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Travelling phonographs in fin-de-siècle Spain: recording technologies and national regeneration in Ruperto Chapí's *El fonógrafo ambulante*

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Even though the early developments of phonography in Spain (from the first demonstration of an Edison phonograph in 1878 to the arrival of multinational recording companies between 1903 and 1906, suffocating the thriving indigenous recording industry) coincided with one of the most widely studied eras of Spanish cultural, the origins of recording technologies in the Spanish context have received surprisingly little attention, and almost none at all from cultural historians or musicologists with a critical bent: indeed, the main secondary source on the topic remains Mariano Gómez-Montejano's (2005) well-documented, albeit non-theorized, account of the first commercial recording studios in Spain (*gabinetes fonográficos*), flourishing between 1896 and 1905. And yet, even though the cultural impact of early recording technologies on Spanish society was less spectacular if compared with electricity, photography or the cinematograph, the arrival and early life of the phonograph and gramophone in Spain was certainly influenced by prevailing discourses concerning modernization, national identity, regional difference and mobility, which partly determined their afterlife as gramophones and recordings became widespread from the 1910s onwards; in turn, the arrival of recording technologies also influenced such discourses.

This article attempts to discuss how the early steps of the phonograph were read by some sectors of Spanish society under the light of the above-mentioned discourses. In order to do that, I focus on the *zarzuela El fonógrafo ambulante* (music by Ruperto Chapí, libretto by Juan González¹), premiered on 24th April 1899 in Madrid. As I will argue later, the role and

¹ Ruperto Chapí (1851-1909) was, together with Federico Chueca, Manuel Fernández Caballero and Tomás Bretón, one of the most successful composers of *zarzuela* of the late

significance of *zarzuela* in late 19th-century Spain suggests that the ideas around recording technologies presented by Chapí and González might have been shared or at least considered by a sizeable part of their audiences; moreover, such ideas are not concerned exclusively with recorded *music*, but rather with recorded sound, language and politics of listening, arguably making this *zarzuela* relevant for a broader study of sound cultures in late 19th-century Spain. One of my aims is to deploy in the Spanish context some of the main critical avenues developed by recent studies focusing on the cultural meanings and impact of early recording technologies in other countries.² I am, however, equally interested in bringing a Spanish perspective into wider scholarly debates on the early history of recording technologies: in fact, critical takes on the early history of recording technologies have emerged mostly from accounts about technologically advanced countries and musical cultures considered hegemonic or quasi-hegemonic (e.g. Germany for art music, the United States or United Kingdom for popular music).³ As such, they often make certain assumptions that are not always helpful for Spain. These assumptions concern modernity and modernization, the

nineteenth and the early twentieth century (Ibèrni). Juan González is a more dubious character: no other *zarzuela* libretto is credited to a person by that name, and a review of the first performance of *El fonógrafo ambulante* claims that González ran away from the theatre when the audience called his name at the end so that he could take a bow (Blasco, April 25, 1899). Another review in Palencia suggests that the author was “a high-up, well-known aristocrat” using Juan González as a pseudonym (*El día de Palencia*, May 11, 1899), and Ruiz Albéniz (1953, 297) echoes this suspicion. If this is to be trusted, a likely contestant is José Ramiro de la Puente y González-Nandín, Marquis of Alta Villa (1845-1909), an aristocrat with interests in music and recording technologies: he published a singing method in 1905 and founded the magazine *El cardo*, which between 1899 and 1900 included a few pages in each issue about phonography.

² It would be onerous to list all the critical contributions to the study of recorded music for the past twenty-five years, but I am particularly indebted to the following: Chanan’s pioneer study (1995) of the impact on recordings on musical practices, and two books that followed up on how recordings changed audiences’ ideas of music, especially on absolute music (Ashby 2010 and Katz 2010). Feaster’s work illuminates the patterns of adaptation to technology in performance in early recordings (2001 and 2012), whereas Gitelman (1999) and Sterne (2003) have disentangled the social and material conditions that gave rise to sound reproduction.

³ This applies to all of the works cited in the previous footnote, as well as to pioneering studies of recordings and performance practice, such as Philip (2004) and Leech-Wilkinson (2009).

circulation and dissemination of technologies, and how individuals saw themselves and their culture in the broader international context with which recording technologies helped them interact.

Modernity, modernization, dissemination, national identity versus internationalization, were indeed significant concerns for all of the Western world at the time. Spain was no exception, but such concerns were often deployed here in ways that separate Spain from other Western countries: they were indeed at the centre of a decade-long concern commonly known today as *regeneracionismo*. *Regeneracionismo* was not a movement, association or political party per se, but rather an attitude shared from the 1870s by many individuals of differing ideologies and professional and political trajectories, but united by a sense that Spain was in crisis and that solutions needed to be implemented at an economic, political, cultural, scientific and even existential level (Harrison 2000), as well as a sense that their main strength was that they represented a new, vigorous, anti-establishment strand of Spanish society (Andrés-Gallego 1998, 241; Salavert and Suárez Cortina 2007, 11). *Regeneracionismo* peaked after the 1898 *Desastre*, as a response to Spain's inferiority in the international colonialist context (Andrés-Gallego 1998, 253; Suárez Cortina 2007, 22). Although the solutions proposed by the *regeneracionistas* to solve Spain's crisis also varied enormously (Andrés-Gallego 1998, 242), there was a general sense that scientific research, particularly applied research and technology, were crucial to solve Spain's crisis.

In the realm of recording technologies, whereas some of the *gabinetes fonográficos* did certainly echo *regeneracionista* concerns in the discourse they elaborated around recording technologies, presenting them as a civilized and refined pastime and a potential key improvement to Spanish commerce and administration, we should not assume that all of those who embraced recording technologies did so because of their *regeneracionista* resonances. Indeed, *El fonógrafo ambulante* demonstrates that attitudes towards

technological change are rarely uniform and unambiguous and are instead mediated by a number of considerations, including social class, identity, gender and political ideology. In accordance with the typically conservative values of *género chico* and contrary to the faith in reform and science exhibited by some *regeneracionistas*, in this *zarzuela* the advances of science and technology as embodied by the phonograph, are not accepted wholeheartedly as a route to progress, but they are not dismissed either: as I will analyse, there is a sense throughout that recording technologies (and, by proxy, all scientific and modernizing projects) can be positive as long as they are used to further the values of the *pueblo* and allow them to flourish. I use the term *pueblo* throughout this article as is commonly understood in *género chico* works themselves and in the critical writings that emerged around it during or shortly after its development (Antonio Peña y Goñi, Matilde Muñoz): *pueblo* denotes the Spanish working and lower-middle classes (including peasants, skilled and unskilled urban workers, artisans, small business owners such as shopkeepers and, in some cases, characters from the lowlife), which in *género chico* are typically portrayed as devout, patriotic (but also proud of their regional background) and family and community-oriented. Although not formally educated, they are also normally witty, resourceful and supportive of each other to face the various adverse situations that they encounter due to their relatively unprivileged position within Spanish society, although such resourcefulness or solidarity never involves revolting against power.

In the *zarzuela*, Chapí and González articulate their view of recording technologies by singling out key issues in contemporary discourses about the phonograph (mobility, scientific development) which in turn were also central in *regeneracionista* debates, and by reframing such issues as subordinate to the *género chico*'s ideal of the *pueblo*: mobility and scientific development are only celebrated inasmuch as they facilitate understanding and healthy

exchange between Spanish regions and between the genders, thus helping construct a unified national identity which, however, leaves some space for national difference.

To what extent can we use a single *zarzuela* – and one which didn't have much of an afterlife after its premiere and is today all but forgotten⁴ – to make generalizations about prevailing views concerning the advent and early development of recorded music? The question is best answered with reference to the conditions in which *zarzuelas* were written, composed, produced and consumed at the time; indeed, the standardization of the genre suggests that individual *zarzuelas* are to be understood not so much as vehicles for self-expression for their authors, but rather as products which shared a modicum of ideological background with each other and their audiences. At the time of the premiere of *El fonógrafo ambulante*, *zarzuela* had become a veritable industry after fifty years of quick transformations to adapt to ever-changing audiences.⁵ From 1851, with the premiere of Francisco Asenjo Barbieri's *Jugar con fuego*, the first *zarzuela grande*⁶, the genre provided a platform for the staging and negotiation of national identity issues in monarchic Spain. From 1868 the *zarzuela grande* was progressively replaced by the *teatro por horas* (theatre by the hour), consisting of shorter

⁴ In the few months following its premiere in Madrid, *El fonógrafo ambulante* was performed in Palencia and Extremadura. I have not been able to find any evidence of any performances in subsequent years, nor any recordings (either part or full). This was, however, the norm for the vast majority of the tens of thousands of *zarzuelas* performed during the golden age of the *género chico* (1870-1900), so we should not assume that *El fonógrafo ambulante* fell out of favour because of its engagement with recording technologies: out of the circa 150 *zarzuelas* composed by Chapí, only a fraction are remembered, performed or recorded today at all. Víctor Ruiz Albéniz (1953, 297), in his monumental chronicle of the Teatro Apolo, states that *El fonógrafo ambulante* was a great success, but says that this was mostly because of its last scene, in which a real phonograph played back a number of recordings; this suggests that *El fonógrafo ambulante* might have originated or have been read as a circumstantial work, successful inasmuch as it capitalized on a new, fashionable technology, but lacking the canonic status of other works.

⁵ Theatre critic Manuel Cañete called it “literatura en serie” (serially produced literature), quoted in del Moral Ruiz (2004, 21).

⁶ *Zarzuela grande* was characterized by full-length plays combining spoken dialogue and musical numbers, often dealing with historical or otherwise serious topics and exhibiting a modicum of musical complexity and difficulty

plays, with tickets being sold individually for each play, which allowed more flexibility to theatres, impresarios and authors (del Moral Ruiz 2004, 20-21; Membrez 1987, 61-2). This marked the beginning of the *género chico*, with all *zarzuela* theatres in Madrid adopting the new format throughout the 1870s and 1880s. With the production process becoming more streamlined to satisfy the constant demand for new plays, the *género chico* soon had to develop its own physiognomy. For example, whereas in *zarzuela grande* folk-inspired numbers were mostly reserved to choirs and ensembles, in *género chico* they were introduced in the soloist's arias as well. Many of the singers were selected predominantly on the basis of their acting capabilities. A beautiful or trained voice in a *zarzuela* performer was seen as a welcome bonus, but not necessarily a must.

These musical and theatrical changes impacted on *zarzuela*'s civic and political role too. The audiences of the genre expanded enormously, including all social classes, but the genre did not necessarily appeal to all for the same reasons. The aristocracy saw in the genre an idealized revival of the eighteenth-century *pueblo* (del Moral Ruiz 2004, 154), and this was likely, too, the view of the upper classes to which the genre was increasingly oriented (Young 2015); this necessitated for the *pueblo* to be reframed to suit the needs of the more privileged classes, as is certainly the case with *El fonógrafo ambulante*. On the other hand, for the middle and working classes arriving in Madrid at the time, *género chico* provided an opportunity to get to know the city and familiarize themselves with the social and status ideals they should aspire to (del Moral Ruiz 2004, 154) – the portrayal that the genre offered of the *pueblo* was, indeed, a construct, but it was close enough to reality and flattering that a broad range of social classes could accept it as truthful and reflective of an integrative, progressively industrialized, urban, somewhat relaxed in terms of social mores, yet still ideologically conservative Spain (Encabo 2007, 18-25; Salaün 1996, 24-5; Membrez 1987, 69 and 115-8; Young 2015, 8-10; Ferrera 2015, 370). It seems thus reasonable to assume that

the views on sound technologies expressed by Chapí and González in *El fonógrafo ambulante* would have resonated with a significant proportion of their audiences; this is not to say that Chapí and González managed to perfectly embody the audiences' opinions on the matter (as it is unlikely that these were uniform anyway), but the view they presented on recording technologies was likely one audiences could recognize and engage with, as it amplified or parodied some of their opinions of the topic, but did not necessarily challenge them in a decisive way, as is the case with *zarzuela* as a genre (Harney 2006, 161). It is in this sense that we might regard *El fonógrafo ambulante* as not merely the opinions of its authors, but as illustrative of their view of broader debates on recording technologies.

Mobility and science to the service of the *pueblo*

That mobility is a key axis in the discourse about recording technologies presented in the play is obvious from its very title and its premise, which is presented in the dialogue between the Andalusian villagers that takes place after the first chorus: an operator called Restituto and his assistant Antero have arrived in the village as part of their tour of Spain to demonstrate a phonograph. It seems therefore sensible to look at the growing field of study of music and mobility in search of a framework for analyzing the representation and meanings of mobility in *El fonógrafo ambulante*. What characterizes this field is that it is not simply seen as synonymous with movement, but is instead thought to encompass too the meanings (and constant renegotiations thereof) that music and musical materials acquire by virtue of being mobile, the discourses connected to movement itself, and the representation of mobility in music (Doughy and Lagerqvist 2014, 151). Mobilized elements – including artefacts used to store and playback sound, such as the phonograph - are not simply vehicles or containers for

content, but instead play an important role in shaping and defining musical and sonic experience (Gopinath and Stanyek 2014, 25).

It is therefore not trivial that Chapí and González presented their phonograph as mobile from its very title. On the one hand, the phonograph's ability to be paraded around is central to the plot, because it allows Antero to travel around Spain and reunite with Araceli; once he is in the village, he and Araceli move the phonograph around the place so that all the locals can see it, providing the lovers with an excuse to spend time together without arising suspicions. On the other hand, Chapí and González were drawing upon a phenomenon that would be well-known to a majority of their audiences: that of travelling phonographs, popular all over Spain and across social classes in the 1890s. Chapí and González could also build upon discourses surrounding recording technologies their audiences would be familiar with – either from simply witnessing such phonograph demonstrations or, in the case of literate spectators, from reading advertisements and reviews of such demonstrations, as well as newspaper and magazine articles about recording technologies.

A short overview of such discourses, and indeed of how mobility was essential to Spaniards' early experiences of recording technologies is necessary here. The invention of the first phonograph in 1877 was duly reported in Spanish newspapers. The first phonograph demonstration took place the following year in Barcelona, and for the next decade, phonographs were occasionally exhibited and played as a scientific curiosity in front of audiences belonging mostly to the middle and upper classes (e.g. *El globo*, Feb 5, 1879), but they were not seen very often. For an individual to own a phonograph for entertainment purposes was practically unheard of, as they were expensive and sound quality was still insufficient for any aesthetic enjoyment to be derived from it. This changed with the introduction of the Perfected Phonograph in 1888. The new phonograph used wax cylinders as its primary means of recording, instead of tinfoils, which made it easier to record sound

and instantly play it back; this helped redefine the entertainment and scientific potential of recording technologies. Individuals who bought phonographs for their own private use were still a minority, and the concept of the recording as a stand-alone product to be bought and sold had not really entered the Spaniards' consciousness, but, during the 1890s, increasing numbers of Spaniards became acquainted with recording technologies. This was partly thanks to some educational institutions, notably secondary schools, which acquired phonographs for teaching purposes (e.g. *Diario de Tenerife*, Oct 2, 1896; *El noticiario de Soria*, Oct 3, 1896; *El Lábaro*, Aug 27, 1897), but the biggest push to the phonograph's popularity came from a few funfair impresarios and scientific enthusiasts who toured the country with their phonographs, exhibiting them and organizing demonstrations at inns, civic centres, church halls and private homes in rural and urban Spain,. Travelling phonographs were referred to in the press and literature simply as *fonógrafos*. I have not been able to find any occurrence of the phrase *fonógrafo ambulante* other than Chapí's and González's *zarzuela*, but the subject matter would have thus resonated with audiences, even if by the time of its premiere it was starting to worn out already, as suggested by a reviewer in Extremadura (*La region extremeña*, May 5, 1899). Indeed, with Edison's New Phonograph in 1896 and the Standard Phonograph in 1898, phonographs (and, later on, gramophones) became easier to use to non-specialists and affordable to at least the middle and upper classes. It is at this point that the phonograph became a domestic artefact, complete with a growing range of recorded repertoire, with public exhibitions decreasing in appeal and frequency.⁷

⁷ Between 1896 and 1905, phonographs were sold and recordings (on wax cylinder support) were produced and distributed by some forty independent *gabinetes fonográficos* all over Spain. From 1903, coinciding with the development of the gramophone and related technological innovations that enabled the reproduction of recordings on an industrial scale, multinational record companies opened subsidiaries in new markets all over the world (Patmore 2009, 122 and 124), including Spain; Compagnie Française du Gramophon (Compañía Francesa del Gramófono) was the first. By 1905, most *gabinetes* were no longer operative as such.

Before the development of domestic phonography, mobility had not just been a necessary characteristic of phonographs: indeed, it was a crucial part of how early recording technologies were imagined as they became better known in Spain. We find an early example in the 1885 play *El fonógrafo*,⁸ in which mobility, although not key to the development of the plot as in *El fonógrafo ambulante*, helps establish the device's appeal. In one of the initial scenes, the main character, Próspero, declares that he is leaving his flat to go on a "paseo fonográfico" (phonographic promenade), subsequently hiding the phonograph in his pocket with the aim of recording everything going on in town as he walks by. The libretto does not explain how Próspero is supposed to fit a phonograph in his pocket, but Próspero's announcement is not intended as a joke either, given that he subsequently arrives back from the streets having effortlessly accomplished his mission. This suggests that the authors of the play (and possibly their audiences too) would have heard or read about Edison's invention from the numerous press notices or books mentioning them at the time (Casas y Barbosa 188?), but would have never touched or even seen one in real life. Nevertheless, the fact that the authors imagined the phonograph as being mobile (and portable) comes across as significant evidence that mobility was key in the Spanish imaginaries of early recording technologies.

We find further proof of this in press coverage of the phonographs touring Spain during the 1890s. Arrivals and departures of exhibitors in villages and cities were duly reported in local

⁸ *El fonógrafo's* libretto was written by José del Castillo y Soriano, whereas Isidoro García Rosetti wrote the music (now lost). The play was given its first performance on 28th August 1885 at the Teatro Recoletos in Madrid. The plot revolves around middle-class Próspero, who has just returned from Paris and is very favourably impressed by the technological advances he has witnessed there. He has brought a phonograph with him, which he keeps hidden from his wife Rosa. Pepito, a friend of Próspero's, arrives at the flat and is left alone with Rosa, with whom he is in love. Nevertheless, before he declares his love so he spots the phonograph and instead tries to convey his feelings with hand gestures. After Pepito leaves, Rosa receives the visit of a Madame Niní, who claims she was Próspero's mistress while he was in Paris. Próspero, on the other hand, finds out about Pepito's attempts and is convinced that Rosa is cheating on him. The spouses are determined to confront each other, but finally reconcile, and Próspero decides to send the phonograph back to France with Madame Niní.

newspapers. Such notices are pervaded with verbs denoting mobility or immobility: it is common to read that a phonograph has arrived, or has departed, or is travelling towards a locality, or, in contrast, has been installed (*El bien público*, June 28, 1892; *El liberal*, 24 July, 1896). They were often printed side by side with others referring to the mobility of people, means of transport or merchandise. On 28th October 1898, the Galician newspaper *El Eco de Santiago* reported about a phonograph being installed in the Rúa del Villar side by side with two other notices about local doctors leaving for various destinations (Oct 28, 1898).

Evidence even suggests there was an expectation that phonographs should travel to people, and not the other way around: in 1897, funfair impresario Adolfo Fo exhibited a phonograph in the centre of Alicante, and he was forced by popular demand to take the device to the neighbourhood of Benalúa for a few days (instead of Benalúans travelling to the city centre) (*La correspondencia de Alicante*, May 11, 1897).

Another feature of the discourse surrounding recording technologies that suggests that these were meant to be mobile, but not necessarily make people mobile, is connected to the fact that phonograph exhibitions typically took place along well-defined social class boundaries. A manual worker living in Madrid or Barcelona might have got to know the phonograph in a demonstration at his or her *círculo obrero*, but, more often than not, he or she would have to attend a *salón recreativo* to listen through headphones for a few *pesetas*, whereas members of the middle and upper classes would typically enjoy more frequent opportunities to see and listen to phonographs in their *casinos* or *ateneos*. In smaller cities and sizeable towns, phonograph operators typically offered one or several demonstrations at the local theatre, which would have presumably been attended by the local bourgeoisie. After this, the phonograph would often be installed at a local inn, church atrium or other public space where it could be listened to on demand for a modest fee, presumably for those social classes who for whom the theatre was not their preferred sociability space. There is, therefore, a

suggestion that, even though the phonograph travels to people, geographically and metaphorically (between social classes), it does not necessarily enable individuals to mobilize so easily.

The focus on the early recording technologies' mobile nature must be understood in connection with broader discourses about mobility in turn-of-the-century Spain. Geographical mobility was indeed heavily connected to progress and modernization in the *regeneracionista* imaginary. Investment in railways and roads was prominent during the early years of the Restauración, and in the early years of the twentieth century, *regeneracionista* minister Rafael Gasset (1900-1903) focused his attention on other aspects of Spain's underdeveloped transport network, such as maritime ports. These measures were supposed to facilitate the modernization of Spain through allowing the circulation of goods and people, both within Spain (hence domesticating regional differences too) and between Spain and foreign countries. Mobility and modernization were connected in deeper ways too, other than transport and other mobile artefacts being carriers of modernity – they are often represented as being integral to modernity themselves, as demonstrated in the poem that Manuel Curros Enríquez, a Republican, anti-clericalist Galician-language poet and journalist, wrote on the occasion of the arrival of the railway to his native Ourense in 1880. The third-person omitted subject in the first stanza could indeed be either the locomotive or a feminine noun connected to progress (maybe 'modernidade' or 'rexeneración'):

Vela ahí ven, vela ahí ven avantando
cómaros e corgas, e vales, e cerros.
¡Vinde vela, mociños e mozas!
¡Saudáina, rapaces e vellos!

The phonograph's mobile capabilities are, strictly speaking, not central to its function of recording and playing back sound. Accentuating them, therefore, emphasizes its potential as

an agent and embodiment of modernization. The arrival of the phonograph to the Andalusian village in which *El fonógrafo ambulante* is set must thus not be understood simply as a realistic portrayal of how arrivals and departures and phonographs punctuated the lives of cities and towns across Spain: it also allows Chapí and González to suggest that recording technologies both bring modernity with them and embody modernity. As such, they can disrupt traditional ways of life – as those shown in the opening scene of the play. In this, a group of men from the village come back from their work singing about their struggles in the fields. They are welcomed by a group of women, who comfort them by offering food, drink, and affection. This is a stereotypical scene of rural *zarzuela*, and as such meant to extol – albeit in a rather patronizing way - several virtues of the *pueblo*: hard work, honesty, chastity, simplicity and the ability to derive pleasure from the small things in life. The male and female choirs sing distinct melodies with, however, harmonize well with each other, suggesting that relations between the sexes should also be harmonic. At a certain point, the men try to cross boundaries and ask for inappropriate displays of affection, but the women wittily (and rapidly) stop them.

An idyllic scene instead – and one that almost calls for being disrupted. It soon is, at least nominally, when it is announced that the following Sunday a phonograph (already arrive in the village) will be exhibited publicly and a general election will take place on the same day. That both the elections and the phonograph are seen as creatures of modernity, alien to the simple and traditional life of the *pueblo* (where Gerónimo, the mayor, seems to rule in an almost *cacique*-like fashion), is made clear by the fact that some of the villagers are initially suspicious of the two: Araceli, who has already seen the phonograph, says that “parece que está allí dentro el demonio”, whereas her neighbour, Encarnación, is concerned because every time there is an election her husband gets drunk in the tavern “por cuenta del *deputao*.” The phonograph’s operator himself, Restituto, is also presented from its very first appearance as

an outsider, not quite a member of the *pueblo*. In this regard, we might compare him to the *deputao*, who is never seen or heard at any time, but is regularly referred to by the locals. Anxiety among the villagers surrounding his visit (which never materializes) suggests that, like the phonograph, the *deputao* is seen as alien to the *pueblo* and potentially disruptive – in a way which is not entirely positive. By contrast, Restituto stays as a sympathetic, likeable character throughout the play: he does not have an Andalusian or indeed any other recognizable regional accent, but instead expresses himself in highly polished Spanish (we can presume the same would be true of the *deputao* were he to speak during the play), and he is indeed tacitly revealed as a *regeneracionista* when he introduces himself as a man of science, claiming that: “Mi misión es eminentemente civilizadora: difundir el conocimiento de este descubrimiento admirable, de esa última palabra de la ciencia.” Although there is no hint that Restituto is based on a real person, members of the audience would no doubt recognize in him traits of some of the scientific popularizers who brought phonographs into areas of rural Spain, such as Frenchman Armando Hugens, who after a few years exhibiting phonographs throughout Spain went on in 1896 to open the first *gabinete fonográfico*, Hugens y Acosta. We might also want to see a hint in Restituto of Francisco Giner de los Ríos’s 1881 project for a series of *misiones ambulantes*, which did not materialize until 1931 under the name of *Misiones Pedagógicas*, with noted Spanish intellectuals and artists travelling around the rural areas of the country and exposing locals to a range of cultural, artistic and educational activities.

The bewilderment some of the villagers experiment at Restituto’s recording technologies and *regeneracionista* outlook is reminiscent of contemporary press accounts of phonographic sessions in rural areas of Spain. In these, rural Spaniards were portrayed as superstitious and not enlightened enough to make sense of scientific discovery, with some of them allegedly thinking that a devil was locked inside the phonograph, as Araceli does in the play (*La*

Dinastía, Sept 7, 1895; Pitis, Aug 24, 1903). It would be unpractical and outside the scope of this article to determine whether such accounts are real or fictional. Their interest, instead, lies in what they reveal about the newspapers themselves and at least some of their middle-class audiences: concern in some sectors of society that superstition and ignorance among the Spanish population would be an obstacle to the introduction of science and education and, ultimately, to *regeneracionismo*. This opens up another reading of *El fonógrafo ambulante*, which recasts sound recording technologies as a probe for the receptivity of Spain's rural population to modernising projects.

The first conversation between Araceli and Antero, in which they recognize each other and renew their love, partly confirms the disruptive potential of the travelling phonograph – because their relationship is a threat to Araceli's engagement to Gerónimo, which on paper sounds auspicious: the mayor of the town gets married to the most accomplished woman of the community and a true representative of the *pueblo*. When some in the village express doubts that Araceli can be happy with Gerónimo, though, it becomes clear that their marriage is not as auspicious and consonant with the values of the *pueblo* as it initially seems to be, suggesting that Gerónimo, as a *cacique*-like figure, might be fundamentally detached from the true needs and wants of the people and therefore unsuitable to marry Araceli. The initial sense of disruption is thus replaced by the suggestion that mobile recording technologies might indeed fulfil the opposite role than we are initially led to believe: they might help restore the true values of the *pueblo* as posited by *género chico*. These involve marrying for love rather than out of economic or social interest, staying reasonably close to tradition without necessarily shunning innovations and conforming to particular gender roles.

The order-restoring potential of recording technologies is confirmed when Antero and Araceli sing their big love duet, a feature in many *zarzuelas*: Antero sings of his love for Araceli to the tune of a *jota aragonesa*, Araceli responds by claiming that she cannot sing

jota but will instead declare her love in an Andalusian *malagueña*. At the end of the number, though, they both sing a *jota* together. The signifiers of both the *jota* and of Andalusian folk music are complex and ever-evolving throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century both in Spain and abroad. Indeed, whereas Andalusian or Andalusian-inspired music often functioned abroad as a metonym for the whole of Spain, as is the case in Bizet's *Carmen*, it is telling that Chapí chose a *jota* at the end of the duet to signify the whole of Spain: indeed, although the *jota* is a typical traditional music genre from Aragón, I argue that Araceli joining her lover in singing a *jota* must not be understood as a sign of Araceli's submissiveness to Antero, or Andalusia's submissiveness to Aragón; rather, as Andalusia and Aragón coming together under a broader Spanish identity. In *género chico*, the *jota* indeed frequently functions as a metonymy for all of Spain, and the work in which this is perhaps most clear is Manuel Fernández Caballero's *Gigantes y cabezudos* (Encabo 2007, 76, 83 and 120) – set in Saragossa, the capital of Aragón, and celebrating the Aragonese and, by extension, the Spanish people's courage and determination in both the front and home front of the Spanish-American war. With *Gigantes y cabezudos* premiered less than six months before *El fonógrafo ambulante* and achieving unparalleled success, it is likely that Chapí had Fernández Caballero's *jotas* in mind when he composed his. Moreover, the *jota*'s potential to denote national identity was recognized outside of Spain too (Llano 2012, 100) – as in Glinka's *Jota aragonesa*, Raoul Laparra's *La jota*, Manuel de Falla's 'Jota' from *Siete canciones populares españolas*.

The *jota* scene is crucial in instrumentalizing recording technologies and the mobility possibilities they engender and facilitate to advance the broader discourse of national identity and regional difference characteristic of *género chico*. Even though *género chico* is an eminently Madrilenian product, and most of the plots would be typically set in Madrid itself in the present day (or, as many libretti put it, "Madrid, época actual"), it still had some

potential to accommodate regional difference, as long as deviations from the norm were understood as *regional* and subsumed under the national, and not as nation-defining characteristics: indeed, Madrid was growing rapidly at the time thanks to newcomers arriving from all over Spain in search of jobs and business opportunities. Non-Madrilenian characters in *género chico* are identifiable by accent, music (normally based on the traditional music of their home region), character traits and traditions they follow. Ultimately, though, such newcomers are normally portrayed as part of the Madrid landscape: people from different regions may speak with different accents and sing different music, but they share the basic characteristics of the Spanish *pueblo*, which is assumed to be found at its finest in Madrid, where people coming from different regions coexist peacefully. Such differences make Spain more diverse and colourful, but are not meant to be the foundation of rivalries.

Predictably, it is in such terms that *El fonógrafo ambulante* deals with regional difference within Spain. Characters are defined, individually or collectively, by stereotypical traits: at the beginning of his first conversation with Araceli, Antero invokes *La Pilarica*, the Virgen del Pilar, patron saint of Saragossa, but also of the whole of Spain.⁹ As is the case with the *jota*, the choice of *La Pilarica* suggests that most regional differences can easily be subsumed under the characteristics of the Spanish *pueblo*: someone from Aragon may be more devoted to *La Pilarica* than someone from elsewhere in Spain, but the two are not fundamentally very different – what matters is that Catholicism and devotion is, generally, a characteristic shared by the Spanish *pueblo*. The Andalusians are portrayed in a similarly stereotyped manner: on the score's cover, the men wear *sombreros cordobeses*, a type of hat made in Córdoba but worn all over Andalusia, and the dialogue attempts to capture some inflections typical of the

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According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to the Apostle St James on a pillar (*pilar* in Spanish) in what would then become the city of Saragossa, and she encouraged him to evangelize the whole of the Iberian Peninsula.

Andalusian accent. From Araceli's first intervention we learn she feels staunchly Andalusian: she claims she has been born "cerca del Guadalquivir", is determined to die in its vicinity too and has never left her homeland. (In the next scene, though, the latter claim is revealed as untrue: from the lovers' conversation, we learn that she actually spent a few days with her aunt in Saragossa, where she met and fell in love with Antero).

But, other than this, Araceli is not substantially very different from average *género chico* heroines – Aragonese Pilar in *Gigantes y cabezudos*, or Madrilenian Mari Pepa in *La Revoltosa*; they all share with each other, beyond stereotypical regional traits, a common ideal of Spanish femininity, resourceful and suitably fiery when necessary, perhaps a little too fond of flirtation, but ultimately devoted to religion, family, community and tradition. For example, recalling notions of the pastoral prevailing in *zarzuela*, such as simplicity, modesty and piety (Harney 2008, 267), Araceli claims that she only needs a few flowers and a well-starched *bata* (a modest, simple dress) to ornate herself. But, as is the case with most *género chico* heroines, her modesty and femininity do not imply submissiveness or a complete retreat from public life and she indeed demonstrates considerable influence in the domestic and even the community arena. From the first scene between Araceli and her widowed father, Don Frasquito, it becomes clear that without Araceli the household would fall apart, and it is also Araceli who keeps track of crucial details of the election to make sure that her father fulfils his mission in ensuring the re-election of the *deputao* (which is ironic, considering that, being a woman, Araceli would not have had the right to vote at that stage). These traits confirm Araceli as a working class/rural heroine, distinct from both the incipient first wave feminists and the urban, middle-class 'ángel del hogar' model.

El fonógrafo ambulante, while not deviating substantially from established discourses of national identity and regional difference in *género chico*, exhibits a few particularities that speak of Chapí's and González's attempt at speaking of recording technologies in a way that

would be familiar to their audiences, confirming the views of some and perhaps stimulating light debate among others. Firstly, even though non-Madrilenian characters do appear in *zarzuelas* set in Madrid, they normally do so as secondary stock characters (e.g. the Galician guard) and not so much as romantic leads. Around 1900, *zarzuelas* set outside Madrid, such as *La alegría de la huerta* and *La tempranica*, became fashionable, but in most cases both romantic leads came from the same region. Mixed-region couples such as Antero and Araceli were rare, but it is not difficult to see how such couples further the idea of mutual understanding between the two build a more unified, stronger Spain – and, more generally, being a metaphor for *regeneracionista* ideals which spoke of enhanced understanding and solidarity between regions to facilitate economic, social and technological progress. Secondly, the encounter between characters from different regions does not take place in Madrid, as was the norm in *género chico* (and possibly in real life too), but in rural Andalusia, a region unlikely to attract significant contingents of Spaniards from other areas looking for job or businesses opportunities. Chapí and González thus suggest that recording technologies, especially if they are mobile, can facilitate regional exchange and are hence fully compatible with the values of the *pueblo*.

Chapí and González, though, express reservations about the beneficial potential of science, technology and *regeneracionismo*; these are most obvious in how Restituto is presented and treated. Restituto is by no means a villain: he is sincere and well-intentioned in his *misión civilizadora*, and once he finds out about Antero and Araceli's relationship, he supports them wholeheartedly. But his *regeneracionista*, evidence-based outlook is questioned by Chapí and González, most patently in the quartet sung by Antero, Araceli, Restituto and Gypsy fortune-teller María del Carmen. The number takes place after the two lovers learn that the *deputao* is on his way and their plans to run away are threatened. Araceli and Antero are concerned, but María del Carmen predicts that they will be married before eight days. Restituto is doubtful,

not so much about the Gypsy's prediction, but rather about her methods, which are alien to Restituto's scientific, empiricist outlook. Chapí makes it obvious again that Restituto is not part of the *pueblo* music by having him sing a *cantabile* in triple metre rather akin to operatic writing, whereas María del Carmen's music is closely based on Andalusian folklore.

Interesting here is also María del Carmen's status, as a Gypsy, *vis-à-vis* the *pueblo*. Even though María del Carmen's role is a short one and appears almost *ex machina* to complete the quartet towards the end of the play, it is also a crucial one in decisively orienting the discourse around recording technologies, science and the *pueblo*. Indeed, the character might be seen as a further embodiment of the complex discourses pervasive in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain, in which the figure of the Gypsy (often conflated with all of Andalusia) was absorbed into the broader nationalist enterprise, becoming an exotic, highly exportable Other abroad (Charnon-Deutsch 2004, 184), but also fulfilling a key role as an internal Other, in that it facilitated redefinition of certain aspects of Spanish identity in opposition to the Gypsy population. It is telling that it is a Gypsy and not a local woman who is invoked to make use of her powers of prediction to anticipate what will become of Araceli and Antero, as fortune-telling might have been perceived as incompatible with the piety and devoutness typical of the *pueblo* – but blind, cool scientifism, the authors suggest, is not fully compatible either; both can be listened to and followed, but only inasmuch as they further the ideals of the *pueblo*.

The quartet might have ended with Restituto embracing the ideals of the *pueblo* (as María del Carmen does in this scene), but it does not: instead, Antero, Araceli and María del Carmen leave the stage to reunite with the rest of the villagers, convinced that their plan will work out, whereas Restituto is left behind. He does, nonetheless, experience a transformation: he sings his opening theme again, but this time it is in the major mode and expresses a more sympathetic (if ultimately somewhat ironic) view on María del Carmen's abilities: "Bruja es

la gitana / pues ve aquí una yunta. / Demuestra que tiene / la vista sutil” (This gypsy woman is a witch / because she sees a yoke here. / She certainly has / sharp eyesight). In the last scene, with the lovers indeed ending up together and presumably planning to get married María del Carmen’s fortune-telling reveals itself as equally or more reliable than Restituto’s positivistic approach in this case. There is, however, no attempt at criticizing or ridiculing Restituto and his views: he emerges at the end of the play as a sympathetic, if somewhat eccentric, character, whose *regeneracionista* views, like the phonograph, might help further the *pueblo*’s values and traditional way of life, but should not be embraced unconditionally.

Conclusion

El fonógrafo ambulante comes across as a warning against narratives of technological determinism which see technologies being uniformly and inevitably embraced by whole communities or geographical areas without accounting for the dynamic discourses generated by such technologies’ inventors, operators and users. During the 1880s and 1890s, a number of accounts about the capabilities of phonograph to revolutionize the Spanish industry, education and legal system were published that now come across as overly optimistic, and some of the most prominent *gabinetes fonográficos* operating between 1897 and 1905 presented themselves as state-of-the-art, patriotically committed businesses. *El fonógrafo ambulante*, however, must not be read as the polar opposite of these. Indeed, discourses about early recording technologies in Spain are not easily understood in terms of dichotomies, with very few voices (if any) dismissing the phonograph’s potential; what is full of nuance instead is how recording technologies were inserted in existing discourses mediated, among others, by social class, race and political ideology.

The last scene of the *zarzuela*, in which all inhabitants of the village, from the mayor to the dispossessed agricultural workers, sit in fascination in front of the phonograph, similarly suggests that recording technologies might have been perceived as beneficial in uniting Spaniards from all social classes or at least soothing class differences and instead celebrating commonalities – a goal shared by many in turn-of-the-century Spain. Nevertheless, in contrast with Curros Enríquez’s poem, the discourse of *El fonógrafo ambulante* with regards to mobility and progress is less ambitious: no grand claims are made about Spain’s progress and regeneration; instead, the focus is on how Chapí and González think that progress, regeneration and mobility might be appropriated by the perspective of the *pueblo*. Whereas Curros Enríquez portrays mobility as transformative, it is restorative in *El fonógrafo*: Araceli and Antero are able to reunite and ultimately marry for love and not for convenience - which, according to the conventions of *género chico*, is exactly what two young, honest members of the *pueblo* should do.

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Abstract

Through analysis of the zarzuela *El fonógrafo ambulante* (1899; music by Ruperto Chapí, libretto by Juan González), this article discusses how the arrival of recording technologies in Spain (1877-1900) was influenced by and in turn influenced prevailing discourses concerning modernity, regional difference and interregional mobility. With recent critical accounts of the

early history of recording technologies having emerged mostly from the study of technologically and musically advanced countries, this article also intends to be a reminder of the role of cultural context: the study of the arrival of the phonograph in Spain indeed reveals how early users of recording technologies related their experiences and perceptions to broader discourses of modernity and identity that had often taken for granted elsewhere.

Intended to entertain big contingents of people across a variety of social classes, *El fonógrafo ambulante* portrayed an aspect of late nineteenth-century life in Spain its audiences would have been familiar with, i.e. the travelling phonographs paraded through Spanish cities, towns and villages during the 1890s. The work also embodies views on sound recording technologies which would have resonated with its audience— consonant with zarzuela's defense of an integrative, progressively industrialized, urban, somewhat relaxed in terms of social mores, yet still ideologically conservative Spain. In fact, whereas the arrival of a phonograph in an Andalusian village at the beginning of the zarzuela is initially presented as a potential danger to social practices, reservations are quickly overcome when it becomes clear that mobile recording technologies can make the Spanish pueblo thrive through encouraging mutual understanding between Spanish regions and ensuring the preservation of gender roles. *El fonógrafo ambulante*, though, shies away from defending transformative uses of phonography that other, more *regeneracionista* sectors of the population anticipated; in doing so, it ultimately presents a sceptical view of modernity as the path to national regeneration.

Keywords

regeneracionismo, phonograph, recording technologies, Chapí, mobility, modernity

Bio

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