

## A body marked to resist before dying: *Tybyra, a Brazilian indigenous tragedy*, by João Nyn /

### *Um corpo marcado para resistir antes de morrer: 'Tybyra, uma tragédia indígena brasileira', de João Nyn*

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Tybyra: uma tragédia indígena contemporânea* is a play published by the Potiguara indigenous writer João Nyn in 2020. The work stems from a critical reinterpretation of the work *Viagem ao norte do Brasil feita nos anos de 1613 a 1614* by French clergyman Yves d'Evreux, a member of an expedition to Maranhão. In this intertextual dialogue, we analyze the processes of composing the tragedy, highlighting the narrative paths that lead the character Tybyra to death. The study shows that his body is marked for death because he is considered impure, homosexual, and classified as a sodomite by the colonial and Christian gaze. However, before being just a condemned body, Tybyra appears as a body destined for resistance, confronting the colonial system, European values, and religious impositions on indigenous customs, identities, and ways of life. Thus, the play constructs a powerful reflection on violence, intolerance, cultural erasure, and coloniality, while at the same time claiming memory, dignity, and the right to exist.

**KEYWORDS:** Tybyra; João Nyn; Drama; Death, Homosexuality.

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## RESUMO

*Tybyra: uma tragédia indígena contemporânea* é uma dramaturgia publicada pelo escritor indígena potiguara João Nyn, em 2020. A obra nasce de uma releitura crítica da obra *Viagem ao norte do Brasil feita nos anos de 1613 a 1614*, texto do religioso francês Yves d'Evreux, integrante de uma expedição ao Maranhão. Nesse diálogo intertextual, analisamos os processos de composição da tragédia, destacando os caminhos narrativos que conduzem o personagem Tybyra à morte. O estudo evidencia que seu corpo é marcado para morrer por ser considerado impuro, homossexual e enquadrado como sodomita pelo olhar colonial e cristão. Entretanto, antes de ser apenas um corpo condenado, Tybyra aparece como um corpo destinado à resistência, que confronta o sistema colonial, os valores europeus e as imposições religiosas sobre os costumes, as identidades e as formas de existência indígenas. Assim, a dramaturgia constrói uma reflexão potente sobre violência, intolerância, apagamento cultural e colonialidade, ao mesmo tempo em que reivindica memória, dignidade e direito de existir.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Tybyra; João Nyn; Drama; Morte, Homossexualidade.

## 1 Introduction

Published in 2020 by the Potiguara indigenous writer João Nyn, *Tybyra: uma tragédia indígena contemporânea* critically revisits the colonial narrative present in *Viagem ao norte do Brasil feita nos anos de 1613 a 1614*, by the French clergyman Yves d'Evreux, proposing a resignification of indigenous memory and colonial violence. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the processes of composition of the indigenous writer's play, highlighting the narrative paths that lead the character Tybyra to death and the strategies of resistance inscribed in his representation.

João Nyn, as an indigenous individual from Brazil's Northeast, a multi-artist of the Potiguara people of Rio Grande do Norte state, brings to his art the revelation of voices that were silenced, voices that were cut down by the knife, by gunfire, by disease, by hunger, by misery, by exclusion from spaces of power — including in the arts — or by the mouth of a cannon. In *Tybyra* (2020), the indigenous author builds a denunciatory, provocative text. Through a language of his own, ironic and subjective, the eponymous character narrates the process that leads to his own murder.

Chapter V of the ethnographic reports of the French priest Yves d'Evreux is entitled “De um Indio, condenado á morte, que pedio o baptismo antes de morrer” [“Of an Indigenous, condemned to death, who asked for baptism before dying”] (d'Evreux, 1874, p. 230). The “Indigenous” in question is Tybyra. In d'Evreux's narration, the “Indigenous” was “an iniquitous, impure, and filthy savage” (d'Evreux, 1874, p. 230), but who, through the colonizing narration of the clergyman, accepted baptism to inherit the Christian kingdom of heaven. Tybyra was considered impure and was condemned to death for having effeminate characteristics and for

having relations with other men. The “Indigenous” was demonized in d’Evreux’s writing because of his practices, and the way he accepts baptism and the epithet “son of God” (d’Evreux, 1874, p. 232) seems to be a mode that was widely used by writers of Brazilian literature up until Romanticism.

In this way, we here analyze how João Nyn, then, writes a play from an indigenous standpoint, giving Tybyra the possibility of self-creating an image of his own death. Thus, the first recorded case of LGBT-phobia in the colonizer’s ethnographic accounts is reread and retold through the voice of a Brazilian indigenous writer. In an autonomous, authorial manner, and possessing an aesthetic that departs from the way the Brazilian publishing market aims for and produces, the author creates a form of his own that he calls a “dramaturgy”. Matheus Picanço Nunes observes that this specific form used by Nyn (2020) “is noted from the breaking of the structure into dialogues, generally built through the interwoven speech of various characters” (Nunes, 2024, p. 461, our translation).

Nunes (2004, p. 462, our translation) also points out that “Tybyra, despite being a tragedy, proposes tensions that call into question the essential traits of this genre: it is not a complete subversion, but a way of generating instability within its relative stability”. Thus, the dramatic genre itself is rethought in João Nyn’s narrative construction, so as to subvert aspects such as the way of writing, the stages of the drama, and the absence of dialogue between the characters, for example. Tybyra narrates and creates his own images: from pleasure to demise.

Thus, if in d’Evreux’s writings – those of an author who represents what was most inherited as colonial in Brazil: Christian, white, heterosexual, European – there is a description of the colonial view as sin and error, in João Nyn’s fiction we see the opposite of that hegemony. Thus, Tybyra now denounces the homophobic practices of those who sought him out and led him to death at the mouth of a cannon. In *Devassos no Paraíso: a homossexualidade no Brasil da colônia à atualidade* (2018), João Silvério Trevisan discusses the history of homosexuality in Brazil, noting that the epithet “devassos no paraíso [debauched individuals in paradise]” was given to Brazilian indigenous people by the historian Abelardo Romero “because of this pansexualism that was at once libidinous and candid” (Trevisan, 2018, p. 62, our additions) among the natives who inhabited the lands of Pindorama.

The idea of debauchery as sin comes from Christian hegemony, since “among indigenous peoples, sexual codes had nothing in common with the Western puritanism of that era; for example, they placed little importance on virginity and even condemned celibacy”

(Trevisan, 2018, p. 62, our translation). From this angle, the condemnation of Tybyra to death, the rejection, and strangeness toward indigenous homosexuality come from a white, Christian, European conception, since among different indigenous peoples such relations caused no strangeness at all, so that homosexual relations between different subjects were common practice, as pointed out by Trevisan (2018).

Thus, João Nyn writes *Tybyra* emphasizing the tragic character of the narrative, presenting it in two languages: Tupi-Guarani and Potyguês.

*tataendy oendy mbengwe'i nhe'é moĩ porãa tembé a'e idjadju'y  
odjikwaá.i'ã oatsá wa peteí teĩ mokõe re vogais tupi guarani a'e y  
(nhanhimongueta awã), ywyrá ragwé pu odjeroky.*

The lighting slowly comes up, gradually revealing only the jaw and neck of the *nhe'é moĩ porãa* (actor/actress). The scenes that follow are a monologue, but also a poetic dialogue between two Tupi-Guarani vowels: Y and Silence (whence everything comes and to where everything goes). The sound of leaves being stirred (Nyn, 2020, p. 28).<sup>1</sup>

Regarding João Nyn's language and writing style, it is worth noting that the Tupi-Guarani language in question is modern Tupi, and that the letter "i" is suppressed throughout the monologue, as well as whenever the author himself speaks. In the "Yntrodução [Yntroduction]", the author explains his choices: "First of all, I need to make clear that here, and throughout the aesthetic of the book, whenever I write or whenever TYBYRA opens his mouth, all the 'i's disappear and are replaced by Y" (Nyn, 2020, p. 9, our translation). The author adopts an aesthetic and political stance of rejecting the letter "i," and names this language "Potyguês," a language he created.<sup>2</sup> And he explains:

Why?

Because Y is a sacred Tupi-Guarani vowel.

Because Brazyl is a country without dots on its "i"s.

Because Brazilian indigenous languages are not alphabetic (Nyn, 2020, p. 9, our translation).

Juão Nyn politically chooses these three factors and assumes this stance in his life. Potyguês then becomes a manifesto-language, inspired by the vowels of Tupi-Guarani, which are: A, E, I, O, U, Y, and silence. Silence is a word/action that is constantly present in every act of

<sup>1</sup> In the remaining quotations from the play, I will present only the Potyguês version of the language.

<sup>2</sup> This political and aesthetic act by the author João Nyn does not occur only in the writing of *Tybyra*. In all of his writing, including messages and social media, the author writes in Potyguês.

*Tybyra*. In this way, *Tybyra* is a bilingual literary work, written first in Tupi-Guarani and then translated to Potyguês, which becomes an indigenous language in its own terms.

Thus, the text that follows sets out to analyze the compositional processes of the tragedy reread and written by João Nyn, examining processes such as the white man's pursuit of sexual activity with *Tybyra*, the aspects that dichotomize the gay sexual act top and bottom, the process of demonization of homosexuality through religion, imprisonment and condemnation to death by the Church, and *Tybyra*'s resistance even while being seen by white people as a body marked to die.

## 2 The juruá's pursuit of intercourse

It is fair to note that *Tybyra: uma tragédia indígena brasileira* (2020) is divided into five acts, called LUZ (LIGHT), and entitled: I — *O Prazer* (Pleasure); II — *A Prysão* (Imprisonment); III — *O Cárcere* (Confinement); IV — *A Sentença* (The Sentence); and V — *A Execução* (The Execution), and also features illustrations by the indigenous artist Denilson Baniwa. Thus, the tragedy follows a chronological order that extends from the moments of pleasure, the sex between *Tybyra* and the colonizers, to the moment of his death. In LIGHT I — PLEASURE, the character *Tybyra* talks with those who would be his partners in pleasure. Their words never appear, but the reader infers them from *Tybyra*'s own. Through an ironic manner of speaking, the protagonist shows that he enjoys sex and that it is the colonizers who seek him out for the encounter.

– Hey, pssst.... Come here, juruá\*. Come here.  
[Silence]  
– Pssst, come here...  
– I'm here... Can't you see me?  
– [Silence]  
– Are you blind, or what?  
– Oh, poor thing, with his bad eyes...  
(Nyn, 2020, p. 28-29, our translation).

In the first act, *Tybyra* is in the forest and, upon spotting the juruá, calls out to him. The juruá is the white man. It becomes clear, then, that it was the white man who was seeking, and the indigenous man who was waiting. Yves d'Evreux's descriptions are thus refuted, since it was

the men who sought out Tybyra for sexual intercourse. The character Tybyra adopts an ironic stance regarding the fact that the juruá has a bad eye – that is, he cannot see him. A constant ironic attitude on Tybyra's part can be noted throughout the monologue, often accompanied by laughter or sarcastic questions.

In the book *Cartas do Brasil* (1886), the priest Manoel da Nóbrega notes that “many children of Christians” wandered “through the backlands lost among the Gentiles, and though Christian, live in their beastly customs” (Da Nóbrega, 1886, p. 84, our translation). This remark by the Catholic priest highlights that those homosexual relations, described as “beastly customs”, were engaged in even by the children of Christians – that is, by the very juruás of whom Tybyra speaks. In a similar point of view, Pierre Moreau, a French traveler who arrived in Brazil in 1646, notes that “everyone, indiscriminately, led a lascivious and scandalous life; Jews, Christians, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, Germans, Black people, Brazilians, Tapuias, mulattoes, mamelucos, and Creoles cohabited promiscuously” (Moreau, 1979, p. 30, our translation). It becomes clear, then, that sexual practice, understood as promiscuity through the colonizing point of view, was common among different subjects.

Given that sexual activity and the juruá's pursuit of Tybyra were common, once they met, the indigenous man continues:

– Are you going to tell me that wasn't what you were hunting for in the forest?

[...]

– What are you afraid of?

– Easy...

– We have nature's own time...

– Over there is better...

– Come...

– You can come in...

– I only bite if you ask...

– Come.... I just don't like Portuguese men; Frenchmen, I take care of...

(Nyn, 2020, p. 30, our translation).

In an ironic tone, Tybyra asks the juruá whether that wasn't exactly what he was looking for. When he says “Are you going to tell me that wasn't what you were hunting for in the forest?”, the indigenous man refers to the sexual encounter the colonizer sought, but in a hidden way. Through the monologue, we can understand that the white man sought intercourse but feared being discovered. The encounter had to be quick, and the use of reticence (...) after the words

evidences the voice of others that is not written into the text. Through the writing, the critique of d'Evreux's account becomes evident, since the homosexual practice in the French author's version led Tybyra to his demise – a practice that even today leads indigenous and non-indigenous people alike to different forms of being bound to the cannon muzzle.

It should be noted that in the text Tybyra is presented as a subject who enjoyed sex, enjoyed intercourse, and constantly mocked the juruá's fear of being discovered, of being seen. He then takes his partner to another space in search of discretion for sexual intercourse. This juruá's need for discretion is required by his understanding that from the public from which he came (Christian and white), as Trevisan (2018, p. 63, our translation) points out well, "nothing shocked the Christians of that era more than the practice of the 'unspeakable sin,' 'sodomy,' or 'filthiness.'" The fear of being discovered reveals the understanding instilled by European discourse: two men engaging in sexual relations was sin, sodomy, filthiness. However, sex between people of the same sex was not just any sin. Trevisan (2018, p. 63, our translation) points out that "sodomy was listed among the four *clamantia peccata* ('sins that cry out to heaven') of medieval theology".

The non-acceptance of a possible bisexuality also relates to the fear that a society such as the one that killed Tybyra would commit the same acts against those subjects. Tybyra further emphasizes that he only bites if the white man asks for it, and invites the other into the encounter. In doing so, he references the French, from which the clergyman Yves d'Evreux came and about whom he wrote regarding Tybyra. The situation of favoring the Frenchman and not the Portuguese sounds, besides ironic, comic, since the colonizing process bears the stain of the Portuguese's image.

### 3 The Active x Passive Dichotomy: Tybyra, a textually active subject

As the drama unfolds, it becomes clear that Tybyra does not hide his desires and wishes, and that the white men constantly, and furtively, seek out the indigenous man's bush. It is possible, therefore, to observe that the practice of sex is not viewed by Tybyra with shame. He gives himself without reservation, as we can see below:

– Açu\*... Hmmm... Açu, huh...

- Delicious, right?
  - I show it, I show it off, I show everything...
  - What else do you want?
  - Speak it up, because today I'm going easy on the juruá.
- (Nyn, 2020, p. 31, our translation).

The asterisk on “Açu” indicates that the word has a different meaning. According to the glossary in the book, “Açu” means “big”. Without shame or discretion in his expressions, Tybyra expresses satisfaction in describing the juruá's penis as something good, delicious. Further, it is understood that the white man asks Tybyra to show something, probably some specific part of his body, and Tybyra promptly replies that he will show everything. Tybyra presents himself as a subject who seeks to satisfy his own desires and to satisfy the other as well. He even asks whether his partner wants anything more, saying that in this case he would be going easy – that is, not showing his full potential in the sexual act.

Here, it should be noted that the description is clearly of a sexual practice between two men, and, through the development of Tybyra's lines, it is understood that in this part of the act the white man plays the role of the top subject (who penetrates) and Tybyra of the bottom subject (who is being penetrated). João Nyn creates images, and we, as readers, come to identify them, following the example of the sexual act between Tybyra and the juruá. However, it is worth noticing that this top x bottom dichotomy does not sustain the discourse of penetration, because although Tybyra is penetrated, it is Tybyra himself who commands the entire action. He directs the pleasure, says how it should be, guides, converses. Textually, Tybyra is the top subject. This becomes even more evident below:

- Put it all in...
  - Easy.. What's the rush?
  - Slow is better to start ...
- (Nyn, 2020, p. 31).

Emphasizing his textually top position, Tybyra suggests full penetration and asks the juruá to be calm, which further highlights his top position in the text, because when the one penetrating does so hastily, he directs him that “slow is better to start with”. Engaged in an act considered dangerous from a cultural and religious standpoint, the white man, fearing detection, tends to perform it quickly to bring the act to a close. There isn't, at any point in the tragedy, a demonstration that Tybyra denies his own desires, wishes, and positions.

However, the discussion of positions during the sexual act calls attention to a discussion on the stigma of the sexually bottom partner, addressed by the Brazilian researcher Michel Misse (2007). According to the researcher, the bottom partner – the one who is penetrated in the homosexual relation – deals with stigma and inferiorization because homoaffective sexual discourse is structured around a hierarchical position in which the top homosexual wields considerable power, while the bottom homosexual is inferiorized. In *Tybyra*, after the character suggests “–Now it’s my turn...” (Nyn, 2020, p. 33), we understand that there is a refusal on the part of the other with whom Tybyra was involved, and when the indigenous man asks “– Why not?” (Nyn, 2020, p. 33), the act of the sexual relation calls into question a discussion of this power relation established within homosexual relations.

Misse (2007, p. 23) observes that “this ‘top/bottom’ ideological antinomy begins in corporate accounting books and extends throughout the dominant symbolic universe,” such that the idea of the bottom subject is always aligned with the notion of femininity and fragility. After being refused when he sought to switch positions, in a supposed denial of passivity, Tybyra exclaims:

- You can go, then. Beat it, boy! You don’t know what you’re missing...
  - No problem, my bush is well known...
  - Yeah... Another one will show up soon. It is constant, the movement.
- (Nyn, 2020, p. 33, our translation).

The character’s sarcasm quickly conveys that any disappointment over not penetrating will soon pass, since he has a well-known bush, another man will soon arrive. The bush is described as the place of encounter, of the relation. In the master’s thesis “Os Afectos Mal-Ditos: O Indizível das Sexualidades Camponesas” (Badly-Spoken Affections: The Unspeakable in Peasant Sexualities), the Brazilian anthropologist Paulo Rogers traces a study of the imaginary built around the body of the countryman, addressing the sexual relations carried out in the bushes by men from the town of Goiabeiras (a fictitious name), in the Cariri region of Ceará. The anthropologist’s discussion is relevant here for thinking about how, just as the social imaginary was built around the idea that the countryman could not experience pleasure or relate to other men, the same was built in the society in which Tybyra lived.

Rogers (2006, p. 107, our translation) points out that “the unspeakable of peasant sexualities creates the impossible, the unsaid, the badly-said”. In this sense, in that context

studied by the anthropologist, peasant sexualities remained in the status of the unspeakable – they existed, they escaped the traditional family model, but they were denied, repressed. The countryside men of Goiabeiras were drawn to one another because, as Rogers (2006, p. 59, our translation) points out, “badly-spoken affections are intensities and passions”, and such passions left the unspeakable only in the bush, the place of encounter, of sex. The bushes, the alleys, the countryside, and so many other places were (and still are) the place of the unspeakable encounter, of the invisible encounter and of risk, just as it happened to Tybyra and to the men of Goiabeiras. By having a very well-known bush, Tybyra emphasizes the demand that there was for the encounter, for the badly-spoken practice.

Thus, in this discussion of the idealization of top/bottom in homosexual relations, Misse (2007, p. 24, our translation) points out that this dichotomy is grounded in the idea of normality and stigmatization:

The “normal” is associated with the “top” stereotype and the “stigmatized” with the “bottom” one, the former corresponding to the sexual function of the heterosexual male and the latter to the sexual function of the heterosexual female. By extension, and in reverse order, the “bottom” male homosexual and the “bottom” female homosexual will correspond to the “stigmatized,” and the “top” male homosexual and “top” female homosexual will be equivalent to the “normal”.

Tybyra, then, corresponds to the stigmatized “bottom” male homosexual, placed in a situation bordering on inferiority, but one that is soon rejected by the character’s own discourse that his bush is well known and that another man would soon appear. However, in homosexual relations, this dichotomization has prompted new research. In *Tybyra*, the colonizer’s pursuit of the sexual relation is evident, but so is a supposed supremacy in the top position of the one who penetrates, relegating Tybyra to a stigmatizing condition, even though we have previously discussed the top role, mediated by discourse, that Tybyra plays in the text.

#### 4 Gender control and the demonization of homosexuality

Light I – Pleasure calls Tybyra’s arbitrary desire into question. There is no shame or reservation. Through the monologue, one notes that Tybyra did not seek intercourse; he was

sought out. In fact, he responded to the appeals of the men who pursued him. In literature, the description and/or narration of bodies in sexual relation often tends toward the discreet, the metaphorical. In *Tybyra*, there is no discretion in the narration; the images are explicit, even though it is a monologue in which we infer things through the protagonist's narration – the sexual practice is quite evident. Even more evident is that white men/juruás are the ones who seek him out, because, as Tybyra himself states well: "Whoever comes through here is because they want to discover me..." (Nyn, 2020, p. 35, our translation). This discovery relates to the sexual encounter, given that the men who sought him out went there in the dark so as not to be discovered: "– That one already came, as far as I recall, it was dark, but I remember" (Nyn, 2020, p. 35).

Juão Nyn points out that *Tybyra* (2020) has power struggle as its content. This dispute becomes materialized toward the end of the tragedy, since the Church plays a crucial role in the death of the character condemned for sodomy. Through Tybyra's monologue, criticism is directed at the Christian institution:

– Here that's normal, isn't it where you come from?  
– I thought so..  
– I've seen it with my own eyes even a friar doing it.  
– Friar, priest, altar boy, I don't know the name of these devils...  
– I mean... Aren't they saints?  
(Nyn, 2020, p. 37, our translation).

By stating that friars, priests, and altar boys have also done what is described as "abnormal," Tybyra points out that sexual practice between men also occurred among the clergy. The protagonist's narration describes that the men who sought him even trembled with fear before and during the sexual encounter, fearing they would be discovered. Thus, the description points not to a taboo around what was understood as homosexual sex, but rather to a fear of the discovery of an act considered sinful. The character's critique becomes even more evident when he confirms that many of those who judged him were themselves among those who labeled the practice as sodomy. Once again, then, we see the character's irony turn caustic when he asks: "– I mean... Aren't they saints?", refuting the demonization of the act when carried out by Tybyra himself, yet silenced/hidden when carried out by clergymen.

In this way, Tybyra criticizes the institution and its members who demonized his practice, when they themselves also sought to engage in it: "– Another one'll show up soon.../ – They must

be tired of doing it among themselves.../ – Hungry for new worlds, new flesh” (Nyn, 2020, p. 39, our translation). Tybyra’s irony suggests that homosexual practice occurred not only involving him, but also among the clergymen themselves.

Considering the power that the colonial matrix established in the colonizing process of the Americas, the researcher Estevão Rafael Fernandes, in studies on indigenous homosexuality in Brazil and the United States, highlights, based on the discussions of Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova (2008) in “The Postcolonial and the Global,” four moments in which “there are radical changes in the history of humanity” (Fernandes, 2020, p. 241, our translation) arising from colonial propositions. Only one of these moments is of interest to this discussion: the one that defined the control of sexuality. About this, Fernandes (2020) observes that there was:

the control of gender and sexuality with a view to conforming to the control of the economy and authority. Christian morality, the notion of family, and patriarchal superiority were imposed at the same time that homosexuality was condemned and placed alongside the demonic (Fernandes, 2020, p. 242, our translation).

It is possible, therefore, to observe the demonization of homosexuality in the tragedy composed by Juão Nyn, since Tybyra is killed for being considered impure. Such control of sexuality – and automatically of bodies, within the process of the colonial matrix – occurs steeped in the “three central elements that affect the daily life of the entire world population: the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism” (Quijano, 2005, p. 124). These three elements cited by Quijano drastically affect various areas of indigenous existence, including sexualities. Established colonial power, capital aimed solely at profit, and the imposition of a Eurocentric Christian identity shaped Tybyra’s body and existence.

“Light I” closes with Tybyra emphasizing the practice with both French and Portuguese men, further noting that the sexual practice sometimes occurred with more than one partner at a time. The second act, entitled “Light II — IMPRISONMENT”, addresses Tybyra’s arrest, as he is accused of sodomy and thus imprisoned by those people with whom he engaged in intercourse.

Tybyra is “captured” and imprisoned without explanation. He then asks to be told the reason for such an act. Through constant questioning, being dragged and having his hair pulled, the capture and imprisonment process reveals a colonial power that extended throughout colonization and still reveals cruel remnants today. What it was/is considered wrong by white, Christian, European, and imperial norms, and out of step with what was established by their laws

(many of which do not apply to indigenous cosmologies), will be captured and imprisoned as Tybyra was, whether figuratively or literally.

- Why do you want to arrest me? What did I do?
  - I don't know what that means, I didn't do anything wrong!
  - Sodo-what? Sodomy? I don't even know what that is.
  - I'm a Qualyra\*, but so what? He is too...
- (Nyn, 2020, p. 49, our translation).

At this moment of the arrest, Tybyra is informed of the “crime” that led him to prison and later to death: sodomy. Tybyra is incriminated, questioned, judged. Here, then, the account draws close to an inquisitorial regime, in which, as Trevisan (2018, p. 149) notes, “for crimes of sodomy, generally a single accusing witness sufficed — considering that the punishment of such cases was ‘a first necessity in a Christian republic,’ as an inquisitorial prosecutor once argued.”

Accused, assaulted, and insulted, Tybyra was taken away by the white men to prison. If, in the Inquisition, sodomy cases required only one accusing witness, then whoever accused Tybyra had already visited his thicket. The practice of sodomy refers to the biblical event discussed in the book of Genesis, in which the city of Sodom was destroyed for the continuous sinful practices carried out by its people. Sodomy, then, refers to the practice of anal sex between two men or a man and a woman. Tybyra, by the definition of those who arrested him, would be a sodomite. However, if the definition applied to everyone, those with whom he had relations — since they carried out the anal penetration — would also be sodomites.

In the *Tratado descritivo do Brasil em 1587*, Gabriel Soares de Sousa, talking about the Tupinambá people, notes that they were “so lustful that there is no sin of lust they do not commit” (Sousa, 1879, p. 286, our translation). The sin of lust is also closely tied to sexual practices, since Sousa (1879, p. 287, our translation) adds that the Tupinambá were “too given to the unspeakable sin, among whom it is not held as an affront”; by unspeakable one should understand the homosexual relations practiced among indigenous people.

Tybyra did not know the meaning of sodomy, but understood that he was being arrested for sexual practices with another man. The indigenous man calls himself “qualyra,” which, according to the afterword of Nyn (2020, p. 106, our translation), is a “local expression from São Luís do Maranhão for a bottom pederast, homosexual”, that is, Tybyra recognized himself as a homosexual/queer man, if we think of this conception invented by the colonizer. However, Tybyra also points out that the man who arrested him was one too. It should be noted that the notion of

sin addressed by friars, monks, and sixteenth-century writers stems from the Christian, white, European conception. Among indigenous peoples, including the Tupinambá, the notion of sin was introduced by the colonizers. Thus, thinking of homosexuality as sin stems from a worldview that often does not match indigenous lives. And Tybyra continues:

- Wherever they take me, they'll want me... There is no use. My exposed skyn looks lyke temptation to these dogs...
- I didn't even choose this for my lyfe, but I succeeded at it, and it became routine. Don't you want a taste? This other one here, look... He already...
- Ay... I won't shut my mouth! If you're going to arrest me for this, you gotta take this other one too... Those over there too... (Nyn, 2020, p. 50, our translation).

Tybyra presents himself as a desired body, and wherever he may be, he'll be a temptation. In this conception, he approaches the notion of eroticism discussed by Georges Bataille (1987, p. 14, our translation), when he observes that “every erotic act, at its foundation, involves a destruction of the structure of the closed being that is, in the normal state, a partner in the game”. For Bataille, when alone, the subject is closed — that is, discontinuous. The sexual act, eroticism, however, is the opposite of discontinuity, of what is closed. Thus, Bataille also observes that “every realization of eroticism aims to reach the innermost part of the being, the point where the heart fails us. The passage from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes in us the relative dissolution of the being constituted within the discontinuous order” (Bataille, 1987, p. 14, our translation). Tybyra's desired body, his erotic body, emerges from discontinuity when the sexual act is consummated.

## 5 Religion and the imposition of imprisonment and death

Continually, in the monologue, Tybyra denounces those who imprisoned him, even though they had already slept with him. The practice of sodomy, highlighted by the colonizer, was seen as wrong only when carried out by the indigenous man, thus being covered up when carried out by everyone else. Luiz Mott, a scholar of issues involving homosexuality, including in pre-colonial Brazil, notes in his study on gays in Pre-Colonial Brazil that

homosexuality was so widespread in the land of Brasilis that the Tupinambá had specific names to designate the practitioners of this erotic performance: male homosexuals were called Tibira and lesbians Çacoaimbeguira (Mott, 2011, n.p., our translation).

The practice was common; and, even though it was taken as sinful, unspeakable, and deserving of death by the colonial power, in Tybyra's telling, he alone was condemned to death. The naming of indigenous homosexual people as "Tibira" reveals a colonial mark sustained by Christian ideation. Homosexuality, viewed as sin by Christians, still dictates rules in contemporary society. As a result, the imposition of some people's beliefs prevails over the individuals' free right to be who they wish to be. Returning then to the literary matter, Light II closes with Tybyra being taken to the jail. THE CONFINEMENT, therefore, is the title of Light III.

– Could at least tell me what it was I dyd. Was it that time that...  
No...Nobody saw me steal\*.

[...]

– ...almost everybody's already vysyted my tent, and none of them will free me?

– Already put those parts in my mouth and won't even look me in the eye?

(Nyn, 2020, p. 58-59).

Act III is short and presents Tybyra still questioning the reason for his arrest. The imprisonment appears as a place of doubt, of questioning, and also of reunion with family after the arrest. Tybyra even asks whether he was being arrested for *manguear* — that is, for stealing — which is soon dismissed, since, according to him, no one saw him commit such an act. Tybyra's fierce irony grows more constant toward those who once sought him out and now were the ones watching over him in the jail. In this way, the character repeatedly states that they had already visited his tent and, erotically, states that their genitals had already been placed in his mouth, yet they won't even look him in the eyes.

Tybyra's repulsion at the juruás' denial fuels the discourse of invisibility that afflicts the character. From pleasure, through arrest, to imprisonment, Tybyra constantly denounces the process of invasion as an injustice. Light III unfolds with the character requesting the possibility of bathing. Tybyra exclaims: "I want to take a bath! Let me clean myself! I can't stand going without washing myself this whole time, not like you all..." (Nyn, 2020, p. 63, our translation). Here, the

text presents Brazil's tropical climate and the constant bathing of indigenous peoples, which, in turn, was rejected by the colonizers, especially the French. Moving toward the end, Light IV is entitled THE SENTENCE, and unfolds the character's sentencing to death.

- Oh, Priest... Your blessing...
  - Are you not going to give me your blessing?
  - Whoa, what a rude Priest...
  - Well then... There is no use prayin' for an yndian, Priest...
  - Our half-soul doesn't even believe yn a half God like yours, a God that massacres without mercy, because if it's done in his name... I deny him...
- (Nyn, 2020, p. 77).

Although Tybyra was rebellious against the system established by the colonizers, he had already been introduced to many actions proposed by them. The imposition of the language and the request for the priest's blessing, for example, reveal tensions that were introduced violently. However, the priest's refusal to "bless" the indigenous man shows that the subject, according to Christian discourse, "was beyond saving". He was condemned. The character, however, denounces politically and critically that what the priest held as truth, as God, was not the same belief that he, as an indigenous man, held. The imposition of Christianity, and the notion of homosexuality as error and as sodomy, applied only to those who practiced the religion — which was not Tybyra's case.

The priest, as in d'Evreux's narration, is asked to baptize Tybyra and free him from condemnation, in the Christian conception. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in 1992, sets out the doctrine of the Catholic faith and discusses all aspects related to Catholic Christian principles. On homosexuality, the Catechism states:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. [...] They are contrary to the natural law, they close the sexual act to the gift of life, they do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity, and under no circumstances can they be approved (Catechism, § 2357). A considerable number of men and women present deep-seated homosexual tendencies. [...] They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination toward them must be avoided (Catechism, § 2358, our translation).

Considering this Catholic Church document, which is grounded in the Bible, homosexuality is regarded as depravity — that is, as something indecent, contrary to natural law, namely heterosexuality. However, the document acknowledges that “a considerable number of men and women” present homosexual tendencies. Here, it is not clear to which historical moment the document refers, by euphemizing with the expression “a considerable number.” The document suggests acceptance and respect, which differs from what happens to Tybyra.

Finally, homosexuals are called to conversion, to moving away from error. However, in the dramaturgy, the character mocks the fact that he needs baptism in order to find a supposed salvation, while his accomplices would not meet the same end as he. In a tone of denunciation, Tybyra raises several questions to the priest and to those who condemned him: “– If priests love lyfe, why do they let this Christian die?” Note that Tybyra takes on the position of a Christian, yet does not accept baptism. He then adds: “– If you love Christians so much, why don’t you love this one?” Even knowing he was not free from death, Tybyra questions whether Christian principles would not spare him from the condemnation to which he was being sentenced to die.

## 6 A body marked to resist before dying

From another perspective, João Nyn’s dramaturgy can be read, then, through a necropolitical lens. Bodies became entangled, men had relations with Tybyra, but there were specific bodies marked for demise. In the essay *Necropolitics*, the philosopher Achille Mbembe discusses and updates the concept of Biopower created by Michel Foucault. Mbembe, however, reveals how colonial power exercises power through the right to kill or to let live.

In conceptualizing necropower/necropolitics, the Cameroonian critic observes that there are “contemporary forms that subjugate life to the power of death” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 71, our translation). Although Tybyra’s narrative takes place in São Luís do Maranhão in 1614, Tybyra’s body was subjugated to death. This subjugation can be understood as the fruit of a colonial and sovereign power that marked Tybyra’s death.

Thus, it is also understood that “sovereignty is the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is ‘disposable’ and who is not” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 41). Tybyra is sentenced to death, but not to just any death — he is sentenced to a violent, brutal death, one that tore his body apart. Tybyra is blown apart at the cannon muzzle because his body was marked to die,

read as a disposable, impure body, just like the bodies of many indigenous people today. Colonial, sovereign, and imperial power continues to sentence bodies like Tybyra's daily, in an extremely necropolitical practice, toward death. In this way, the text moves toward its close. The final Light, entitled THE EXECUTION, closes the tragedy with Tybyra's death. The narrative repeats d'Evreux's description and retells the case of the first indigenous victim of homophobia in the construction of the idea of the country we today call Brazil.

On the day of his execution for Sodomy, before the French Commanders, the clergy, and the local citizens, the sky is overcast, heavy clouds announce a storm. Tybyra's mouth is obstructed by a piece of cotton; he spends some time in silence until he manages to remove the obstacle that separates his mouth from the world. Tybyra speaks as if, after the lightning, the sound of thunder came out of his mouth: (Nyn, 2020, p. 84-85, our translation).

Tybyra is bound to the cannon, his arms and legs tied. The description of lightning occurring at the moment of execution recurs frequently in this final act. This time, the monologue's lines are more extensive. The description of these moments carries a more tragic tone, so that the descriptions of movements, of space, and of the bodies inhabiting that moment are dense.

The people who attended the execution were, mainly, the colonizers formed by the clergy and the French commanders. Everything leaned toward colonial supremacy. Tybyra's silence, caused by the cotton binding, is broken, and he is then able to express himself. Tybyra criticizes the invasion, denounces that the colonizers brought diseases, talks with his relatives and asks them not to watch the moment of his death, and curses the one who will light the cannon that will kill him.

Through a language I would call fierce, one that tears, criticizes, and denounces, it is possible to understand, through the character's narration, that the colonizers, besides killing Tybyra, had also already managed to persuade some of the character's relatives, instilling an idea that persists in contemporary society: the racist and prejudiced notion that indigenous divinities are demonic. Thus, Tybyra exclaims:

– Jeropary is not a demon, Anhã is not a devil. I am not from hell, they are enchanted beings that we need to understand... Look at it differently... Nature teaches us every day that there is no boundary

between the sacred and the profane. You're fooling yourself... (Nyn, 2020, p. 89, our translation).

This discourse appears in the literary text, but its effects persist to the present day. Colonization fed, and neocolonization continues to feed, the demonization of indigenous belief, generally in accordance with Christian principles. In this sense, the effects of the coloniality of power discussed by Quijano (2005, p. 121, our translation) “forced — also to varying degrees in each case — the colonized to partially learn the culture of the dominators in everything useful for the reproduction of domination, whether in the field of material, technological activity, or in the subjective, especially religious, field”. Although Tybyra rejected the imposition of Christianity, many of his relatives had already been steeped in Christian discourse.

Fábio Eduardo Cressoni, in his doctoral thesis, studying the difficulties the missionaries of the *Companhia de Jesus* (Society of Jesus) found in the catechetical process with the Tupinambá, discusses the phenomenon he defines as the demonization of the indigenous soul. Cressoni's (2013) discussion is grounded both in the conception of hell addressed by the Portuguese colonizers, as well as in the social relations that permeated Europe. Thus, the scholar observes that

[...] the symbolic practices that shape the Lusitanian way of being, and, in turn, the missionary exercise throughout the expansionist action inherent to the conquest of new spaces, are categorically marked by fear relating to the greatest adversary of Christianity, resulting in the demonization of practices that diverge from the divine order and its respective royal ordinance (Cressoni, 2013, p. 34, our translation).

On this point, it is worth noticing that Christian religions, both Catholic and Protestant, spread their ideals across many indigenous communities and continue to sentence indigenous bodies based on what they believe and defend. Observing Tybyra's speech, when the colonizers define Jeropary and Anhã as demonic entities, this discourse resembles what Cressoni (2013) points out; such practices, according to the colonial view, diverge from the divine order.

The discourse of heaven and hell, God and the Devil, right and wrong, has always been grounded in the colonizer's perspective. For Tybyra and his people, such conceptions held no value. Thus, the indigenous man exclaims that neither Jeropary nor Anhã are demonic figures; on the contrary, they are enchanted beings of nature. The ancestral force that these enchanted beings emanate is not matched by Christian ideals.

Thus, the dramaturgy also serves to denounce and announce that indigenous divinities must be revered and respected. Therefore, attributing negative and intolerant labels to them only reinforces white Christian colonial power. Moreover, it reinforces the attempt at Christian supremacy within communities, given that in the text Tybyra's brothers already believed not in the indigenous man, but in the clergy and the commanders. From the literary material to the many indigenous communities across this vast national territory, many indigenous people are persuaded and begin to deny their own divinities and beliefs. Before dying, Tybyra still exclaims that he denied baptism:

- You think so, but they never baptizd me...
- I don't need their baptysm. We don't need it (Nyn, 2020, p. 90, our translation).

Juão Nyn writes a drama in which the character rejects the imposition of Christian baptism. Tybyra makes clear that he did not need baptism, that no indigenous person needed it. Tybyra was executed because he did not deny what he did, did not accept baptism, and in an inquisitorial process received his sentence. Trevisan, discussing the Inquisition in Brazil in cases of sodomy, notes that after judgment, the Inquisitorial Tribunal issued one of the following sentences:

[...] depending on whether the defendant was considered diminished (for confessing insufficiently), contumacious (fugitive or disobedient), feigned (pretending repentance), convicted (persisting in error), false (confessing only to avoid punishment), recanting (contradicting himself in confession), or relapsed (a repeat offender, after having been reconciled with the Inquisition) (Trevisan, 2018, p. 149, our translation).

Taking these principles into account, Tybyra was configured as a “convicted” defendant, since, for colonial power, the indigenous man's practices were error. In this way, the letters, travel reports, and so many other genres that served as support for feeding extremely colonial and Christian discourses still deserve to be revisited, retold. If they were created under the influence of Christians, this time, they are (re)narrated through the perspective of those who were the characters, who were the colonized — that is, indigenous people themselves.

Sound of the cannon's explosion;

Smoke below the curtains.

Complete darkness.

The curtains open, **nhe'é moi porãa** (actor/actress) gives thanks, adorned with a sacred Tupinambá cloak, and speaks about the living indygenous LGBT people who resyst in the present day (Nyn, 2020, p. 95, our translation).

Now closing the dramaturgy, Tybyra still emphasizes that he believed in the God Tupã, thus reinforcing indigenous religiosity, grounded in cosmologies that were not the same as those of the people who condemned him to death. Before the end, Tybyra still asks for a bit of tobacco and says that after death he too will become an enchanted being. Near the end of the text, we see the beginning of the tragedy's climax. Tybyra was marked by the cannon, because his end is tragic. But before that, he was defined by the right to exist and to be who he was, even though he was constrained.

### Final Considerations

They shoot. Tybyra is shattered. The character's death ends the tragedy. The colonizer's flags wave, but Tybyra's memory is evoked as an act of resistance. He did not allow himself to be dominated by the colonizer's powers. The execution reveals that the necropolitics highlighted by Mbembe (2018) has won once again. The question remains: how many Tybyras have died, and how many more will still die, condemned by this Euro-white-Christian-imperialist-colonial system? From silence to the scream, voices like Tybyra's are not silenced; cannons do not shatter them.

The analysis of *Tybyra: uma tragédia indígena contemporânea* shows that João Nyn promotes a resignification of the colonial narrative by shifting Tybyra from the condition of a silenced victim to that of a historical and political subject who resists the structures of coloniality. By critically revisiting Yves d'Evreux's narrative, the indigenous author's dramaturgy denounces the mechanisms of violence, intolerance, and erasure imposed on indigenous peoples.

Thus, Tybyra, the character of the tragedy written by João Nyn, although he was a body marked to die, was first a body marked to resist, not accepting the Christian domination that was imposed on his body, rejecting baptism, and denouncing those who sought him out in his thicket. The contemporary indigenous tragedy, as an artistic-literary work, also rises as a political

instrument of struggle and denunciation, emphasizing freedom and the right to existence, so that, beyond the dramatic text, tybyras may exist as they wish to be.

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