

CONTEMPORARY ICONOCLASM: ANTI-RACISM BETWEEN THE DECOLONISATION OF ART AND THE (RE)SACRALISATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute to the reflection on the phenomenologies of non-identification with the cultural and artistic heritage, namely the architectural and sculptural, installed in the urban public space. Contemporary iconoclastic practices have made the political and media debate aware of the quality and pertinence of cities' aesthetic and artistic transformations. I aim to establish possible relationships between iconoclastic phenomena, contemporary mythography and postcolonial and neo-colonial discursive ways, addressing the social and political issues underlying racism, which may be at the origin of iconoclastic practices against heritage. I conducted a selected review of the scientific literature published in the last 20 years, namely authored by Araújo and Rodrigues (2018), Kilomba (2019; " 'O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca' diz Grada Kilomba", 2016), Maeso (2016), Roldão et al. (2016), Ribeiro (2021), Santos (2003), V. Sousa (2020), Vale de Almeida (2000, 2012), Varela and Pereira (2020), and others. On that basis, I tried to demonstrate how the contemporary art and curatorial activism within museological institutions contributed to challenging institutional historical narratives and the progressive deconstruction of Lusotropicalist discursive practices, which institute colonialism and slavery as acceptable historical inevitabilities. I found that western hegemonic thinking is based on a false ideological construction of identity, supported by an alleged moral and racial superiority, to justify pursuing a model of economic exploitation structured in cultural domination. I concluded that multiculturalism within cultural institutions, safeguarding cultural diversity and heritage interpretation in the public space, could ensure inclusion and social cohesion, develop feelings of belonging, and mitigate inequalities and violence.

KEYWORDS

iconoclasm, coloniality, anti-racism, multiculturalism, activism

A ICONOCLASTIA CONTEMPORÂNEA: O ANTIRRACISMO ENTRE A DESCOLONIZAÇÃO DA ARTE E A (RE)SACRALIZAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo contribuir para a reflexão sobre as fenomenologias da não identificação com o património cultural e artístico, nomeadamente, o arquitetónico e o escultórico, instalado no espaço público urbano. As práticas iconoclastas contemporâneas trouxeram para o debate político e mediático o questionamento da qualidade e pertinência das transformações

estéticas e artísticas que aconteceram nas cidades. Pretende-se estabelecer possíveis relações entre os fenómenos iconoclastas, as mitografias contemporâneas e as práticas discursivas pós-coloniais e neocoloniais, abordando as problemáticas sociais e políticas subjacentes ao racismo, que poderão estar na origem das práticas de iconoclastia contra o património. A partir de uma revisão selecionada à literatura científica, publicada no último vinténio, nomeadamente, da autoria de Araújo e Rodrigues (2018), Kilomba (2019; “O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca” diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016), Maeso (2016), Roldão et al. (2016), Ribeiro (2021), Santos (2003), V. Sousa (2020), Vale de Almeida (2000, 2012), Varela e Pereira (2020), entre outros, procurou-se demonstrar o contributo da arte contemporânea e do ativismo curatorial, no seio das instituições museológicas, para o questionamento das narrativas históricas institucionais e para a progressiva desconstrução das práticas discursivas lusotropicalistas, que instituem o colonialismo e a escravatura como inevitabilidades históricas aceites. Verificou-se que o pensamento hegemónico ocidental está assente numa falsa construção ideológica identitária, suportada numa alegada superioridade moral e racial, tendo em vista justificar a prossecução de um modelo de exploração económica estruturado na dominação cultural. Concluiu-se que o multiculturalismo no seio das instituições culturais, a par da salvaguarda da diversidade cultural e da interpretação patrimonial no espaço público, poderá assegurar a inclusão e coesão social, desenvolvendo sentimentos de pertença, e, por conseguinte, permitindo a mitigação das desigualdades e da violência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

iconoclasmo, colonialidade, antirracismo, multiculturalismo, ativismo

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary iconoclastic practices have brought to the political and media debate the questioning of the quality and pertinence of the aesthetic and artistic transformations (Goes, 2020, 2021) which have taken place in the urban public space (Correia, 2013; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Silva, 1996; Stavrides, 2016/2021). Interpreting artistic and built heritage and questioning its function and place in the city (Mitrache, 2012; Muxi, 2004; Stavrides, 2016/2021) within a globalised contemporary society (V. Sousa, 2020) has become an object of debate. This debate should not seek to establish a false majority consensus but rather encourage the development of new inclusion and cultural identification (Huntington, 1996; Steinmeyer, 2021). Monuments and public statuary have always been ideological affirmation instruments of the political and economic hegemony. Commissioners use it to institute official discourses, aesthetic ideologies and historiographical narratives, targets of mythification (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Duarte, 2019; Goes, 2020).

Understanding heritage refusal processes and iconoclastic practices in contemporary times presupposes the comprehension of urban spaces expansion and the underlying economic and social development models. Those models expose the conflicting nature of public space and cultural non-identification processes with inhabited places (Mitrache, 2012; Muxi, 2004; Stavrides, 2016/2021). Furthermore, we question and delegitimise the historiographical narratives taught within the teaching spaces (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Maeso, 2016; Roldão et al., 2016) and those presented in the museography discourses of museological institutions (Adams & Koke, 2014; Welch, 2006).

Iconoclasm managed to expose the social fragilities and ethical decadence of society. On the other hand, it allowed the confrontation of ideas and conceptions about the art's function in the public space. It also exposed, by virtue, the critical and conflictive nature of the sculpture installed in the public space, addressing issues that have long been repressed as an antithesis to the establishment of false social consensus (Hardt & Negri, 2019; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015).

This article aims to contribute to the reflection on the reappearance of various phenomenologies of non-identification with heritage, addressing the underlying social and political issues at the origin of these iconoclastic practices. We reviewed the scientific literature published in the last 20 years. We based our research in the contemporary iconoclasm study essentially on articles, theses and monographs authored by several thinkers, namely, Cantarelli (2018), Cordeiro (2012), D'Ottavio et al. (2021), Elsner (2012), Fernandes (2018), Frank and Ristic (2020), Freedberg (2021), Gamboni (2018), Leupin (2019), McClanan and Johnson (2016), Paiva (2018), Renou (2020), Rota and Fureix (2018), Stapleton and Viselli (2019), Taussig (2012), among others from the international context.

The discussion on the phenomenologies of racism and anti-racism in contemporary times draws on revisiting of some authors from the Portuguese context, namely, Araújo and Rodrigues (2018), Kilomba (2019; “ ‘O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca’ diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016), Maeso (2016), Otávio et al. (2009), Ribeiro (2021), Roldão et al. (2016), Santos (2003), Vale de Almeida (2000, 2012), Varela and Pereira (2020), among others.

We aim to demonstrate how contemporary art (Ribeiro, 2021), namely the one installed in urban public spaces and curatorial projects within cultural institutions, can establish critical relations of questioning post-historical narratives and call for reflection on persistently hegemonic western cultural heritage, a past of slavery, colonialism and racism. This investigation thus aims to contribute to the enhancement of cultural heritage by understanding and overcoming contemporary iconoclasm phenomena that jeopardise the integrity of the heritage.

Postcolonial discourses (Ashcroft, 2014; Nebbou, 2013; Olaniyan, 1993), defined by the newly established power relations, based on processes of common cultural identification (Huntington, 1996; Steinmeyer, 2021), seek to maintain the prevailing hegemony or the installation of a development model based on materialism and the economic exploitation of the former colonial space. Unleashing a new sphere of geopolitical relations and reactivating economic ties, like with the former metropolises, sedimented the new identity narratives legitimising the historical mechanisms of oppression. Ironically, the process of globalisation more efficiently concealed and implemented the hegemonic project of western economic domination (Hardt & Negri, 2019; Huntington, 1996; V. Sousa, 2020), transforming the old political colonialism into an apparent new project of cultural neocolonialism (Huntington, 1996; Santos, 2003).

The complexity of the map of post-colonial geopolitical relations, based on the maintenance of colonial heritage cultural links, namely with the definition of linguistic

communities, contributed to the dissemination of consumption in the former colonial space, instituting a new formula of economic colonialism. The supranational and supra-sovereign cultural models sought to sell an idea of transnational free space. Instead, they sold the imaginary view of a non-existent cultural democracy, without this meaning the creation of conditions for the effective social emancipation of the citizens of developing countries, former colonies. The phenomenology of the processes of cultural non-identification with the inhabited place (Stavrvides, 2016/2021) may have contributed to the assumption of anti-colonial activism (Hardt & Negri, 2019; Hickel, 2021). The nihilistic logic makes the iconoclastic double condition explicit in these sociological processes. It seeks to restore legitimising meta-narratives of the oppression heritage of these places, making them conducive to new economic exploitation and the implementation of a so-called free market.

The cultural capital (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015) of the old and new rulers is crucial, in neoliberal globalisation (Santos, 2003), for the metamorphosis of classical imperialism to take place, transforming it into surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), in a post-globalisation era (Ashcroft, 2014). As an economic, political and cultural model, westernization has culturally uprooted local communities, universalising an aesthetic model and accentuating social exclusion and inequality (Scheidel, 2017). According to Rosembuj (2019), the concept of “surveillance capitalism”, exposed by Zuboff (2019) in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, can pose a threat to the rule of law, sovereignty, and individual liberties, raising doubts about the role of democratic institutions.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the dismantling of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1991; D’Ottavio et al., 2021), we have noticed an artistic development, for example, in literature, cinema, music, and visual arts. This development aimed at its insertion into the global market and corroborated narratives established by the triumphant model and used the new means and technologies provided.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1997, as cited in Vale de Almeida, 2012) points out the apparent state of permanent crisis confronted with the emancipation projects, thus, alluding to the introduction of human rights in contemporary discursive practice. However, the non-effectiveness of these rights, as a process of political action, leads to the assumption of (new) identity policies (Vale de Almeida, 2012). These identity policies contribute to the legitimation of new sovereignties. On the other hand, they socially fragment a society through racial and ethnic-cultural hierarchy, establishing a majority identity as prevailing. According to Santos (2003), considering the concept of “inter-identity”, it is proposed that Portuguese post-colonialism is expressed as anti-colonialism and as counter-hegemonic globalism in the face of Portugal’s peripheral insertion and subalternity in the European and Atlantic neoliberal context.

Perhaps market value formation, to the detriment of the narrative critical to history (and memory), has contributed to the forgetting (or whitening) of history itself (“O

Racismo É uma Problemática Branca' diz Grada Kilomba", 2016; V. Sousa, 2020; Trouillot, 1995/2016; Vale de Almeida, 2000, 2012; Varela & Pereira, 2020). The whiteness of racial identity reflects the power relations (Vale de Almeida, 2000, 2012) and privilege within western societies ("O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca' diz Grada Kilomba", 2016; Trouillot, 1995/2016, Varela & Pereira, 2020), namely through the imposition of narratives in cultural and educational institutions (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Roldão et al., 2016; Soares, 2020) and public urban space art (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Cadela, 2007; Frank & Ristic, 2020; Goes, 2021).

Mythographies deconstruction (Barthes, 1957/2001) of White racial power (Vale de Almeida, 2000, 2012) should be a premise of contemporary art (Ribeiro, 2021) and curatorial practices. It can also be used as a pedagogical tool to effect the inclusion of racial, cultural and ethnic minorities, ensuring that the cultural diversity of society constitutes an added value for human development and social cohesion.

The progressive technological transformation initiated since the industrial revolution contributed to a gradual improvement of living conditions in western societies. On the other hand, it contributed to increased social inequalities (Scheidel, 2017), more pronounced in the outermost regions. This economic model and social framework challenge individual rights and the very sustainability of the model.

The appropriation and use of data to transform into commercial or political products aim to influence or control the individual's behaviour (Rosembuj, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Post-colonial narratives are justified by denouncing and criticising the previous regime or model. On the other hand, they find new means to institute their neo-colonial programs from a moral and aesthetic point of view in contemporary culture. Today, contemporary neocolonialism is cultural and technological, feeding relationships of direct dependence between individuals and supranational institutions. Art does not dissociate from this debate. Therefore it is crucial to measure the impacts of contemporary artistic practices on public space and curatorial projects in the definition of post-colonial, anti-colonial and anti-racist narratives. We intend to verify the effects of iconoclastic customs associated with activism and transgressive artistic practices and evaluate the success of pedagogical actions in heritage implementation to develop processes of social identification, community participation and appreciation of artistic and built heritage.

The knowledge of phenomenology and motivations surrounding the order, as well as the production and references for public statuary or art in urban public space, are, perhaps, crucial to finding new solutions for the maintenance of heritage and cultural diversity (Meyer-Bisch & Bidault, 2010/2014) and avoiding future iconoclastic, non-institutional actions. These proposals for understanding include heritage education and interpretation (Goes, 2020, 2021).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO ICONOCLASM

It is possible to identify a sequence of iconoclastic cycles throughout human history (Fernandes, 2018; Freedberg, 2021; Gamboni, 2018; McClanan & Johnson, 2016). The process of globalisation has resized iconoclastic phenomenology in contemporary times, making it global (D'Ottavio et al., 2021; V. Pereira, 2013; Stapleton & Viselli, 2019). In his theory of the image-simulacrum (Cordeiro, 2012; Fernandes, 2018), Plato accused artists of creating a game of illusions in which representation is always the projection of a fictionalised existence falsified natural and material reality (Goes, 2020, 2021). This philosophical thought believed that images devoid of a utilitarian function were a source of fascination for fools and children (Fernandes, 2018).

Some traditional African or Afro-Brazilian ethnic religions (Nogueira, 2013; V. Pereira, 2013; Valle, 2020) faced cyclical phenomena of cultural and religious syncretism (Nogueira, 2021), acculturation processes and ethnocide (Davidson, 2012), which exist in contemporary times. Iconoclasm is one of the processes of ethnocide: the totemic objects of the previous culture are destroyed (Davidson, 2012) — “fetishes” according to a western perspective (Pires, 2011; Sansi, 2008) — and replaced by the new icons of the dominant culture (Nogueira, 2013; V. Pereira, 2013; Valle, 2020). Buildings and religious representation are ranked in the urban public space (Nogueira, 2013) to establish the new religious doctrine and dethrone the old identity symbols, considered inferior (Nogueira, 2013; V. Pereira, 2013; Valle, 2020). Therefore, contemporary religious iconoclasm underpins the maintenance of imperialist structures, accentuating the racist tradition instituted by Catholics and Protestants (Valle, 2020), and jeopardises human rights, cultural diversity, and religious freedom.

In the monotheistic religious domain, in the Abrahamic religions, the most orthodox currents of Judaism, Islam and Protestantism (Pires, 2011), based on the sacred books, have considered the cult of images idolatry (Fernandes, 2018). Consequently, they would have exercised and implemented their aesthetic ideology as a visible form of affirmation of a particular religious, political and social hegemony. The expansion of faith translated into cultural growth and, therefore, the refusal or destruction of images was the reason for its implementation (Cross, 1912; Haldon, 1999; Paiva, 2018).

Cantarelli (2018), referring to the images, allows us an intelligible reading of the signs inscribed in a work of art. Because they are identifiable with a collective cultural body, they become significant, symbolic forms, emanating a plurality of meanings and descriptive values of the spirit of their time. Thus, all iconographic representation is always determined by time and place. A hiatus interrupts or connects the iconographic domain to the iconological and the representation to the symbolic (Cantarelli, 2018). Iconoclastic practices are, therefore, determined by the cultural context in which they take place. Opposite to iconology, iconoclasm destroys (Cantarelli, 2018; Fernandes, 2018; Paiva, 2018), assuming in destruction the refusal of the superposition of an idea that prevails over a previous symbolic figure. The iconoclastic act will contribute to the legitimation of the preceding symbolic reality. Giving it a further historical resizing that

accentuates the meaning and symbolic value of the image, removing it from the forum of the past (Cantarelli, 2018; Fernandes, 2018; Freedberg, 2021; Paiva, 2018).

The hypothetical formulation that a symbol survives time, repeating itself cyclically, overcoming periods of long concealment, is necessary for carrying out an “iconological interpretation” (Cantarelli, 2018). However, the multiplicity of meanings or symbolic connotations attributed or gained according to different historical contexts suggests that, despite the cultural transience of times, signs transformed into new symbols (which accumulate meanings from the past) if not rooted in the cultural reality of the society or community, may become the reason for conflicting practices and exclusion factor in contemporary times. The new symbols (Barthes, 1957/2001), once they are not actual totemic objects, become “fetishes” of a society (Pires, 2011; Sansi, 2008), making it impossible for them to develop feelings of belonging necessary for its legitimation and maintenance. Instead, failure to identify with a symbol will lead to processes of refusal, questioning and destruction.

The hierarchical iconographic model, adopted for statuary installation in public space, was repeated from antiquity to modernity (Bina, 2020). This model used a podium or pedestal to top the subject of the representation, placing it above humans (Bina, 2020; Goes, 2020), elevating the sculptural object to the category of idol and the deification of the represented figure (Barthes, 1957/2001), for propagandistic purposes.

Iconoclastic practices within the Byzantine empire (Freedberg, 2021) enabled the leaders of the time to measure widespread adherence to prevailing aesthetic-theological ideologies, intending to ensure the hegemony of political power and perpetuate itself in it. The persecutions and deaths of iconophiles and the destruction of religious icons in the Byzantine era were powerful political instruments for the Byzantine emperors, who did not intend to hinder the domination of the territories subordinated to the sovereignty of Byzantium (Paiva, 2018). This domination could only be achieved by bringing Eastern Christians closer to Jews and Muslims and by developing processes of cultural integration — iconoclasm would be one of these processes. The destruction of Christian icons, namely saints and martyrs (Cross, 1912), and the persecution of iconophiles were intended to facilitate the subjugation of the empire’s communities that professed different religions to political power (Cross, 1912; Goes, 2020; Haldon, 1999). Ensuring that, despite being dispersed, they would identify with the empire’s capital and develop a feeling of belonging to it (Paiva, 2018).

Paiva (2018), paraphrasing Haldon (2014), demonstrates, from the treaties of the 5th and 6th centuries, that the ideological antagonism between Islam and Christianity reflected an apparent hostility to orthodoxy and imperialism of Byzantium, despite representing opposition to Christian values (Freedberg, 2021). Based on assumptions of cultural and religious differences, the war conflicts substantiated a program of economic expansion of the belligerent empires that would materialise in the following centuries. Byzantine emperors, through the legitimisation of iconoclastic practices, sought to mitigate the differences between orthodoxy and Jewish and Islamic cultures to ensure the

domination of these peoples within the Byzantine empire (Cross, 1912; Freedberg, 2021; Haldon, 1999; McClanan & Johnson, 2016; Paiva, 2018).

The conflict of iconoclasm within Christendom would be exported and accentuated throughout the middle ages and during the modern age, opposing iconoclastic political-religious movements (Orthodox and Protestants) to the dominant Roman Catholicism (McClanan & Johnson, 2016). Traces of this civilizational clash persist in art to the present day (D'Ottavio et al., 2021; Elsner, 2012; Frank & Ristic, 2020; Freedberg, 2021; Gamboni, 2018; McClanan & Johnson, 2005; Rota & Fureix, 2018; Stapleton & Viselli, 2019).

The system of relations between aesthetics and politics (Frank & Ristic, 2020) came, centuries later, to materialise a project of the aesthetic ideology of the papacy: the baroque. The exuberance of its narratives, fear of emptiness and scenic drama of iconographic figuration characterise this style, Catholic by definition (Benjamin, 1928/1984; Gombrich, 1950/2008; Hartt, 1993; P. Pereira, 1995; Prado, 2016; Upjohn et al., 1949/1977). In opposition to the Protestant aesthetic, he debated the issue of the image policy of the Catholic Counter-Reformation (Solís, 2011) around the discussion about the danger of iconographic figurations constituting a phenomenon of idolatry in the votive practice, in opposition to the iconoclastic Protestant aesthetics (McClanan & Johnson, 2016; Solís, 2011).

Also, from the 19th century onwards, the progressive laicisation of state institutions and the secularisation of society (Barrios Rozúa, 2003), namely in France, Spain (Rota & Fureix, 2018) and Portugal, gave rise to the development of a militant anticlericalism (Barrios Rozúa, 2003). It materialised in the iconoclastic destruction of religious statuary and built heritage (Rota & Fureix, 2018). The reforms were initiated, the result of the triumphant new currents of political thought — liberal and republican — to disseminate an aesthetic ideology opposite to that displayed by the old regime.

In the 20th century, the idolatry of images became the best propagandistic and pamphleteering instrument of the new totalitarian ideologies (D'Ottavio et al., 2021). Idolatry — not of a religious or sacred nature, but the profane — the cult of personality, constituted a mechanism for the transfer of value between the represented and objectified subject and the one who sponsored the work of art (Goes, 2020). Modern idolatries, objectified in works of art, devoid of a critical spirit, have become privileged tools for maintaining and perpetuating the hegemony of political, economic, cultural and mediatic powers (Goes, 2020, 2021).

2.2. ICONOCLASM IN CONTEMPORANEITY: THE DEMOCRATIC AND CONFLICTING NATURE OF PUBLIC SPACE AND THE EPHEMERAL AND WASHABLE NATURE OF PUBLIC SCULPTURE

Public, physical and media space, as well as cultural expressions, fulfil the dual function of demonstrating, on the one hand, the inseparability of the concepts of history and memory and, on the other hand, to point out that, despite being related, they are

distinct (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Bina, 2020). Thus, a statue does not portray a historical figure. It is just a particular representation, an apologetic memory (Ávila, 2020; Bina, 2020; Santiago, 2020). Therefore, its overthrow does not imply the historical disappearance of a figure (Bina, 2020) rather the destruction of the legacy of its commissioners, who, dressed in a built dignity, find in the construction of public statuary a form of self-glorification and immortalisation of its inheritance (Bina, 2020; Goes, 2020).

One of the problems with the determinism of artistic interventions in the public space is related to the discursive updating, not only from an aesthetic, technical and conceptual point of view but also from a narrative point of view. Public sculpture stopped questioning, and it became uncritical. Instead of examining the subject, object of representation and interpreting it, the sculpture made it allegorical and legitimised it as a contemporary idol (Barthes, 1957/2001; Pires, 2011; Sansi, 2008). This difficulty in establishing a narrative that relates a non-figurative expression with a non-allegorical interpretation of the subjects of the representation arises from the spectator's impossibility to reach another intelligible reading of the work other than the immediate, institutionalised one. The correspondence of a non-allegorical representation with a contemporary aesthetic and technique will have to be necessary, the result of integration with the architectural buildings, the surrounding territory, and the communities that inhabit it (Bueno Carvajal, 2021). From Krauss (1979), contemporary sculpture expands beyond the purist and functional dimension of academic statuary, decisively contributing to the defunctionalisation of the occupied place (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Cadela, 2007; Stavrides, 2016/2021; Thörn, 2011).

Bina (2020) considers that there will be no anachronism in condemning a statue that enthrones slavery because the historical existence of the represented figure is not called into question since it is the study and investigation of the same that gives it the timelessness. On the contrary, this sculpture's place in public space does not refer to the past but to the present time (Bina, 2020). It acts ideologically on all those who inhabit or enjoy the public space. Historical anachronism results from the very antagonism of the discussion. Public space is a democratic place but is not a privileged institutional space for debate, as is the academy or the museum (Soares, 2020).

This dystrophy between the democratic and conflictive space and the exercise of historical, aesthetic and artistic questioning is essential when sculptures in public space constitute a reason for litigation between different political groups or activists (Otávio et al., 2009; Varela & Pereira, 2020). The historiographical narratives and mistakes perpetuated within the school spaces accentuate this conflict (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Goes, 2020; Maeso, 2016). Sculpture materialises in the public space, legitimising what is taught.

Araújo and Rodrigues (2018) highlight that the political decision demonstrates resistance regarding the need to adopt a critical questioning about the teaching of history and the respective adaptation of curricular programs. The maintenance of outdated museographic discourses also perpetuates the fetishist hegemony of an oppressive past (Soares, 2020).

The democratic and community nature of public space (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Stavrides, 2016/2021) also exposes the conflicting nature of this place, where public art, instrumentalised with ideological use, becomes an object of discussion. Therefore, before the debate on iconoclasm in contemporary public space, the debate on the quality of aesthetic transformations that take place in a territory should be underlying (Goes, 2020, 2021). Namely, inferring the quality of sculptural objects installed in cities and their impacts on the landscape they occupy (Goes, 2020, 2021). Therefore, iconoclastic phenomena and behaviours may constitute an opportunity to activate the debate on history and the safeguarding of heritage and contribute to delegitimising hegemonic historiographical narratives taught within school spaces (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018).

2.3. HERITAGE INTERPRETATION: BETWEEN DECOLONISATION AND (RE)SACRALISATION OF PUBLIC SPACE AND ANTI-RACIST PHENOMENOLOGY

According to Gambioni (1997, as cited in Frank & Ristic, 2020), the destruction of monuments in urban public space is considered a deliberate protest against authority and the underlying ideology, thus a practice of political iconoclasm. On the one hand, iconoclastic behaviours question the accepted moral and cultural order (Barthes, 1957/2001), demystifying it; on the other hand, they expose a dichotomy, condone their legacy, and activate a collective conscience around the destruction of heritage (Fabre, 2019, as cited in Manzon Lupo, 2021).

The creation of a false collective consensus around the preservation of icons of “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm, 1983, as cited in Frank & Ristic, 2020) sediments the new power relations (Frank & Ristic, 2020; Manzon Lupo, 2021; “O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca’ diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016; Trouillot, 1995/2016; Varela & Pereira, 2020), which seek to base themselves on nostalgic and historicist narratives.

Public space is an ideological, necessarily political, and therefore a place of conflict (Krauss, 1979; Mitrache, 2012; Silva, 1996; Stavrides, 2016/2021). Art takes part in this conflict. Silva (1996) considers that the public space provides continuity and permanence that opposes mono functionality and segregation (Cadena, 2007; Frank & Ristic, 2020) of the private or domestic place. The difficulty in limiting public space, by its definition, in the topological sense, determines the very conception of public art (Correia, 2013).

Frank and Ristic (2020), rereading Stevens and Franck (2016) and Knierbein and Viderman (2018), consider that the urban place is characterised by a discursive heterogeneity, typical of inclusive and more cohesive societies. According to the authors, the vestiges of the past, materialised by architecture and public art, can coexist with social, political and artistic activism, contributing to the questioning of narratives engraved in the buildings and enabling the improvement of conditions for cultural enjoyment and aesthetics transformations in urban territory.

Regarding public art, it is necessary to question to what extent the aesthetic and artistic interventions irreversibly transform a space, which, due to its public character,

is collective and democratic (Cadela, 2007; Correia, 2013; Stavrides, 2016/2021). The problem of acceptance and legitimation of public art, namely contemporary art, is related to the fact that all over the western world, territories have been occupied for decades or centuries by bronze heads, proliferating in squares, gardens and roundabouts as if there was no place for silence (Goes, 2020, 2021). As if public space was necessarily ornamental, allegorical and symbolic, as if art did not fulfil a function other than beautifying public spaces that, through carelessness or inertia, were successively left in ruins and defined as places of abandonment and loss (Augé, 1992; Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Cadela, 2007; Goes, 2020, 2021).

Before discussing iconoclasm, we need to question the need for education and heritage interpretation, therefore, the need to develop feelings of belonging caused by these objects installed in public space. When public art sponsors are not concerned with the community's involvement, acceptance and identification with what is installed, nor with the impacts of art in defining the identity of that community, it gives rise to a non-identification of works of art with the communities and the space in which they operate. The public work of art enthrones the elite that sponsors or commissions it (Ávila, 2020; Goes, 2020, 2021; Santiago, 2020). The destruction of public art challenges the installed power more than the history of the represented subject.

All art performs a social task, promoting inclusion, civic participation, aesthetic education, and criticism development. Therefore, it should encourage tolerance and respect for difference and diversity (Adams & Koke, 2014; Meyer-Bisch & Bidault, 2010/2014; Welch, 2006). For this reason, art that populates the public space, decorating it with allegories of a past that cannot be questioned, is not fulfilling its function (Goes, 2020, 2021). The historical review and heritage interpretation may be an object of study within universities and museums (Primo & Moutinho, 2021). This study will trigger the decolonisation of public and media space, raising awareness of the anti-racist phenomenon (Otávio et al., 2009; Varela & Pereira, 2020) and the non-sacralisation of public space. In most western countries, historical graphic narratives persist due to reference authors affectionate to the ideologies of the 20th-century totalitarianism (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Ávila, 2020; Goes, 2020; C. Pinheiro, 2002). The narratives taught in Portuguese schools (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Roldão et al., 2016) convey ideologies common to nationalism, totalitarianism. It perpetuates myths (Barthes, 1957/2001) about the Portuguese way, a racial nationality and "the myth of the good coloniser" (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Goes, 2020).

The past revolutionary movements destroyed the monuments or statuary of the deposed emperors or dictators (Ávila, 2020; Bina, 2020; Santiago, 2020). Themselves protagonists in the looting, censorship and destruction of the heritage in conquered territories (Goes, 2020). In other words, institutional powers, belligerent powers, revolutionary movements and terrorist groups used iconoclasm as a symbolic act of triumph, demarcation or intimidation over the installed power and for the implantation of a new social, political and governmental order. Iconoclasm is a historical act (Ávila, 2020; Bina, 2020; Santiago, 2020), which does not refer to historical deconstruction, but to

the construction of post-memory (Ribeiro, 2021), constituting an act of enthronement of new triumphant elites.

The same elites have now their legitimacy or moral authority questioned by the unprivileged that historically remain poor, excluded and exploited. The most recent iconoclastic interventions proliferating in the western world are, therefore, a reason for questioning this very system of historical value, a mechanism of legitimation and enthronement of the elites of the colonial and western slave-holding past (C. Pinheiro, 2002; Santiago, 2020; Vale de Almeida, 2000).

An interventional act against a statue is both literal and metaphorical. It constitutes the vandalism and destruction of the historical or artistic object. It is also a symbolic act of questioning the past corpse, which wants to be covered (Santiago, 2020). The maintenance of a media cult to historical figures, without question, makes them become modern idols, occupying the public space, perpetuating the history of a nation that praises the slaveholders of yore (C. Pinheiro, 2002; Santiago, 2020). These modern sculptures, installed in public space on a podium or pedestal (Bina, 2020), fulfil the ideological function of perpetuating a particular hegemony of power instead of fulfilling the task of the art in enabling critical questioning about the past and quality of social, cultural, economic and political transformations. Removing them from the place where they were, makes it possible to recreate the community space (Santiago, 2020; Stavrides, 2016/2021). Hence, the iconoclast is the one who, looking at a representation, sees it as an idol (Ávila, 2020; Bina, 2020; Santiago, 2020). The sculpture in the square is an ancestral image of the community that occupies the public space, an idea for a society to recognise and identify itself through its founders. Destroying sculptures of these racist founders is a way of relooking these idols (Barthes, 1957/2001), converting them into false ancestors or unwanted founders (Santiago, 2020).

3. DISCUSSION: ICONOCLASM AS A CRITICAL QUESTIONING OF HISTORY AND CREATIVE STRATEGY

Contemporary art uses the denial of its condition as art as a practice for its institutional legitimation; an iconoclastic proposal can assume a creative strategy that allows the critical questioning of history. In a palimpsest logic, this strategy sets on the deconstruction of previous imagery through different subtraction and sum processes of traces, where the prior symbolic tradition reopens a new concept. The transformation of a sign, attributing a new, formal value, removes it from a past category, updates it and makes it (again) symbolic (Barthes, 1957/2001). Despite the refusal of figuration, the iconoclastic processes establish new narratives, maintaining an intrinsically non-representative and non-naturalistic character, maintaining or not the previous symbolic tradition (Cantarelli, 2018). Deleuze (1987, as cited in Ávila, 2020) questions the definition of a creative act, proposing that it constitutes an act of resistance to death and a form of humanity's struggle. In this way, a historical narrative underlying a public work of art is always an artificial construction in the service of installed power (Ávila, 2020).

Ávila (2020) states that establishing a stable consensus around alleged universal values that sustain a certain narrative demonstrates how naturalised they are within a society. The tribute paid by installing a sculptural monument in the public space, enthroning some conqueror or slave trader, apart from interfering with the democratic nature of the public space, legitimises the (bad) practices of the person being honoured (Ávila, 2020; Silva, 1996). It is worth noting that architecture so often establishes or legitimises the historical omission (Ávila, 2020) of colonialism and slavery (Kilomba, 2019; “O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca’ Diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016; Santos, 2003; Vale de Almeida, 2000, 2012; Varela & Pereira, 2020).

Western hegemonic thinking, based on moral and racial superiority (Jones & Okun, 2001; Trouillot, 1995/2016; Weber, 1905/2004), uses this false ideological construction of identity to justify pursuing a capitalist model structured on cultural domination, in the oppression and devaluation of human resources, as a guarantee for the maximisation of profits. The cultural domination of other peoples and communities is seen as collateral damage of imperialism (Ávila, 2020), justified by a duty to civilise and evangelise. In the Portuguese case (Varela & Pereira, 2020), it may not be just the historical characters at stake but their representation and the mechanisms of legitimation of these, namely the commissioner’s role. The figurative representations of the statuary installed in the public space perpetuate the fetishism (Pires, 2011; Sansi, 2008) of colonial heritage and the myth of the “good” coloniser (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Ávila, 2020; Goes, 2020; Kilomba, 2019; C. Pinheiro, 2002).

If, on the one hand, the iconoclasm of public statuary can bring into debate the deconstruction of established historical narratives, on the other, it can constitute a factor in the elevation of the same and reiteration of nationalist pride sentiment. Therefore, it is vital to identify the protagonists in these acts and their real motivations. If associated with anti-racist (Alvarez, 2009; Bell, 2021; Maeso, 2016; Renou, 2020) and anti-colonialist movements or if provided by nationalist, racist and xenophobic movements, to exacerbate tension and conflict, blaming other ideological factions or currents of opinion. Alternatively, if acts of random vandalism or provided with a mandate of intervention and artistic questioning.

Although questionable from an ethical point of view and criminalised from a legal point of view, they still are essential instruments: for the reactivation of debates around narratives of “whitening” or historical silencing (“O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca’ Diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016; Trouillot, 1995/2016; Vale de Almeida, 2000; Varela & Pereira, 2020), and the quality of artistic interventions in public space. They also allow for the appreciation of the importance of heritage interpretation for the development of feelings of belonging and preservation of heritage, namely the historical and artistic.

When we question history, we redefine and improve the construction of identity. This path is only possible without masks, ghosts or hidden skeletons, with the courage to look critically and shamelessly at the nudity of works of art. Times of confrontation allow us to reflect, question and denounce the quality of aesthetic and infrastructural

transformations we inhabit, which may lead us to a decadent identity (Goes, 2020, 2021). The issue is not, therefore, in the fact that a community does not value heritage but in the fact that they have not been allowed to experience their collective, pre-existing heritage (Goes, 2020, 2021). The disinvestment in people's schooling prevented them from enjoying a heritage education, which exercises criticism and ensures its safeguard (Adamopoulos, 2003).

The culture of vandalism was institutionalised (Cadela, 2007; Pinilla, 2012; Thörn, 2011) and legitimised by the elites that sponsored it, impacting the public space (Goes, 2020, 2021). Ironically, making a vandalism culture aesthetic (Cadela, 2007; Pinilla, 2012; Thörn, 2011) has perhaps contributed to the assumption of new iconoclastic practices (Goes, 2020, 2021). The critical exercise of art may constitute a necessary condition for a heritage interpretation of public space (Cadela, 2007; Thörn, 2011) by decolonising it. It may give objects a new context that acquired a historical distance within the museum space and update discourses within museums (Adams & Koke, 2014; Clarke, 2021; Gregório, 2015; O'Neill, 2020; Pauls & Walby, 2021; Reilly, 2018; Welch, 2006).

4. CONCLUSION: THE DECOLONISATION OF ART AND CURATORIAL ARTIVISM AS ANTI-RACIST FORMATIVE PROCESSES

The decolonisation of urban public space (Correia, 2013; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Silva, 1996) and cultural and educational institutions, museums, and universities (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Roldão et al., 2016) are an ideological instrument. Should aim to deconstruct the imposition of a hegemonic, seductive aesthetic and visual model underlying the needs of consumers, which makes use of racism to justify the economic exploitation of human and natural resources (Hardt & Negri, 2019; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015).

The decolonisation of historical narratives (Nebbou, 2013; Olaniyan, 1993) within museums and other cultural spaces (Soares, 2020), the adaptation of their discourses, the heritage interpretation of public statues and monuments, the decolonisation of public space, the new context of artistic objects from colonialism in museums (Bina, 2020), contemporary artistic practices (Ribeiro, 2021), the installation of urban public art (Duarte, 2019; Gregório, 2015), new curatorial projects (Clarke, 2021; Gregório, 2015; O'Neill, 2020; Pauls & Walby, 2021; Reilly, 2018), can be powerful instruments of criticism and historical reparation by deconstructing fetishisms (Pires, 2011; Sansi, 2008).

Social movements, research groups and artistic collectives of African descent can develop curatorial projects (Duarte, 2019; Gregório, 2015; O'Neill, 2020; Ribeiro, 2021) and didactic initiatives in performative and plastic arts to interpret the built and artistic heritage amplifying the critical view on historic public space, post-memory (Ribeiro, 2021), colonialism and slavery.

In this regard, it is essential to notice the Resolution 69/16 (2014) of November 18, 2014, by the United Nations General Assembly, which proposes a program of activities to implement the International Decade for People of African Descent (Resolution 68/237,

2013). It seeks to develop awareness-raising actions by states and civil society to encourage equality and the realisation of human rights. To promote the remembrance of slavery and colonialism victims and prevent and combat racial discrimination, xenophobia and associated prejudice (Resolution 69/16, 2014). Some of the main goals of this resolution are promoting cultural diversity, civic participation and social inclusion, valuing the contributions of people of African descent for growth (Resolution 69/16, 2014).

Guided visits, awareness-raising actions for the interpretation and appreciation of heritage, artistic expression workshops, debate forums, along with an interdisciplinary program, outside the doors of institutions can support the practices of inclusion and social cohesion, combating racism and xenophobia (Alvarez, 2009; Bell, 2021; Maeso, 2016; Renou, 2020; Resolution 69/16, 2014).

Art as the epistemology of decolonisation (Balona de Oliveira, 2019; Soares, 2020) allows the adoption of a community aesthetic program (Stavrides, 2016/2021), anti-colonial (Hickel, 2021) that triggers a mindful critique of the social and human development state, fulfilling the duty of denunciation, underlying the social function of art. Contemporary thinking and the dialectic exercised by contemporary art, namely through new curatorial projects (Ribeiro, 2021), have made it possible to criticise the mechanisms of imperialist appropriation (Hickel, 2020, 2021) within cultural institutions (Soares, 2020). Colonialism was at the genesis of the great European art collections, used as a propaganda instrument under the pretext of the Christian and civilised will (Goes, 2020) to hide the real motivations of a hegemonic western elite: domination and economic exploitation of lands.

The devaluation of labour costs, which sustains modern capitalist growth, was ensured over centuries by colonial exploitation (Hickel, 2020, 2021; Vale de Almeida, 2000) via slavery and justified by the cultural backwardness of the racial minority of the dominated peoples. Ideologies that use racism were implanted within contemporary societies to justify labour exploitation and the devaluation of human resources (Hickel, 2020, 2021). Ensuring the maintenance of a “race-based class structure” (Vale de Almeida, 2000, p. 4) guarantees the continuation of labour exploitation and profits maximisation. The end of value formation based on labour exploitation will inevitably underlie the process of cultural decolonisation (Hickel, 2020, 2021; Vale de Almeida, 2000).

Therefore, contemporary cities need to adopt new post-capitalist, post-neoliberal urban planning (Stavrides, 2016/2021), which considers art’s deployment and expansion in the public space (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Frank & Ristic, 2020; Thörn, 2011). The success of this exercise is measured by the impacts caused by the development of collaborative artistic projects, the return of public space to citizens (Stavrides, 2016/2021) and the activation of civic participation processes in the redefinition of the architectural and landscape space (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Frank & Ristic, 2020; Stavrides, 2016/2021; Thörn, 2011).

Contemporary art (Duarte, 2019; Gregório, 2015; Ribeiro, 2021) can call for a critical debate on history and omissions (Pauls & Walby, 2021) within cultural institutions, museums and universities (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018; Soares, 2020; Roldão et al., 2016), as

well as enhancing the debate in the public and media space, namely, with the youngest, deconstructing institutionalised colonial discourses (Roldão et al., 2016). Immigration, historical and identity questioning, interculturality, religious, musical and linguistic diversity, the end of the empire, post-colonialism (Leupin, 2019), racism, social insertion and the archive are some examples of the themes underlying the concept of post-memory (Ribeiro, 2021), addressed in contemporary artistic discourses.

The journey, research, and artistic work of Grada Kilomba (2019; “O Racismo É uma Problemática Branca’ Diz Grada Kilomba”, 2016) exemplify the activation of the debate and invite the spectator to participate in it. Some Afro-descendant authors/artists (second and third generations) who, according to Ribeiro (2021), interpret the concept of post-memory through their multiple artistic practices: Aimé Mpane, Amália Escrava, Ana Mendes, Délio Jasse, Fátima Sissani, Francisco Vidal, John K. Cobra, Louise Narbo, Margarida Cardoso and Nuno Nunes-Ferreira.

Community artistic interventions in urban public space (Stavrides, 2016/2021), namely, developed by Afro-descendants, can contribute to a process of social inclusion (Resolution 69/16, 2014) and overcome institutional omissions of racism and gender, persistent in many collections and exhibitions (Kilomba, 2019; Pauls & Walby, 2021).

Promenades of heritage interpretation and pedagogical activities in public spaces may contribute to realising human and cultural rights (Resolution 69/16, 2014; Vale de Almeida, 2012). By enriching the development of feelings of belonging (Stavrides, 2016/2021), the mitigation of social inequalities (Bueno Carvajal, 2021; Thörn, 2011), the elimination of conflicts and the phenomenology of violence (Otávio et al., 2009), ensuring cultural diversity (Vale de Almeida, 2012) and the deconstruction of the mythographies of the past (Barthes, 1957/2001).

A socially committed museology (Gouveia, 2013; Á. Pinheiro et al., 2016; Soares, 2020), alongside *curatorial activism* (Clarke, 2021; Gregório, 2015; Leupin, 2019; O’Neill, 2020; Pauls & Walby, 2021; Reilly, 2018), as political acts and pedagogical practices, can simultaneously enhance the establishment of new post-colonial narratives (Nebbou, 2013; Olaniyan, 1993) and deconstruct neocolonial discourses, as well as promote anti-racist dialectics (Alvarez, 2009; Bell, 2021; Maeso, 2016; Renou, 2020).

The development of collaborative and inclusive curatorial projects (Gonçalves et al., 2021; Leupin, 2019) and the use of inclusive speech in museums (Primo & Moutinho, 2021; Soares, 2020) can free cultural institutions from the burden of heritage (Alcântara Conde da Silva, 2021) and involve diverse communities in the process of identity construction. Other proposals include replacing statues in museums or sculpture parks or placing interpretive information next to buildings (Bina, 2020).

Contemporary art (Rendeiro & Lupati, 2019; Ribeiro, 2021) and curatorial activism (Clarke, 2021; Gregório, 2015; Leupin, 2019; O’Neill, 2020; Pauls & Walby, 2021; Reilly, 2018; Taussig, 2012) can allow the deconstruction of Lusotropicalist discursive practices (Duarte, 2019), which mythologise Portuguese colonialism (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2018),

under an allegorical cover of a civilising and evangelising duty (Goes, 2020). Maintaining these “old” discursive practices masks the actual impacts of violence and racial oppression (Otávio et al., 2009; Roldão et al., 2016; Varela & Pereira, 2020), leading to more discrimination and the dissemination of racist discourses at present.

Although we gained some progress due to the historical distance, the post-colonial narratives (Nebbou, 2013; Olaniyan, 1993) still have the stigmas of war, the struggle for emancipation, exploitation and loss, replaced by the silencing of memory (Ribeiro, 2021; P. Sousa, 2019). This silence led to a false social consensus, neglecting the horror drama and historical tragedy (Steinmeyer, 2021) to the romanticised travel narratives wrapped in nostalgia (Duarte, 2019; Gregório, 2015).

Questioning totalitarian and racist ideologies and activating the debate on the state of civilisation can be exercised within cultural institutions, namely museums and universities. As a political place, the public space is also a propitious space for the reactivation of this debate, where contemporary art can play a fundamental role.

Duarte (2019) verifies how contemporary art (Rendeiro & Lupati, 2019; Ribeiro, 2021) can be an important critical tool for decolonising thought and questioning history. Gregório (2015) also considers the contribution of the visual arts to the construction of post-colonial identities and the deconstruction of prejudices, basing artistic practice on the affirmation of diversity and discursive plurality. In this way, cultural institutions, namely museums, should invest in a plural program open to the community, promoting multiculturalism (Adams & Koke, 2014; Primo & Moutinho, 2021; Welch, 2006) and collaborative projects, inclusion through art.

Following the provisions of the bibliographic review, it is possible to identify a critical interpretation concerning the use of public space and the art installed in it. It understands the contemporary iconoclastic practices as political instruments that activate the debate around the processes of refusal of the hegemony of the current memory and non-identification with heritage. It concludes that the symbolic hierarchy of buildings and public statues constitutes ideological instruments conveying historical narratives common to totalitarian regimes. The persistence of these narratives makes it impossible to change the cultural paradigm and psyches, which can also jeopardise contemporary democratic processes and the realisation of human rights (Resolution 69/16, 2014). The absence of a critical heritage interpretation creates a gap in understanding history based on reciprocal altruism. Consequently, rather than art in the public space and heritage building forming instruments of social inclusion, they have been accentuating the phenomenology of violence as they perpetuate the legacies of oppression, slavery, and racism, legitimising the new forms of colonialism contemporary (Huntington, 1996; Santos, 2003).

The maintenance of discursive practices that enthrone nostalgia for the colonial past (Duarte, 2019; Olaniyan, 1993), corroborated by structures of the formative power of thought — museum and academy — confirm the difficulty of social emancipation by racial and ethnic-cultural minorities. Furthermore, make it challenging to deconstruct

ontological racism, namely, in the Portuguese case, concerning young people of African descent (Roldão et al., 2016). Cultural diversity endurance (Meyer-Bisch & Bidault, 2010/2014) and historical criticism are predominant premises to ensure social cohesion, which only the decolonisation of thought and art will be able to operate (Duarte, 2019).

5. LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Due to their interdisciplinary character, the subjects under study are worthy of further reflection. The recent iconoclastic events on public statuary, which occurred in Portugal and different western countries, may deserve a particular approach, considering the specificity of their representation. The recommendation is that a future study uses a methodology of questionnaires to the general population and interviews with Afro-descendant curators, artists and activists to deepen the following questions: is contemporary iconoclasm a global phenomenon? How can an anti-racist education contribute to changing the cultural paradigm? Who do the statues best serve? How can contemporary art update the interpretation of historical narratives? Can removing the statuary installed in the public space, namely the commission of the *Estado Novo*, contribute to the decolonisation of thought or accentuate contemporary totalitarian discourses? Can the restitution of historical heritage be an asset to the places of origin, contributing to the cultural identity of these territories or, instead, will it contribute to the perpetuation of relations with the former colonial power, removing pedagogical possibility from the historical correction of the oppressor? How can the redefinition of the economic model underlying urban planning contribute to the democratic process, realising human rights and social inclusion of racial minorities?

Translation: Sónia Mendes Serrão and Tânia M. Serrão

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