

Becoming-Woman in Hypermasculine Organizations: The Case of Female Officers in the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar do Espírito Santo*

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How to cite: Souza, E. M., Brewis, J., & Godfrey, R. (2026). Becoming-woman in hypermasculine organizations: The case of female officers in the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar do Espírito Santo*. *BAR-Brazilian Administration Review*, 23(3), e250196.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2026250196>

Keywords:

becoming-woman; bodies; gender binary; leadership; resistance.

JEL Code:

M14

Received:

October 15, 2025.

This paper was with the authors for two revisions.

Accepted:

June 15, 2026.

Publication date:

August 21, 2026.

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Funding:

This work was supported by Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq, Brazil).

Conflict of Interests:

The authors stated that there was no conflict of interest.

Editor-in-Chief:

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One anonymous reviewer.

Peer Review Report:

The disclosure of the Peer Review Report was not authorized by its reviewers.

Editorial assistants:

Eduarda Anastacio and Simone Rafael (ANPAD, Maringá, Brazil).

ABSTRACT

Objective: this paper analyses resistance by cis female leaders in a military firefighting organization in Brazil, expanding debates around the intensity of binary gender norms in hypermasculine organizations like the military. We use Deleuze and Guattari's theorizing on becoming-woman to apply this concept to the organizational context. Our contributions include: studying resistance by military personnel to their own organization; focusing on women leaders in a Global South military firefighting organization; and deploying becoming-woman, an under-used concept in organization studies. **Methods:** 17 semi-structured interviews were carried out with all the female officers of the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar* in the state of Espírito Santo. **Results:** based on thematic analysis of the data generated, we argue that these women officers resist the gender binary through two processes: (1) the use of masculine characteristics to resignify their gendered bodies, especially physical strength; and (2) the resignification of leadership in the context of military firefighting through the feminine. **Conclusions:** we suggest that these instances of becoming-woman have the potential to bring about real, if subtle, organizational change; but also set an agenda for future research into leadership in hypergendered contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Following [Butler \(1990\)](#), many organization studies scholars have argued that a binary intelligibility of gender exists which results in the exclusion of women from certain workplaces or occupations, or at least creates significant challenges for them. This is identified as an outcome of the heterosexual matrix. For example, see [Branicki et al. \(2023\)](#); [Franken et al. \(2024\)](#); [Hales and Galbally \(2023\)](#); and [Rumens and Lewis \(2023\)](#). Here we follow [Ashcraft and Muhr \(2018\)](#) in understanding the gender binary as the “host of dualisms that emanates from the oppositional division of ‘men’ and ‘women’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, such as hard-soft, rational-emotional and analytical-intuitive” (p. 207). These dualisms establish hierarchies which devalue female bodies and feminine characteristics, privileging the masculine ([Schilt & Westbrook, 2009](#)) and building asymmetries that (re)produce male dominance.

This binary is at its strongest in hypermasculine organizations like the military. Their hallmarks are an emphasis on presumed masculine traits such as aggression, action, bravery in the face of extreme risk, physical prowess, rationality and fearlessness. In contrast, female bodies and the feminine are represented as passive, emotional, instinctive, weak and intuitive ([Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018](#); [Godfrey, 2009](#); [Godfrey & Brewis, 2018](#); [Godfrey et al., 2012](#); [Heinecken, 2002](#); [Höpfl, 2003](#); [Husain-Talero & Angulo, 2019](#); [Karazi-Presler, 2020](#); [Lee et al., 2019](#); [Sasson-Levy, 2008, 2011](#); [Souza et al., 2023](#); [Tyler et al., 2019](#)). The presence of cis¹ female and other non-cis-male bodies, feminine values and behaviours therefore threatens the symbolic order of these organizations ([Godfrey et al., 2012](#); [Souza et al., 2023](#)). In response, binary gender boundaries are constantly reproduced that aim to exclude assigned-female-at-birth (AFAB) and some assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) bodies as well as the feminine in such spaces. The feminine becomes a foil against which to situate the superiority of the masculine.

However, by extension, there is also always resistance to the gender binary, and tensions within it. To this end, we pose the question: what are the (micro) practices of resistance employed by cis women leaders in a hypermasculine organization? To answer this, we draw on data generated through interviews with female officers of one branch of the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar*, the Brazilian Military Firefighting Corps. We explore how these women resist the gender binary that seeks to exclude them from – or at least significantly devalue them within – this space.

To address this research question, we adopt a post-structuralist position that sees gender identity as neither stable nor fixed but rather fluid and performative. As a

conceptual lens, we draw on [Deleuze and Guattari's \(1987\)](#) notion of becoming-woman and [Pullen et al.'s \(2017\)](#) illustration of the usefulness of this concept in understanding the workplace. In doing so, we argue that our women officers actively resist binary essentialism through practices that seek to resignify their bodies and their leadership. For this, they mobilize both masculine and feminine characteristics to disrupt the gendered boundaries that constitute them as flawed and inadequate subjects for military firefighting. We identify and discuss two such practices of resistance: (1) the use of masculine characteristics to resignify their gendered bodies, especially physical strength; and (2) the resignification of leadership in the context of military firefighting through the feminine. The resistance exerted by these women also involves a two-way flow: it not only resignifies their bodies and their leadership, but also those of their male colleagues.

Our main aim is to contribute to studies of workplace resistance by exploring the intensity of binary gender norms in hypermasculine organizations and the (micro)practices of resistance which challenge such binaries. A further contribution reflects the organizational context for our study, for very few researchers have studied resistance amongst military personnel against the organization itself. One exception we have located is [van Douwen et al. \(2022\)](#), who document the resistance of cis male personnel against the government-mandated introduction of women into the Dutch Marine Corps, previously a men-only branch of the military. Equally, only a handful of researchers have studied the leadership of women or the possibilities for dissolution of the gender binary in military organizations, like [Ashcraft and Muhr \(2018\)](#), [Husain-Talero and Angulo \(2019\)](#) and [Karazi-Presler \(2020\)](#). Instead, most research on gender in military organizations analyses masculinity in these spaces (e.g. [Godfrey et al., 2012](#); [Lee et al., 2019](#); [Sasson-Levy, 2011](#); [Tyler et al., 2019](#)). The same is true of the literature on firefighting (e.g. [Ainsworth et al., 2014](#); [Ericson & Mellstrom, 2016](#); [Perrott, 2019](#); [Tyler et al., 2019](#)).

A further contribution stems from the empirical site of our study. The vast majority of literature within resistance studies explores these issues in the Global North, whereas our empirical focus is on a Brazilian organization. Brazil also constitutes an underexplored context for the study of gender in hypermasculine contexts although, as Brazilian scholars like [Pitanguy \(1982\)](#) have observed, there is a marked exclusion of women even from less hypermasculine workplaces in Brazil. This is rooted in the colonial period and continues to this day. In her cross-national analysis, [Hirata \(2002\)](#) agrees that the persistent sexual division of labour in organi-

zations is a division that creates tension throughout the Brazilian social field, involving the interests of antagonistic groups. Similarly, based on an analysis of the Brazilian census, Freitas (2015) finds entrenched differences between public and private organizations such that the latter are a good deal less equitable and inclusive than the former. Importantly, she suggests that relatively strong government policies and accompanying workplace structures around gender as well as anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action all exist in Brazil, but explains why these have not, as yet, had the same effects in private sector workplaces. Relatedly, Moura et al. (2017) argue that femininity is something that is met with hostility in Brazilian organizations even today. As such, Brazil constitutes an important and valuable site of inquiry for the study of workplace resistance in hypermasculine organizations.

As to our theoretical contribution, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work has been very influential in organization studies for more than two decades now, including publications on critical management education (Hietanen & Mohammed, 2024), working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Waters-Lynch & Duff, 2024) and space and entrepreneurship (Kuismin et al., 2024). However, the concept of becoming-woman, as expounded in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), is much less travelled, even in the relatively limited organization studies literature drawing on their broader thesis of minoritarian resistance and deterritorialization (e.g. Fouweather & Bosma, 2021; Moriceau et al., 2022).

Next, we discuss the extremely gendered aspects of military organizations before outlining our theoretical understanding of resistance via becoming-woman. Subsequently, the methodology used to carry out the research is described, our findings are presented and we end with our discussion and conclusion.

THE MILITARY AS A HYPERMASCULINE ORGANIZATION

As we have suggested the military writ large is an example of a hypermasculine organization, one that places great value on cis men, masculinities and cis AMAB bodies (Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018; Godfrey, 2009; Godfrey & Brewis, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2012; Heinecken, 2002; Höpfl, 2003; Husain-Talero & Angulo, 2019; Karazi-Presler, 2020; Lee et al., 2019; Sasson-Levy, 2008, 2011; Souza et al., 2023; Tyler et al., 2019). However, what differentiates military organizations from others in this respect is that they are not just a reflection of wider society but have historically been one of the main producers and legitimizers of the gender regimes circulating in that society.

In some instances, these organizations can even be identified as the source of the hegemonic masculinity that classifies all citizens of a nation (Godfrey, 2009; Sasson-Levy, 2002). For example, Lee et al. (2019) demonstrate that the masculinity which characterizes South Korean military organizations spills over into wider society, helping to perpetuate gender inequalities in other workplaces. Similarly, Sasson-Levy (2002, 2008) contends that the construction of the combatant soldier's ideal of masculinity in the Israeli army is conflated with the State of Israel itself, becoming the hegemonic masculinity of this country and its citizens. Ultimately, then, military organizations can and do shape the construction of gender more widely, including the construction and maintenance of patriarchal orders (Enloe, 2000). Therefore, the gender regimes established by military organizations have characteristics which distinguish them from other hypermasculine organizations in terms of political relevance, because, as Sasson-Levy (2011) has it, the military "is the institution most closely identified with the state, its ideologies, and its policies. At the same time, it is also bound-up with essentialist and hierarchical conceptions of gender" (p. 392).

Equally, armed conflicts strengthen the social construction of gender in which cis men are legitimized as warriors (Godfrey & Brewis, 2018), reinforcing an intelligibility that values masculinity and limits opportunities for cis women and transgender and non-binary people to participate. Instead they are understood as victims and in need of protection (Heinecken, 2002; Sasson-Levy, 2008, 2011). Indeed, and despite the increase in the number of women serving in military organizations in recent decades, typically with considerable merit, Sasson-Levy (2011) argues that their "fundamental gender regimes, cultures, and identities have not altered" (p. 392). Hegemonic masculinity is crucial to the analysis of the gender binary in this context. As described by Connell (1995), this consists of "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimation of patriarchy, [and] which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 7). Thus, for Sasson-Levy (2011), the "combination of a rigid gendered structure and masculinist culture foster[s] a narrow repertoire of gendered identities for both men and women" (p. 405) in military organizations.

Considering that these organizations have an important role in maintaining and producing the binary gender order in society, they act as guardians of heteronormativity. Any threat to this order is also a direct threat to the intelligibility of the heterosexual matrix, causing what Schilt and Westbrook (2009) identify as

the use of “gendered tactics to accomplish the policing of supposedly natural gender boundaries and to repair breaches to heteronormativity” (p. 440). The logical corollary is that physical and mental resilience are highly valued in military organizations, where hierarchy and obedience are also fundamental (Godfrey & Brewis, 2018). The body of the ideal warrior is premised on self-control and self-discipline (Sasson-Levy, 2008). In these organizations’ heterosexual matrix, masculinity and cis male bodies are marked by strength and persistence, while cis female bodies and the feminine represent weakness and failure.

And, unlike in many other male-dominated professions which are not total institutions, Steidl and Brookshire (2019) suggest that women in the military cannot “compartmentalize their embodied reality into the private sphere” (p. 1272; see also Godfrey & Brewis, 2018). Instead, they are continually compelled to perform a specific form of masculinity due to the prevailing gender regime. Sasson-Levy (2002) explains this as “accept[ing] the model of the hegemonic masculinity and employ[ing] a series of discursive and bodily practices in order to shape their identity accordingly” (pp. 357-358; see also Ainsworth et al., 2014).

In addition, bureaucratic rationality prevails in the military through the aforementioned and well-defined hierarchy of command, discipline and highly standardized procedures, creating metaphors about leadership that promote and privilege the masculine such that cis men are conceived of as natural leaders (Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018). Leadership here is expressed via the material presence of leaders, through which physicality is deployed so that leadership and the leader alike acquire gendered meanings (Ford et al., 2017). Thus, leadership is what Ropo and Salovaara (2019) define as a “embodied and performative process between people and space” (p. 461) in which we shape spaces, but are also shaped by them. It is not an entity, but an ongoing process constructed by physically located interactions which Bell and Sinclair (2014) describe as a way of “creating and experiencing our bodies, our careers, our lives, through embodied participation with others” (p. 270). In military leadership positions, women need to navigate the norms in which the embodiment of the ideal leader is understood as cis male and masculine, making their bodies and their practices more visible, more problematic and therefore subject to constant judgement.

Equally, as we argued in a sister paper (Souza et al., 2023), the hypermasculinity of CBM as a military organization is amplified because its personnel are also firefighters. Certainly firefighting has likewise long been understood through this lens, with Kukula et al. (2024)

suggesting that “a traditional firefighter ... is characterized by physical strength, ... male gender, and heroism” (p. 10). Equally, Lopes et al. (2024) write that the ‘particularities’ of firefighting “characterize hegemonic masculinity as the demonstration of traits such as endurance, bravery, competence, and strength, which are socially attributed to men” (p. 5). And Riddle and Heaton (2023) select firefighting as one of their exemplar professions where cis women are especially likely to be sexually harassed. As such, the bringing together of these two occupational cultures means CBM is yet more gendered, yet more hypermasculine, than even its individual military and firefighting counterparts.

In sum, the structure, culture and activities of both military and firefighting organizations promote a specific kind of gender binary and elevate the cis man as the ideal type of organizational actor. However, Butler (1990) avers that the heterosexual matrix always contains within itself possibilities of resistance that break with its normative order. As such, within the power relations of military and firefighting organizations are also possibilities of resistance to the gender binary according to the contingencies in each context. We turn to this next, via Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Pullen et al. (2017).

RESISTING THE GENDER BINARY: BECOMING-WOMAN

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), everything is political, with macro and micropolitics being intertwined: they coexist inseparably, and one permeates the other. A key instance of political relations or forces here can be thought of as hard or ‘molar’ lines in a cartography of the social field, one which creates certain effects as it delineates specific kinds of phenomena. These lines are prescriptive as well as descriptive, segmenting the world into hierarchical categories like classes, nation states and genders, Molar lines reproduce the status quo by segmenting oscillating molecules into legible particularities. All modalities of being, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), thus acquire either molar or molecular assemblages. Molar assemblages are stable identities like ‘man’ and ‘woman’, with their apparently distinct and well-defined borders and territories: what lies within the boundaries is designated as stable, solid and enduring, not an ever-moving collection of molecules. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987; their emphasis) suggest,

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the function it fulfills [sic]. On the plane of consistency, a body is defined only

by a longitude and a latitude: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude) (p. 260).

As such 'a woman' (and of course also 'a man') is understood as a specific type of being, having a particular kind of body, 'endowed' with specific reproductive organs which function in distinctive ways. 'Woman' is constructed as a subject – a being, a modality – on this basis. According to [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#), gendered molar assemblages develop in childhood through the following process:

The body is stolen first from the girl: Stop behaving like that, you're not a little girl any[]more, you're not a tomboy, etc. ... The boy's turn comes next, but it is by using the girl as an example, by pointing to the girl as the object of his desire, that an opposed organism, a dominant history is fabricated for him too. The girl is the first victim, but she must also serve as an example and a trap (p. 276).

This molar segmentation also has the effect of producing and reproducing the majority and the minority, the former having privilege and social influence, the latter being enclosed within their subordinate status. As such, the demarcations that molar assemblages create between 'people' – such as where 'a man' or 'a woman' starts and ends – have significant political consequences, creating hierarchies which elevate some beings over others.

For [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#), only minorities have the potential to break with the majority pattern. The majority is homogeneous, static and (re)produces the constant, whereas the minority has a potential and creative becoming that produces variation and deterritorialization. In deterritorialization, the context of specific social relations – the borders between or territories of molar assemblages – is altered or mutated through lines of escape or flight. These can subvert the stabilities imposed by the majority which prohibit and limit the potential for change by fixing rigid contours around vacillating molecules through dualistic oppositions like the gender binary. Such oppositions restrict the social world by establishing distinctions and thereby by exclusions.

Such molecular challenges to molar lines might be triggering because they illuminate the arbitrariness of these lines and lend a generative quality to agency. These continuous movements produce lines of flight

and thereby deterritorializations. Thus, it is through the operation of lines of escape that the territory – the relation between 'static' beings – is modified and abandoned for a movement of reterritorialization to occur ([Enes & Bicalho, 2014](#)).

The concept of 'becoming-woman' is particularly important in [Deleuze and Guattari's \(1987\)](#) theorizing because, as interpreted by [Braidotti \(2003\)](#), they argue that 'woman' and the differences between the 'sexes' are the most significant ways/molar assemblages/modalities of being in which we are compelled to understand ourselves and each other. Becoming here, as [Morris \(2018\)](#) understands it, consists of "modalities of being that are in constant experimentation, creation and disjunction" (p. 508). However, belonging to the minority alone does not mean that this potential for becoming will materialize. A minority develops into becoming only if elements of it are mobilized to establish two-way connections with the majority. In these connections, the minority both affects and is affected by the majority and vice versa. The use of affect here is deliberate because becoming-woman is a concept which proceeds directly from the Spinozan roots of [Deleuze and Guattari's \(1987\)](#) thinking. It refers to the desire and capacity of our bodies to induce effects in other bodies and to be affected by those bodies. Becoming-woman, then, stands for an ongoing affective (and affecting) refusal to conform to gendered expectations, to observe the limits of the molar assemblage and the restrictions it places on fluctuating molecules. In our case, this happens in hypermasculine organizations like the military, where these expectations are so very stark.

In order to operationalize the notion of becoming-woman in an organizational context, we draw on the work of [Pullen et al. \(2017\)](#), who identify strategies, or micropractices of resistance, such as "ignoring dress codes or prescribed ways of speaking, not being amused by sexist humour and admiring unconventional role models" (p. 117). Indeed, as [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#) argue,

You don't deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off ... Anything at all can do the job, but it always turns out to be a political affair. Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power (puissance), an active micropolitics (p. 291)

Crucial for our analysis here, therefore, is [Pullen et al.'s \(2017\)](#) contention that

the response to the gendered organization does not have to involve only apathy and cynicism, compli-

ance, resignation or incorporation ... affective responses can also come in the form of embarrassment and shame, frustration and anger, which are felt and expressed through our bodies. However, such effects are not simply negative but can trigger radical (but not predetermined) political action (p. 117).

One crucial element of Pullen et al.'s (2017) argument for ours is their assertion that becoming-woman can shed light on resistance to what might otherwise feel like "the overwhelming power of oppressive gender structures" (p. 105). All of this works to subvert gendered structures and cultures, albeit often in understated, infrapolitical ways, which in military and firefighting organizations subtly diminishes cis men's bodies and masculinity as the ideal. Another important point is that becoming is not a form of imitation or play, and does not lead to a state of being in which one becomes something else – a 'woman' becoming a 'man', for example. Instead, becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest,

produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed[/molar] terms through which that which becomes passes (p. 238).

Becoming-woman therefore affirms the potential of minorities to subvert exclusionary power regimes which establish women and transgender and non-binary people as the Other (Goulimari, 1999). For Pullen et al. (2017), it "releases affective flows and possibilities that contest and transgress the increasingly subtle and confusing ways in which gendered organization affects people at work" (p. 105). Becoming-woman does this through affective encounters between different bodies, establishing forms of resistance that break with naturalized subjective positions and the apparent limitations of bodily capacities sedimented around gender. Thus it operates through deterritorialization in gendered organizations undertaken by the subjects who become-minoritarian in these spaces. It is an affirmative strategy that subverts established norms about and restrictions on bodily experiences and behaviours, promoting new skills that subvert oppressive regimes of gender through constructing new territories of what women can be and do, and undermining cis male dominance and the dominance of masculinity (Pullen et al., 2017).

Here the subject is complex, heterogeneous and multiple: it is not one thing or the other; either male or female, masculine or feminine, for example. Becoming-

woman declares that it is crucial to acquire the meanings necessary to survive, especially in hostile territories that, as Morris (2018) notes, "demarcate difference as opposed to ambiguity, until a safe place is reached to shed such limiting significations" (p. 512). These include hypermasculine organizations like the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar*. Thus, Braidotti (2003) tells us that becoming-woman is a transformational process that "does not refer to empirical females, but rather to socio-symbolic constructions, topological positions, degrees and levels of intensity, affective states" (p. 49). As Pullen et al. (2017) explain, it

encourages us to experiment with gender difference, re-embody masculinities and femininities and recompose relations between women and men ... To be sure, these kinds of mundane everyday responses do not enable us to change the world in one fell swoop. Instead, small things matter ... by scrambling transactions between predefined selves, our affective relations with others in organizations change the meaning of what it means to be a self, right here, right now (pp. 116-117)

Having established the hypermasculinity of military firefighting organizations but also, at the same time the possibilities of resistance within such spaces via Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Pullen et al. (2017), we turn to our methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Our research site is the branch of the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar* in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil (hereafter CBMES), established in November 1913. The first author of this paper interviewed seventeen cis female commissioned officers from CBMES, having been invited to do so by the General Commander. The Commander professed himself keen to promote gender inclusivity in the Corps, especially after a highly charged incident at a command meeting. This occurred when a female officer used the feminine Portuguese term 'bombeiras' in citing the name of a conference she had recently attended. She was then subjected to an aggressive backlash from her male colleagues on the basis that, as one senior officer said, this term does not officially exist – in other words, there is no formally recognized Portuguese noun for a female firefighter.

CBMES' gendered history is evident in the sense that these seventeen women represent all commissioned women in this military hierarchy. CBMES has 142 officers. Thus, women are very underrepresented, occupying approximately 12% of leadership roles. They also only occupy junior to middle ranks (from Second

Lieutenant to Captain). There are no women in the higher officer ranks of Major, Lieutenant, Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel and the highest rank of all, General Commander, has only ever been held by a man. The age of those interviewed varies from 28 to 59 years old. Most of our respondents are married to cis men and have children. Their tenure in CBMES ranged from eight to 36 years and some have worked in other military organizations. Each participant was also randomly assigned a feminine Portuguese name to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Table 1 provides more details.

Table 1. Interviewees' biographical data.

Pseudonym	Age	Rank	Length of service
Amanda	32	Second Lieutenant	11 years
Antônia	48	First Lieutenant	29 years
Beatriz	51	Captain	22 years
Bruna	36	Captain	11 years
Elisa	47	Captain	29 years
Eloísa	38	Captain	12 years
Fabiana	28	Captain	8 years
Josefa	48	Captain	26 years
Joseli	51	Captain	22 years
Lúcia	30	Captain	9 years
Márcia	40	First Lieutenant	22 years
Maria	35	Captain	13 years
Marília	36	Captain	17 years
Marilene	46	First Lieutenant	17 years
Marta	46	First Lieutenant	25 years
Rosa	59	Captain	36 years
Teresa	48	First Lieutenant	16 years

Note. Elaborated by the authors.

As aforementioned, the interviews were undertaken by the first author of this paper who was granted access to CBMES by the General Commander on the basis of his research on gender inclusion and leadership in the military. Considering that here a man was researching women in a military organization, before the data generation the first author of this paper had many meetings with the female officers explaining the research and establishing an ethical and trusting relationship with them. The research was approved by the research ethics committee at his university.

Interviews were used to collect data because they allow access to discourses related to gender, highlighting their functions in the specific context of this military firefighting organization. As Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) argue, interview data are therefore useful for studying the collective cultural processes related to the (re)construction of gender identities. All interviewees signed an informed consent document. The first author of this paper used a semi-structured interview template organized into four blocks of questions: (1) contextual and demographic information; (2)

the process by which interviewees joined CBMES; (3) military work and gender relations; and (4) the connections between gender and leadership. Within blocks 3 and 4, specific questions were posed about (a) the possible forms of resistance exercised by female officers to combat gender stereotypes; (b) how the presence of female officers breaks with a binary gender logic, helping to redefine what it means to be a leader; and (c) how this redefinition breaks with masculine values. All 17 interviews were recorded and transcribed, later being translated from Portuguese into English by the first author of this paper. This process yielded some 137 pages of interview data.

We employed Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) well-established approach to thematic analysis to allow ourselves maximum flexibility and recursivity in getting to grips with our data. This is a flexible but also systematic method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns, or themes, in a dataset. It consists of six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2022): (1) transcription, familiarization with the data through repeated readings and initial note-taking; (2) generation of initial codes, through the systematic coding of relevant aspects of the data; (3) searching for themes, grouping codes together that share the same core meaning; (4) reviewing themes, verifying the internal and external coherence of each grouping; (5) defining and naming the analysis categories; and (6) analysis, articulating the empirical data via the relevant theoretical framework.

In step 1, the interviews were transcribed and translated, and the transcripts were read and re-read several times so we could familiarize ourselves with the data. During this stage, potential codes related to resistance to the gender binary in CBMES began to emerge alongside those explored in our sister paper (Souza et al., 2023). We assigned these initial codes to the interviewees' responses in step 2. At this point the codes were organized by the most common keywords in the data – i.e., semantic coding – followed by latent coding where we revisited the codes to look for their structural and cultural implications in the organizational context. We did this by inserting examples of each code into a spreadsheet to be re-read and re-analysed. After several readings, what started to stand out was that these instances of resistance were typically triggered by some form of negative affect, including a sense of injustice, being deliberately provoked, fatigue, irritation, dread, hatred and feeling dehumanized. However, they seemed almost quotidian, nothing unusual or even necessarily very impactful in and of themselves. For example, as Maria suggested in a data extract to which we return later, "to be a woman [in CBMES] I think it's always having to overcome yourself and having to prove

it. It gets to be at the same time both exhausting and valuable to that point". Her use of 'always', 'exhausting' and 'valuable' here speaks to us of both the everyday character of the resistance we detect here and its affirmative power. Thus, the set of codes generated from the answers to the interview questions evoked notions such as exhausting; unfair; testing; valuable; body; strength; duality; masculine; and feminine.

Step 3 was based on identifying broader categories of these instances of resistance; for example, did they consist of leadership behaviours, physical displays or specific types of language? By this point, we were therefore beginning to generate themes. The themes generated were inequalities; gender; leadership; embodiment; disruption and challenge. These themes were then reviewed in step 4, leading to two main categories of analysis during step 5. These we saw as indexing resistance by our female officer respondents to the powerful gender binary at CBMES via becoming-woman, and they comprise of (1) the resignification of bodies, whereby these women describe performing feats of physical strength which are either not required of their male counterparts or where they outperform those counterparts; and (2) the resignification of leadership, within which our respondents reported drawing on masculine but also feminine discursive resources in their interactions with those they manage, displaying a more particularistic, less authoritarian and better-received leadership style.

Finally, the data were articulated together with the theoretical framework in step 6. Our identification of negative affective triggers but also the combination of a certain mundanity and affirmative characteristics in the female officers' responses reminded us of [Deleuze and Guattari's \(1987\)](#) concept of becoming-woman. Rereading *A Thousand Plateaus* confirmed our initial hunches about the usefulness of the concept, so we then sought out relevant applications in organization studies to further guide our analytical thinking. These turned out, as we established earlier, to be almost non-existent. However, the search did lead us to [Pullen et al. \(2017\)](#) and their insightful discussion of resistant workplace micropractices via becoming-woman. We sought to understand the functioning of molar lines and escape lines alike, paying special attention to the micropolitical field. As such we systematically mapped the molecular movements of deterritorialization that produced lines of flight in relation to the hypermasculine context of military firefighting. Equally, however, the themes that we arrived at should not be understood as fixed or stable. Instead, and per Deleuzoguattarian theorizing, they illustrate what we see a constant and ever-fluctuating process of becoming-woman as our

interviewees respond to the inimical affective stimuli they experience in the course of their employment in the hypermasculine environment of CBMES.

Overall, then, our thematic analytical practice resembles [Finlay's \(2021\)](#) persuasive description of her approach as:

one of grafting and crafting. Themes don't simply 'emerge'; they're not already 'in' the data 'waiting to be discovered' - like a pearl in a mollusc on the seabed. It does not do to sit waiting passively for themes to arrive or be discovered. Instead, there is a painstaking process of gradually pulling the data together as themes are iteratively evolved, shaped, polished, and systematically evidenced (p. 107).

In terms of our respective ways of being-in-the-world and how we exercised reflexivity in this analysis process, the first author of this paper is a cisgender Brazilian man who researches inclusion and equality related to gender, race and sexual orientation (LGBTQIAPN+ people) in the workplace. The second author of this paper is a cisgender British woman whose research focuses on gender inequality and inclusion in the workplace, especially around reproductive processes. The third author of this paper is a cisgender British man who, amongst other topics, explores gender as a key organizing principle in military organizations. We all employ poststructuralist theorizing in our work. As such, as an authorial team we share key scholarly interests and approaches but we also differ in gender and nationality. Our thematic analysis was undertaken collaboratively, which meant we were able to revisit emerging codes, themes and theoretical directions repeatedly as we proceeded. In keeping with [Clarke and Braun's \(2013\)](#) view that thematic analysis is not a straightforward linear procedure, the analysis therefore remained iterative throughout. The range of subject positions within the team in relation to gender and familiarity with the Brazilian national context, and CBMES specifically, created space for critical reflection and challenge. As such, we continually questioned one another's interpretations as the analysis progressed. This aligns with [Braun and Clarke's \(2022\)](#) emphasis on reflexivity as central to rigorous thematic analysis.

We present our data analysis next. As mentioned earlier, the heteronormative structures of these organizations nonetheless contain within them the seeds of forms of resistance ([Spedale, 2019](#)), most notably micropractices of resistance in everyday encounters. Moreover, the possibilities of resistance to the powerful gender binary are limited and contingent on the specific characteristics of each individual organization ([Bardon](#)

et al., 2012; Essers & Benschop, 2007). We therefore analyse how these female officers seem to subvert the binary gender logic in CBMES by continually resignifying their bodies and the meanings of leadership in this context. First, the resignification of corporeality is analysed by reference to processes of embodying masculinity. Then, we discuss how conventional authoritarian military leadership is disrupted and reframed by these women.

BECOMING-WOMAN, RESISTANCE AND THE RESIGNIFICATION OF MILITARY BODIES

In CBMES, as in similar hypergendered organizations, physical resilience is highly valued and this characteristic is considered natural in AMAB bodies and absent or limited in AFAB bodies. As we interpret it, our respondents' resistance establishes affective connections with the CBMES masculine majority that enable the quiet subversion of well-defined borders between male and female bodies and behaviours – or molar assemblages – which rank the latter as inferior, inappropriate and fragile.

The main way these women resignify their bodies is to 'show physical strength' (Lúcia). This demonstration of physical capacity, often different to or in excess of that expected from their male colleagues, as we read it, is much more than an acceptance and reproduction of the hegemonic androcentric and masculine model in CBMES. It also represents a micropolitics that disrupts the hard lines of molarity, those which solidify the status quo that 'men' are innately always stronger than 'women' and therefore mark 'women' as automatically inferior, as the minority in this context. It is a deterritorializing line of flight that produces the unpredictable and the heterogeneous through difference (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

For example, there is a particular CBMES training regime that involves cutting through tree trunks and metal sheets and bars that might be encountered when officers are called out to incidents. As reported by Rosa, demonstrating more than the strength necessary to accomplish these tasks is a way of resisting the gender binary:

[The officer responsible for training] always left the worst part for me to do. It was the thickest part of the log to cut, it was the thickest [piece of] iron to cut Everyone noticed that. On the day that we went for a walk with the equipment, I felt the weight of the equipment. For you to have an idea, there was a stretcher that was made of iron to carry a person, ... since we already had light stretchers. There we

went, we had to carry the same weight as the men; great. On the way back, do you know what [the trainer] did on the way back? He sent the heaviest woman in the group ... to lie down on the stretcher and sent the shorter ones, me and another woman, to take the stretcher and bring it [back ...]. On the way back, they changed [the stretcher carriers]. In the middle of [the return journey...]. The men offered 'Let me get it, let me get it'. I said: 'No, he ordered me. I'll take it to the barracks, even if I'm crawling'.

Rosa describes how the training officer tests her physical, and indeed mental, resilience and that of her female colleague. She implies that, as one of the shortest women present, he considers her fragile. As she sees it, he purposely assigns her activities that require more physical strength than was expected of the male firefighters, believing she would fail and knowing that failure would have problematic consequences for her CBMES career. This triggers a negative affect in Rosa, in that she feels a strong sense of being treated unfairly: this "small detail ... starts to swell and carries [her] off" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291). She resists by accomplishing the order given and, as if to leave no doubt about her physical and mental capacity, later refuses to transfer the stretcher to a man, even though she was authorized to do so by the training officer. Thus, Rosa performs valued masculine physical characteristics as a form of resistance to the binary that disqualifies her, resignifying her body. In doing so, she demonstrates that the molar boundaries between 'female' and 'male' bodies are permeable and constructs a new territory of what the former can achieve vis-à-vis the latter. Via this intercorporeal interaction, Rosa also affects her male colleagues who are, it seems, equally anxious that she does not succeed given their offers to step in.

This is also why Maria declares that to be a woman in CBMES requires continual effort to prove yourself:

So, I always try to escape a lot from this duality because ... we find that there are things that we practise that are masculine and others that are feminine. So we experience that, but to be a woman I think it's always having to overcome yourself, and having to prove it. It gets to be at the same time both exhausting and valuable to that point.

As Maria's comments suggest, in this military organization, career trajectories are associated with the successful performance of hegemonic masculinity. Physical toughness, as we have seen, is a key indicator of this performance. Indeed, career progression through access to and completion of specialist train-

ing courses is often predicated on passing demanding tests. These Physical Aptitude Tests (PATs) are used to identify firefighters who will take specialist courses that have the greatest impact on their military careers. The tests overwhelmingly focus on activities that are particularly well-suited to (a particular form of) the AMAB physique – such as press ups – and exclude those areas where women frequently perform better, such as flexibility. In this way, embodied masculinity is both elevated and rewarded.

Equally, in CBMES, diving and rescue at height are considered the most difficult and prestigious courses and firefighters who complete these are highly valued by the organization, giving them significant status and prestige. However, spaces on these courses are limited and because of this a PAT is used to allocate them. The recent approval of women in this branch of the Corps to take these courses at all is described by Marta as “a breaking of barriers ... it was always only men who dived, it was always only men who did work at height. Women have no arms”. Her expression ‘have no arms’ means that women were considered to lack the physical strength necessary to accomplish the courses. Now, however, they are proving themselves more than capable of succeeding in such training, as Eloisa explains:

We now pass the most difficult courses, which [are] diving and height. Here in the battalion ... there were several candidates, among these candidates there were women. The battalion commander, he [ran] a pre-PAT, because for you to take part, take the course, you have to take a PAT. These two courses had a lot of candidates and the commander did a pre-PAT to try to eliminate women. But he did badly One girl was [approved]. Because there were only two vacancies and there were a lot of people and [the commander] wanted to take the course, so he at least wanted to guarantee his place. Only one woman went to both courses, diving and height, the person who had the best grade was a woman. [The commander] thought that a woman] has no physical strength, no ability because it is a nationally recognized course. [For t]he government of the state of Espírito Santo, the height rescue course, the diving course, a woman could not do [them]. ... And look ... see how interesting it was: ... no male officer passed the test.

Eloisa remarks on how physical strength, considered a natural attribute in cis men, is again used as a strategy to exclude women from diving and height courses, and by, extension, the career progression they offer. We detect becoming-women in her account in her evo-

cation of a sense of injustice around the commander’s attempts to continue to exclude women from these courses by instating a PAT as the only entry route. By passing the PAT and then achieving the highest grade in both, presumably fuelled by resentment, one female firefighter subverted the gendered norms and expectations in CBMES. This was more remarkable because no male officer even passed the PAT. As Pullen et al. (2017) suggest, the affective trigger here was therefore “not simply negative” because it led to “radical (but not predetermined) action” (p. 117). There is a clear tension here between the masculinization of the female officer, who completed the PAT and shone in the courses themselves, and a feminization of the male officers, who failed. In other words, her minoritarian body affects their majoritarian bodies. This deconstructs the binary gender order, once more diminishing cis men’s bodies as the ideal. The successful woman did not become a man (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238); instead she outdid her male colleagues by becoming-woman. Her physical experimentation demonstrated the fallibility of the molar assemblages of ‘a man’ and ‘a woman’ alike, pointing directly to the porosity of molar boundaries because these gendered assemblages only exist in relation to each other. Thus, as the latter is subverted and destabilized via lines of flight, so is the former.

However, resistance to the gender binary by female officers occurs not only through the resignification of their bodies, but also through a resignification of their leadership via the feminine. We turn to this next.

BECOMING-WOMAN, RESISTANCE AND THE RESIGNIFICATION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership across military organizations is fundamental in reproducing the gender binary logic by which leaders must be authoritarian, rigid and extremely rational. It requires subordinates to obey at all times and enshrines cis men as natural leaders, simultaneously entrapping women as their inferiors. However, and despite this, our CBMES female officers index how they break with this tightly bounded meaning of leadership. We have already argued that they resignify their bodies using masculine characteristics to deconstruct the hard molar line or boundary that they are too physically weak for service in this branch of the Corps. But masculinizing their bodies as a form of resistance does not mean the abandonment of the feminine. Instead these women report mobilizing the feminine to resignify leadership, transgressing the epistemological cartography which corrals such behaviours in this male-dominated context. Maria, for example, suggests that female officers at CBMES practise a less authoritarian form of command:

militarism arose from war and [those] who went to the war were ... men. So, being a military person came into being through the masculine world. So, everything that has to do with behaviour, decision[s], [the] definition is masculine, the very characteristic of our [military] culture. But this has been changing a little, I think, with the inclusion of women ...

Josefa agrees:

as a woman leader I ask in one way, as a man he asks in another way. ... The woman puts the feminine side ... even in her command. And I see it like this: the female officers here are softer, they are lighter, you know? So, I think it affects [others] a lot more because of that. Because the female personality is softer, more peaceful. So, she manages to issue this command in a more relaxed way, even when it is necessary to impose herself.

Of course one way of interpreting what is happening here is that these women are perpetuating the molar gender binary by claiming that they are 'softer', 'more peaceful' and 'less authoritarian' than men: thus they are complicit, knowingly or not, in their own subjection. But, as we read such performances, the negative affects triggered by working in this hypergendered organization seem to underlie their resistance to its leadership norm. Elisa spells these affects out: "that rigidity of militarism, that rigidity that makes many people hate it, a dread of militarism because of all this toughness". The more feminine leadership style the female officers describe is in our interpretation an affective response to the hyper-masculine institutional environment. It represents a line of flight because it breaks with the molar assemblage of leadership as always and necessarily masculine, being distinct from the authoritarianism that persists within CBMES. How these officers mobilize the feminine subverts the dominance of the masculine symbolic order and the masculine meaning of leadership alike, reaffirming the potential of minorities to subvert and disrupt the majority via becoming-woman. Their political agency confronts the frontiers of military leadership, and also those of 'man' and 'woman' in this context, by pointing to the foreclosure around these static assemblages, to the arbitrarily gendered segmentation of the social world in this branch of the Corps. Maria adds that

I think we can show that leadership goes beyond being the boss. I think that the woman, she fights against this established culture, among these paradigms, perhaps, she can resignify in that sense. To bring the awareness that I do not need to im-

pose [on] you, that I am better than you or that I'm above you. ... I think the woman, she brings this ... this discourse a lot. ... I believe that this generates, it is not even affectivity, but a closer link [with the subordinates]."

Here Maria also points to a beneficial effect on/(affect for) the lower ranks in CBMES, in that for her minoritarian forms of leadership create stronger connections between the leader and the led. In this branch, the leader's authority is to be unquestionably obeyed by subordinates. Non-compliance is seen as an extremely serious fault, subjecting subordinates to severe punishments in accordance with military law. But these female officers describe performing leadership in a way that destabilizes this majoritarian construction. In this sense, their leadership is not entirely based on authoritarianism and rigidity, but encompasses building mutually trusting relationships with their subordinates. Put another way, this specific social relation or territory of authoritarian leader and always-obedient and subordinate led is subverted, or deterritorialized. The new social relation which results represents a form of reterritorialization. As Marta says,

I think that the woman being a leader brings some things that men miss. Perhaps we end up having a more peaceful look towards the other, [more] welcoming. [But] it is not so straightforward. In the middle of that we see the human being there, executing something that we demanded. We need to have a certain authority, but at the same time we can, I at least, I try to look at the person who is accomplishing the command with his/her particularities, try to accept all these particularities. ... I don't let him/her loose: he/she knows that he/she can ask me about his/her doubts about the task that we will try to solve together.

Marta says she seeks to look at all the differences in her team, trying to take a broader view in the task assignment process rather than just issuing orders indiscriminately – although she acknowledges that command and control is still a part of this process. Amanda agrees: "I think that women can have a broader view of everything. And she gets to treat subordinates differently too, without losing respect". So does Antônia, who declares "I think it breaks this masculinity a little in the militaristic world, in the world of militarism, I think it does". These comments also remind us that becoming-woman will not transform gender binaries in any all-encompassing way: its effects are quieter, less discernible, but they still matter (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 117).

Our female officers therefore describe not entirely abjuring the use of hierarchical authority with their subordinates; rather, they recount performing a more encompassing form of leadership which employs both the feminine and the masculine discursive resources - or molecules - available to them. This also seems to affect the leadership practised by men in CBMES, as "the widespread female presence also contributes to the personal growth of men, improving their command characteristics" (Marília). Here again it is suggested that male leaders in this military firefighting branch are affected by the women they work alongside, showing the creative potential of minorities when establishing connections that circulate in a double direction between the male majority and the female minority. In this way, the rigidity of colonialist hierarchical command so present in and characteristic of the masculine conception of leadership is subtly weakened.

What is also significant is that many CBMES firefighters, including men, apparently prefer to be under the command of women. Amanda suggests that "[e]ven the officers say that they prefer to work with women". Female officers are reported to perform an enriched form of leadership in this otherwise profoundly hierarchized military context, as Elisa suggests:

So, at this point I think that some firefighters would even prefer to be led by women. We listen more, pay more attention. ... You do not see the subordinated as only a number. That in militarism has always irritated me deeply. To this day, I feel extremely uncomfortable with this, to look [at] a person and say ... 'it doesn't matter who does it, it matters that the activity is being done'. I think this is horrible. So, I think that we care, sometimes we even suffer more than we should for that.

Elisa and Amanda suggest therefore that the resignification of leadership through the destabilizing feminine is something positive for the organization. This further challenges the gender binary in CBMES. It also re-emphasizes the negative effects that trigger becoming-woman in Elisa's comments about feeling deeply irritated by and finding traditional military leadership 'horrible', indeed dehumanizing.

Finally, we turn to our discussion and conclusion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hypermasculine organizations such as the military are built on strict gender hierarchies in which a particular form of the cis male body and the hegemonic masculinity of the ideal warrior assume symbolic and material dominance over other bodies and forms of military

performance. This dominance is exemplified in the culture, structure and everyday activities of this type of organization, creating the conditions in which the Other must either conform to the hegemonic ideal through replicating the symbolic order or accept their position of subordination, even exclusion (Williams et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, structures that seek and indeed perpetuate such conformity also bring with them the conditions of possibility for resistance, because as subjects we simultaneously occupy different and antagonistic positions in any given discourse at the same time (Spedale, 2019). Although breaking completely with the gender order in hypermasculine organizations is an impossible task, strategies are available in these contexts to alter and challenge power relations, even if in small ways and/or temporarily (Karazi-Presler, 2020). The possible forms of resistance to the gender binary must, equally, be understood in the context in which they materialize. Therefore, there are no universal solutions to break with this binary and the possibilities for its deconstruction must be considered in the places and spaces where molar subjectivities are built (Knights, 2015; Pullen et al., 2017).

As such, we collected data from female officers of one branch of the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar*, the Brazilian Military Firefighting Corps, an extremely gendered, hypermasculine organization, and insodoing were able to understand how these women resist the gender binary that seeks to exclude them from - or at least significantly devalue them within - this space. Underpinned by a poststructuralist lens, drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Pullen et al. (2017), we posed the question: what are the (micro) practices of resistance employed by cis women leaders in a hypermasculine organization? Our aim was to contribute to the debate around the intensity of binary gender norms in hypermasculine organizations and the practices of resistance which challenge such binaries.

Within the specificities of CBMES, the masculine is deployed to normalize particular kinds of bodies and to derogate others, hence reproducing the norms of the symbolic order. However, as our data shows, female officers deploy masculinity in resistant physical displays of strength, a strategy which effectively turns on cis men at their own game as they either exceed these men's performances or do things which they are not required to. Also noticeable are the effects that trigger these mobilizations of masculinity, in particular a sense of injustice or provocation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Pullen et al., 2017). Such affects allow the development of becoming-minoritarian, specifically becoming-woman, which constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as 'an active micropolitics'. Through such re-

sistance, our women officers establish a molecular assemblage which destabilizes – or deterritorializes – the stable molar assemblage of or relation between naturalized subject positions/modalities of being and constructs new territories/relations around the capabilities of non-cis male bodies in the Corps. Importantly as well, this deterritorialization affects those who inhabit cis male bodies, creating what seems to be profound anxiety at the threat it poses to the CBME'S symbolic order. This resistance to the gender binary in CBMES thus takes place within the contingencies imposed by the context. In an organization where the norm is the overvaluation of masculinity, our women officers use the same norm that marks them as inferior and undermine it. As Pullen et al. (2017) suggest, they “re-embodiment ... masculinities” to write the boundaries between men and women, male and female, differently, “scrambling transactions between predefined selves” (p. 116, p. 117).

But becoming-woman in CBMES is not a matter of abandoning the feminine nor of women officers somehow transforming into men. Scrambling is a powerful metaphor here because it signals an ongoing process through which our female officers draw on the masculine and feminine discursive resources at their disposal in their resistance to the symbolic order of this hyper-gendered organization. Our data point to a resignification of leadership by these women which is rooted in a strong antipathy – an affective response – to traditional forms of military command where subordinates are dehumanized, treated as a homogeneous bloc and expected to comply with any and all orders given by a superior. Instead the female officers report practising a form of leadership which they describe as softer, less authoritarian, more attentive to their subordinates as individuals and focused on creating mutual respect. Once again, this undermines what Sasson-Levy (2011) describes as “a narrow repertoire of gendered identities for both men and women” (p. 405). Moreover, what we detect here is effects on/(affects for) those subordinates, who are reported to be appreciative of this more personalized, less abrasive leadership performance to the extent that they prefer to be under the command of female officers, but also on cis male leaders in the Corps. As Pullen et al. (2017) put it, this approach to leadership therefore appears to “[release] affective flows and possibilities that contest and transgress” what might otherwise appear as “the overwhelming power of oppressive gender structures” (p. 105, p. 117).

Whilst our research only focuses on a small number of participants in one branch of the CBM, we believe that “these mundane everyday responses” (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 117) are important examples of wider micropractices of resistance that can and do have ma-

terial effects on organizational practice. In this regard, we contribute to ongoing debates within organization studies over the past 25 years that have centred on the impact that resistance can really make in these contexts (Baikovich et al., 2022). For some, it has a transformative dimension that can challenge and disrupt power relations (e.g. Hoy, 2005) whereas for others it serves more as a ‘safety valve’ (e.g. Fleming, 2013) through which isolated and largely inconsequential practices of resistance fail to disrupt the current order of things. We align ourselves most closely with the former position, as our data shows that the presence of women in a Brazilian military firefighting organization poses a continual threat to the symbolic order of this organization. Through becoming-woman and the associated micropractices of resistance this entails, their presence in this hypermasculinized space is a paradigm break that has the potential to subtly undermine the essentialist gender binary within the organization.

In summary, we argue that they constitute more than Fleming's (2013) ‘safety valve’: instead these practices have the capacity to effect real, if quiet and delicate, organizational change. As evidence of this, an important recent study by Coimbra et al. (2024) on the *Corpo de Bombeiros Militar* branch in Minas Gerais (CBMMG) found resistance to the dominant masculine discourse, but this time amongst cis men within the service. Drawing on data from 32 predominantly cis men, none of whom held an officer rank, they describe, amongst other things, “the enforcement of excessive rules and protocols”; “infantilization and the restriction of autonomy”; “absence of recognition or appreciation”; “exaggerated, severe, and often unjustifiable” punishment; unequal allocation of tasks and overload; as well as “sexual harassment, bullying, embarrassment, and sexism” (p. 9). The CBMMG interviewees also point to rigid hierarchies which preclude any form of opposition, a culture of mistrust and very little consultation or dialogue between superiors and subordinates. Importantly, to begin to break down this “very old ... very archaic, very masculine” (p. 10) system, they identify the need for “improvements in professional training, the attitudes of certain leaders, and opportunities for greater flexibility and dialogue” in this Corps (p. 9). Whilst we would not claim a causal effect, we do suggest that resistance of the type we discuss here seems to constitute some movement, however slight, towards exactly the kind of changes these personnel see as so urgent.

However, whilst, as we interpret them, our data are encouraging, there is still much work to be done. Gender equality initiatives are becoming more common in military organizations, but strong opposition

persists to the full integration of cis women, transgender and non-binary people into many such workplaces (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2024; van Douwen et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2024). Often these constitute forms of microresistance in their own right. For example, as Burkinshaw and White (2020) have observed, male leaders often employ language that seeks to subordinate women who resist the hypermasculine norm, referring to them as 'troublemakers' or 'the problem'. We can see this in the aforementioned incident at the CBMES command meeting that initiated this research, where the use of the term 'bombeiras' met with fierce resistance by the men present. Even more ironically, in this instance the woman using the term was simply quoting the name of the conference she had recently attended, which used this feminized Portuguese noun.

Such opposition has also taken much darker and worrisome forms. For example, the newspaper *Gazeta de Alagoas* (2020) reported the doxing and online abuse of a female lieutenant colonel in the Alagoas branch of the CBM. This senior officer was prominent in campaigning against the harassment of her female colleagues in CBMAL barracks. The backlash was orchestrated on the deep web; and her home address, telephone number, personal and family data, amongst other things, were made public with the intention of inciting both cyber- and physical attacks against her. In addition, the officer received hateful messages on her social media accounts. This exemplifies the extremes to which hypermasculinity may go in its efforts to remind cis women of their 'inferiority' against the masculine norm, especially in hypermasculine organizations like the CBM.

As such, whilst micropractices of resistance are an important element of organizational change processes, much more could be done at an institutional and policy level to address some of the forms of inequality and exclusion that have been identified in this paper. It has been well established, as we outline throughout the paper, that hypermasculine organisations such as CBM are structured around gendered hierarchies that privilege hegemonic masculinity and marginalize other bodies, identities and leadership styles. As such, any widespread and lasting change will also require formal policy reform combined with organisational transformation. Rather than relying solely on isolated acts of resistance of the kind we have explored above, institutions must systematically embed inclusive practices, protect those challenging inequality, and redefine leadership beyond masculine norms. This is especially urgent in hypergendered contexts.

There is also scope for more scholarly work in this area. The analysis and findings we have presented here

are of course partial and incomplete. For example, none of the 125 male officers in CBMES took part in the data generation, and neither did any of the rank-and-file military firefighters. On this last point, officers in the CBM obviously enjoy more social status and better pay than their subordinates, and they are also more likely to have higher levels of education. As such, we have not been able to analyse how identity markers beyond gender, like class – or indeed race, sexuality and so on – might intersect to produce more complex experiences for different groups of women (or indeed men) at other levels in this organization. Moreover, this was a cross-sectional piece of research, and longitudinal investigations over time would be very helpful in tracking whether the quiet forms of resistance we detect in our respondents' accounts can be found amongst other military firefighting groups, in other contexts, with what consequences. All of these limitations represent avenues for future research into leadership and leader-led relationships in the CBM, and institutions like it, which we hope other scholars will see fit to take up.

ENDNOTE

1. Cis refers to people whose gender identity correlates with the sex they were assigned at birth.

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