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DESIRE, NEED, WILL A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AXEL HONNETH, DAVID HARVEY AND THE BAND: TITÃS

Enio Everton A. Vieira

Student of the interdisciplinary
postgraduate program in Education,
Art and History of Culture at:
Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie

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Abstract: This article aims to create a dialogue between the song “Comida”, by the São Paulo rock group Titãs, with the ideas of Axel Honneth in his classic book “Luta por Reconhecimento” (Fight for Recognition), and also studies on the Marxist capitalist mode of production David Harvey, in “The Enigma of Capital”. We will draw a parallel between the song’s lyrics and the theoretical reflections of the two philosophers. We will also use complementary bibliography on the historical context that Brazil was going through during the time of the song’s release, using the text by João Manuel Cardoso de Mello and Fernando A. Novais, about Brazil’s insertion in late capitalism during the second half of the 20th century.

Keywords: History; Brazilian rock; capitalism

INTRODUCTION

This article arises, firstly, from reflections on the work of the German philosopher Axel Honneth, who, with his free teaching thesis called *Struggle for Recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*, studies how individuals seek, before each other, to be recognized and respected, whether in the legal, emotional and/or loving spheres. Starting from notions already well established in the philosophical sphere, such as Rousseau’s Social Contract or Machiavelli’s perpetuation in power, Honneth provides a historical-philosophical overview of how various intellectuals, especially Hegel, understood the issue of recognition, but as a social struggle not so much groups, but focusing on individuals excluded from the social and legal forms established by certain societies. According to the preface by Marcos Nobre in the 2003 Brazilian edition of *Fight for Recognition*:

“The type of social struggle that Honneth privileges in his theory of recognition is not marked in the first place by goals of self-preservation or increase in power - a

conception of conflict predominant in both modern political philosophy and the sociological tradition, which eliminates or tends to eliminate the normative moment of all social struggle. Rather, he is interested in those conflicts that originate from an experience of social disrespect, from an attack on personal or collective identity, capable of triggering action that seeks to restore relationships of mutual recognition or precisely develop them at a higher evolutionary level. Therefore, for Honneth, it is possible to see in the various struggles for recognition a moral force that drives social developments” (NOBRE, 2003, p. 18).

We will also use a lot of the ideas contained in David Harvey’s work, “The Enigma of Capital”, released in 2011. Starting from the global economic crisis of 2008 and 2009, the British thinker’s work makes a deep analysis of the ways in which the capitalist system evolved in the last decades of the 20th century, seeking to elucidate how the rise of neoliberal theories occurred, and how they affected business, ecology, underprivileged populations, technology, education, and other issues in the modern world, modernity understood here as “style, custom of life or social organization that emerged in Europe from the 17th century onwards” (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 08).

Thinking about relationships of mutual recognition, added to the conception of conflict that tends to eliminate the normative moment of all social struggle and the economic problems generated by neoliberalism, we will establish a dialogue between these ideas with the song “Comida” (Food), by the São Paulo rock group, Titãs. According to Severiano (2008), the (originally) octet that makes rock based on a wide variety of styles, released its first album in 1984, but would only gain public and critical acclaim with “Dinosaur Head”, its third LP, establishing itself, since then, as one of the great bands of Brazilian rock (SEVERIANO, 2008, p. 440). The song studied here is the second track from the

album released in 1987, called *Jesus Has No Teeth in the Country of Toothless*. We will now go to your lyrics.

Titãs – ‘Comida’ - (food), (Araldo Antunes/Marcelo Fromer/Sérgio Brito)¹

Drink is water
Food is pasture
What are you thirsty for?
Do you have what hunger?

we do not want just food
We want food, fun and art
we do not want just food
We want to go anywhere

we do not want just food
We want drinks, fun, ballet
we do not want just food
We want life the way life wants it

We don't just want to eat
We want to eat and we want to make love
We don't just want to eat
We want pleasure to alleviate pain

We don't just want money
We want money and happiness
We don't just want money
We want it whole and not half

Fun and art
For any part
Fun, ballet
How life wants
Desire, need, desire

WE DON'T JUST WANT MONEY

Released in 1987, “Comida” is one of the biggest hits of the group Titãs, a song that came to light at the time known as the redemocratization of Brazil after the period of Civil-Military Dictatorship, more specifically, at the time of economic reforms, which culminated in the launch in 1986 of the so-called “Plano Cruzado”, under the administration of then president José Sarney (FAUSTO, 2012, p. 443).

Sarney called on “Brazilians” to collaborate in the implementation of the plan and to wage a life-and-death war against inflation. The government seemed to make the dream of going to sleep in Brazil and waking up the next day in Switzerland come true. The price freeze had a profound impact on the population, who could not follow the complicated intricacies of the economy and preferred to believe in the acts of will of a leader now seen as courageous (FAUSTO, 2012, p. 444).

According to Giddens, one of the hallmarks of modern societies is the emphasis on economic issues, and modern monetary activity would not be as it is if it were not for the fact that all members of the population master certain concepts of economics. “The lay individual cannot necessarily provide formal definitions of terms such as ‘capital’ or ‘investment’, but everyone who, say, uses a bank account, demonstrates an implicit and practical mastery of these notions”. (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 41) However, the rapid changes in currencies during the period of Brazilian redemocratization meant that the population did not keep up with the complicated developments in the economy, and the band from São Paulo criticizes the government, not necessarily only in the scope economic instability, but also the lack of planning in other social issues. The “Plano Cruzado” frozen food prices, but the rulers of the time were unable to visualize that the people, represented here in the voice of vocalist Araldo Antunes, not only wanted food, but also wanted fun and art.

Such economic reforms followed the neoliberal logic of the 1980s, known in Brazil as the “Lost Decade”. These economic reforms had as their greatest exponents Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, President of the United States and British Prime Minister, respectively. Seeking to reduce the size of the State’s administrative machine, and make cuts

1. For reasons of space and dynamism, the repetitions of stanzas that occur in the song were omitted.

in social programs, neoliberalism sought, according to Harvey (2011), to consolidate and restore the power of the capitalist class. It was believed that, by allowing the rich to accumulate more assets, they would invest in new activities, thus generating new jobs and growing the economy. However, that was not what happened.

The success of wage suppression policy after 1980 allowed the rich to get richer. We are told that this is good because the rich will invest in new activities [...]. Well, yes, they invest, but not necessarily directly in production. Most of them prefer to invest in stocks. For example, they put money into the stock market and the value of the shares rises, so they put in even more money, regardless of how well the companies they invest in are actually doing (HARVEY, 2011, p. 25).

Neoliberalism, constant and periodic change of currencies, cuts in social programs, high inflation and wage crunch. In the midst of all this, Brazilian rock bands were successful - the movement known as BRock - and one of them called for "fun and art". Let's see why.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT HUNGER?

Right at the beginning of the song, Titãs' lead singer, Arnaldo Antunes, sings that "drink is water, food is pasture". Throughout the so-called "Lost Decade", workers, especially rural workers - the so-called farm worker - experienced situations of extreme poverty and hunger. By reducing drink to water, and food to grass, the song criticizes the situation of workers, who suffered from the constant economic instability of currency changes, neoliberal policies, and the salary squeeze of the period.

A portion of ordinary workers were, in 1980, immersed in absolute poverty. In regions with greater economic dynamism, the occurrence of some mishap or fatality was enough for the vulnerability resulting from

low wages or low income to translate into food insufficiency, housing precariousness, etc. [...] However, where relative lethargy prevailed, as in some cities in the Northeast and even in Rio de Janeiro, a contingent of structural poverty accumulated. If we add the miserable city dwellers to the farm workers and small rural producers, equally miserable, we will be faced with the excluded (MELLO and NOVAIS, 1998, pp. 625-626).

We need, however, to relativize and problematize the idea of "excluded". David Harvey (2011, p. 102), in his reading of the evolution of capitalism, points out that there are both positive and negative aspects in the development of this mode of production. On the positive side we have medical advances, which allow us, living beings in general, to live much longer lives than previous generations; physical barriers were virtually torn down with the speeds of transportation; and the modes of communication promoted by technology have never been so efficient (even allowing us to listen to our favorite songs, such as the group Titãs, at any time and place). However, capitalism also causes world wars, environmental degradation and social exclusions on global scales, as the system is "a fundamental globalizing influence precisely because it is an economic and not a political order: it has been able to penetrate distant areas of the world where states of their origin could not fully assert their political influence" (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 64), therefore also affecting countries like Brazil and its economic organization. Therefore, we can say that the "excluded", as Mello and Novais point out, are not necessarily outside the system, but are an intrinsic part of capitalism itself, even necessary for its full movement of renewal.

Wars between states in the historical geography of capitalism have been resounding episodes of creative destruction. Not only are physical infrastructures destroyed, but workforces are also decimated, environments devastated,

institutions reinvented, social relations disrupted, and all kinds of new technologies and organizational forms created (from nuclear bombs, radar, advanced surgeries to burn treatment to logistics systems and decision-making command and execution models). Reconstruction after wars absorbs surplus capital and labor [...]. It is not, of course, that wars are purposely designed by capital for this purpose, but capital certainly fuels them for this purpose (HARVEY, 2011, p. 164).

While David Harvey analyzes the so-called “excluded” on a Marxist level, the German philosopher Axel Honneth follows a different path in his interpretations. Coming from the Frankfurt School, he thinks about social exclusion not from the perspective of the economic sphere, but from mutual respect and personal autonomy. Such exclusions, for Honneth, can occur in exceptional historical situations, such as the case of the civil rights movements of Afro-descendant populations in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. In this specific situation, tolerance of legal underprivilege led to a paralyzing feeling of social shame, from which only active protest and resistance could free (HONNETH, 2003, p. 198). Still on social exclusion, Honneth states that:

The particularity in forms of disrespect, such as those existing in the deprivation of rights or social exclusion, not only represents the violent limitation of personal autonomy, but also its association with the feeling of not having the status of an interaction partner with equal value, morally on an equal footing; for the individual, denying socially valid legal claims means being harmed in the intersubjective expectation of being recognized as a subject capable of forming moral judgments. [...] Therefore, what is taken away from the person here by disrespect in terms of recognition is the cognitive respect of a moral imputability which, in turn, has to be acquired at cost in processes of socializing interaction (HONNETH, 2003, pp 216-217).

Synthesizing what has been said so far, we have, on the one hand, those excluded in the economic sphere, deeply analyzed by David Harvey as an integral part of the capitalist system, even necessary for its functioning and evolution. On the other hand, there are those excluded in the legal sphere, who feel, based on Honneth’s observations, paralyzed from a social point of view, as they are not fully socialized and integrated. Simplifying the two philosophers in the phrase from Titãs, “we don’t just want money, we want money and happiness [...], we want it whole and not half”. In other words, social inclusion through economic means is not enough; it is necessary to have legal recognition to guarantee the rights and use of laws by and for everyone.

But Honneth goes further in his investigations. Citing several thinkers, especially Hegel, the German philosopher of the Frankfurt School points out that, for full social recognition, the individual must be integrated, beyond the field of law, in the spheres of love and solidarity, to which we will turn our gaze further below.

WE DON’T JUST WANT TO EAT, WE WANT TO EAT AND WE WANT TO MAKE LOVE

The food song continues to criticize the government’s lack of initiative in investing in solving social problems, as if the panacea for all the population’s obstacles were limited to the economic sphere. For the band, people want, in addition to eating, to have the option of choosing what they want to eat, in addition to “water and pasture” (after all, what are you hungry and thirsty for?). As the band Titãs is a product of the cultural industry, it is understandable that its composers highlight cultural demands. The people - in the case of the lyrics, “we” - want money, but also love, fun, art, ballet, happiness, pleasure to alleviate pain, going out somewhere, they want to live

a life that is full, that is whole and not in half.

The emphasis that the band gives to other contexts, in addition to the economic one (but not excluding it), comes once again closer to what Harvey calls the “seven spheres of activity” in the evolution of the capitalist system. According to the British thinker, capitalism was only able to overcome the feudal mode of production because it developed into seven different spheres, which interrelate and feed each other in a dynamic and dialectical way. These spheres are: technologies and forms of organization; social relationships; institutional and administrative arrangements; production and work processes; relationships with nature; reproduction of everyday life and the species; and mental conceptions of the world.

None of the spheres is dominant, and none is independent of the others. But none of them is determined even collectively by the others. Each sphere evolves on its own, but always in dynamic interaction with the others. Technological and organizational changes arise for any reason (sometimes accidental), while the relationship with nature is unstable and changes perpetually only in part because of human-induced changes. Our mental conceptions of the world, to give another example, are often unstable, conflicting, subject to scientific discoveries as well as to whims, fashions, and deeply ingrained cultural and religious beliefs and desires. Changes in mental conceptions have all kinds of consequences, intended and unintended, for technological and organizational forms, social relations, work processes, relationships with nature, and acceptable institutional arrangements. (HARVEY, 2011, p. 104)

Harvey follows his explanation by saying that, while no sphere overlaps the others, none of them develops autonomously. From time to time, some spheres encounter obstacles to their development, and other spheres will evolve more quickly, but not necessarily in a sense of improvement, as there may be setbacks, and in this constant dialectic all

spheres influence and change each other. The British thinker also points out that the error of socialist experiences, more specifically in the former Soviet Union (although existing in the 1980s), was the excessive exaltation and focus on institutional and administrative spheres, and on production and work processes, leaving the others spheres on a lower plane, which did not allow for a full transmutation in the mental spheres of the Russian people, causing the fall of the Soviet socialist system at the turn of the decade.

Returning to the idea of fighting for recognition, and now thinking about affective issues, “Food” highlights the fact that people, in addition to eating, want to “make love”, and want to “go somewhere”. The issue of affective love is addressed by Honneth, as a way of building self-esteem and confidence, allowing human beings to have a more hopeful behavior towards themselves and towards the world.

It is the three forms of recognition of love, right and esteem that primarily create, taken together, the social conditions under which human subjects can arrive at a positive attitude towards themselves; because only thanks to the cumulative acquisition of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, [...], a person is capable of conceiving himself in an unrestricted way as an autonomous and individuated being and of identifying himself with his goals and desires. (HONNETH, 2003, p. 266)

The lack of love, for Honneth, is a type of disrespect that can harm the very autonomy of the being, causing, in addition to a loss in the autonomous coordination capacity of the body itself, “a loss of trust in oneself and in the world, which becomes it extends to the bodily layers of practical relationships with other subjects, paired with a kind of social shame” (HONNETH, 2003, p. 215). This social shame provokes in the individual an annulment of self-respect, that is, a lack of ability to refer to oneself on an equal footing in interactions with

other individuals, which leads to emotional damage, and here comes close to the idea of ontological security by Anthony Giddens.

Ontological security is a form of feeling of security that refers to the belief that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material action environments. It has to do with “being” or, in phenomenological terms, “being-in-the-world”. It is an emotional phenomenon rather than a cognitive one. (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 84)

We still have to think about how we can understand, in the light of the authors studied here, the phrase sung by the group from São Paulo that says we want to “go anywhere”. One could refer to the violence in large urban centers, a very common problem during the period in which the song studied here was released. Mello and Novais compare the situation of Brazilian families to a true State of Siege not declared by the government, given the countless social problems that plagued Brazilians during the period, which prevented full mobility and, consequently, socialization in the city’s circulation spaces. A problem caused, once again, by economic issues, but which were not limited to this sphere alone.

We are facing a family under siege, which does not have constructive assistance from the school. Besieged by an increasingly competitive life, threatened by unemployment, downward social mobility, lower consumption, in short, the lack of future prospects. Besieged by the false values that spring from both the unregulated and wild market and the mass media - success at any cost, exacerbated consumerism, “negative” freedom. Finally, besieged by the increasing spread of drugs, a means increasingly used to escape a meaningless, futureless, unbearable world. (MELLO and NOVAIS, 1998, p. 654)

There is, therefore, a convergence of thoughts between the two Brazilian authors

and David Harvey and his seven spheres, as Mello and Novais, in the quote above, highlight at least five of the seven “Harveyan” spheres: technologies and forms of organization (school and media of communication); social relations (exacerbated consumer society); institutional and administrative arrangements (values that arise from the deregulated market); production and work processes (competitive society due to unemployment); and mental conceptions of the world (which are meaningless and without a future, leading to drug consumption).

In their text about Brazil’s insertion in late capitalism and modern society, Brazilian thinkers, João de Mello and Fernando Novais, also come close to the questions raised by Axel Honneth regarding mutual recognition, as they denounce that “a society without freedoms Effective fundamental principles are incapable of giving firm shelter to universal values and of allowing innovative confrontation between different world views and different alternatives for the organization, present and future, of collective life (MELLO and NOVAIS, 1998, p. 637). The absence of fundamental freedom is, on the part of the State, what Honneth would call a break in the Social Contract relationship, forcing individuals who feel outside the contract to seek some form of legal guarantee, even if it is through “provocative actions”, in other words, crime. Even though the criminal provocative action has a negative connotation, the German philosopher interprets it as a conduct demanding social recognition, which is only possible in societies in which there has been a high development of legal forms of organization.

[...] the same thing takes place in crime, in the advanced stage of law, as in the life and death struggle, under the conditions of the individual formation process; a subject seeks, through a provocative action, to lead another individual or many associates to

respect what has not yet been recognized in their own expectations for forms of social relationships. [...] The outcome of successful recognition was also accompanied by progress in the mode of socialization, as each individual could then know himself as both an autonomous person under the law and as a social member of a legal community". (HONNETH, 2003, pp. 100-101)

Social recognition, whether through crime, art, affective relationships, the right to come and go, integration into consumer society. Better understanding of economic, social, and cultural problems. All of this can be extracted from the lyrics of "Comida", a big hit by Titãs, virtually present in all of the band's performances, with a lyrical complexity that allowed us to associate it with studies of names like David Harvey, Axel Honneth and Anthony Giddens. A cultural and entertainment product that makes it possible to rescue the problems that occurred in Brazil throughout the 1980s, reflecting the period in which it was launched.

FINAL THOUGHTS – FUN AND ART FOR ANY PARTY

More than making associations between the lyrics of the song "Comida" (Food) and some thinkers on issues of the modern world, this article also sought to show the range of possibilities that we can make between the lyrics of the bands of the BRock movement and the socio-historical situation for which our country was going through at the time

of this musical fashion. In addition to Titãs themselves, Jairo Severiano points out eight more bands that, in his view, "synthesize, one could say, the best that has been done in the genre" (SEVERIANO, 2008, p. 437), namely Blitz, Barão Vermelho, Paralamas do Sucesso, Kid Abelha, Ultraje a Rigor, RPM, Legião Urbana and Engenheiros do Hawaii.

Furthermore, much can still be studied in light of these and other musical artists. Marcia Tosta Dias exposes us to the paradox of Brazil being a country with a great musical tradition, possessing an enormous diversity of rhythms, but such plurality has not yet been fully appropriated in academic circles.

[...] When this musical tradition is compared to the studies that have been carried out on it, it is clear that there is a hiatus. Far from constituting a well-defined field of study, as happens with other specialties in the Social Sciences, it is observed that reflection on Brazilian popular music is still restricted to musicologists and a small sector of communication faculties. Both Sociology, Anthropology and History, until recently, showed little interest in the issue in question. (DIAS, 2008, p. 11)

So, there is still a lot to study, not just about song lyrics, but also about the ways in which people listen to and record their songs, going beyond chronological lists of famous artists, successions of musical styles and fashions, throughout of the history of musical culture. In addition to "fun and art", music can be, above all, knowledge and - why not? - a recognition mode.

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