

**The Migrant Protagonists in Ignacio del Moral's *La mirada del hombre oscuro*
and José Moreno Arenas' *La playa***

Eugenia Charoni
Flagler College, St. Augustine, USA

Abstract

The constant movement of populations in search of a better standard of living is a phenomenon that has always defined the human condition. In recent decades, Europe has been facing a relentless migratory wave that has been transforming its social, political, cultural and economic dynamics. Spain has experienced the impact of this movement by accepting migrants from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. In an effort to better portray the migratory situation in the Iberian Peninsula, Spanish playwrights have been staging characters who are either torn by stereotypes confronting the unknown *Other* or who turn their backs to the cruel reality of drowned bodies.

Ignacio del Moral in *La Mirada del hombre oscuro* (1991) and José Moreno Arenas in *La playa* (2004) endow their Spanish characters with sharp and provocative language while at the same time questioning their assumptions regarding the *Other*. In both plays, migrant characters remain silent, immobile and unable to react to or communicate with the Spaniards. This paper aims to discuss the silence and immobility of migrant characters and portray how they actually become an essential point of reference and eventually overpower the Spanish protagonists. José Moreno Arenas and Ignacio del Moral invite the audience/reader to reflect upon the accuracy of certain judgments toward the *Other*, to reexamine the way in which we perceive ourselves and the ones around us, and to gain a deeper understanding of human commonalities.

Keywords: immigration, Spain, silence, drowning, beach, Africa, theater, stereotypes

Introduction

The movement of migrant populations to the Iberian Peninsula has been of special interest in Spanish theater since the end of 1980's (Doll, 2013, p. 17). Spain became a member of the European Union on 1 January 1986; that integration had, by most accounts, a positive impact on Spain's economy. Numerous employment opportunities attracted immigrants from Africa, Latin America and European countries who came with the expectation of finding a job and a better life. As seen in Figure 1, in January of 2001 there were 1.3 million registered foreigners, while in 2010, 5.7 million were registered, a number that represents an increase of 319%. According to the National Center for Statistics, Spain's migrant population went from a 2% share of the country's population in 2002 to approximately 12% in 2011. Figure 2 depicts the migrant population's countries of origin as of 2012. The largest number of European immigrants comes from Romania. Morocco is the African country with the most immigrant representation because of its proximity to Spain. As expected, due to common language and religion, there is also a large representation of Latin Americans, with the most numerous being citizens of Ecuador followed by those of Colombia.



Figure 1: Immigration in Spain 2001- 2010.¹



Figure 2: Immigrants' counties of origin (2012).²

In the two plays to be discussed in this presentation, *La Mirada del hombre oscuro* written by Ignacio del Moral (1957 –) in 1991 and *La playa* written by José Moreno Arenas (1954 –) in

¹ <http://www.ine.es/>

² <http://migracioneseuropeas.com/inmigrantes-en-espana-de-la-acogida-a-la-comunion>

2004, the migrant characters are Africans. They either do not speak at all or they speak in their native language, which does not allow them to communicate with the Spaniards. In both cases the Spanish characters describe the immigrants as dangerous, uneducated and poor in moral values. This rejection results from an ongoing fear of the *Other*. The Spaniards are not only unable to speak the language of *Other*, but they also hesitate to come closer to get to know them better. Their attitude is historically justified. During most part of the twentieth century and until 1975, the year when General Franco passed away, Spain was not attracting immigrants due to its political and economic situation, which means that Spaniards were not exposed to people of other ethnicities. The migrant wave forced Spanish society to reconsider a homogeneity that until that time was actively promoted by the Franco regime (Doll, 2013, p. 19). Initially the Spanish reacted by adopting ethnocentric attitudes and creating stereotypes that led to racist and xenophobic public narratives. The presence of new ethnicities in the Iberian Peninsula inevitably led to radical changes triggered by interracial relationships, cultural and linguistic influences and, above all, new ways of understanding or rejecting the differences that the “Other” brought to the social fabric.

This paper aims to draw attention to the silent migrant characters who become victims of unfair and false accusations and are not given the right to speak and defend themselves. From a humanistic point of view, the literarily or metaphorically silent African immigrants become the plays’ indispensable point of reference, as they come to epitomize the entire migrant population. Moreover, and despite their silence, they explicitly stand up to all types of discrimination and implicitly invite readers and audience to evaluate the Spaniards’ spiteful and condescending comments.

Migratory Policies

To better understand the social context within which the plays were written, it is imperative to outline the Spanish government’s actions upon the arrival of migrant populations. The first initiative was taken in 1994 when the Cabinet Council (Consejo de Ministros) approved a plan called *Plan para la integración social de los inmigrantes* (Plan for the social integration of immigrants). Its aim was to assess the constant movement of immigrants and help them integrate into Spanish society. There was not a specific budget to fund the plan, and all activities were monitored by the *Observatorio Permanente de Migraciones* (Permanent Observatory of Migrations) and the *Foro para la Integración Social* (Forum for Social Integration).³

In 2000 the Interior Ministry presented the plan *Programa común de regulación y coordinación de la extranjería e inmigración*, (Common Program for the Regulation and Coordination of Immigration Policy), better known as *Plan Greco*, based on the following four principles: first, the migratory wave should be seen holistically as part of a global phenomenon, one that was welcome in Spain; second, to promote the integration of foreign residents with measures such as improvement of the procedures for citizenship, equal rights of employment, care for vulnerable immigrants and resistance against any type of discriminatory, racist and xenophobic actions; third, to monitor the migrant wave to guarantee the balanced coexistence of immigrants and Spaniards in the Iberian Peninsula; and fourth, continue the system of protection for refugees and displaced populations.⁴ In September 23, 2011, the Spanish Ministers’ Cabinet approved the *Plan Estratégico de*

³ Source: https://elpais.com/diario/1994/12/03/espana/786409207_850215.html

⁴ Source: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2001-8154>

Ciudadanía e Integración (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration), simply called PECEI.⁵ Based on the launching of programs and informative seminars for the protection of human rights, the program focused on equality, proscribed discrimination and fostered citizenship and intercultural understanding.

In September 27, 2013, and in an effort to overcome the recession, Spanish authorities implemented the *International Mobility Section of the Entrepreneurial Support and Internationalization Act*; it was amended in 2015 and is currently in effect. Its main objective is to attract professionals and highly skilled immigrants to “increase the competitiveness of the Spanish economy and the ability of Spanish companies to compete in a global environment”. This “transformed Spain's management of immigration . . . [as] . . . in previous years, migration had focused on meeting the needs of a labor-intensive job market, often unqualified.” The plan has proven vital for the Spanish economy, as “the investment generated by all categories over the next five years is expected to reach EUR 694 million and generate around 12,685 new jobs (8,581 direct and 4,104 indirect).”⁶

The budget for the implementation of above plans is of great interest. From the 308.5 million euros that were earmarked in 2009, the allocation dropped to 166 million euros in 2010 as the result of the economic crisis. In 2014 it was 139.89 million euros, as the economy was still affected by the crisis, and for 2017 it will be increased to 373.35 million euros. It is estimated to reach 428.35 million euros thanks to funds from the European Union.⁷

Plot Synopses

In *La Mirada del hombre oscuro*, del Moral situates the action in a beach in the south of Spain. It is in southern Spain because African immigrants set off from Morocco to reach the Iberian Peninsula by boat, since the distance that separates Spain from Morocco is only fourteen kilometers. In the play a Spanish family of four, the parents and their two kids, looks for shells on a beach. Their daughter encounters Ombasi, an African immigrant who arrived in Spain by sea, illegally. Alone (a friend who accompanied him drowned), tired and afraid, he hopes for the Spaniards' mercy and help. He talks to the family to explain his situation, but because he speaks in his native language communication fails, leaving him practically mute. From that point on constant misunderstandings, false stereotypes and misleading beliefs deepen the cultural and linguistic gap between the two parties. By the end of the play, fear conquers the Spanish family. The Father refuses to allow Ombasi in his car and acts violently against him. Ombasi reacts the same way confused by the Father's erratic behavior. At the last scene the dead body of his drowned friend appears on stage, foresees the future and informs the Daughter about each characters' fate. As a result of the fight, the Father is blinded in one eye. His wife and kids will abandon him. Ombasi will be taken by the Guardia Civil and will die sometime later of pneumonia. The “other side” that was so promising and in which, according to the immigrant, nobody would be at risk of death by pneumonia due to the high quality of health care, will be the one to condemn him to death.

⁵ http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/es/destacados/Open_to_talent.pdf

⁶ http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/es/destacados/Report_on_the_Implementation_of_the_International_Mobility_Section.pdf.

⁷ <http://www.laregioninternacional.com/articulo/espana/presupuesto-secretaria-general-inmigracion-emigracion-asciende-373-35-millones-euros-2017/20170427133827252475.html>

Although Ombasi speaks in his native language, Ignacio del Moral writes the text, including Ombasi's lines, in Spanish, as this is the only way for the readers to understand the plot. However, in the movie *Bwana* (1996), which is based on the play, Ombasi indeed speaks in his native language. This helps the viewer to better sense the frustration and misunderstandings generated by the language barrier and become compassionate for Ombasi, whom the Spanish family sees as an intruder and predator.

In the one-act play *La Playa*, Moreno Arenas also chooses a beach in southern Spain as a backdrop. The play is the soliloquy of a Spanish beachgoer apparently speaking to a motionless African immigrant who lays on the beach in silence, although he never shows up on stage. The Spaniard intends to initiate a dialogue with him, “dirige la palabra a alguien que—se supone—descansa sobre la arena” [speaks to someone who is – supposedly – resting on the sand] (Moreno Arenas, 2014, n.p.). The beachgoer does not know that he is an immigrant that, as the end of the play reveals, has drowned. Despite the lack of response, the Spaniard starts a long soliloquy, a “perorate” [boring speech] in which he gradually unfolds his bitter sentiments towards immigrants.

In a provocative manner, he insists that none of his accusations have anything racist or xenophobic: “Yo no soy racista” [I am not a racist] he repeats over and over. Using the same false stereotypes and calling the immigrants uneducated, dangerous and unfit for Spain, the beachgoer gradually reveals surprising personal information. An immigrant himself, he left Spain for a country somewhere in Europe many decades ago, and he claims to have been a person of good quality, unlike today's immigrants. This is a reference to the massive migratory wave of Spaniards in the twentieth century toward other countries in Western Europe and in Latin America. Soler-Espiauba explains that during the twentieth century more than seven million people left Spain to look for a job and they never returned.⁸

“A lo largo del siglo XX más de siete millones de personas salieron de España para buscar trabajo y muchas no regresaron más.” (Soler-Espiauba, 2004, p. 7)

He respected the country to which he went because he did not enter it illegally at night and he did not steal anybody's job. His soliloquy is a direct attack against every immigrant, the result of the superficial understanding he has of the *Other* and what this entails.

Motifs and Themes

In the theater, language is unmistakably the key means of communication between characters. It is also the means for characters to give detailed information about other characters or about themselves, undertaking an explicit self-presentation (Pfister, 2000, p. 124). The characters' speech in *La Playa* and *La Mirada del hombre oscuro* indeed reveals not only details about themselves but also about the other characters. The theatrical gambit, in both plays, rests upon the effort to give each immigrant character a collective implication, an ecumenical quality that will touch the unconscious of the Spanish audience. As such, the “other characters” refer collectively only to one core character, the *Other*, one that will represent the whole migrant body of people that fled their countries looking for a better future. The expressive function of speech needs to be understood as a mutual exchange of information

⁸ For further information, refer to the documentary *El tren de memoria* (2005), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xgeGuPmhTs>

based on the same language. This is not the case of speech in *La Mirada del hombre oscuro* because Ombasi, by not speaking Spanish, cannot be understood nor can he communicate with others. Speech is a one-way activity in *La Playa* as well, as it is a soliloquy.

There are cases where the inadequacy of language – its occasional role as *impediment* to communication – can be overcome through the use of non-verbal devices that can be informative in nature (Pfister, 2000, p. 120). Yet even those same non-verbal devices fail in *La mirada del hombre oscuro*, as Ombasi tries to explain who he is and what he wants with gestures but is not understood. Those non-verbal devices are not operative in *La playa* either, as the drowned immigrant lies lifeless on the beach, is never on stage with the Spaniard and is never part of the action. It is for these reasons that both immigrants remain practically mute. Their silence provokes empathy in the reader and audience, who immediately sense the injustice that will fall upon two people who are basically unable to react.

Furthermore, the fact that neither José Moreno Arenas nor Ignacio del Moral gives these migrant characters an actual voice derives from their stated objectives in writing these plays. Del Moral explains that it was a mixture of personal concerns and questions that led him to write the play.

. . . en el caso de *La mirada del hombre oscuro*, hubo un detonante concreto que, con preocupaciones y preguntas que ya bullían en mi cerebro, me llevó a componer esta fábula de la incomunicación (del Moral, 2007, p. 11).

[. . . in the case of *The Gaze of the Dark Man*, there was a concrete determinant that, along with the anxieties and questions that swirled in my mind, led me to compose this fable based on the lack of communication.]

Moreno Arenas tries hard not to show his analytical standpoint regarding the events he depicts, allowing his characters a wide berth. Thus, he seems to be simply depicting events from a distance. The idea behind this strategy is to give the sense that the characters are autonomous agents not directly under the playwright's control. Accordingly, his protagonists seem independent, rich and influential, truly lacking in compassion, in sympathy and understanding. Secondary characters are also given a degree of autonomy: these are people of low socio-economical class, rejected socially, weak, innocent and needful, like the drowned immigrant.

Se concretan en protagonistas poderosos, ricos, influyentes . . . que originan en el receptor rechazo y animadversión. Frente a ellos se ubican los miserables sociales, quienes nos provocan, si no afecto, sí una relativa atracción o cierta complicidad. Este grupo lo constituyen los mendigos, los desheredados, los inválidos, los inocentes, incluso algún cadáver, o sea, los necesitados de lo que sea. (Moreno Arenas, 2004, p. 15)

[They are embodied in powerful, rich, influential protagonists . . . that produce feelings of rejection and animosity in the audience. Facing them are the social outcasts who provoke, if not affection, an uncertain attraction or sense of complicity. This group consists of the beggars, the disinherited, the invalids, the innocent, even a corpse, that is to say, those in need.]

Manifestly, the lack of verbal communication or the failure of the attempt to communicate facilitates the playwrights' intention to point out western society's unpreparedness to dialogue with the *Other*. The false accusations against the immigrants call for further discussion not only because of their bold content, but also because of the immigrants' reactions. But does this reaction exist? Do Ombasi and the drowned African immigrant defend themselves? Do they have a chance to confront the Spaniards and present their own point of view? It is only just that the accused to have access to proper defense, but is this the case in these two plays? And what about the real world? Do immigrants have a voice for themselves or do they remain silent like the characters in these plays? A closer look at the plays along with survey data could answer these questions, although the findings can only be indicative of the situation and not necessarily representative of attitudes, reactions and behaviors that depend on each individual and in no way portray a society holistically.

In *La mirada del hombre oscuro* the Spanish family confronts Ombasi with suspicion, fear and bias. When Ombasi approaches them telling in his native language that he is hungry, the Father and Mother refer to him as “éste” [this one].

El padre: (*llama a la madre.*) ¡Dori! ¿Queda merienda?

La madre: ¿Para qué?

El padre: Para dársela a éste.

La madre: ¿Y para qué le vas a dar a éste la merienda? (del Moral, 2007, p. 25).

[The Father – (*calling The Mother*) Dori! Are there any snacks left?

The Mother – What for?

The Father – To give to this one.

The Mother – And why are you going to give this one the snacks?]

The word *éste* is pejorative and reflects the couple's already negative disposition toward Ombasi and, consequently, the *Other*. Ombasi in turn tries in vain to tell them that he is hungry, introducing himself in his native language and using the non-verbal device of tapping on his chest: (*Se señala el pecho*). “Ombasi, me llamo Ombasi” (Del Moral, 2007, p. 22). Later on he continues:

Ombasi. Tengo hambre... (*Se vuelve a señalar el pecho*). Ombasi. He venido nadando. Tengo hambre. Mi compañero se ha ahogado. Está muerto. (del Moral, 2007, p. 23).

[Ombasi. I'm hungry . . . (*He again taps on his chest*). Ombasi. I swam here. I'm hungry. My buddy has drowned. He's dead.]

His effort to communicate to the Spanish couple his basic need for food and the fact that a human being has drowned is unsuccessful. Both Spaniards are overwhelmed by the mechanical failure of their car and the appearance of someone who, according to their son, wants to eat their daughter.

Ombasi: La niña se ha caído, pero no es nada. Tengo hambre. Me llamo Ombasi. (*Para hacerse entender, señala a la niña, se señala a sí (mismo, hace gesto de comer)*).

El niño: ¡Dice que se quiere comer a la niña! (Del Moral, 2007, p. 23).

[Ombasi – The girl fell down, but she’s OK. I am hungry. My name is Ombasi. (*To make himself understood, he points to the girl, points to himself, and gestures as if he were eating.*)

The Boy – He says that he wants to eat the girl!]

This begins the miscommunication that characterizes the exchanges and that Del Moral accentuates with humor, as the above scene shows. When the Father desperately tries to find the missing spark plug to start the car and lead with his family away from Ombasi’s supposed threat, the Mother refers to Ombasi as “he”. Although several times Ombasi has stated his name, no one has made an effort to understand what he was saying. The Mother also accuses Ombasi of having stolen the spark plug: “A lo mejor la tiene él” (Del Moral, 2007, p. 29). When the Father tries to communicate with Ombasi and explain that he is looking for a spark plug, the Mother in a diminishing way, asks her husband if he really thinks that Ombasi is going to understand him: “Pero, tú crees que te va entender?” (Del Moral, 2007, p. 29). Significantly, she does not say that the lack of understanding is due to the fact that they do not speak the same language, but because Ombasi has not seen a car in his life (“¿Lo ves? ¡Este no ha visto un coche en su vida!” (del Moral, 2007, p. 30). Later on their son asks if Ombasi comes from the jungle, and the Mother answers “or from thereabouts”: (El niño: ¿Viene de la selva? - La madre: O de por ahí) (del Moral, 2007, p. 30).

Ombasi, in an effort to bridge the gap between him and the Spaniards and to convince them that he has good intentions, repeats several times “Viva España”. The sentence triggers the daughter’s curiosity and she asks her Mother why Ombasi always repeats the same thing. The Mother answers that this is the result of a lack of education in people of color, referring in this case to African immigrants whom she calls “personas incultas”, or uneducated people. That statement that subsequently triggers the following question: what does it mean to be uneducated and how is this determined?

La Niña: Por qué siempre dice lo mismo?

La Madre: Porque a lo mejor no sabe decir otra cosa.

La Niña: ¿No sabe hablar más?

La Madre: No.

La Niña: ¿Por qué?

La Madre: Porque estas personas negras son muy incultas (del Moral, 2007, p. 33).

From the beginning of the play, del Moral creates a tragic dialectic by placing the characters in antithetical positions, positions from which they cannot budge because of the lack of communication. On one side there is the “good, innocent immigrant” and on the other “the mean, biased Spanish family” that believes it has the right to reject any *Other* that looks different and comes from a developing country. The family’s reaction is justified up to a certain point, as Spanish society at the time the play was written had not been exposed to the *Other*. But could this have changed ten years later? Maybe, although statistics show that the attitude towards the immigrants varies depending on their country of origin. According to a survey conducted in 2003 by CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas = Center for Sociological Research) (Figure 3), it is evident that Spaniards prefer Latin Americans (specifically Argentinians) to Moroccans and Americans. This preference has historical, political and cultural connotations and cannot be generalized.

Tabla 6.1. Actitud de los españoles hacia nacionales de diferentes países

	"Simpatía que le despiertan los..."						"Confianza que le despiertan los..."					
	Mucha	Bastante	Poca	Ninguna	N.S.	N.C.	Mucha	Bastante	Poca	Ninguna	N.S.	N.C.
Brasileños	11.3	54.1	16.9	3.9	11.7	2.1	6.1	44.7	23.9	7.8	15.5	2.0
Franceses	7.1	45.7	29.6	7.5	8.6	1.4	6.0	42.6	27.6	9.6	12.3	1.9
Colombianos	5.6	41.7	29.4	10.6	10.8	2.0	3.9	32.5	32.6	14.9	13.9	2.2
Cubanos	11.2	51.8	19.4	6.4	9.3	1.9	6.0	41.7	26.9	9.6	13.6	2.2
Italianos	10.8	56.6	17.5	4.8	8.6	1.6	6.5	49.2	22.6	6.9	12.9	2.0
Mexicanos	11.9	56.0	16.1	4.1	10.2	1.7	7.3	48.6	21.7	6.5	13.9	2.1
Marroquíes	4.5	29.2	32.9	23.7	8.4	1.4	3.3	23.3	32.1	27.4	11.7	2.2
Peruanos	6.9	50.3	22.4	7.1	11.4	1.8	4.8	40.8	27.8	9.4	15.1	2.1
Venezolanos	7.9	53.7	19.6	4.5	12.4	2.0	5.1	45.1	25.0	7.5	15.1	2.1
Estadounidenses	4.9	35.0	32.2	16.1	9.8	1.8	4.1	32.6	31.0	17.1	13.1	2.1
Argentinos	14.9	58.6	13.3	3.5	8.0	1.8	8.8	51.2	19.9	5.7	12.2	2.2
Alemanes	8.1	50.3	22.7	7.6	9.4	1.9	6.7	46.1	23.3	8.6	13.1	2.1
Chilenos	8.0	51.5	20.4	5.7	12.5	1.8	5.2	44.9	24.7	6.9	15.9	2.3

Fuente: CIS, Estudio nº 2.545. Barómetro de noviembre 2003.

Figure 3: Spaniards' attitude towards citizens of different nationalities.⁹

Ombasi's first encounter with the Spanish family is through their daughter. The curious little girl wanders along the beach behind the dunes, where she spots Ombasi and his drowned friend. Scared by the unknown man she runs to find her parents, but trips and falls. Ombasi, without hesitation, picks her up and takes her to her parents who, surprised and afraid, immediately reject his genuine attempt to help the child and misinterpret it. This is a tender, human scene that reveals his sensitive nature. Later on, by nightfall the temperature drops, the children are cold and insist on staying by the fire that Ombasi has built. The antithesis of cold and warm aligns with the opposing emotional state of each side. It also creates the hope that the warmth of the fire – an obvious parallel to Ombasi's warm personality – will overpower the coldness that the family emanates and the two sides with eventually merge. Eventually the parents allow Ombasi to help them, by necessity accepting the help of a person who up until that moment was begging for theirs. The momentary proximity is abruptly interrupted, as the parents refuse to befriend him; hope immediately evaporates. The parents are ungrateful and unappreciative of Ombasi's survival skills and inviting nature. The audience, who unavoidably will feel empathy and compassion for him, cannot overlook the African's attitude.

In the same scene around the fire, Ombasi offers the family clams, using the father's knife to open them. The Spaniards continue their insulting comments, accusing him of being an AIDS carrier. Once again Ombasi, with his calm personality and unable to understand the accusations, shares a few aspects of his own culture and evokes his dead friend, with whom he used to share his food. This is a very touching moment, as it reminds everyone that friendship, collaboration and companionship can enhance human relations and overcome challenges.

Subsequently the Mother notices that her son is sleeping by Ombasi's side. She comments that she does not want her son so close to "him" for fear of lice, ringworm or leprosy, very

⁹ <http://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/93165/1/LA%20INMIGRACI%C3%93N%20EN%20ESPA%C3%91A%20%282000-2007%29.pdf>

common in “those countries that are infected”. Once again her superficial explanation is nothing more than an indication of a lack of education and of basic information:

La Madre: No me gusta que el Niño esté tan pegado a él. A lo mejor tiene piojos, o la tiña, que creo que en esos países la tienen mucho. Hasta la lepra (del Moral, 2007, p. 58).

In *La Playa* there are similar accusations against the immigrants, although, as already mentioned, no interaction between the characters exists. The Spaniard beachgoer seems to be very sure of himself and has control of what he says. He justifies all the accusations against the immigrants based on personal beliefs and explains that his “logical and irrefutable arguments” have nothing to do with racism:

Sí, sí . . . por supuesto.. antes de dar a conocer mis lógicos e irrefutables argumentos, siempre lo hago . . . Siempre, siempre . . . ¡Yo no soy racista! .. Si he de serle sincero, se trata de una táctica, ¿sabe . . .? . . . No me queda más remedio que hacerlo porque – créame lo que le digo – hay mucha leche en este lado del estrecho. (Moreno Arenas, 2014, p. 140)

[Yes, yes . . . of course . . . before making known my logical and irrefutable arguments, I always do . . . Always, always . . . I'm not racist! . . . To be honest, it's a tactic, you know . . . ? . . . I have no choice but to do it - believe me - there is a lot of milk on this side of the strait.]

He speaks about a lack of interest in what people say; he adds that people can manipulate words to make things appear different than what they really are:

. . . Y antes de que te des cuenta, sin que nadie se haya interesado siquiera lo más mínimo en saber lo que realmente ronda por tu coco, te manipulan las palabras, te tergiversan las declaraciones, te interpretan – lo de interpretar es por utilizar una palabra suave y agradable para los oídos – hasta el tono de las expresiones y consiguen que aparezcas antes los demás como lo que no eres... (Moreno Arenas, 2014, p. 141)

[. . . And before you know it, without anyone being slightly interested in knowing what really goes around in your head, they manipulate your words, they misrepresent your statements, they interpret you – to interpret is to use a word that is soft and pleasing to the ears – even the tenor of the expressions, and get you to appear before others as what you are not . . .]

Ironically, this postulation describes his own attitude, as everything that he says about immigrants projects a false image of what they really are. He accuses them of ruining Spanish society. In addition, he blames the media and young people for Spain's downfall. Thanks to freedom of speech, they advocate “wrong” ideas that contradict his “correct ideas”, moreover, they are more open to the *Other* and embrace differences. He gets upset by the fact that young people are receptive to African music without thinking of the negative consequences, but he ignores the fact that, historically, Spain has been a repository for diverse cultures, such as the Arab culture, and also the transmitter of its own culture to Latin America.

He describes the African immigrants in the same pejorative way that the Spaniards in *La mirada del hombre oscuro* do. They call Ombasi “negro” and they refer to all immigrants as “negros”. Similarly, here the beachgoer feels pity for those with dark skin color and calls for compassion, as the immigrants cannot escape from the negative consequences that their color brings to them. According to his words, they are poor creatures of God who need to accept living with this pigmentation that is a gift poisoned by a despised and cruel reality. “. . . Pobres criaturas de Dio . . . que han que resignarse a vivir pigmentados con el tinte más oscuro del color gris, ese regalo envenenado de una naturaleza despiadada y cruel” (Moreno Arenas, 2014, p. 144).

He differentiates himself from the *Other* by repeating several times that he is “white, completely white, truly white . . . why cloud the issue?: “En realidad, yo soy blanco... ¡Blanco . . .! ¡Enteramente blanco . . .! ¡Completamente blanco . . .! ¡Absolutamente blanco . . .! ¡Para que andarnos por las ramas . . .?” (Moreno Arenas, 145).

His persistence in the white color, “proof” of his superiority, confirms the absurdity of his so-called “logical and irrefutable arguments” and makes the reader/audience wonder who, in the final analysis, needs compassion. He is biased against any *Other* who does not look like him, who plays a different type of music or who tries to survive doing odd jobs like selling clothes, jewelry or purses in the streets. His accusation that immigrants are responsible of Spain’s unemployment is also unfounded. Figure 4 clearly shows that foreigners who live in Spain are at a higher risk to lose their jobs than Spaniards.



Figure 4: Comparison of the possibility of Spaniards and foreign citizens losing their job.¹⁰

Later on he expresses even more bitter feelings when he calls immigrants ignorant when it comes to human rights. They demand to be seen and treated equally in the country to which they immigrate, when in their countries they do not dare to do so for lack of resources and of a stable government. His contradictory arguments unraveling, he shares that when he was himself an immigrant somewhere in Europe more than thirty years ago, he felt inferior to the local people because they believed that they had more rights than him and his fellow Spaniards. For this reason, they all came together to support each other, in the same way that

¹⁰ http://www.revistasice.com/cache/pdf/ICE_854_3748__C50F00870BEE39801219B8CA4588DB.pdf

immigrants everywhere still do. He fails to see this tendency as the result of the basic human need for support and contact with other people in times of necessity and loneliness:

Allí éramos todos como una piña . . . ! Todos para uno y uno para todos . . . ! Se lo puede imagina Había que defenderse con algo más que uñas y dientes de la altanería y de los improperios de aquellos cabronazos que se creían con más derechos que nosotros (Moreno Arenas, 2014, p. 157).

[There we were all of a piece ! All for one and one for all . . . ! You can imagine We had to defend ourselves with something more than tooth and nail from the haughtiness, disdain and disrespect of those bastards who believed themselves to have more rights than we had.]

His words portray two opposite sides, “aquellos” [them] and “nosotros” [us], that are separated by a wall of misunderstandings. That wall is not that different from the one that he has presently built between himself and the immigrants. What is surprising, though, is that he does not realize that his past is a reflection of the present that he so sharply criticizes. Having been an immigrant himself, he was once on the “other side” and was seen as a lesser human being. He acknowledges that his feelings were hurt back then, but that experience did not teach him compassion. Today he perceives the immigrants in the same negative way in which he was perceived back then.

His ignorance, arrogance and refusal to accept the *Other* is so evident that he does not even try to approach the immobile immigrant to check on him. In reality he is also dead, devoid of even the most diminutive sign of humanity or sensibility (Doll, 2013, p. 113). At the end of the play the silence of the immigrant staggers the audience as it is revealed that the person is dead. According to Eileen Doll, the silence serves as a witness for the racism that the Beachgoer refuses to acknowledge in himself (2013, p. 225).¹¹ The audience recognizes the human value of the prostrate immigrant who remained silent while being accused and disparaged. Unexpectedly, the mute, immobile man now becomes the point of reference and the main protagonist. Moreno Arenas thus invites the audience to evaluate the Spaniard’s accusations, respect the human dignity of the migrants, and question the boundaries between the *Us* and the *Other*.

Conclusion

Since the early 1990’s the Spanish government, by way of migratory policies, plans and informative efforts, has attempted to decrease the cultural gap between Spaniards and immigrants. The Spanish playwright Jerónimo López Mozo in his article *Emigrantes y exilidados en mi teatro* (2008) acknowledges that Spaniards, though most deny it, are racist. He adds that they are not the only racists in Europe, and explains that individuals who reject the accusation of being racists (like the beachgoer in *La Playa* who claims “Yo no soy racista”) are the ones who are more racist than anyone else:

Los españoles somos racistas, aunque lo neguemos, somos racistas. No somos los únicos en Europa, desde luego. Con frecuencia, quiénes rechazan la acusación más airadamente, lo son en mayor medida, aunque lo ignoren. (López Mozo, 2008, p. 5)

¹¹ Original citation: “El silencio del Otro sirve de testigo del racismo que tanto deniega el Bañista.”

The process of assimilating immigrants into a new society is long and arduous. Educational programs and equal treatment in the professional and social spheres are keys for acculturation and coexistence. Furthermore, human relationships based on friendships or love can bring people together.¹² Mixed marriages have also facilitated the process not only practically but culturally as well, as they unite two people of different linguistic, ethnic and even religious backgrounds. In 1996 there was only a 4.13 percent of mixed marriages in Spain; in 2005 the percentage increased to 10.8%. That same year (2005) the children born of mixed couples represented 11% of the total births.¹³ These numbers are a clear indication of the ongoing contact between Spaniards and citizens of other countries; additionally, this rising percentage could certainly decrease cultural differences and erase the fear of the *Other*.

Whether Spaniards or any other people are racists and xenophobic has not been the topic of this article. What has been touched upon is the impact of xenophobic attitudes on society and the manner in which these attitudes are depicted in literary works. Silence and voice, tolerance and intolerance, rejection and acceptance, compassion and insensibility are contradictory terms that are abundant in both plays; they are used profusely because they explain separation, disjoining, and the bitter sentiments of not belonging that racism and xenophobia occasion.

In *La Playa* and *La mirada del hombre oscuro* none of the Spanish characters reflected on their own flaws, yet they judge the African immigrants based only on stereotypes and false beliefs. The silence of the immigrants calls for a closer inspection of what the Spaniards say, and this, of course is deliberate: The playwrights invite us to evaluate what is being said in an effort to highlight the need to reestablish a level of dignity and tolerance in a world that seems progressively silent on the matter.

¹² *Memoria fotográfica* (Beth Escudé y Gallés) and *Harira* (Ana Diosdano) are plays based on friendship between immigrants. The film *Las cartas de Alou* (1990) portrays mixed relationships based on true love.

¹³ <http://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/93165/1/LA%20INMIGRACION%20EN%20ESPA%C3%91A%20%282000-2007%29.pdf>

References

- del Moral, I. and Imbach, W. (2007). *La mirada del hombre oscuro*. Bonn: Romanistischer Verl.
- Doll, E. J. (2013). *Los inmigrantes en la escena española contemporánea: buscando una nueva identidad española*. Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos.
- López Mozo, J. (2008). Emigrantes y exiliados en mi teatro. Retrieved July 2, 2017 from http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/emigrantes-y-exiliados-en-mi-teatro-0/html/01b28f9c-82b2-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_3.html.
- Moreno Arenas, J. (2014). La playa. Retrieved August 22, 2017 from https://issuu.com/karma-teatro/docs/la_playa
- Moreno Arenas, J. (2004). *Trilogías indigestas*. Salobreña, Granada: Alhulia – La Avispa.
- Pfister, M. (2000). *The theory and analysis of drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Soler-Espiauba, D. (2004). *Literatura y pateras*. Seville: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía and Ediciones Akal.

Corresponding author: Eugenia Charoni

Contact email: echaroni@flagler.edu