Quadrinhos Resistentes — Graphic Novels Against Gender-Based Violence in the Lusophone World: A Mapping

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Abstract

Gender-based violence, defined as any act of violence perpetrated due to the victim's gender (Boyle, 2019), is a pervasive phenomenon with substantial socio-economic costs. In Portugal alone, gender-based violence is estimated to cost the State 8,4 million euros annually (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021), while in Brazil, one of the most widespread forms of gender violence, violence against women, costs the government approximately 214,42 billion Brazilian reais, or 38,60 billion euros (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Minas Gerais, 2023). In parallel, the graphic novel and comics market is experiencing significant growth in both countries, with Portugal reporting a 73% increase in sales in 2021 (Coelho, 2022; Queirós, 2022), and Brazil seeing a rise in the production of printed comic titles (Martinez, 2023). Although a growing body of feminist graphic narratives and related scholarly research exists, no systematic study has yet examined comics and graphic novels that specifically address gender-based violence within the Lusophone context. This article seeks to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive mapping of graphic novels published in Brazil and Portugal that engage with this theme. A total of 40 graphic narratives were initially identified through a defined methodology. Of these, 24 titles were selected for detailed analysis, based on two main criteria: compliance with the adopted definition of a graphic novel and the centrality of gender-based violence within the narrative. The mapping revealed significant thematic and formal heterogeneity across the *corpus*. Key findings include the dominance of the Brazilian comics scene in the production of graphic novels that address patriarchal violence and a significant presence of fictional works.

Keywords

gender-based violence, graphic novels, Lusophone world, Brazil, Portugal

Quadrinhos Resistentes — Novelas Gráficas Contra a Violência de Género no Mundo Lusófono: Um Mapeamento

Resumo

A violência de género, definida como qualquer ato de violência praticado com base no género da vítima (Boyle, 2019), constitui um fenómeno estrutural com custos socioeconómicos

substanciais. Só em Portugal, estima-se que a violência de género represente um encargo anual de 8,4 milhões de euros para o Estado (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021), enquanto no Brasil uma das formas mais prevalentes de violência de género, a violência contra as mulheres, custa ao Estado cerca de 214,42 mil milhões de reais, equivalentes a 38,60 mil milhões de euros (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Minas Gerais, 2023). Em paralelo, o mercado da banda desenhada e da novela gráfica tem registado um crescimento significativo em ambos os países, com Portugal a evidenciar um aumento de 73% nas vendas em 2021 (Coelho, 2022; Queirós, 2022) e o Brasil a registar um crescimento na produção de títulos impressos de banda desenhada (Martinez, 2023). Apesar do aumento do número de narrativas gráficas feministas e da respetiva investigação académica, ainda não foi realizado um estudo sistemático centrado especificamente na banda desenhada e nas novelas gráficas que abordam a violência de género no contexto lusófono. O presente artigo procura colmatar essa lacuna, apresentando um mapeamento abrangente de novelas gráficas publicadas no Brasil e em Portugal que exploram esta temática. Foram inicialmente identificadas 40 narrativas gráficas através de uma metodologia previamente definida. Destas, foram selecionados 24 títulos para análise detalhada com base em dois critérios principais: conformidade com a definição de novela gráfica adotada e a relevância da violência de género na narrativa. O mapeamento revelou uma heterogeneidade temática e formal significativa no *corpus*. Entre os principais resultados, destaca-se a predominância da produção brasileira na publicação de novelas gráficas que abordam a violência patriarcal, bem como uma presença expressiva de obras de ficção.

Palavras-chave
violência de género, novela gráfica, mundo lusófono, Brasil, Portugal

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence, namely any act of violence carried out because of the victim's gender (Boyle, 2019), is a vicious phenomenon that costs 8,4 million euros per year to the Portuguese State (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Similar statistics suggest that one of the most widespread manifestations of gender-based violence, violence against women, costs the Brazilian government approximately 214,42 billion Brazilian reais, equivalent to 38,60 billion euros (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Minas Gerais, 2023). Parallelly, the consumption of graphic novels and comics is experiencing rapid growth in Portugal, with sales of graphic narratives increasing by 73% in 2021 (Coelho, 2022; Queirós, 2022). In Brazil, the already successful local comics market has advanced in the last few years, with growth in the production of printed comics titles (Martinez, 2023). This growth was facilitated by emerging trends in the production and consumption of graphic narratives. Among these, the advent of the so-called graphic novel, a format that started its circulation within the book market in the 1980s (Baetens & Frey, 2015) and that, despite the many controversies associated to its critical reception and definition, can be broadly identified as a "flexible editorial container" for stories "narrated through the comics medium in a limited amount of volumes (typically one or two), distributed through literary channels (…), which developed directly from the auteur magazine comics tradition" (Mandolini et al., 2024, p. 377). The graphic novel has provided the comics medium with a new outlet, granting graphic

narratives access to a new cultural sphere (namely, the literary *milieu*) and, consequently, to a symbolic status that comics have always struggled to attain (Beaty, 2012). The increasing relevance of digital platforms for communication and artistic dissemination is another crucial aspect to consider in a discussion about the growing popularity of graphic narratives, both at the international level and in the Lusophone world. In Brazil, widespread web access led to significant changes in the production process of graphic narratives, especially graphic novels. Crowdfunding and social networking platforms where artists can share their work, receive feedback, and raise funding for publication are nowadays commonly used resources to increase readership and facilitate production (Carvalho, 2017; Mandolini & Busi Rizzi, 2023).

International comics studies scholarship have already pointed out how both the rise of the graphic novel, with its generic preference for non-fictional storylines which support personal accounts of trauma and marginalization, and the increased weight of internet-based communication have functioned as a prompt for the visibilization of comics artists belonging to non-socially hegemonic categories (Ahmed, 2023; Chute, 2010; Khulman, 2017; Mandolini & Busi Rizzi, 2023). These include women and gender non-conforming authors who, in Brazil, were previously ostracized by a comics publishing market that was notoriously keen to prioritize the work of heterocisnormative male creators (Crescêncio, 2019; Marino & Machado, 2019; Vilela, 2019) . These authors are now vastly populating the bookshelves of comics and bookshops thanks to a success acquired on the web (Crescêncio, 2021; Mandolini & Busi Rizzi, 2023; Messias, 2018; Vilela, 2019). In Portugal, women and non-heterocisnormative creatives have participated in the underground comics scene since the post-Salazar dictatorship and the advent of third-wave feminism. Still, they managed to reach the traditional publishing sphere only recently, when the graphic novel format gained (modest) popularity in the country and the internet began boosting the visibility of some artists (Moura, 2023).

As part of a virtuous cycle, the capacity of graphic novels and the internet to amplify the expression of formerly segregated and invisibilized gender identity categories resulted in a proliferation of graphic narratives addressing topics that were either unexplored or traditionally framed through the rhetorical and representational conventions of patriarchal discourse. Among these is the portrayal of gender-based violence, a societal issue that feminist activists began to discuss as a political concern in the 1970s, and which theorists have since sought to conceptualize and systematize throughout that decade and beyond (Mandolini, 2017; Matthews, 1994; Santos & Izumino, 2005). Graphic narratives have then joined other media and artistic domains in engaging with the issue of gender-based violence from a feminist perspective.

It is not a coincidence that a growing field of research in cultural studies is focusing on the analysis of feminist representations of gender-based violence in different artistic and mediatic domains (Baptista & Himmel, 2016; Greer, 2017; Gunne & Thompson, 2010; Mandolini, 2021a; Purcell et al., 2017; Williamson Sinalo & Mandolini, 2023). The aim is to identify the contribution these portrayals make to subverting patriarchal discourse,

as well as their actual or potential impact on the implementation of awareness-raising and educational projects aimed at preventing the phenomenon. In the field of comics studies, scholars have recently begun examining feminist productions on gender-based violence. They have emphasized how graphic narratives provide a platform for feminist denunciation of patriarchal violence, for the re-appropriation of voice and agency by artists and individuals who experienced it, as well as for the symbolic subversion of the partitions imposed by gender roles that give rise to violence (Chute, 2010; Fedtke, 2020; Gray & Wright, 2017; Lodhia, 2021; Logie et al., 2023; Mandolini, 2021b, 2022; Romu, 2021). Some of the aforementioned research identifies the medium-specific strategies employed by feminist comics creatives as a powerful tool to "take the risk of visual representation" (Gray, 2020, p. 155) to produce accessible and engaging, though multifaceted and complex, condemnations of gender-based violence. These include comics' cross-discursivity or multimodality (Chute, 2010; Mandolini, 2021b); braiding, namely the dialogue through visual and textual references that panels establish with other panels in adjacent or non-adjacent pages (Mandolini, 2021b); comics' ability to display internal and external processes simultaneously through the technique of cartooning (Lodhia, 2020); and comics' propensity to transmedial contamination (Mandolini, 2022).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned emerging trend of feminist graphic narratives and the growing body of related research[1], no systematic overview has yet been conducted on comics and graphic novels specifically addressing the theme of gender-based violence in the Lusophone context. This article seeks to fill this research gap by providing scholars with a comprehensive mapping of graphic novels published in Brazil and Portugal that engage with this issue.

2. Mapping Lusophone Graphic Novels on Gender-Based Violence: A Methodological Note

The methodological framework selected for the research presented in this article is inspired by the practice of cultural mapping. Cultural mapping can be broadly defined as a research process that envisages "new ways of describing, accounting for, and coming to terms with the cultural resources of communities and places" (Duxbury et al., 2015, p. 2). The scholarly effort to provide the academic and broader community with a comprehensive list of graphic novels on the theme of gender-based violence produced in

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[1] In the Portuguese context, scholarly analyses of feminist graphic narratives published at a local level are scarce and include the previously mentioned reflection of Moura (2023) on the works of Hetamoé, Ana Margarida Matos and Joana Mosi; a study on female pain as it is represented in the graphic anthology *Nódoa Negra* published by Chili Com Carne in 2018 (Frota & Soares, 2023); a discussion of feminine abjection and monstrosity as portrayed in the Portuguese zine *Fundo do Nada* published by Sapata Press in 2017, by Ana Caspão (Mandolini, 2023). None of these scholarly articles centers on the specific theme of gender-based violence. The scholarship on Brazilian feminist graphic narratives and cartooning is far more extensive, thus counting on historical analyses of the role played by women in the production and popularization of the local *histórias em quadrinhos* (Avelino, 2023; Crescêncio, 2022; Moreira, 2023; Nogueira, 2017;), as well as on the presence of women and gender non-conforming subjects in the contemporary comics scene of the Latin American country (Carneiro, 2021; Coan, 2018; Dalmaso & Madella, 2017; Dantas & Nolasco, 2017; Eugênio, 2017; Guimarães, 2021; Lelis & Lima, 2023; Mandolini & Busi Rizzi, 2023; Marino & Machado, 2019; Mastroberti, 2014; Messias & Crippa, 2017; Pires, 2019).

the Lusophone context aligns with the ethos of cultural mapping, as it is not a merely erudite cataloguing exercise. On the contrary, it functions as a specific tool aimed at "informing collective strategies, planning processes, and other initiatives" (Duxbury et al., 2015, p. 2), given its interdependence with the broader research-community-based project *GENTEEL – Graphic Novels Against Gender Based Violence*. The main objective of the project is to explore the use of graphic narratives as a symbolic means of challenging patriarchal abuse among secondary school students in Northern Portugal. This mapping, the project's first research output, serves as a crucial instrument for identifying a range of graphic novels on the matter produced across the Lusophone world — specifically in Portugal and Brazil. It will form the basis for the subsequent selection of five works to be used in schools to assess students' reception and, consequently, for drafting guidelines on implementing the use of graphic narratives on gender-based violence in educational settings.

The proposed cultural mapping does not center on materials whose connection to their geographical place of production is necessarily direct, identifiable, or rooted in specific concerns of the local community. Graphic novels, as cultural artifacts, often resist straightforward geographical characterization. Even when they possess a tangible material form — as physical books rather than digital media — they are not always easily anchored to a particular location. Like many other non-site-specific cultural objects, graphic novels can reflect multiple geographies: those of their publication, those where their creative processes were developed, and their narrative setting. The latter, in particular, can transcend the physical and topographical constraints of the real world, allowing for symbolic, imagined, or hybrid spatial configurations. However, the graphic novels selected for this mapping are far from untangled from their cultural context. . They are all written in Portuguese and published and created in Portugal and Brazil, countries historically linked by a colonial rapport that extends to present social and political relationships. These same social and political relationships generated, and continue to generate, a controversial yet deeply intertwined wave of memories and connections on which some theorists have based a renewed vision of what they defined as "cultura lusófona" (Lusophone culture) or "lusofonia" (Lusophony). Baptista (2000), building on the earlier work of Eduardo Lourenço, states that the concept of "lusofonia" must emerge from a thorough re-examination of the colonial imaginary, which has been centered on the unilateral expansion of Portuguese culture. The Lusophone cultural space should be re-conceptualized as a locus of difference and plurality (Baptista, 2000), where the fragmentation inherent in its multiplicity is understood as an opportunity to reshape a common, non-monadic, and non-fixed identity (M. Martins, 2006). It is in this sense that the mapping proposed in this article possesses a specific — albeit, as we shall see, far from homogeneous — cultural dimension.

The exploratory approach of the research project from which this article stems did not allow for a broader examination of graphic novels produced in other Lusophone countries, beyond Portugal and Brazil. Further research will need to extend the current mapping

to include graphic narratives on gender-based violence from Mozambique, Cabo Verde, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Macau, and Goa.

The search for material, namely graphic novels on gender-based violence, to be considered for the mapping was carried out by means of research conducted online and offline. The online part of the research availed of free search on browsers, examinations of comics forums and blogs, as well as of social media (mostly Instagram, given its predominant visual aspect) and other internet platforms (e.g., crowdfunding sites used by artists to showcase, discuss, and financially support their projects), used by comics creators to share their work. The authors also conducted research using publishers' websites, a useful resource when catalogues are available. The offline component was held at libraries, bookshops, and comics events. The contributions of fellow comics scholars, enthusiasts, and artists with whom the authors engaged in dialogue were essential, leading to a series of suggestions that significantly influenced the map's composition. The authors deliberately chose not to conduct a systematic search through library databases, as graphic novels remain poorly represented in public libraries, and specialized comics libraries (*bedetecas* in Portugal and *gibitecas* in Brazil) are scarce and often lack comprehensive collections.

After being collected, the graphic novels were read by the authors and subsequently evaluated for inclusion in the mapping based on two main criteria: do they align with the definition of graphic novel selected by the researchers? Is the theme of gender-based violence central to the graphic novels' narrative trajectory?

The mapping draws on Baetens and Frey's (2015) open and non-essentialist definition of graphic novel. According to Baetens and Frey (2015), the graphic novel is a medium that departs from the comics medium, opening new avenues for artistic expression and communication. The graphic novel showcases different degrees of experimentation with comics' main formal features, namely the grid and sequentiality, it tends to display a clear individual/authorial style and a "disposition towards realism" (p. 12), it tends to have "a strong preference for the book format" (p. 13) and to avoid serialization. The decision to focus on an open definition enabled the researchers to include works in the mapping that may not neatly conform to a rigid definition of graphic novel. This flexibility is warranted by the graphic novel's susceptibility to rapid evolution and its context-sensitive nature, which varies both spatially and temporally. Thus, the selected works reflect the ever-changing format characteristic of the graphic novel's format.

Moreover, graphic novels were included in the mapping if they portray and discuss gender-based violence by making the phenomenon central to their plot or representation. The definition of gender-based violence with which the authors worked is that provided by the Council of Europe: "any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (Pandera et al. 2019, p. 18). This broad definition allowed for the inclusion of not only graphic novels on violence against women, but also texts on

transphobia and violence towards cisgender boys or men who do not conform to the model of hegemonic masculinity[2].

Before being included in or excluded from the mapping, the graphic novels were classified according to their main characteristics, including country of publication, type of publisher, publication format, narrative, degree of fictionality, genre, and type of gender-based violence addressed. They were then briefly described, taking into account their content and style. The results of the mapping will be discussed in the following section of this article.

3. To Map or Not to Map: Why Some Graphic Novels Didn't Make the Cut

A total of 40 graphic narratives were initially collected using the previously discussed methodology. Among these, 24 were selected for mapping following careful application of the aforementioned main criteria: alignment with the provided definition of graphic novel and centrality of gender-based violence within the narrative. The remaining 16 were deemed ineligible for inclusion.

The graphic novels mapped are:

- *Juízo* (2025), *Sonhe Comigo* (2025) and *Aparição* (2021), by Amanda Miranda;

- *Boy Dodói* (2023), edited by Bebel Abreu, Carol Ito, and Helô D'Angelo;

- *Lovistori* (2021), by Lobo and Alcimar Frazão;

- *Tina – Respeito* (2019), by Fefê Torquato;

- *Não Binaria, Apenas* (2024), by LittleGoat;

- *Filosofia do Mamilo* (2024) and *Tomboy* (2017) by Kael Vitorelo;

- *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba* (2022), by Sama;

- *Entre Cegos e Invisíveis* (2019), by André Diniz;

- *Cartas Para Ninguém* (2019), by Dina Salu;

- *Sem Olhos ou Ecos de Maria* (2019), by Guilherme e Silveira;

- *Em Ti Me Vejo* (2023), by Regiane Braz and Marília Marz;

- *Cadeado* (2017), by Juscelino Neco;

- *Os Pássaros* (2023), by Dieferson Trindade;

- *Barreira* (2023), by Jéssica Groke;

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[2] Graphic novels depicting violence perpetrated on the basis of the victim's sexual orientation were not included in the analysis, notwithstanding the inclusion of this category in the Council of Europe's definition. The inclusive approach ensured by employing the category of gender-based violence allowed for the analysis of a significant number of works focusing on transphobia. Within the *corpus* of this study, these texts address the violence and abuse suffered by transfeminine or non-binary subjects. No graphic novels dealing with the gendered discrimination against cisgender boys/men were identified. In light of this, the mapped graphic novels engage with girls/women and non-binary subjects as victim typologies.

- *Lavagem* (2015), by Shiko;

- *Parque das Luzes* (2020), by Cecilia Marins, Mariana De Vicentis, and Tainá Freitas;

- *Transistorizada* (2018), by Luiza Lemos;

- *Pequenas Felicidades Trans* (2019), by Alice Pereira;

- *Nos Olhos de Quem Vê* (2022), by Helô D'Angelo;

- *Hinário Nacional* (2016), by Marcelo Quintanilha;

- *Manda Msg Qnd Chegares* (2025), by RGB.

The graphic novels not mapped are:

- *O Coração Partido* (2018), by Ellie Ireneu;

- *Sete Senhoras* (2024), by Margarida Madeira;

- *Aconteceu Comigo* (2020), by Laura Athayde;

- *Carniça – E a Blindagem Mística* (2024), by Shiko;

- *Monstrans* (2021), by Lino Arruda;

- *Luzia* (2021), by Zé Wellington and Débora Santos;

- *Nódoa Negra* (2020), a miscellaneous with various authors;

- *Fundo do Nada* (2018), by Ana Caspão;

- *Tungsténio* (2014), and *Escuta, Formosa Márcia* (2021), by Marcelo Quintanilha;

- *Hoje Não* (2021), by Ana Margarida Matos;

- *Judite* (2022), by Vitorelo;

- *Óleo Sobre Tela* (2018), by Aline Zouvi;

- *Anarcoqueer? Queercore!* (2014), by Rui Eduardo Paes;

- *Sexopatia* (2019), by Marcos Trindade;

- *Cicatriz* (2018), by Sofia Neto.

The exclusion from the mapping was based on the second criterion, as all the narratives under consideration could be classified as graphic novels despite their different formats, genres, and types of authoriality. Only one narrative, *Carniça – E a Blindagem Mística*, is structured as a series, with a storyline that unfolds across four volumes. Although seriality is often — albeit inaccurately — perceived by non-specialists as misaligned with the graphic novel form, Shiko's work exhibits key qualities that do support its description as a graphic novel: it is the creation of a single, identifiable author, with a distinct stylistic trait, and it is distributed through the book trade. However, the work

was not mapped because gender-based violence is not the central theme of the narrative. While the first volume of the series — *É Bonito o Meu Punhal* — opens with an act of sexual violence, this event does not remain the narrative's focus throughout the four volumes, which instead center on non-gender-based episodes of retaliation. Some other graphic novels were deemed ineligible for mapping for the same reason: while gender-based violence is addressed, it is not the central focus of the narrative. This is the case with *Sete Senhoras*; *Aconteceu Comigo*; and *Nódoa Negra*, three collections of graphic stories that explore themes such as domestic violence, patriarchal neglect of labor-related suffering, and sexual harassment. However, these are presented alongside a broader array of gender-related topics, including menstrual pain, women's labor and freedom, feminine genealogies, and the challenges of women with disabilities. In the long-form narratives, *Luzia* and *Tungsténio*, gendered violence emerges as a significant thematic element, though it does not function as the primary driver of the narratives. In *Hoje Não*, the issue of femicide is only briefly mentioned.

Works like *Cicatriz*; *Escuta, Formosa Márcia*; *Óleo Sobre Tela*; and *Sexopatia* engage with gender-related concerns that do not include gender-based violence. More controversial is the case of *Monstrans; Fundo do Nada*; *Judite*; *Anarcoqueer? Queercore!*; and *O Coração Partido*, where gender-based matters are clearly addressed and occupy a pivotal role in the narrative. However, the link with the actual phenomenon of gender-based violence and its material manifestations appears rather loose. In *Monstrans*, for example, the author addresses some of the forms of discrimination faced by trans individuals in hetero-cis-patriarchal societies. However, gender transition is depicted primarily as an intimate process of transformation, tied to the broader human experience of perpetual becoming, rather than as a source of vulnerability to societal violence. Similarly, *Fundo do Nada* evokes themes related to the abjection of femininity, yet its connection to gender-based violence remains implicit and difficult to discern, unless one adopts an interpretative lens rooted in complex feminist philosophical frameworks.

4. Why Location Matters and Which Kind of Cultural Relationships do Graphic Novels Against Gender Violence Display?

If we exclude one graphic novel published in Porto by an author from the Brazilian diaspora of migrants towards the European country[3], *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba*, by Sama, and *Manda Msg Qnd Chegares*, by RGB, which was published in Lisbon by Iguana, the remaining mapped works (22 in total) were created and published in Brazil. A small number of these graphic narratives (three in total: *Tomboy*; *Entre Cegos e Invisíveis*; and

[3] Since the 1980s, Portugal has seen a growing presence of citizens from its former colony, Brazil, on its territory. The migration flows that started in this decade, thus contributing to "the remodeling of Portugal from an imperial metropolis to a European postcolonial nation" (Feldman-Bianco, 2001, p. 637), intensified towards the end of the 1990s and, later on, following Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 (van Meeteren & Pereira, 2018). This migratory tendency has increased steadily since 2018, the year of Jair Bolsonaro's election, to the point that in 2023 the number of Brazilians resident in Portugal reached a record 368,449 (Lopes & Sousa, 2024).

Hinário Nacional) were re-edited and redistributed by publishers that frequently import Brazilian graphic narratives into Portugal (namely, Polvo and Sapata Press). Even when considering the total set of graphic novels evaluated — 40 in total — only 11 were published in Portugal or written by Portuguese authors.

Even though, as already observed, it is not always easy to precisely locate a graphic novel at a geographic level, the mapping clearly shows that São Paulo is the privileged place where graphic narratives on gender-based violence are published, conceived, and funded. 17 of the mapped works clearly belong to this category, being authored by creatives who live in the city or state of São Paulo, have benefitted from funding that local administrations provided, and/or have collaborated with the many comics publishers that are based in the region. A graphic novel, *Cartas Para Ninguém* by Diana Salu, was published in Brasília; another, *Transistorizada* by Luiza Lemos, is linked to the city of Paraty, where the author lives; *Pequenas Felicidades Trans* by Alice Pereira was published in Rio de Janeiro; *Sem Olhos ou Ecos de Maria* by Guilherme e Silveira, in Londrina; *Lovistori* by Lobo and Alcimar Frazão, was published in Porto Alegre and is set in Rio de Janeiro.

The dominance of the Brazilian comics scene and one of its cultural centers (namely, São Paulo) stands out as the main finding of this mapping effort. The finding reflects some of the current dynamics within the Lusophone cultural spheres, where the persistence of postcolonial and neocolonial social and political relationships is counterbalanced by Brazil's role as a cultural innovator, capable of redeeming the now declined colonizer from the risk of a cultural and creative limitation due to its current semiperipheral role, if the circulation in the Lusophone areas of the material produced in the Latino-American country is implemented.

In the case of the type of material discussed in this article, this marked imbalance can be attributed to two main factors: on the one hand, the differing prominence and popularity of comics as a communication and artistic medium in Brazil and in Portugal; on the other, the unequal dissemination of feminist thought and grassroots movements within the two countries.

The popularity of comics in Brazil dates back to the late 1800s, when the medium was introduced by Angelo Agostini, an Italo-Brazilian artist recognized for his early use of sequential, verbo-visual storytelling. By the 1930s and 1940s, Brazilian audiences had already become acquainted with American superhero comics, which began to arrive from the United States and gained widespread appeal as mass entertainment. A domestic comics industry began to flourish in the 1950s and 1960s, with a notable focus on educational content, including adaptations of literary and historical works. From early on, Brazilian comics were valued not only for their didactic potential but also as tools for political commentary and activism. This dual role became particularly pronounced during the military dictatorship (1964–1985), when underground publishers and satirical magazines acted as powerful voices of dissent. Figures such as Angeli and Laerte Coutinho, who gained prominence during this period, would later become central to the mainstream comics scene in the era of democratic transition

(Vergueiro, 2017). Among these figures, crucial but often marginalized, were women such as Conceição Cahú (Crescêncio, 2022), Mariza Costa Dias, Cristina Siqueira, Ciça e Crau da Ilha (Sierpinski, 2021). Building on this tradition and embracing significant innovations in production and distribution — largely enabled by the rise of internet-based platforms for both circulation and crowdfunding — graphic narratives in Brazil have become a thriving medium in which diversity emerges as a key factor, both in terms of authorship and thematic focus, during the second decade of the new millennium (Mandolini & Busi Rizzi, 2023).

In contrast, Portuguese comics have neither enjoyed the same historical success nor attained comparable contemporary popularity. As Moura (2022) observed, the creation and circulation of comics in Portugal operate within the dynamics of a semi-peripheral comics tradition, where a sense of residuality is particularly significant, especially when compared to the visibility and richness of more established European comics cultures, such as the Franco-Belgian, the Spanish, and the Italian. It is no coincidence that the majority of graphic narratives distributed in bookshops across the national territory are translations from foreign productions (mostly North American, Franco-Belgian, or Japanese). The significant productivity of underground production is a characteristic of Portuguese comics, fostering a certain degree of experimentation in format and style. This, however, hasn't led to a noticeable change in feminist representation in Portuguese comics. If we exclude the work of comics artists such as Ana Cortesão, Alice Geirinhas, Mimi, Maria João Worm, and Isabel Carvalho, active during the 1990s and early 2000s, and mostly producing short publications or collective volumes, rare is the authorial decision to address gender-related topics from a feminist perspective. Even contemporary women authors generally avoid engaging with gender identity as a distinctive and foundational topic (Moura, 2023).

This is not surprising if we take into account the fact that "the Portuguese feminist movement appears far from having assumed a strength and massiveness that has characterized other activist contexts", due to "structural weaknesses" (Clemente, 2022, p. 427) that have characterized its evolution since the years of the democratization process. Feminist discourses on gender-based violence have entered mainstream communication, and the media contribute to raising awareness of the issue in Portugal (Garraio et al., 2023). Associations like União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta (Alternative Women's Union and Response) have addressed the problem over the past decades and have impacted the process of uncovering and denouncing the phenomenon through initiatives such as the Observatório de Mulheres Assassinadas (Observatory of Murdered Women; Cerqueira & Gomes, 2017). However, the journalistic coverage of acts connected to gender-based violence often engages in rhetorical practices of sensationalization and reduction of victims to their traditional gender roles (Correia & Neves, 2024; Garraio et al., 2023). Moreover, although feminist debates on the topic have gained some public visibility — albeit in problematic ways — this discourse does not appear to have significantly influenced artistic intervention and representation, which remain largely

disconnected from the broader conversation. The absence of Portuguese graphic novels addressing the issue clearly reflects this gap[4].

Brazilian feminist movements and thought, on the contrary, have produced substantial innovation, especially in relation to the issue of gender-based violence. Among the many contributions of Brazilian theorists and activists to the global feminist struggle, we could mention the pivotal concept of "lugar de fala" (place of speech) elaborated by Ribeiro (2019), which is now recognized as fundamental within the spectrum of reflections of intersectional feminism. We could also reference the concept of "transfeminicídio" (transfemicide), introduced by Bento (2014) to adapt the notion of femicide to the gender-related killings that affect transfeminine individuals. Moreover, Brazilian scholars have contributed to legal studies on gender-based violence by developing innovative methodologies to approach femicide through a non-punitive and abolitionist lens (F. Martins, 2021).

In light of these considerations, the prominent presence of Brazilian graphic novels on gender-based violence in the mapping aligns with our expectations as scholars working at the intersection of comics and gender studies within the Lusophone context. However, the absence of Portuguese works (aside from Sama's and RGB's graphic novels) compels us to reflect on the pressing need to foster intercultural communication within the Lusophone spheres. This need is further underscored by the fact that only four of 24 mapped graphic novels have been republished and redistributed in Portugal, despite the common language. Clearly, the path towards a shared yet diverse Lusophone culture remains a long one.

5. Which Types of Gender-Based Violence are Represented and how?

Gender-based violence is a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests in varying degrees of severity and affects individuals with different non-hegemonic gender identities. Gender-based violence is rooted in patriarchal partition between genders, which consequently establishes hierarchical divisions that result in acts of discrimination and abuse towards identity categories that do not align with the models offered by hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The graphic novels mapped reflect the complexity of the issue by providing representations of types of gender-based violence that include transphobia, intimate partner violence/domestic violence, sexual violence, femicide, violence of imposed beauty standards, sexual harassment in the workplace, violence against sex workers, lack of access to reproductive rights, and violence rooted in gender difference.

The typologies are not distributed equally in quantity, and each representation showcases qualitative differences of authorial positioning, level of fictionality, and chosen genre. This section aims to discuss these variances and their potential impact on

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4 The Portuguese situation could be compared with that observed in other national contexts, such as Italy, where the mainstreaming of feminist discourse on gender violence has significantly affected the production of narrative artistic representation in the last decade (Mandolini 2021a, 2021b).

both discourse about patriarchal abuse and graphic novels' production.

Transphobia, understood as any form of violence and discrimination against trans- individuals[5], is the most prominent type of gender-based violence portrayed in the mapped graphic novels, with nine works approaching the issue. Like the broader category of gender-based violence to which it belongs, transphobic violence is a multifarious phenomenon that affects trans- individuals across a range of specific gender identities. The graphic novels discussed in this article explore both transmisogyny, which is to say abuse directed at trans- individuals who present a feminine gender expression (Serano, 2007), and violence against non-binary persons. Furthermore, the intensity of transphobic violence differs. The works examined address transfemicide, the murder of a trans- woman because of her gender identity (Bento, 2014), as well as non-lethal forms of maltreatment and societal segregation to which trans- individuals are routinely subjected.

Interestingly, transphobia is often the most overlooked form of patriarchal violence in institutional discourses on gender-based violence, which tend to approach the issue through a heterocisnormative lens and, as a result, focus predominantly on violence against cisgender women (Graaff, 2021; Jauk, 2013). However, Brazilian feminist discourse appears to be particularly attuned to this issue, likely due to the country's alarmingly high rates of transphobia and transphobia-related murders. This sensitivity is reflected in numerous statements by Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais (ANTRA; National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals), which consistently denounce the pervasiveness of transphobic violence in Brazil and draw attention to comparative data from other regions of the world (Narcisa & Bonets, 2025). It is not coincidental, then, that the two graphic novels in the mapping that focus specifically on the phenomenon of transfemicide — *Lovistori* and *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba* — either mention the tragic statistics provided by ANTRA or discuss the situation of constant exposure to violence of trans- subjects in their paratexts. These references serve to ground the fictional narratives of lethal transphobia in a stark and troubling reality, highlighting a use of fiction that remains closely tied to the practice of truth-telling. However, this narrative practice substantially differs from that encountered in other graphic novels authored by trans- subjects who select the autofictional mode to draft their own graphic stories of survival and constant struggle, such as *Cartas Para Ninguém*; *Transistorizada*; *Pequenas Felicidades Trans*; *Não Binária Apenas*; and *Filosofia do Mamilo*. In these cases, the link to reality is stronger and more directly connected to the authors' specific positioning, whose artistic endeavor amounts to a declaration of their personal involvement in the dynamics of transphobic suffering. But the degree of fictionality is not the only variable affected by the author's positioning, it also results in a different selection of the narrative genre. If the cisgender, male authors of *Lovistori* and *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba* opt for a storytelling explicitly devoted to the patterns of the

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[5] The use of the term "trans-", with a hyphen, as introduced by Stryker et al. (2008), reflects our intention to keep the category open, resistant to rigid definitions, and consequently inclusive — fostering a sense of belonging among various identity typologies (e.g. travestis, binary trans people, non-binary trans people, non-binary individuals, genderfluid subjects, bigender individuals, and drag performers) which is, as we will see, clearly reflected in the graphic novels mapped despite the differences of subjectivities represented.

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crime genre, the transfeminine or non-binary creators of the remaining works on transphobia either disregard generic literary forms (*Pequenas Felicidades Trans*) or resort to a narrative in which the memoir mingles with the lyrical, intimate modes of graphic poetry (*Cartas Para Ninguém*) or with the instructive/pedagogical tones of the graphic essay (*Não Binária, Apenas*; *Filosofia do Mamilo*; and *Tomboy*). *Transistorizada* and *Os Pássaros*, one authored by a transfeminine artist and the other by a cismasculine author, are the only titles that escape this pattern, being the first an autofictional account that dialogues with the superhero genre, and the other a fictional account with non-specific generic references.

Intimate partner violence and domestic violence[6] represent the second most frequent forms of gender-based violence depicted in the mapped works. Except for *Boy Dodói* — an anthology of short graphic stories based on testimonies of dating violence from women and non-binary individuals, written by women and non-binary subjects — the other graphic novels (*Entre Cegos e Invisíveis*; *Hinário Nacional*; *Lavagem*; *Cadeado*; *Os Pássaros*; and *Lovistori*) approach the topic through fictional narratives. Notably, all of these works are authored by cisgender male comics artists.

A predominantly fictional approach also characterizes the treatment of other forms of gender-based violence in the mapping, such as femicide[7] (*Aparição*; and *Sem Olhos ou Ecos de Maria*), sexual violence (*Sonhe Comigo* and *Hinário Nacional*[8]), restricted access to reproductive rights (*Juízo*[9]), workplace sexual harassment (*Tina – Respeito*[10]), and violence stemming from gender difference (*Barreira*). Even if, in the case of the last-mentioned graphic novels, the authorial position is mixed, and women comics artists are not absent, it is interesting to observe the prevalence of a fictional dimension that is often intertwined with a tendency to engage with specific genres like the splatter/horror (*Sonhe Comigo*; *Juízo; Aparição*; and *Lavagem*) or the crime (*Entre Cegos e Invisíveis*). Recognizing this propensity is relevant for scholarship on graphic novels and the representation of gender-related issues. Previous studies have shown that feminist graphic narratives addressing gender-based trauma or gender-based violence more specifically, often favor non-fictional forms, whether autobiographical (Chute, 2010) or biographical (Mandolini, 2021b). In the case of Lusophone graphic novels, however, fictional narratives appear to dominate, excluding, notably, the previously discussed portrayals of transphobic violence, the work on gender difference and street harassment by RGB (*Manda Msg Qnd Chegares*), and graphic works that denounce the violence of societal beauty standards imposed on feminine individuals[11]. This last issue is approached through an autofictional mode by women artists in *Nos Olhos de Quem Vê* and *Em Ti Me Vejo*. The approximation

[6] On domestic violence, see Dutton (1996/2011).

[7] On femicide, namely the killing of a woman because of her gender, and its representation, see Radford and Russell (1992), and Mandolini (2021a).

[8] On sexual violence and its relation to gendered politics, see Brison (2019) and Cahill (2001).

[9] On the restriction of access to reproductive rights as a form of gender-based violence, see Chadwick and Mavuso (2021).

[10] On the dynamics of workplace sexual harassment, see McDonald (2011), and McLaughlin et al. (2012).

[11] On societal impositions of beauty standards as a form of gender-based violence, see Oyedemi (2016).

to the biographical mode is present in only one of the mapped graphics novels: *Parque das Luzes*, a graphic journalistic endeavor that tells the stories of sex workers active in a park in São Paulo and regularly exposed to patriarchal violence.

6. Publishing Formats and the Plasticity of the Graphic Novel

The decision to base our selection on an open definition of the graphic novel, as suggested by Baetens and Frey (2015), led to the inclusion of works with diverse narrative and publishing formats in our mapping, ranging from long and short narrative forms to short story collections, books, and graphic zines.

Within this list, the coexistence of books and graphic zines might seem controversial. However, the category of graphic zine is quite broad if we consider the definition provided by Todd and Watson (2006), who describe zines as "cheaply printed forms of expression on any subject" (p. 12). According to them, "zines are like mini-magazines or homemade comic-books (...), zines can be by a person or many, they can be any size: half-paged, rolled-up, quarter-sized (...)" (p. 13). In this sense, the typology of the graphic zine may overlap with that of the graphic novel in the case of cheaply and independently produced publications that exhibit a strong authorial presence (they are often single-authored) and are designed to tell a specific story. *Juízo* and *Sonhe Comigo* by Amanda Miranda, *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba* by Sama, and *Tomboy* by Vitorelo, for example, retain the characteristics of a zine, being self-published works with a deliberately low-cost aesthetic, yet still qualify as graphic novels.

Despite the aforementioned heterogeneity, all the works included meet specific criteria that Baetens and Frey (2015) identify as common to the graphic novel. They are all works that, albeit in different ways, rely on the book supply chain for distribution and circulation. In some cases (*Nos Olhos de Quem Vê*; *Boy Dodói*; *Entre Cegos e Invisíveis*; *Lavagem*; *Hinário Nacional*; *Lovistori*; *Tina – Respeito*; *Filosofia do Mamilo*; *Cartas Para Ninguém*; *Sem Olhos ou Ecos de Maria*; *Em Ti Me Vejo*; *Cadeado*; *Os Pássaros*; *Barreira*; and *Aparição*), the connection to the bookshop distribution chain is more direct and robust, as these titles were published by either mainstream or independent publishers that typically operate through bookshops, whether general or specialized in comics and graphic novels. In other cases, the mapped graphic novels were published independently, with the support of institutional funding and/or crowdfunding (*Juízo*; *Sonhe Comigo*; *Detetive Ayahuasca/Tranzomba*; *Transistorizada*; *Pequenas Felicidades Trans*; *Parque das Luzes*; *Não Binária, Apenas*; and *Tomboy*). Nonetheless, they are or were available through bookshops specializing in graphic narratives.

Moreover, the label of graphic novel was assigned based on the presence of a strong authorial dimension. Almost all the selected works are single-authored graphic narratives, with the exceptions of *Em Ti Me Vejo*; *Lovistori*; and *Boy Dodói*. While the first two are the result of a collaborative effort between a scriptwriter and a comics artist

— with a consistent graphic style maintained throughout — the latter is a collection of stories written by different authors, unified by editorial oversight that ensured stylistic coherence throughout.

Another element deemed essential for inclusion in the mapping was limited seriality. As Crucifix (2018) observed, "the graphic novel has adopted one-shot publication as a conscious break away from serial models typical of cultural industry" (p. 4). Still, it is not accurate to consider the absence of seriality as an essential feature when it comes to the definition of what a graphic novel is, given that graphic novels with a serial dimension do exist — *Watchman* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibson being the most recurring example (Baetens & Frey, 2015). Thus, seriality is not alien to the graphic novel format, it manifests either through a limited, linear mode of seriality, implying the publication of several volumes that continue a single narrative, or through what Crucifix (2018) terms "dispersed serialization," which "is no longer based on a traditional use of the comic book periodical but rather spreads itself across multiple publishing venues and material forms" (p. 8). The previously mentioned *Carniça – E a Blindagem Mística*, for example, was excluded from the mapping not because of its publishing format, which, being divided into four volumes, aligns with the model of limited seriality proposed for identifying graphic novels, but because its central theme is not gender-based violence. Another relevant case is *Boy Dodói*, which fits the model of dispersed seriality, as the narrative does not conclude in the book. On the contrary, the eleven stories on toxic masculinity selected by the editors for inclusion in the volume are accompanied by comic strips published on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, serving as teasers or additional content to promote the work (Câmara & Lage 2025).

7. Conclusive Remarks

This study has examined the multifaceted representation of graphic novels produced in the Lusophone cultural areas, namely Brazil and Portugal, with gender-based violence as a core narrative theme. It highlighted the *corpus*'s heterogeneity, both in its thematic approaches and in the formal characteristics of the publications. The graphic novels included in the mapping approach gender-based violence from different thematic and authorial perspectives, covering a broad range of manifestations of patriarchal abuse and narrative positionings. Among these, a notable prevalence of transphobia as a dominant theme can be observed. Such representations often emerge through autofictional narratives, the result of the authors' efforts to engage with the practice of narrating their own story of transphobia. Other themes, such as domestic violence, femicide, and sexual violence, to mention only a few, are present in the mapping. Still, they are generally approached through a fictional lens and with a strong reliance on literary genres (such as splatter/horror or crime), thus contrasting with previously observed tendencies in the production of graphic novels on gender-based trauma and violence. Moreover, the

inherent plasticity of the graphic novel form — manifested in its wide-ranging narrative structures and publishing modalities, including zines — facilitates diverse modes of engagement with content related to gender-based violence.

The strong prominence of Brazilian graphic novels within this landscape underscores the current imbalance in the production of graphic narratives on gender-related themes across Lusophone regions. This disparity highlights the limitations of the Portuguese comics scene, particularly in addressing issues such as patriarchal violence and gender-based oppression. These findings call for a deeper reflection on the concept of "lusofonia" and the dynamics among the various spheres that constitute the Lusophone world — composed by regions historically and linguistically connected, yet often marked by limited cultural interdependency. In this context, the role of cultural agents, including publishers, artists, and academics, becomes crucial in fostering a more dynamic and reciprocal circulation of cultural products and in promoting more equitable and diverse representations across Lusophone spaces.

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