

“BECAUSE I LOVED HER SO MUCH”: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMININE IN THE MANGA TOMIE

“PORQUE EU A AMAVA DEMAIS”: VIOLÊNCIAS DE GÊNERO E AS REPRESENTAÇÕES DO FEMININO NO MANGÁ TOMIE

“PORQUE LA AMABA TANTO”: LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO Y LAS REPRESENTACIONES DE LO FEMENINO EN EL MANGA TOMIE



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ABSTRACT

This article, part of the research conducted for the Master's in Communication (PPGCOM-UFPI, 2025), proposes an analysis of how violence against women and villainy are represented in the manga "Tomie," highlighting the ways in which narratives reinforce cultural and social norms that perpetuate such violence. This work by manga artist Junji Ito, known for his stories of psychological horror and supernatural elements, first published in 1987, revolves around the character Tomie, with the narrative—"an irresistibly beautiful young woman provokes obsession and violence in the men around her." This phrase summarizes the dramatic structure of the work, but also reveals, in deeper layers, a powerful commentary on how patriarchal culture constructs, controls, and punishes the female figure. The research adopted a qualitative approach, with content analysis (Bardin, 2006), observing 12 selected Figures from the manga, which were organized into five categories: 1) femicide, 2) nudity, 3) passion, 4) villainy, 5) male brotherhood, and 6) enchantment. Categories 1, 4, and 5 are analyzed in this article, from the theoretical perspectives of Beauvoir (2014), Segato (2013), Elena Teles and Valeska Zanello (2017), and Alves (2021). The analysis of violence against women in Tomie reveals not only Junji Ito's skill in creating horror narratives, but also his ability to address profound social issues. Through Tomie's story, we are confronted with the reality of obsession, objectification, and violence, themes that continue to resonate in contemporary society. The repetition of Tomie's femicide and her regeneration throughout the narrative suggest a critique of the objectification and blaming of women. Therefore, concrete actions are urgent, considering the exponentially increasing rates of violence against women, producing profound impacts both on individual structures—especially those of female victims—and on the sociocultural dynamics that affect their families and communities.

Keywords: Narratives of Violence Against Women. Feminine Representations. Media. Manga. Tomie.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo, parte integrante da pesquisa realizada no mestrado em Comunicação (PPGCOM-UFPI, 2025), propõe analisar como as violências contra as mulheres e a vilania são representadas no mangá Tomie, destacando os modos que as narrativas reforçam normas culturais e sociais que perpetuam tais violências. A obra do mangaká Junji Ito, conhecida por suas histórias de terror psicológico e elementos sobrenaturais. Publicado pela primeira vez em 1987, o mangá gira em torno da personagem Tomie, tendo como narrativa – ‘uma jovem irresistivelmente bela provoca obsessão e violência nos homens ao seu redor’. Essa frase resume a estrutura dramática da obra, mas também revela, em camadas mais profundas, um poderoso comentário sobre o modo como a cultura patriarcal constrói, controla e pune a figura feminina. A pesquisa adotou uma abordagem qualitativa, com análise de conteúdo (Bardin, 2006), tendo como observáveis 12 Figurens selecionadas do mangá que foram organizadas em cinco categorias – 1) feminicídio, 2) nudez, 3) passionalidade, 4) vilania, 5) irmandade masculina e 6) encantamento, sendo analisadas neste artigo as categorias 1, 4 e 5, nas perspectivas teóricas de Beauvoir (2014), Segato (2013), Elena Teles e Valeska Zanello (2017), Alves (2021). A análise da violência contra mulheres em Tomie revela não apenas a habilidade de Junji Ito em criar narrativas de terror, mas também sua capacidade de abordar questões sociais profundas. Por meio da história de Tomie, somos confrontados com a realidade da obsessão, da objetificação e da violência, temas que continuam a ressoar na sociedade contemporânea. A repetição de feminicídio de Tomie e sua regeneração ao longo da narrativa sugere uma crítica à objetificação e culpabilização da mulher. Portanto, ações concretas são urgentes, considerando os índices de violências contra as mulheres que crescem de maneira exponencial e produzem profundos impactos tanto nas estruturas individuais – especialmente das mulheres vítimas – quanto nas dinâmicas socioculturais que afetam suas famílias e comunidades.

Palavras-chave: Narrativas de Violências Contra a Mulher. Representações Femininas. Mídia. Mangá. Tomie.

RESUMEN

Este artículo, parte de la investigación realizada para la Maestría en Comunicación (PPGCOM-UFPI, 2025), propone un análisis de cómo se representan la violencia contra las mujeres y la villanía en el manga "Tomie", destacando las maneras en que las narrativas refuerzan las normas culturales y sociales que perpetúan dicha violencia. Esta obra del mangaka Junji Ito, conocido por sus historias de terror psicológico y elementos sobrenaturales, publicada por primera vez en 1987, gira en torno al personaje Tomie, con la narrativa: "una joven irresistiblemente bella provoca obsesión y violencia en los hombres que la rodean". Esta frase resume la estructura dramática de la obra, pero también revela, en capas más profundas, un poderoso comentario sobre cómo la cultura patriarcal construye, controla y castiga la figura femenina. La investigación adoptó un enfoque cualitativo, con análisis de contenido (Bardin, 2006), observando 12 imágenes seleccionadas del manga, organizadas en cinco categorías: 1) feminicidio, 2) desnudez, 3) pasión, 4) villanía, 5) hermandad masculina y 6) encantamiento. Las categorías 1, 4 y 5 se analizan en este artículo desde las perspectivas teóricas de Beauvoir (2014), Segato (2013), Elena Teles y Valeska Zanello (2017) y Alves (2021). El análisis de la violencia contra las mujeres en Tomie revela no solo la habilidad de Junji Ito para crear narrativas de terror, sino también su capacidad para abordar profundas problemáticas sociales. A través de la historia de Tomie, nos enfrentamos a la realidad de la obsesión, la cosificación y la violencia, temas que siguen resonando en la sociedad contemporánea. La repetición del feminicidio de Tomie y su regeneración a lo largo de la narrativa sugieren una crítica a la cosificación y culpabilización de las mujeres. Por lo tanto, urgen acciones concretas, considerando el aumento exponencial de las tasas de violencia contra las mujeres, que produce profundos impactos



tanto en las estructuras individuales —especialmente en las víctimas— como en las dinámicas socioculturales que afectan a sus familias y comunidades.

Palabras clave: Narrativas de Violencia Contra las Mujeres. Representaciones Femeninas. Medios de Comunicación. Manga. Tomie.

1 INTRODUCTION

The realization that humanity has historically been defined from a male reference point forces us to rethink fundamental categories of culture, knowledge and politics. This definition is not neutral: it legitimizes inequalities, makes experiences invisible, and sustains power structures that make violence against women possible and recurrent. By questioning this construction, feminism does not seek to invert hierarchies, but to universalize the human in fact, recognizing women – and all marginalized subjectivities – as subjects full of rights, dignity and existence.

Gender violence is a structural phenomenon of society. In 2022, according to the Patrícia Galvão Institute³, femicide data in Brazil increased by 6%, while femicide attempts grew by 17%, these being the highest rates since 2015, the year in which the femicide law came into force in the country. According to DATASSP⁴, from 2022 to 2025, Piauí recorded a total of 182 cases of femicide. In 2024 alone, 56 cases were recorded, representing an increase of 32% compared to the previous year. This year alone, 18 confirmed femicides were registered in March, which indicates a growing trend.

Table 1

Year	Brazil – Femicides (%)	Brazil – Femicide attempts (%)	Piauí – Cases of femicide	Notes
2022	+6%	+17%	182 (2022–2025 total)	Highest rate since 2015
2024	-	-	56	32% increase compared to 2023
Mar/2025	-	-	18	Only in March, growth trend
2015	Initial reference Law 13.104/2015	-	-	Beginning of the Femicide Law
Last decade	11,967 women killed	-	-	Cases have almost tripled in 10 years

Source: Authors.

Almost 12 thousand women have suffered femicide in Brazil in the last decade. In March 2025, Law 13.104/2015, which deals with femicide, completed 10 years, as reported by Gortazár (2025):

The femicides accounted for almost tripled in these 10 years (from 535 to 1,259 deaths). If in 2015 they were only less than two women killed per day, it now reaches four deaths per day at the hands of husbands, boyfriends, etc. Experts attribute this increase to

³ The Patrícia Galvão Institute monitors the dissemination of data and research in Brazil, following the government agencies responsible for this data, the research institutions that work with this theme and the media. Making the data available on the Violence Against Women in Data Platform.

⁴ Center for Advanced Studies in Public Security.

several factors: an increase in violence as women gain autonomy, an increase in complaints, and an increase in registrations.

The data presented show violence against women – female body, constituted from a power that perpetuates submission. This dynamic can be explained, according to Santos and Izumino (2005), through the lens of male domination, a violence that manifests itself as an expression of patriarchy and its tentacles disseminated by institutional means that structure contemporary society, such as the media.

In view of the above, the implementation of the law is crucial for a real mapping and typification of crimes against women. It should be noted that these numbers, although expressive, represent only a part of the reality, as many cases are not reported, and the underreporting of crimes of domestic and family violence is a persistent reality.

It should be noted that Japan, the manga's country of origin⁵, despite having one of the lowest crime rates in the world⁶, The White Report on Gender by⁷ the Japan Office for Gender Equality mentions recent measures: the enactment of a law that in April 2024 expanded the law on the prevention of spousal violence; among other improvements in protection, restraining orders, actions to support victims based on government consultations.

Violence against women is a consequence of historically patriarchal social, cultural, political, and economic structures, which have been consolidated over time and naturalized gender inequalities. These structures establish asymmetrical power relations between men and women, attributing positions of dominance to the masculine and to the feminine roles of subordination, fragility and dependence.

In this context, violence is not an isolated phenomenon or the result of individual behaviors alone, but rather the concrete expression of a system that legitimizes and reproduces control over women's bodies, sexuality, autonomy and lives. The macho culture, gender stereotypes, inequality in access to rights, and institutional omission contribute to the maintenance of these violent practices.

In this way, patriarchal control is reflected in a strong mythology full of legends and stories about the 'feminine that portrays it as monstrous', whether in the representation of seductive and sinful women, or emotionally unbalanced and crazy. One example is the

⁵ Japanese comic books.

⁶ Japan is at the top of the ranking among the least violent countries, with a number that varies between 0.3 (2008) and 0.4 (2009) homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Moreira, 2013).

⁷ Available at: https://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/whitepaper/r07/zentai/pdfban.html?u. Accessed on January 10, 2025.

Japanese folklore entity *Yanagi Baba*⁸, the depiction of a scary old woman reflects the cultural tendency to associate the undomesticated feminine – especially when aged, lonely, or connected to the supernatural – with danger and marginality. In patriarchal societies, the woman who escapes traditional roles (mother, wife, caregiver) is often branded as "monstrous," "witch," or "evil."

From this perspective, this article, an integral part of the research carried out in the master's degree in Communication (PPGCOM-UFPI, 2025), proposes to analyze how violence against women and villainy are represented in the manga *Tomie*, highlighting the ways in which narratives reinforce cultural and social norms that perpetuate such violence. The work of mangaka Junji Ito, known for his psychological horror stories and supernatural elements. First published in 1987, the manga revolves around the character *Tomie*, with the narrative "an irresistibly beautiful young woman causes obsession and violence in the men around her". This phrase sums up the dramatic structure of the work, but it also reveals, in deeper layers, a powerful commentary on the way patriarchal culture constructs, controls, and punishes the female figure.

In *Tomie* (2021), V. 01 and V. 02, we analyze events in which the protagonist, the name of the work, is repeatedly a victim of femicide – but always regenerates from the junction of her limbs that were dismembered – perpetuating the cycles of violence. Despite the numerous attempts at destruction and annihilation, *Tomie* always returns. This supernatural characteristic can be interpreted as a metaphor for female resistance in the face of violence. Even dead, women victims of femicide leave marks: social movements emerge, policies are created, and memories are preserved. *Tomie*, by being reborn, denies patriarchy the absolute power to silence her — and represents the impossibility of eliminating the female presence from history.

Manga is not just Figureic or media entertainment, but a cultural document that materializes social imaginaries. The multibillion-dollar manga industry is not limited to moving expressive figures; It also exerts a deep symbolic and cultural power, configuring itself as a vector for the diffusion of social imaginaries about the feminine. By consolidating itself as one of the pillars of the Japanese cultural economy, manga reaches not only domestic readers, but global audiences, crossing borders through adaptations, merchandising, and derivative media,

⁸ The figure of *Yanagi Baba* – literally "old woman of the willow" – is a deeply symbolic entity of Japanese folklore, associated with nature, time and the feminine imagination. It is a *yōkai* (spirit or supernatural creature) linked especially to ancient willows, trees traditionally associated with mourning, memory and the spirit world in Japan. Available at: https://www.google.com/search?q=representa%C3%A7%C3%A3o+do+Yanagi+Baba+como+uma+mulher+velha+e&rlz=1C1CHZN_ptBRBR1173BR1173&oq=representa%C3%A7%C3%A3o+do+Yanagi+Baba++como+uma+mulher+velha+e&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCDE3MTZqMG03qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

such as anime and video games. The manga market in Japan recorded, in 2024, the highest revenue in history: ¥ 704.3 billion (about US\$ 4.6 billion), according to the *Research Institute for Publications*. This represents 44.8% of the entire Japanese publishing sector, consolidating manga as the main force of the cultural industry in the country. The digital format leads this expansion. On the global stage, Japan accounts for about 49.5% of total revenues, with the Asia-Pacific region concentrating more than 85% of revenues. The global manga market is estimated to reach between \$42 and \$47 billion by 2030.

Within this logic of large-scale production, representations of the feminine are simultaneously produced, naturalized, and questioned, reflecting tensions between traditional stereotypes and possibilities of female agency. Thus, manga function as cultural documents, which record historical, social and aesthetic conceptions about the genre, making visible values, fears, anxieties and desires that cross different layers of society. The combination of economic strength and symbolic potential puts manga in a privileged position to study how visual and media narratives shape and reproduce social imaginaries about the feminine, revealing the close relationship between culture, market, and gender constructions.

Therefore, the scarcity of studies in this field underscores the need to broaden the scope of research by integrating popular media, such as manga and anime, with pertinent discussions, which not only fills a gap in our academic knowledge, but also broadens the understanding of how this culture reflects and impacts social and cultural issues of the current reality. Manga, according to Júnior (2005), is a product that is part of a massification, as well as other products of Japanese *Pop Culture* that are sold worldwide, seeking a constant balance in sales and profits, often appealing to appealing, sexual, violent and commonly fictional themes, although others take into account the aspects of everyday life, of the history and culture of a country.

A report presented in 2023 by IMARC,⁹ on "*Manga Market Report by Type (Printed, Digital), Genre (Action and Adventure, Sci-Fi and Fantasy, Sports, Romance and Drama, and Others), Audience (Children and Kids (Aged below 10 years), Teenagers (Aged between 10 to 16 years), Adults (Aged above 16 years)), Gender (Male, Female), Distribution Channel (Online, Offline), and Region 2024-2032*"¹⁰, in which it analyzes the world of manga in the market, pointing out some segments within the industry, namely: reading format, genre, audience (by age), audience (by genre), and region by continent. Better explained in the following table.

⁹ The International Market Analysis Research and Consulting Group – IMARC: offers market research services for various segments.

¹⁰ Manga Market Report by Type (Print, Digital), Genre (Action & Adventure, Science Fiction & Fantasy, Sports, Romance & Drama, and Others), Audience (Children & Youth (Under 10 Years Old), Teens (Aged 10-16 Years), Adults (Over 16 Years Old), Gender (Male, Female), Distribution Channel (Online, offline) and region 2024-2032.

Table 2

Global Manga Market Segments

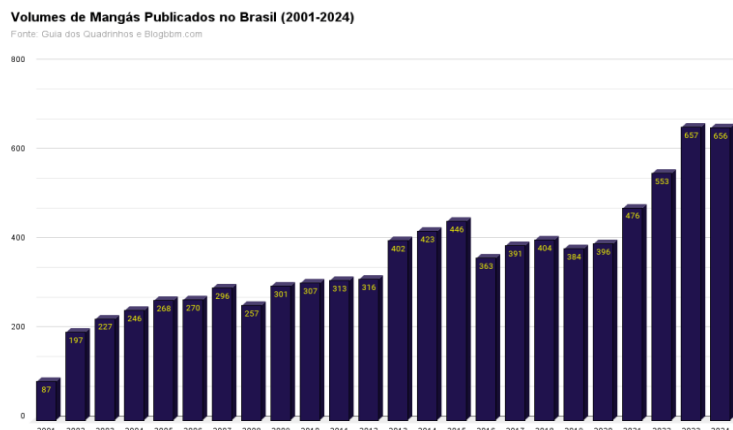
SEGMENT	CATEGORY	HIGHLIGHTS/REMARKS
Audience by Age Group	Children (<10 years)	Important segment; attracted by playful and educational themes (<i>kodomo</i>)
	Adolescents (10 to 16 years old)	Largest segment of readers; strong identification with themes such as friendship and overcoming (<i>shonen</i>)
	Adults (>16 years old)	They represent a significant share; they seek more complex themes
Audience by Gender	Male	Dominant; attracted by male protagonists, plots of overcoming and action
	Women	Growing interest; <i>shoujo</i> and <i>josei</i> titles cater to this audience, but still less expressive in the global market

Source: (IMARC, 2023)

The data presented show a worldwide rise of manga in the various youths and genres. In Brazil, one of the largest consumers in Latin America, we have had a growing increase in manga publications in the last 22 years, as shown in the following Figure:

Figure 1

Volumes of Manga published in Brazil (2001-2024)



Source: <https://blogbbm.com/2025/01/07/numeros-do-mercado-brasileiro-de-mangas-em-2024/>

Editora Pipoca e Nanquim¹¹ is the holder of the largest number of works published by Junji Ito in Brazil, occupying the 6th place in the ranking of volumes published in the year 2024. The publisher, in 2023-2024, published 11 works by Junji Ito: Phantom Zone, The Headless Sculptures, Tombstone Cities, the Alley, Love Dead, Dysmorphics, Crushing Tales, Remina, The

¹¹ Pipoca e Nanquim, initially in 2009 was a *youtube* channel, where the creators, Alexandre Callari, Daniel Lopes and Bruno Zago discussed the world of pop culture: Cinema. Comics among others. In 2016, the friends started an independent comic book publisher, publishing *Swords and Witches*, authored by Esteban Marot, thus Pipoca e Nanquim would be born in the publishing world.

Groaning Enchantment, Deserter's Abode, *Art Book* Grotesque Visions: Junji Ito's Disturbing Art¹² and Holes of Strangeness: 35 Years of Junji Ito's Career (the author's autobioFigurey).

The publisher JBC¹³, which occupies second place in the ranking, also published titles by the author in the period 2023 and 2024, namely: *Black Paradox*, *Decline of a Man*, *Anguish*, *Diário dos Gatos* Yon & Mu.

Although *Tomie* has its publication in 2021, it still occupies the 5th place in sales in *Horror Figureic Novels*, according to the ranking available on Amazon¹⁴ on April 6, 2024, in the same ranking we have her other works: *Uzumaki* (1998-1999), in 7th place and *The Egocentric Curses of Souichi* (2022) in 9th place¹⁵. It is important to note that these works are periodically reprinted due to high demand. Naturally, with each relaunch, they usually register a significant volume of sales and often lead the marketing rankings.

2 METHODOLOGY – THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TRAITS

Qualitative research in communication, according to Bauer and Gaskell (2015), is characterized by the focus on understanding the senses, interpretations and meanings that the subjects attribute to communication practices – the messages, discourses and media practices that are produced, circulate and appropriated by the public in certain cultural, social, historical contexts – in their symbolic, discursive, cultural and social dimensions, rather than prioritizing numbers or statistical generalizations.

The study carried out in the master's degree in Communication (PPGCOM/UFPI) in 2025, was descriptive and analytical, since it allowed us to interpret the symbolic, narrative and visual layers that sustain the normalization of violence and the ambivalences about the feminine as seductive and monstrous, and the meanings attributed to violence and its representations in the manga *Tomie*, by Junji Ito. More than the measurement of data, meanings, symbols and narratives produced by the work were interpreted, understanding it as a cultural manifestation that dialogues with social constructions about the feminine.

¹² This material was launched at the *Comic Con Experience* (2023) in São Paulo, in which the artist was present, for the first time coming to Brazil, to autograph and receive his fans at *the Magic Market* with the publisher Pipoca and Nanquim and a panel on *the Thunder stage*.

¹³ JBC was founded in 1992 as a communication company initially focused on the Japanese-Brazilian community, based in São Paulo. Its original focus included the publication of magazines in Japanese and Portuguese, such as the newspaper *Tudo Bem* and the magazine *Made in Japan*. However, its big leap came in the early 2000s, when it began to publish manga officially translated into Portuguese. Some of them are very famous: *Sailor Moon*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Death Note*, *Bleach*. Source: <https://blogbbm.com/2025/01/07/numeros-do-mercado-brasileiro-de-mangas-em-2024/>

¹⁴ Available at: www.amazon.com.br/gp/bestsellers/books/7842733011/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_books

¹⁵ Lists are frequently updated, according to sales.

The analytical corpus was the manga *Tomie* (1987) which, as a cultural product, is understood as a social text that produces and reproduces meanings about the feminine. The research examined the work in its entirety, volumes 1 and 2 (Junji Ito, 1987; republished in 2021) The manga revolves around the character *Tomie*, with the narrative – 'an irresistibly beautiful young woman provokes obsession and violence in the men around her'. This phrase sums up the dramatic structure of the work, but it also reveals, in deeper layers, a powerful commentary on the way patriarchal culture constructs, controls, and punishes the female figure. The research adopted the content analysis (Bardin, 2006), having as observable 12 Figures selected from the manga that were organized into five categories – 1) femicide, 2) nudity, 3) passionality, 4) villainy, 5) male sisterhood and 6) enchantment, being analyzed in this article only categories 1, 4 and 5:

1) *femicide* – the term has undergone changes since 1970¹⁶, since its emergence, today it does not mean a way to name "the deaths of women by homicide due to their social condition as women", says Diana Russell (1992). It is important to take into account whether the murder is related to domestic or family violence.¹⁷

4) *Villainy* – portrayed from her ambiguous personality, simultaneously victim and villain. This category seeks to analyze how the work explores the villainization of female characteristics, especially those associated with power and the transgression of gender roles.

5) *Male Sisterhood* – refers to the alliance between men (with female participation), which sustains and legitimizes acts of violence against *Tomie*, and *Enchantment*, a category that shows men to be subjected to a kind of "spell" that leads them to a posture of passivity in the face of their own actions. In other words, the author imposes a condition that evidences an alienation in relation to the conscience and individual responsibility of the killers, where their choices and attitudes are not the result of an autonomous decision, but rather of an external force that prevents them from acting actively and critically on their own reality.

The application of content analysis enabled a systematic and thorough approach in the identification and categorization of the different manifestations of violence and oppression represented in *Tomie*. The choice of analytical categories evidenced the thematic recurrence throughout the volumes. As shown in the following table, which shows how many chapters of each volume show each category with a lot of significance:

¹⁶ The term was first used at the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels (1976) by feminist researcher Diana Russell. There was no popularity in the term in other regions of the world. In 1992, Russell co-edited the book *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, which deepened this definition and consolidated the term in the academic and activist literature. It was used in Latin America for the first time in 1998 to describe the brutal murders of women in Ciudad de Juarez.

¹⁷ Law No. 13,104/2015.

Table 3*Categories of Analysis*

CATEGORY	BACKGROUND	Quantity		
		V.1	V. 2	Total
FEMICIDE	Tomie's recurrent femicide	8	11	19
VILLAINY	The representation of Tomie as a villainous figure allows us to question the demonization of feminine characteristics associated with power and seduction.	14	14	28
MALE "SISTERHOOD"	It explores how the male alliance contributes to the perpetuation of femicide and the normalization of violent behavior in the plot.	15	10	25
NUDITY	Analyzed as an element that goes beyond eroticism, nudity in <i>Tomie</i> can be read both as a form of objectification and vulnerability of the character, exploring the female body as an object of desire and violence.	3	4	7
"MALE PASSION"	It refers to the impulse of male characters to commit acts of violence based on intense emotions, such as jealousy or obsession.	8	7	15
ENCHANTMENT	Men appear to be immersed in a "spell" that positions them as passive subjects in relation to their own actions.	14	14	28

Source: Survey Data. (2024)

3 TOMIE: THE WOMAN AS VILLAIN AND VICTIM

The story revolves around *Tomie*, with the narrative of 'an irresistibly beautiful young woman causes obsession and violence in the men around her', and therefore, suffers repeated femicides and regenerations, which causes terror and obsession to readers. In Brazil, the *Tomie manga* was published in 2021, three decades after its original release in Japan. The work is divided into two volumes, containing a total of twenty chapters: 1) the first volume brings together nine chapters: "*Tomie*," "*Tomie - Part 02 - Morita Hospital*," "*Underground*," "*PhotoFigurey*," "*Kiss*," "*Mansion*," "*Revenge*," "*Waterfall*," and "*Painter*," and 2) the second volume consists of eleven chapters: "*Assassin*," "*Hair*," "*Adopted*," "*Littlefinger*," "*Little Boy*," "*Must*," "*Baba*," "*Certain Reunion*," "*Maniac*," "*Top Model*," and "*Decrepitude*".

In the manga, the story is not presented in a linear way, since each chapter we have a different *Tomie*, it is always a new character interacting with new scenarios and individuals. The story manifests itself as a puzzle that we put together each piece. To better understand Tomie's dynamics, we have separated four essential points: 1) a young woman who suffers brutal

femicide, having her body dismembered by her classmates, 2) she is reborn from each dismembered part, 3) she "seduces" men and provokes a "crazy passion" and 4) female relationship: *tomielization occurs*.

The first chapter, simply titled *Tomie*, establishes the starting point of the plot, presenting the birth of the mystical figure that will accompany the narrative throughout the manga. The story begins in an atmosphere of mourning and mystery at the school where *Tomie* studied, as students and teachers mourn the tragic death of the young woman, who suffered brutal femicide and had parts of her body scattered throughout the city. The crime remains unsolved and without suspects, which intensifies the initial suspense.

What seemed to be a story of loss and tragedy turns into a disturbing event when *Tomie* reappears in the classroom, apparently unharmed and without any memory of what happened, as if her death had never happened.

It should be noted that there are attempts to silence, forget and make gender violence invisible. Ricouer (2007) emphasizes that forgetting is not only an individual failure, but also a political and social act, linked to silencing strategies. The feminist theories bell hooks (2019), Beauvior (2014), Segato (2013) show how women's history has been systematically silenced. Elena Teles and Valeska Zanella (2017) discuss how the media naturalize, erase or trivialize gender violence, transforming femicides into "crimes of passion", selecting according to Hall (2003) the hegemonic representations and narratives that will appear and which will be forgotten.

Regarding femicide, Segato (2018) shows that violence against women not only occurs, but is also systematically forgotten or trivialized by state, legal and media institutions. The author speaks of a "pedagogy of cruelty", in which repetition and institutional neglect make violence something "normalized", contributing to its social oblivion. This moment of *Tomie*'s 'inexplicable' return after femicide marks the beginning of the cycle of violence and resistance. A mix of horror defined by the "death and regeneration" that defines the work, bringing with it an atmosphere of confusion and discomfort for both the characters and the readers. Everyone is wondering, as shown in the following Figure – how is this possible?

Figure 2

Tomie's first appearance after her death



Source: *Tomie*, v. 1, p. 7.

Tomie's reappearance, even after being officially confirmed by the police as dead, begins to scare everyone in the class, but not because this event is strange, but because her survival can harm them. The twist that Junji Ito presents to us happens as a flashback in the class walk on the hill of the deity Inari¹⁸. It is revealed how the "accident" that led to *Tomie's murder* happened to and that *everyone* in her class was complicit in the crime.

Tomie's reappearance can be read as a metaphor for the permanence of gender violence – even if women are silenced (or killed), the mark of violence returns, insistent, revealing that the trauma does not disappear. It dialogues with the idea of traumatic memory (Cathy Caruth, 1996) that which was repressed comes back insistently because it was not properly elaborated.

The police, as a state apparatus that confirms death, represents the institutionalization of forgetting: once the death certificate is given, society "closes" the narrative of that life. But *Tomie's return* denies this closure, revealing the failure of institutions to deal with violence against women. This dialogues with the notion of political oblivion (Paul Ricoeur, 2000): what should be remembered and repaired is erased, but returns as a spectre.

Tomie's femicide occurs during the ride when she is pushed off a cliff by her boyfriend Yamamoto in one of his jealousy crises. The young woman is unconscious after the fall and Yamamoto is prevented by Professor Takagi from calling the ambulance so that they would not be arrested, from that moment on everyone in the class accepted to cover up the evidence and disappear with *Tomie's body* dismembering her and hiding her pieces around the city.

¹⁸ In the words of Mendonça (2019), Inari is a deity of rice and Japanese fertility who can take the form of a fox and uses metamorphosis as a harbinger of something.

Doctor Tamura explains that "the dismembered woman has her reproduction similar to planarians" (p. 70), a sense similar to the mythology of the Hydra of Lerna¹⁹, a mythological monster that regenerates when it cuts off one of its heads, two grew in its place). At this point, the author presents us with a scientific explanation for Tomie's reappearance, as shown in the following Figure.

Figure 3

Doctor Tamura explaining how Tomie seems to multiply



Source: Tomie, v. 1, p 70

Tomie is presented as "indestructible". The narrative breaks with the patriarchal conception that killing would be the way to control or silence women. *Tomie* always returns, showing that the female body does not allow itself to be reduced to the destiny of a violated and disposable object. The reappearance of *Tomie* destabilizes the logic of the pedagogy of cruelty (Segato, 2018).

It is important to note that the interactions in the plot have a great focus on *Tomie* and her aggressors, including female characters. "*Tomielization*" shows how gender violence is constructed and internalized in relationships – and among women it is expressed either through rivalry, aesthetic competition or the reproduction of patriarchal norms, because as Beauvoir (2019) states "you are not born a woman, you become one". In the plot, "becoming" is literal and violent, since the woman, in the character of *Tomie*, loses her consciousness and identity, after incorporation, loses her voice and subjectivity. In the manga, this interactive process is called "*tomielization*" – it consists of *Tomie* "possessing" her female victim by incorporating her cells makes her "more beautiful" (Ito, 2021, p. 96), healthier, and all the old physiognomy and consciousness no longer exist.

Tomielization as a process of internalized violence. When *Tomie* "enters" the victim, she erases her previous identity, producing a more beautiful, younger, healthier body — that is, a

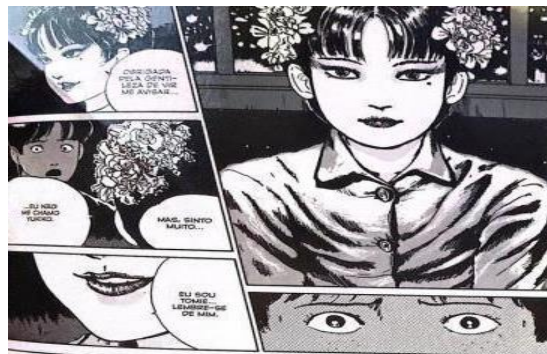
¹⁹ GRIMAL, Pierre. **Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology**. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997.

body adjusted to the aesthetic and social norms of femininity, as Naomi Wolf (2018) discusses, about beauty standards and their functioning as control devices over female bodies.

In the chapter *Morita Hospital*, volume 01, in which *Tomie* donates a kidney to the hospitalized girl, and upon receiving it begins to become strong and healthy, until she discovers that she is turning into a monster (*Tomie* regenerating from the organ), as shown in the following Figure.

Figure 4

Yukiko undergoes "tomielization".

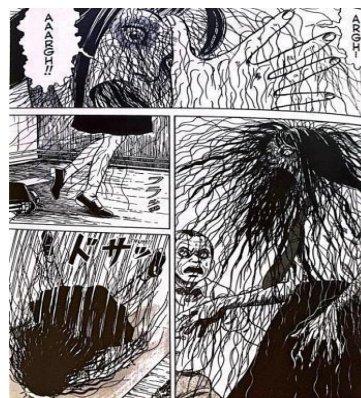


Source: *Tomie*, v. 1, p 112

In the chapter *Hair*, volume 02, the friends find strands of shiny hair and a strand attached to Miki Hatawagama's scalp. This is enough for "tomielization" to happen. She begins to resemble *Tomie* – and starts to be admired at school. At the end of the process, the beauty fades away, and becomes monstrous. The strands of hair begin to come out of each pore and cover the entire body, leaving her lifeless, as expressed in the following Figure.

Figure 5

Miki's "Tomielization".



Tomie, v. 2. p 81

The Figure shows the frightened girl, with a wide mouth and eyes, with long strands of hair coming out of her hand and face, from her legs and arms even lifeless on the ground, expressing the monstrous feminine, regenerating again and again. Barbara Creed (1993) problematizes the female monster, expressed in the case of *Tomie*. The fact that she reappears after femicide becomes an inversion of patriarchal destiny: she is not the silent victim, but a disturbing presence that insists on reexisting. The monstrous feminine is born precisely from that which transgresses and threatens the norms of patriarchy.

The woman's body – *Tomie* – as a field of dispute. "Tomielization" shows the female body as a territory of appropriation. The body as a social construction — but in *Tomie*, this construction is radicalized in an annihilation of identity.

Tomie's femicide, in the following Figure, happens recurrently and moves the story, between the real and the supernatural.

Figure 6

Tomie's body discarded in a stream.



Source: *Tomie*, v. 1, p 112

The body of *Tomie* naked, with multiple cuts scattered throughout the body: face, arms, abdomen and back. His neck and arms are submerged in a pool of dark blood surrounded by stones. The scene reflects the trivialization of the woman's body and existence: mutilated and discarded. There are many cases of femicides marked by extreme brutality where "the perpetrator seeks to demonstrate to his peers his capacity for death and cruelty, making explicit in the victims' bodies" (Caicedo-Roa, Bandeira, Cordeiro, 2022, p. 5), such as the femicides that occurred in the *Ciudad Juárez*, in Mexico, of factory workers, cruelly raped to death represents one of the most emblematic cases of femicide in Latin America.

In *Tomie* the cruelty of her femicide, the following Figure, exposes the violence suffered by the character - mutilation, dismemberment, crushing, burning. His face full of cuts, eyes and mouth open, injured arms raised, a cloth with blood stains.

Figure 7

Tomie dead with several cuts on her face



Source: Tomie, v. 1, p 112.

The face, in particular, carries a deep symbolic value: it is on it that the marks of subjectivity, identity and social presence are inscribed. When it is mutilated, erased or destroyed, the intention is communicated to eliminate not only life, but the social and symbolic existence of the victim. As Segato (2013) observes, femicide violence has a pedagogical and disciplinary character, functioning as a message of power and male domination over the female body.

Many cases of femicide are marked by an extreme degree of cruelty: burned, disfigured, cut faces – practices that go beyond the intent to kill. They represent a desire for control, punishment, and silencing.

The mutilated face, in this context, is the erasure of the female gaze on the world, the silencing of her voice and the denial of her autonomy. It is an attempt to "dehumanize" women even after death, reinforcing the idea that their bodies can be the object of possession, hatred or revenge.

For this discussion, we can bring the example of ancient Greece, in which the death of man, as discussed by Martha Nussbaum, in her work *The Fragility of Goodness* (2009), was considered a national tragedy, a civic loss that added a sense of value to the community. The death of the woman, often portrayed in tragedies, symbolized a reaffirmation of her subordination to male authority and the need to maintain the patriarchal order.

The cruelty of female deaths in tragedies was not only a matter of physical violence, but also a profound social message. The brutal forms of murder of women, whether by poisoning, mutilation, or sacrifice, as in plays such as Euripides' *Medea*, were a way of representing that by challenging the patriarchal order, the female body was not only physically destroyed, but also

publicly humiliated, serving as an example to society that female transgression would be mercilessly punished.

As Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz argues in *Years of Speech: Women and Greek Tragedy* (2008), female death was used as a metaphor for the repression of female potential, a way of showing that women, even in life, were destined to occupy a subordinate space. In other words, her death is less a narrative outcome and more a symbolic device that reiterates the subordinate place of women in the social order.

What we see in *Tomie*, her independence, her desire to continue or not in a relationship is shown as an affront to the man, who decides to take away all the power of choice by murdering her, not only that, but also the cruelty of feminicidal violence is left in sight.

Tomie in her "seductive and fatal beauty", the archetype of the *femme fatale*, whose sexuality can be both admired and feared, according to Mulvey (1975). The facial mutilation - Tomie's disfigured face - shows the impediment to speech, opinion, the public manifestation of the feminine placed as a punishment for her autonomy, interpreted as disobedience. Tomie's beauty, evidenced as seduction and enchantment of men, strengthens the patriarchal and Christian vision.

In volume 2, in the chapter "Nanny", Junji Ito focuses on *Tomie's* being and evil, in which an elderly couple hire a nanny to take care of their baby, Marina. Upon arrival, the nanny Erita is locked in the room with the child, "because most people run away when they see my baby" (ITO. v. 2, p. 225). Erita removes the child's cloak in the crib and is startled: "This doesn't look like a baby, it's like an exposed heart with a head sprouting from it" (ITO. v. 2, p. 228).

Marina was *Tomie* in the regeneration phase. She cried a lot. The elderly couple went out every night to set the city on fire, because only then would they stop crying "If she doesn't see a fire a day, she gets angry and cries all night" (ITO. v. 2, p. 231). His great pleasure was to see the red color of the fire, the destruction.

The resemblance to the biblical character *Eve - the sinner* - who brought evil to the world, sentenced to condemnation by the male (Christian God) to all women and their future generations. Junji Ito puts *Tomie*, the feminine in this place.

In Figure 6, Junji Ito directs men's actions as involuntary, almost automatic. A "spell". An enchantment. The manipulation of the feminine over the masculine considered as emotionally and psychologically submissive. This perspective builds the Figure of the feminine as manipulative, malefic and villain, transforming it into an archetype of threat, seduction and destruction. This framing perpetuates sexist and misogynistic discourses that seek to justify

violence against women and minimize the responsibility of male aggressors, reinforcing patterns of domination and control in gender relations.

Figure 8

Koji Yamazaki explains about Tomie's bewitching power



Source: *Tomie* (ITO, 2021, Volume 1, p. 125).

In the first frame, we have a woman's serious face, black hair down, with a *voice over* of Tetsuo saying "This girl... Tomie... it has an almost bewitching power. The guys who hang out with her are practically slaves to her will" The main interest to bring this picture and discuss it is in the continuation of the speech "... I don't doubt at all that they will kill someone if it's Tomie's order." In the second, a serious man, with his finger raised, mouth open, saying: "Why are you bewitched by this strange magnetism that she has. I hate to admit it, but I also almost let myself be seduced by her."

The association between femicide and seduction reveals one of the most complex and perverse dimensions of gender violence: the transformation of attraction, desire, and romantic love into devices of control, domination, and death. When femicide is born from relationships marked by seduction — and often by affection — it shows how patriarchal structures naturalize the idea that a woman's body and life can be possessed, controlled, and eliminated when she denies or breaks this pact.

Historically, women were represented as objects of desire and conquest, while men were assigned the role of active subjects, holders of decision and power. In this imaginary, seduction – often idealized as a prelude to love – also works as a gateway to violence. The seduced woman is now seen as possession. The affective bond creates a false sense of entitlement over your body, your choices, and your freedom. When this relationship is threatened - by separation, rejection, autonomy or simple divergence - the frustration of male desire turns into violence.

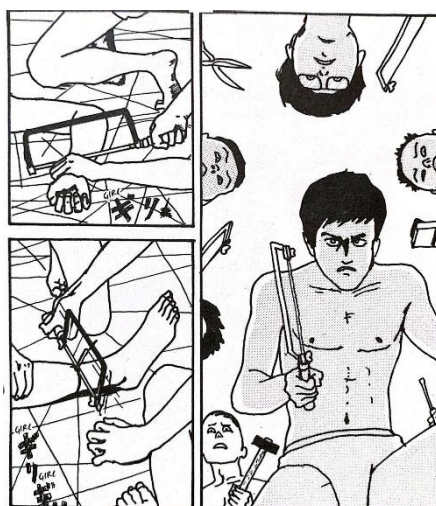
As Segato (2013) states, femicide is not the product of uncontrolled passions, but rather an act of violent reappropriation of a body that the aggressor believes it belongs. In this sense, seduction is the starting point of a process that can culminate in murder when the woman refuses to meet the imposed expectations.

The "seductive woman" is a historical construction that reflects the male gaze on the female body. Elevated to the ideal of femininity and, at the same time, condemned for her sexual freedom, she represents the tension between desire and control that structures patriarchy. When used to justify violence – including femicide – this figure reveals how society transfers the blame for its own victimization to women. Resignifying seduction, therefore, is a political act: it means transforming an instrument of domination into an expression of freedom.

In the following Figure, all the male students naked, holding cutting tools and dismembering *Tomie*, with an expression of anger.

Figure 9

Tomie's death by her classmates



Source: *Tomie* (ITO, 2021, p.).

Femicide with mutilation and dismemberment is not only aimed at biological death. As Segato (2013) analyzes, extreme violence against the female body has a communicative function: it conveys the message that that body does not belong to itself, but to the male domain - and that daring to challenge this domination will be punished with annihilation.

This gesture of brutality also carries a dimension of "exemplary punishment": many victims of femicide dismembered were women who broke off relationships, denounced aggressions, refused to obey or exercised autonomy. The act of dismembering their bodies is the aggressor's attempt to erase female agency—to turn their resistance into eternal silence.

Dismemberment produces more than physical death: it generates a second symbolic death. By removing the integrity of the body, its social and subjective identity is also removed. The woman is reduced to fragments, to the condition of "thing", "object" or "residue". This dehumanization legitimizes violence in the eyes of those who practice it and, often, even of those who narrate it - transforming the victim into something "killable" and "disposable". Butler (2004) calls this condition "precarious life": they are lives that, due to power structures, become less worthy of mourning, less recognized as human. The dismemberment is the maximum expression of this precariousness.

The young women, also accomplices, were responsible for getting rid of *Tomie's body*, each one scattered a part of the body to a different place in the city. Tomie's femicide from the perspective of Segato (2013), in "Scenes of an uncomfortable thought", observes gender violence from two axes that cross each other: 1) the victim-aggressor relationship; 2) the relationship between aggressor and "partners in crime". In the first chapter of Ito's work, there is a strong presence of the second axis: sisterhood, because "Most aggressions against the female body are not committed in isolation" (Idem, 2013, p. 58)

The construction of the Figure of women as victims and villains in cases of femicide reveals one of the deepest contradictions of the patriarchal imaginary and social discourses surrounding gender violence. This double representation is not accidental: it functions as an ideological mechanism of control and disresponsibility, sustaining structures that naturalize violence and blame the woman herself for her death. At the same time that she is portrayed as a fragile and defenseless being – the "ideal victim" – the woman is also transformed into a villain, provocateur and even responsible for the crime she suffered.

The female figure in *Tomie* occupies the role of victim-villain. Function of hiding Tomie's pieces, scattering them around the city at different points, and condoning the crime of her teacher and classmates. The "victim/villain" duality is not a contradiction, but a complementary strategy. Both Figures are used to maintain control over female bodies and behaviors: 1) the woman-victim is exalted because she remains within the expected role and 2) the woman-villain is punished because she transgresses it. In both cases, the patriarchal message is the same: the woman must remain within certain limits - otherwise, her death may be narrated not as a crime, but as a "consequence".

Femicide is not a crime of a man against a woman – it is the project of an entire system, says Segato (2013). The so-called "sisterhood in the crime of femicide" is not only made up of murderers: it includes all those who silence, justify, minimize or ignore violence against women. It is the patriarchal network that sustains femicide as a possible and acceptable practice.

Breaking with this brotherhood requires more than laws - it requires a profound cultural transformation, capable of removing the social and symbolic legitimacy of this crime.

At the end of the first chapter, some of the participants in the murder express the desire to surrender to the authorities, but are pursued by their own companions, who are already taken by madness and the fear of being captured by the police. The "Male Brotherhood", in the chapter *Littlefinger*, the narrator character Hiroya begins the story by telling his relationship with his three older brothers when he was bullied for being short and "far from handsome", this was reflected in his adulthood in which he finds himself with antisocial and self-esteem problems. *Tomie*, in this plot, is the stepmother of the four brothers. After the suicide of their patriarch, Hiroya's brothers "did not look at her (*Tomie*) as a stepmother, but rather as a woman. And she also started to act as if she seduced her stepchildren" (ITO, 2021, p. 126).

This process of eroticization of the maternal role is not natural, but constructed. It originates in the patriarchal logic that reduces women to their sexual and reproductive function, even when they occupy places of care and affection. The stepmother, in this sense, ceases to be a parental figure to become an object of male desire and dispute – including that of children or stepchildren.

As Segato (2013) points out, this type of violence is born not from excessive passion, but from the logic of possession and control, in which the woman who denies male desire challenges the patriarchal symbolic order and, therefore, must be punished. Punishment that *Tomie* suffered again. Once again quartered. The pacts of "Male Brotherhood" take place between the four brothers, with Hiroya being an accomplice in the concealment of *Tomie's* body.

Figure 10

Horaya comes across Tomie's body dismembered by her siblings



Source: *Tomie* (ITO, 2021, Volume 2, p. 133).

The figure of the stepmother desired by her stepchildren clearly illustrates the patriarchal logic that transforms women into sexual objects, even within family ties. When male desire is frustrated, the answer can be extreme punishment: femicide. Violence, in these cases, is not born of individual feelings, but of a symbolic system that legitimizes possession, naturalizes objectification and punishes female autonomy. By blaming women for their own death, this system reinforces inequality and perpetuates the cycle of violence.

Contextualizing the narrative of this section, *Tomie* was murdered by a group of young men who justify the cruelty by saying: "We ended up dismembering *Tomie*. She mocked us. That's why we killed her" (ITO, 2021, p. 133). Hiroya, despite not participating in the murder, was in charge of disposing of the dismembered body, divided into plastic bags.

4 CONCLUSIONS: *TOMIE* AND THE REPRODUCTION OF FEMICIDE

In 2019, Junji Ito gave an interview to *Grape Japan magazine* where the interviewer asks if there was any inspiration for the creation of the character *Tomie*, Ito answers:

"No, I'm afraid there wasn't a beautiful woman as a model. When I was in elementary school, a boy in my class died in a traffic accident. It was so strange to me that a colleague so full of life should suddenly disappear from the world, and I had the strange feeling that he would reappear innocently. Since then, I wanted to express this feeling in my manga" (GRAPE JAPAN, 2019, online)

Initially, we did not realize the initial relationship that moved the narrative, but after repeated readings of the material, we understood that Junji Ito's choice to create a female character within the excessive situations of violence was not arbitrary. The theoretical-methodological discussions about women and gender speak of the social construction of the feminine subjugated to the facets of patriarchy. The work directly relates a more advanced stage of a strong subjection of the feminine to the masculine, which culminates in femicide – the impiety after the act, the ruin of a body, the discarded victim, the sale of his flesh as a commodity, the cannibalization of the aggressor, his pieces scattered around the city.

For the narrative to happen, it is necessary that this "monster" be a woman. Junji Ito got it right! The narrative is initially granted to the reader as something close to him, of a tactile experience, where in addition to all the supernatural horror of a seductive and magical mythical woman, we have the cruel as a reality: femicides and other violence against women.

The analysis of the manga *Tomie* allows us to understand femicide not only as a crime, but as a political and cultural act of control over the body and female autonomy. The repeated destruction of the protagonist, motivated by desire, hatred and fear, reveals the symbolic

functioning of patriarchy: to turn women into objects, to punish them when they challenge this condition and, even so, never to be able to erase them completely.

Tomie forces us to face the uncomfortable truth that violence against women – whether in fictional horror or in reality – is no exception, but part of a patriarchal and oppressive system that tries to contain what it fears most: the beautiful, free, intelligent, unsubmitive woman.

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