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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Female soldiers maneuvering visibility in the Turkish Armed Forces

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ABSTRACT

How do Turkish female soldiers' (TFS) relate to and manage their (in)visibility within the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF)? Guided by a social-constructionist approach and driven by a gendered perspective, we display the embeddedness of gender role expectations and TFS struggle for visibility within TAF and the wider social context. We explore TFS accounts displaying cultural and organizational practices inhibiting their visibility along with how they manage it. Our findings provide insight into the dynamics of social and organizational practices that impact women's visibility and advance the understanding of how marginalized members in similar settings may relate, manage and navigate their careers in their daily organizational life elsewhere.

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Introduction

From the days when I was a captain until now, I see that women in uniform are marginalized, stuck at clerical positions. Society is pushing women back to their homes, and the armed forces reflect this change. Women in uniform do not receive the respect they deserve anymore. In the navy and air force, we had more women engaged in combat planning roles and international missions. I would suspect in the coming years the situation will only worsen for women. Two decades ago, I would have encouraged my daughter to join the Turkish Armed Forces. Today, I am not so confident it is a wise decision for a woman. (A retired admiral, see Tremblay 2017)

The words of the retired admiral reveal how women in the military have become invisible by denying them recognition, legitimacy, authority and voice (Lewis and Simpson 2010; Simpson and Lewis 2005) due to the instrumentalization of women's rights and the transformation of the gender rights regime in the context of democratic backsliding in Turkiye (Arat 2022). This situation is representative of dominant groups rendering marginalized groups invisible through a process of delegitimizing them, often times occurring as marginalized groups seek to increase their visibility and recognition (Lewis and Simpson 2010). Today, as Western armies include women for combat missions, female Turkish students yearning to be military officers struggle to regain the right to apply to military academies (Tremblay 2017). Gender-based inequality in different parts of social life, discrimination toward woman in formal institutions of the society, and the invisibility of woman in political and social contexts continues to be a problem for Turkish society (Müftüler-Baç 2012).

Women's rights have lessened through democratic backsliding regimes (see Diamond 1996, 2015) since around 2010, moving Turkiye steadily in an authoritarian and conservative direction (Arat 2022). This situation has been causing unequal and unfair circumstances creating greater

difficulties and complications for women. For instance, the reconstruction of the category of 'proper woman' – a submissive and modest mother who fulfills her 'God-given purpose', and serves her reproductive function constrains women's rights in public space and defines her role in the private sphere (Atuk 2020). Hence, the need to identify Turkiye's regime type and analyze its discourses and policies in domains of sexuality, reproduction, marriage and family is heightened (Kandiyoti 2016). Moreover, understanding the masculine standards and specific power structures (i.e. patriarchal) that are visible within and outside an organization allows identifying mechanisms that regulate conformity and compliance (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020). In this regard, attention is given to the notion of gender typing of work, presuming work to be best performed by a person of a particular gender – the 'ideal worker' (see Acker 1990; Dumas and Sanchez-Burks 2015; Kelly et al. 2010) Hence, within male dominant organizational space, this norm is more than gender performativity (Butler 1990), as it interprets women's position in organizations solely in terms of exclusion connected to a dominant masculine norm (Lewis 2014).

The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) alike others is a highly male-dominated work-setting (Toktas 2004), where women's visibility (Lewis and Simpson 2010) is up against a number of control mechanisms (Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012). These mechanisms achieve compliance through organizational controls (Acker 2006). A theoretical analyses of visibility requires both an understanding of the mechanisms that control and marginalize group members (see Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012; Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), as well as deepening the scope of identifying the ways marginalized members struggle for their visibility. In support, Ozturk and Rumens (2015) point out that stigma and prejudice do not exist in a vacuum, but rather take particular forms and expressions depending on a range of social, legal, political and organizational contextual factors. We point out that when marginalized group members manage their visibility by keeping some aspects of themselves hidden, it is often with tradeoffs to their sense of authenticity and belongingness within the organization or social group (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Therefore, we acknowledge the importance of context (Ball 2010; Sewell and Barker 2006) and the gendered layer (Fotaki and Harding 2018) of controls within organizational settings (Acker 2006). We also recognize the significance of controls rooted within society (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), deepening the understanding of how women struggle to gain visibility (Acker 2006; Alvinus, Krekula, and Larsson 2018; Buchanan and Settles 2019; Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019; Lewis 2006, 2010, 2012; Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), as marginalized members (Buchanan and Settles 2019). Consequently, we acknowledge that Turkish women are faced with the intricacies of maneuvering gender-normative pressures and their visibility and invisibility are tightly linked to the notion of 'proper woman' (Atuk 2020) and 'ideal worker norm' (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks 2015; Kelly et al. 2010) illustrating a juxtapose of how women are subjected to gender norms (Hearn 2004), where deviation from the norm renders women as less capable and competent, justifying lower expectations by limiting their roles (Trobaugh 2018), and requiring their surveillance. Confronted with this and for the purpose of this study, visibility struggle displays how women strategically resist and comply to maneuver through organizational controls and societal expectations in relation to gender roles and ideal worker norms to gain visibility (Acker 2006; Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012; Wasserman and Frenkel 2020).

Our contributions are three-fold. Firstly, we extend understanding on how women struggle for visibility in a highly masculinized organization and a patriarchal/semi-traditional society. We identify the ways they resist organizational control and societal mechanisms of control. We show the ways they struggle for visibility in connection to managers and peers in the organizational life of the Turkish military, as well as in their daily life within the community with family, friends and neighbors. Here, we confirm that societal expectations on gender roles and the ideal worker norms comply to gender-normative visibility controls TFS experience. We show how TFS struggle for legitimacy by maneuvering invisibility to visibility in three ways. One, they manage their visibility by complying with certain mechanisms of control. Two, they gain visibility by resisting and complying simultaneously with control. Three, they gain visibility by maneuvering the surveillance of multiple

controllers who appear in compliance with one another in regard to certain controls. Previous studies demonstrated managing resistance to controls on gender roles and the ideal worker norm expectations necessitated consent (Ashcraft 2005), and compliance with multiple, contradictory surveillance mechanisms (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), we expand these findings by showing that strategically resisting consent and compliance in settings of multiple, compliant surveillance mechanisms is also possible. Secondly, we add to the literature exploring cultural embeddedness of visibility by displaying the biological, ideological and cultural inflections of the ideal worker norm and the gendered practices that have been reinforcing women's invisibility particularly in hyper-masculine environments like the Turkish military. We display the embeddedness of control and examine practices TFS are confronted with in their relationships with managers, peers, family, friends and neighbors. Thirdly, we present top-down recommendations to support women's activity and help them increase visibility within TAF. Here, we recommend relooking at the Turkish Military Service Law (2016) on compulsory service, which excludes women. Changing legislative policies do set the tone for desired outcomes, along with the agency in facilitating change at the individual level (Erogul, Michel, and Barragan 2019).

The following sections proceed with a review of women's struggles and resistance, the theoretical framework, context of the study, methodology, analysis, discussion and contributions, and the conclusion.

Struggle for visibility by managing (in)visibility

Visibility and invisibility inherently connect with power (Lewis and Simpson 2012). That is, the nature and function of (in)visibility depends on whether one is in a powerful dominant group or a marginalized one (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Visibility can be advantageous and empowering when it facilitates having voice, or the ability to speak and be heard, and when one can control how they are perceived and represented (Lollar 2015). However, for the marginalized visibility can be constraining and disempowering as a result of being recognized for 'otherness' or deviance from the norm (Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019).

Most organizational theories present the 'ideal worker' as gender neutral, but the standards of 'normality' against which individuals in organizations are compared and judged are often masculine (Acker 1990) and unencumbered by domestic responsibilities (Acker 2006). For these reasons, the ideal type often discriminates and disadvantages women based on their gender identity. The outcome of these inequalities is entrenched and sustained through references to biology, culture and tradition (Tatli, Ozturk, and Woo 2017). This brings in a gendered layer (Kelly et al. 2010) to organizational and societal control and discursive practices of 'normalization', revealing that mechanisms of control and surveillance are not only highly gendered (Lewis and Simpson 2010), but that inequalities may become invisible even to those who are disadvantaged by gender hierarchies (Tatli, Ozturk, and Woo 2017). This absence not only obscures work capabilities with gender stereotypes, making it difficult for women to build their careers and feel valued as organizational members (Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019; Bennett et al. 2019), it pressures them into a constant struggle of managing (in)visibility (Kelly et al. 2010; Lewis and Simpson 2012).

The literature on visibility practices explores how women manage their identities and visibility while navigating their careers (Bennett et al. 2019; Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019; Rabelo and Mahalingam 2018; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019; Doan and Portillo 2016). For instance, in one study, female composers employed the passing tactics of concealment and fabrication to lessen the impact of their gender due to the persistent marginalization of female composers, and overcome the career disadvantage it created (Bennett et al. 2019). Similarly, a UK-based study found that women engineer's sexual attributes overshadowed and obscured their other attributes and values. As a result, their engineer identities became overshadowed by their 'sexual visibility', in which they were not being noticed for their professional skills and abilities, resulting in them being perceived as undesirable as engineers (Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019). These

women struggled towards navigating sexualized visibility in their work settings in various ways, yet their collective efforts to ensure a favorable representation of their group led to the reproduction of an implicit but powerful prescriptive gender stereotyping, which constrained their career progression (Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019).

Under these various management techniques, there are also conditions under which invisibility was preferred to visibility by individuals in marginalized groups (Rabelo and Mahalingam 2018; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019) to strategically avoid identity-based mistreatment (Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). For instance, in a recent study, custodial workers reported that invisibility provided welcomed benefits, such as independence from intrusive oversight and the power to choose 'whether or not to engage with others' (Rabelo and Mahalingam 2018). In another study with American female soldiers, researchers identified that the invisibility of a fluid ascribed female gender identity, based on location and positioning with local populations while deployed, allowed female soldiers to operate effectively with men in those societies (Doan and Portillo 2016).

In a study conducted by Pailot, Poroli, and Chasserio (2017), they analyzed French women entrepreneurs and found how social interactions strongly imbue categorical gender judgement, and in order to acquire legitimacy, they found that women encounter their judgements through the development and implementation of interesting strategies. For instance, in a masculine environment, some women performed becoming a 'male' by masking their female sex identity (adopting masculine clothes and discourses) to employing male supervisors or learning to become more directive with employees in order to better deal with daily challenges. These women state that these strategies were in an effort of being visible (Pailot, Poroli, and Chasserio 2017). Women's use of visibility practices aligns with contextual expectations. In patriarchal societies, the local traditions, norms, expectations and the power of religion, along with social segregation, are all examples of how context can influence women's visibility (Roomi 2009). For instance, in one study Pakistani women exercised their agency as a means of negotiating gender roles within both household and society, using religious descriptions as a means to justify their decisions (Roomi, Rehman, and Henry 2018).

Within the literature of organizational visibility, some have explored more specific control mechanisms and their surveillance. In a more recent study, Wasserman and Frenkel (2020) found that adhering to the masculine standard to 'match' the masculine norms of the organization – perpetuate those norms' legitimacy or they can compromise their professional goals and stay in the organization's 'feminine spheres', where femininity is unobtrusive. Wasserman and Frenkel (2020) and others have also identified how compliance and resistance are entangled, while displaying the current state of societal control mechanisms within these particular settings (Acker 2006; Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012; Wasserman and Frenkel 2020).

In the context of TAF, it is still unknown how TFS relate and manage their careers in relation to organizational control mechanisms. In response, we explore TFS experiences with superiors and peers within the organizational framework of the Turkish military. In addition, we study TFS experiences with family, friends and neighbors to understand how they are perceived; moreover, in relation to gender-normative pressures of being a woman in connection to the expectations of the ideal worker norm. We seek to understand TFS struggle within the masculine structure of the military, and the organizational practices enforced on women to present an opportunity to create social, political and attitudinal changes to decrease unfairness against women in the military. To do so, we draw upon Ozturk and Rumens (2015) consideration to understand the underlying relations of sexual and gendered power within the workplace, which may constrain or encourage the development, shape and purpose of organizational practices designed to give marginalized employees a voice in the workplace. In return, this may allow them to participate openly in organizational life. Therefore, the context of the study examines the surrounding society, its politics, history and culture. This not only expands the current literature on how women are controlled by others while struggling for visibility (Wingfield and Wingfield 2014) and the embeddedness of ideal-type discursive practices and institutional structures (Acker 1990), it helps in recognizing the

impact of power relations and differentials (Nentwich 2006) within a setting where women are largely absent and stereotyped.

Resistance against mechanisms of control

Organizational mechanisms of control help maintain power of managers, ensuring that employees act to further the organization's goals, while getting workers to accept the system of inequality (Acker 2006). Observations, examinations and normalizations (Humphreys and Brown 2002) within organizations are meant to control and shape employees' desires, relationships and identities (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Thornborrow and Brown 2009), particularly with power derived from hierarchical gender relations (Acker 2006).

Although organization theorists identify many types of control, we focus on Acker's (2006) categorization of organizational control for the purpose of this study as including rules, monitoring and internalizing the male-worker image through legitimizing it. Acker (2006) explains that selective recruitment along with bureaucratic rules and various punishments for breaking the rules as well as rewards for following them are a means of control. These are also aligned to wages, coercion and physical and verbal violence are all means of directly controlling members. In addition, surveying through technologies, such as the monitoring of telephone calls to time spent online are means of controlling unproductive flow of work. Lastly, internalizing belief in the legitimacy of bureaucratic structures and rules as well as the belief in the legitimacy of male privilege are often invisible controls. Women operating in highly gendered organizational spaces come to internalize the logic and dictates of gender hierarchy within the work organization (Tatli, Ozturk, and Woo 2017).

These mechanisms of control and their surveillance have been coined as a matrix of visibility regimes (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), exerted by superiors and more so by peers (Sewell 1998) upon employees who tend to internalize mechanisms of control and comply with its expectations through active consent and self-discipline (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020). Thus, claiming that employees may even interpret controlling as ethical and desirable rather than oppressive and dominating (Sewell and Barker 2006). For instance, Tatli, Ozturk, and Woo (2017) found that female managers in China consent to the logic of control mechanisms and comply with the male-centered management and vision of management, demonstrating that such compliance and consent is due to external and internal control processes. In support, the effort behind contemporary organizational control mechanisms is to facilitate and sustain employees' commitment, involvement and loyalty to organizational goals as viewed by management (Scott 2001). However, control mechanisms prevent resistance against inequalities and the pressures of compliance form a key component of organizational inequality regimes (Acker 2006).

Still, understanding how women in hyper-masculine environments resist and manage inequality to gain visibility is lacking. Hence, the aspect of employee agency and capacity to manage control requires more attention (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Wasserman and Frenkel 2011/2020). Despite the large number of controlling mechanisms in organizations, the dynamics of multiple and contradictory mechanisms of control and surveillance is under-studied as well (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020).

Context and gender perspectives in TAF

After the decline of the Ottoman Empire much work has been put to bring about change in religious and patriarchal values (Aycan 2004; Toktas 2004) that carry both Eastern and Western cultural normative ideals. Certain cultural beliefs at that time have held women back, but with the modernization movement started with the republican regime after 1923, led by Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, women began regaining their social status (Aycan 2004). The modernization process was a movement to become more western, with a need to adapt to western thought in terms of culture, science, education and law (Toktas 2004). To a large extent, it was a

state-driven process coming from the elites on the top, in which the job of owning the movement of modernization passed over to women (Göle 1998). In this role, women represented the devoted, modest and serious embodiment of the Turkish national modernization project (Toktas 2004). These structural and social changes have helped women at work and at home (Dildar 2015), yet the challenges of traditional socio-cultural templates remain.

In addition to societal norms, Türkiye has been in a process of democratic backsliding from 2010 onwards, in which there has been an increase in the instrumental use of women's rights that has helped the government change the norms and practices of gender rights to promote illiberal conservative gender ideology while increasing authoritarian rule (Arat 2022). To illustrate a case in point in relation to women and the military, in 1955, Turkish women were allowed membership into the Service Academies (the Air Force Academy, the Navy Academy and the Army Academy) and after two years of education, they were assigned officer ranks in the headquarters staff, technical fields and educational services (NATO 2000, 53). This important decision was brought forward to increase female military participation. However, 60 years later in 2017, the decree was lifted which created an outrage among potential applicants, their families and women's organizations (Tremblay 2017). This led many female applicants to organize on social media, and through social media plead their cases with the Ministry of Defense. These pleads were eventually carried to the Turkish parliament. On 16 January 2017 the Turkish Defense Minister addressed the issue:

'Public opinion has become sensitive to this issue. If there are applicants, females will be accepted to these schools,' he went on to elaborate in rather vague terms that the decision to exclude women was based on the idea that there was no need for female officers by stating 'so I told my colleagues, "If there is supply and demand, we should accept them." Since there is supply, they should be allowed'. (see Tremblay 2017)

Consequently, the Ministry of Defense reversed the decision, yet several senior members of the current parliament have repeatedly communicated that they differ from previous administrations regarding ideas of 'appropriate behavior' for women (Tremblay 2017). The lawyer who oversaw the pleads to parliament, succinctly summed up the situation: 'During this era, we have stopped trying to make progress with regard to women's rights and liberties. Rather, we view it as success if we can preserve what we have now' (see Tremblay 2017).

The decline of gender inequality, especially through democratic backsliding is well documented with the abolishment of the Ministry of State for Women and Family in 2011 has further increased barriers in almost all areas of work (see Kanci and Altınay 2007) and equal opportunity (Cosar and Özkan-Kerestecioglu 2017). The ministry was replaced by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and later restructured as the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services in 2018. Not only was this a breach of international treaties that Türkiye had previously signed (Arat 2022), but the government's stance on recognizing women merely as extensions of their families rather than independent individuals with equal rights to men (Cosar and Özkan-Kerestecioglu 2017).

Kandiyoti (2016) claims that various twists of changing policy and discourse in the realms of gender, sexuality and the family have showcased the politics of gender as intrinsic rather than incidental in relation to the characterization of the ruling ideology. The single most important social institution in Türkiye is family, which is said to occupy an oft-perplexing ideational fault-line of uncertainty, change and inertia (Ozbilgin 2012). Patriarchy in its most violent as well as mundane effects still persists in Türkiye (Baba 2011; Cosar and Yegenoglu 2011). In connection, the impact of organizational structures reveals the embedded patriarchal and masculine rationality within them (Arat 2010), negatively disadvantaging countless women (Maden 2015). Therefore, the low proportion of women in the Turkish military may not only be explained by the notion of patriarchy but also by sexism and Turkish identification (Uğurlu and Özdemir 2017) along with the politics of gender in Türkiye (e.g. policing gender norms and enforcing conservative family values) (Kandiyoti 2016). According to the Military Service Law (2016), military service is compulsory for all Turkish men between 20 and 41 years-old. A healthy male Turkish citizen is required to complete a compulsory period of a 6-month (for university graduates) or 12-month military training depending on their

education level. Women cannot serve the compulsory military service, and may only serve as employed officers in TAF (Uğurlu and Özdemir 2017). Unhealthy men and gay men are unable to serve at any capacity. This appears to disadvantage these groups as the Turkish military as an institution acts as a symbolic manufacturing site of an idealized Turkish male identity shaped by a particular construction of hegemonic masculinity (Ertan 2008), providing a number of network benefits in finding jobs and promotion prospects for men, who mobilize these as well as educational and familial ties for crafting and navigating their careers (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015). The absence of an equality body and protective legislation in Türkiye (Ozturk 2011) has significance across all intersecting institutions such as the family, education, military and employment systems (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015). We have provided a list of policies and legislation related to the implementation of gender perspectives in TAF (see Table 1), extracted from the 2017 Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations (see NATO 2017).

The last three decades have witnessed important work analyzing the complex connections among the military, gender and sexuality in various contexts and locations (see, Enloe 2000; Mosse 1996). However, with the exception of a few notable projects (Aciksoz 2012; Altinay 2004; Biricik 2008; Sen 2005, Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015; Uğurlu and Özdemir 2017), the lack of academic studies examining these issues in Türkiye comes as a surprise given the substantial role that the military has played in the construction and regulation of (gender) identities in Türkiye (Basaran 2014).

Methodology

Organizational and societal organizing systems supply identity-shaping interpretations of experience and shape the construction of preferred conceptions (Kuhn et al. 2006); and in doing so, are used to regulate identity and manage visibility (Acker 2006; Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Thus, we adopt a narrative perspective that positions an individual in relation to how they experience work and gender from a wide array of discourses and positions. We explore TFS narratives as current situated experiences (Maclean, Harvey, and Chia 2012) to understand how the ideal worker (i.e. soldier) norm intersects with gender, control and societal expectations, and how it is TFS navigate their careers and gain visibility in TAF.

Data collection

The paper utilized interview data derived from in-depth interviews. The third and fourth authors conducted 75–90 min in-depth interviews in Istanbul and Izmir between April 2016 and March 2017 with nine women participants from the TAF to investigate issues of visibility, the challenges they come across and the coping strategies they engage in to overcome them. The semi-structured interview guide included topical areas of conversation and questions about members' backgrounds, work routines,

Table 1. TAF 2017 gender perspectives.

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- The percentage of TFS from all active duty military personnel in 2017 was 0.8%, with 21% serving in the air force, 24% in the navy and 55% in TAF.
 - Recruited women officer numbers cannot exceed 4% of the total officers to be recruited in a specific planning year.
 - Female personnel cannot serve in Special Forces, submarines, infantry, armor and enlisted.
 - TFS are not allowed in combat positions, in mine clearance and submarines.
 - TAF does not have gender-related training programs nor is it a topic in operational planning.
 - There are no policies that promote the recruitment of women in the military nor network to support women in the military.
 - Maternity leave is a total of 16 weeks. Paternity leave is one week.
 - Flexible hours are not allowed, but part-time employment is during parental leave and studies.
 - There is a child-care policy, but no support for service duties for single or divorced parents nor widows/ widowers looking after their children.
 - There are formal procedures in place for male or female victims to report harassment, but no strategies or programs to prevent sexual harassment and sexual abuse.
 - In 2017, no cases of sexual harassment were reported in TAF.
-

schedules, particular challenges or advantages in relation to their occupation, socialization with colleagues, organizational experiences, work-family-community relations and coping strategies. The data from interviews served to understand the connections between the notion of gender roles, ideal worker norms and mechanisms of organizational control (Acker 2006; Lewis and Simpson 2010, 2012; Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), to how women manage their visibility while navigating their careers.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then translated into English. Transcriptions were double-checked, and reviewed by the second author. Afterwards, the first and second author read the transcripts to begin interpreting the experiences of women in relation to visibility in the work place. TFS provided vivid experiences of control, invisibility and managing processes to understand their everyday work/societal experiences in relation to discursive practices they faced.

We take methodological reflexivity into account, where our own identity standpoint may have influenced the co-creation of the interview narratives (Czarniawska 2004). In this regard, the first author is a Canadian-Turkish male researcher. The second author, who translated the interviews, is a Turkish female scholar, with extensive expertise of the Turkish context and Turkish female professionals. The third and fourth authors who conducted the interviews are Turkish male researchers with extensive experience in various Turkish organizational settings. While the third and fourth author may have appeared as a figure of authority, the women in this study were vocal and eager in sharing their experiences. Familiarity with the study's organizational setting allowed the interviewees to build rapport, facilitating participants to describe their experiences willingly. In addition, the author's affiliations with prevalent institutes, establishments and organizations added psychological safety and trust. As authors, we have discussed our own anxieties among ourselves in relation to investigating women's position within TAF in an environment where the degree of politics of gender and the ruling ideology is so prevalent. One way of overcoming this anxiety has been through familiarizing ourselves with literature related to politics of gender in Turkiye, which has never been free from deep and intractable contradictions (see Kandiyoti 2007, 2016), and merely continues to be compounded with new layers of paradox (Kandiyoti 2016).

Data analysis

The analysis of TFS narratives attended to 'the entire story' and 'its content' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998, 15). We searched for themes through the narratives that described TFS' responses to controls and tensions in regards to being controlled. To identify these controls and tensions we focused on gendered organizational and societal norms, roles and expectations. Moreover, we kept track of the various controls and negotiations within the TFS narratives. Within TFS narratives, we also revealed what appeared as 'quoting talk' of others in their passages, taking into consideration 'discursive practices in context' (Taylor and Littleton 2006).

We then began categorizing narratives around patterns of control aligned within the organizational setting and/or observed within the wider social context. We drew out how these women managed through these experiences and navigated their visibility and careers in response to the controls and the tensions placed upon them (Phillips and Hardy 2002). While moving back and forth between the participant's narratives we refined our analysis to identify experiences connected with interpreting and negotiating mechanisms of control and managing visibility.

Lastly, we selected interview narratives displaying how TFS interpret these roles and norms as well as the controls they experience, while demonstrating how they struggle for visibility. Here we display TFS ways of managing and maneuvering their visibility in order to navigate their careers. We used pseudonyms to protect participant's identity.

Analysis of Turkish female soldier's struggle with visibility and legitimacy

Below we analyze the experiences TFS experience in relation to organizational mechanisms of control by supervisors and peers. We also look at experiences with family, friends and neighbors

in relation to their gender and military identities. In both cases, we discover how TFS maneuver through various mechanisms of control in order to gain visibility within TAF and the wider social context.

Struggling against organizational controls through maneuvering strategies

Struggling masculine norms through complying and de-gendering

Femininity as appearance, by way of practice, is visible as stated by Schneider (1997). Therefore, distancing the feminine-way within male-dominated work settings is highly regulated to make femininity less visible and avoid identity-based mistreatment (see Rabelo and Mahalingam 2018; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Lale remarks on tensions related to women's femininity, discussing the experience of being 'perceived weak and not in-line with the organizing structure of TAF'.

Women need to not worry so much about speaking softly and being gentle, it is perceived as being weak (Lale, Captain, Army)

She advises women of avoiding appearing 'gentle' due to enforced ideal worker norm expectations. She suggests regulating 'femininity' and associating it with weakness. To maneuver this tension, she voices assertiveness as a means to manage it.

Women should express themselves more assertively, show strength but not like men. You can be assertive as a woman. At work, we communicate through commands, especially with ranks below us. Signs of weakness have no place here. I remind women of the dangers of weakness and reprimand ones who are. I feel it is my duty (Lale, Captain, Army)

Lale encourages the delicate maneuvering between strategically coordinating the performance of the expectations of a 'proper woman' and the production of masculine norms while still emphasizing the importance of not appearing like a man. By controlling femininity and the enactment of assertiveness, she is able to achieve organizational duties and expectations of her at work. We conjecture this to facilitate consent and neutralize tensions in on both sides – women's perceptions of being 'too assertive like a man' and – others perceptions of women 'trying to act like men'. These templates of behaving in a particularly masculine way (Powell, Bagilhole, and Dainty 2009), but not too overtly, as a means of displaying visibility (Powell, Bagilhole, and Dainty 2009) is said to influence the control of masculine hegemony within organizational structures (Olofsdotter and Randevåg 2016).

Ipek (1st Lieutenant, Air Force) reveals her feelings of invisibility – she questions 'not being seen fit' and 'prevented from doing certain work', while being told that 'under the uniform everyone is equal' and states 'it is not easy to accept or understand'. Although the military uniform which symbolizes sameness, Ipek is frustrated that the uniform does not ensure visibility as an equal and worthy member. The military uniform does change women's appearance and help in attaining an asexual appearance, or even a masculine appearance that associates with institutional visibility (Schneider 1997), yet the hostility and devaluation experienced by women from the ones who have power and influence renders them invisible (Toktas 2004).

Ipek reflects on this saying 'you just have to deal with it', indicating conformity, yet she goes on further:

I take on whatever is given to me, I ask questions, I ask for advice, I show my abilities and make sure I perform better than anyone else, especially my male officers. I try to show that I am worthy of the uniform not just in my appearance but by my hard work and dedication. This might not change everyone's mind of course, but the more you show yourself the more they notice, it is not easy, I ask myself every day 'do we really belong here' (Ipek, 1st Lieutenant, Air Force)

Ipek shows by exceeding and engaging with peers and achieving beyond expectations she is able to manage 'gender norms'. Becoming visible to her peers for her hard work and dedication, she is able to maneuver consent against perceptions placed on women in relation to not fitting-in and lacking the primacy of work. Yet, she finds that the amount of change may not be enough. By asking herself

everyday 'do we really belong here' she voices her frustration and doubt, but regardless she is able to make some 'visibility gain' through consent and displaying hard work, which helps towards breaking down her peer's perceptions on ideal worker norms.

Struggling selective recruitment through resisting bias while complying sexual visibility through

We find that TFS move between their identities as a soldier, wife, mother, family member and citizen, to fulfill and balance their multiple responsibilities they hold at work and outside of work. This brings with it not only a multiplicity of expectations but culturally embedded values and judgements along with it. Nisa is an experienced high-ranking officer regularly confronted by her male peers with the idea that 'women do not work properly'.

You hear very often that 'women work with a tweezer and a mirror in their hands and that they are occupied with themselves rather than work'. To deal with this stigma, I work much more than my male colleagues, I find myself involved in all sorts of things that are much below my grade level ... its hard ... I do this to break away these thoughts (Nisa, Lieutenant Commander, Navy)

This reminds us of the rhyme of little Ayse singing a lullaby with a baby in her hand, replaced by a tweezer and mirror. Nisa feels subjugated to working 'much more' than others around her in order to resist against the bias placed on women. She maneuvers controls on primacy of work by taking part in activities below or not relevant to her rank and position to demonstrate strong work ethics. Her actions demonstrate fragmenting the gendered ideal-type employee norm (Brown and Starkey 2000). However, knowing her boundaries she complies to masculine norms at the same time, distancing (making less visible) femininity to coordinate the perceptions she is against.

If you want respect and be taken seriously ... I advise younger women who join ... we wear skirts, I tell them to not cross their legs, not put on too much makeup, keep their hair in a tight bun ... just don't distract away (Nisa, Lieutenant Commander, Navy)

Nisa cognizes women's sexual attributes overshadow and distract away from their other attributes and values. These commonly shared gendered expectations transform the concept of 'proper woman' into a 'real' category (Atuk 2020), where the 'proper woman' is designated as one who deserves to be respected by the society, loved by her husband, and protected by the state. '[T]hose with the audacity to break the norms [...] put themselves in jeopardy' (Kandiyoti 2016, 106). Knowingly, she gives emphasis to reducing 'sexual visibility' (see Fernando, Cohenb, and Duberley 2019), to not overshadow hard work, loyalty and 'officer' identity. Nisa maneuvers 'visibility gain' by exceeding beyond expectations on the primacy given to work (e.g. taking on more work, attending events, volunteering) while being less visible in terms of sexual visibility, to not distract away from the ideal-type employee norm. The relationship to Nisa's agency in managing her visibility demonstrates her account of 'distancing femininity' in coordination with the normative image of the military/soldier image (Toktas 2004).

Struggling bureaucracy through complying to the status quo

Banu describes her experience related to two miscarriages, she describes the contradiction claimed by TAF as an official declaration compared to what happens in practice embedded within the controls and tensions taking place.

The TAF message is clear 'under the uniform everyone is equally a soldier'. After my miscarriage and maternity leave ended my ranking officer made sure I am clear on this message by saying something in the lines of 'work continues and nothing has changed' rather than showing any sign of empathy. There was nothing I could do but accept whatever came my way, as I was told (Banu, 1st Lieutenant, Army)

Banu at the time felt her situation required understanding and she needed to be given time to heal, as a mother who just lost her child, she felt hostility in being told that 'work continues and nothing has changed', meaning that there will be no special or different treatment for you. She

describes this experience as feeling trapped. Since this incident, Banu explains that she was 'deeply affected and hurt, but understood that the only way to survive as a woman was by being tough'. She mentions that she too condemns women who are in search of special or differential treatment – 'I have no room for it'.

Struggling legitimacy and sexism through undoing bias and displaying capability

Discourses of sexuality and gender reproduce 'legally and culturally acceptable discrimination[s]' by setting up behavioral norms against which individual performances are judged (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003, 579). In connection to this, Banu states that the contradictions that women experience in search of special treatment effects women's opportunities in relation to credibility and legitimacy and prevent them in developing successful careers in the military.

Male officers always pick men for assignments. They don't even think of women due to their fragile nature. We have some women who think acting delicate is going to help them ... they may manipulate some. I tell male officers to not be fooled and treat them no differently. Being told this helps, it changes their thinking as the advice is coming from me, another woman. If you want to be treated like a soldier you need to act like one and if not, you have no place here. I tell women to toughen up and most do ... here and at home (Banu, 1st Lieutenant, Army)

Banu's observation that men favor men aligns with previous findings (see Erlandsson 2019). Banu indicates that acts of fragility may appear to work for some women, but collectively it fosters benevolent sexism disguised as positive, in the sense that it depicts women as needing care and protection for their own sake (Glick and Fiske 1996). Consequently, with time this discredits them and opens up perceptions of women being inferior and less desired as a colleague. Enloe points out that 'fragility is gendered – to be fragile is imagined by anyone of a patriarchal inclination to be essentially feminized' (2015, 9). Banu maneuvers this inclination that women are 'too soft and too weak' to women are 'capable and strong' members of TAF by having her female colleagues regulate how they are perceived by distancing femininity on one side, and by directly telling men 'not to be fooled' and 'to treat them the same' on the other side. She maneuvers the surveillance on her visibility in regards to 'recruiting and participating' by means of neutralizing gender and rationalizing with men. Banu mentions that she tells men that 'women are fooling you, do not be fooled and recruit them, as they are capable of being treated the same'. Banu's rationalization to her fellow male colleagues and the words of advice she gives to women to toughen up and display capability and strength is a means of resisting against the bias of women officers as incapable and weak members to women who are capable of the roles they take on within TAF.

The organizing principles of institutions along with the taken-for-granted rules guiding work behavior, embedded in belief systems and related practices (Scott 2001), prompt how organizations think and act at work. The hidden discrimination behind these practices forms the core of gendering practices taking place at work and in society (Czarniawska 2006). With this in mind, Seda refers to acts of difference, in which her feminineness is devalued by her fellow male officers, she states they 'forget her existence' and communicate this through insinuating she needs to be protected or that she is incompetent and needs help.

The formal TAF message is 'we are all the same and equal', in reality it is a different story – either you need protection: 'sister let's make sure nothing happens to you' or they insinuate that you are not capable: 'sister let me handle it or better if I do it'. Later, sisters tuned into how beautiful I was after finding out I was divorced (Seda, Ensign, Navy)

Seda's experience as a low-ranking officer displays that sexism can take place not only through benevolence, but also appear in hostile form (Glick and Fiske 1996). This compels her to feel invisible and powerless, she says:

You feel bad, like a sexual object, but you cannot talk back, you have to stomach it. These actions show you your value, you feel alienated. Lately, I help out in ceremonial duties where I meet high ranking officers, VIPs ... I

report back to my base and receive praise as I am somewhat volunteering my time – this has helped because I get less hassle ... who knows maybe they are scared (Seda, Ensign, Navy)

Seda concludes by stating ‘in their minds, women really have no place in their world’ and says regardless what you do ‘you feel it’. Seda has been able to maneuver the hostility she is experiencing by coordinating activities, which help her increase her visibility. This resistance helps her in maneuvering her peers who were mistreating her, from seeing her as weak, inferior, a prey to someone who is capable and supported by others, facilitating a ‘visibility gain’ among her peers.

Struggling gender roles and organizing relations through displaying multiplicity, capability and assertiveness

Preconceived notions of gender identity heavily exist in settings and professions dominated by men (Kelly et al. 2010), viewing women as less capable and competent, and thereby justifying lower expectations and limiting their roles (Trobaugh 2018). Didem’s experience reflects this.

I feel some male colleagues have an expectation of me making coffee, organizing and tidying around ... they say stuff like ‘Didem come make us a nice cake tonight and we can have it with our coffees tomorrow’ generally I accept, I don’t object ... they are just not used to doing these things. Similarly, this is what awaits most women at home too – cook, clean, be a good wife, mom ... we are expected to make it all happen ... this is just the way it is (Didem, 2nd Lieutenant, Army)

Didem conveys accepting these gender roles and justifies it to men who are not accustomed to doing these tasks. In Türkiye, the home is designated as the proper place for a ‘proper woman’, where she is considered a de facto housewife and strictly defined by her membership in a hierarchical social unit headed by men (Atuk 2020). We interpret Didem’s tolerance to safeguarding ‘desired’ harmony at work and at home, by complying with expected gender role stereotypes. Didem continues,

... however, I also show them that I am very capable of the work I have sitting on my desk. I never say ‘I cannot do this or that’ – assignments need to be completed. It is necessary to get all arms working in harmony like an octopus, when you don’t, you are somehow made to feel that possibly it was because of being a woman. I use that same logic and when colleagues don’t deliver, doesn’t matter male or female, I am not afraid to discipline ... if needed I make them feel like their failure is because of them not being able to balance themselves and take things seriously because everything was given to them (men) on a golden platter. I know it is not nice sometimes, but they need to feel what we feel. (Didem, 2nd Lieutenant, Army)

Didem describes her balancing to an octopus’ balancing act – balancing societal expectations driven by gendered assumptions along with organizational procedures, structures, tasks, deadlines and the day-to-day work of TAF. Attitudes and practices related to gender-based-hierarchy and the traditional division of labor appear to be the most resistant to change (Steil 2000; Thebaud 2010; Wyrod 2008). Didem solidifies her exemplary skill in balancing work (gendered view of women as balancers) on one side and then being able to display coercive action (perceived as a masculine activity) against others who are unable to balance and deliver on the other side. Didem maneuvers tensions related to balancing as women’s responsibility and being ‘domestic’ by complying to ‘bake a cake’ and bring to work as maintaining harmony and demonstrates that while she may be displaying certain gendered behavior she is very capable as an officer and in maintaining order and discipline when needed. Being able to maneuver from a ‘domestic’ identity to an ‘assertive’ identity demonstrates her ability to balance a multiplicity of roles and identities as a fluid continuum facilitates ‘visibility gain’.

Struggling against community expectations through maneuvering strategies

Struggling gender role expectations through multiplicity and undoing bias

Family continues to be the construct through which women are defined, while men can claim more space in asserting their entitlements as individuals (Kogacioglu 2004). The gendered expectation of

balancing between work and home persists largely with the responsibility of women. Hence, societal controls by the community (i.e. family, friends and neighbors) have a strong impact on the boundaries of compliance and resistance within public spheres and at the workplace (Lewis and Simpson 2010). We find TFS burdened with the expectation that their success as 'women' is dependent on their ability to balance the existence of all things. Regardless of the various pressures they are confronted with TFS in this study demonstrate agency in constructing positive representation of themselves as capable of work and worthy of being a participating member of TAF.

Ceyda describes the act of balancing as an exhausting endeavor, while pointing out that the expectation of being able to do so for men is not required.

The nature of my work requires excellence and compliancy. I am reminded of this constantly through emails, memos and verbal reminders on a daily basis. As a woman, I feel I have no room to fail. Men don't have this burden, but they should ... why shouldn't they! Then at home you have a family that needs your attention – a good mom, wife, soldier – it becomes exhausting! (Ceyda, Lieutenant Junior Grade, Navy)

For Ceyda failure to balance at work and at home is not something she can afford, not being able to do so is a perceived failure. She is frustrated that men are not measured based on their ability to balance multiple roles between work and home, in which gender stereotypes and bias present a uniform value system, devaluing women with essentialist views of gender and identity. For most men, marital equality may mean a loss of certain privileges (Steil 2000); compared to women, endorsing traditional gender roles is less likely to influence men's relationship satisfaction (Burn and Ward 2005), and life transitions such as getting married or having a child do not necessarily affect men's participation in household responsibilities (Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes 2008; Dribe and Stanfors 2009). Pinar continues by saying,

It is important for me to be able to balance my job, my duties ... and all my other responsibilities as a wife, mother, daughter and soldier ... it is never enough, it is expected. As a woman we are left to balance or else give up and unfortunately some of my colleagues have – they are now full-time homemakers or divorced. My husband is also the same, he expects everything from me, but I talk to him, I explain ... I try to get his support, usually I do. This gives me the confidence (Pinar, Captain, Navy)

Pinar like many other women balance multiple roles continuously, not being able to do so could result in having to quit work or possibly result in the collapse of her marriage. She describes balancing as a capability, a demonstration of managing work and life as well as relationships. Pinar's husband is compliant with traditional gender roles; however, Pinar displays that she is able to create cooperation with her husband by talking to him. Pinar continues about the notion of balancing and its relationship to her work and peers.

The military is a different story, nothing can be out of balance, no excuses ... my male colleagues make remarks like 'so what did you cook for dinner tonight ... they expect me to say I cooked this or that or to blush and be embarrassed that I have nothing prepared. I respond by saying stuff like, 'my husband is cooking tonight', 'we are cooking together', 'this is why we have a happy marriage for so long', 'he understands that we share life and we both need to pitch in'. Sometimes I hear back 'oh you're lucky you can never catch me in the kitchen' or just 'wow I think I need to be in the kitchen more often' and sometimes just 'silence'. Who knows what is going through their head. I want them to understand that we women are just like them, cooking or whatever else, I work so obviously there has to be equal responsibility. Over the years, I sometimes jokingly ask (men) 'so what are you cooking tonight?' I have seen some of my male colleagues changing and actually talking about going home and preparing dinner or helping out ... makes me smile (Pinar, Captain, Navy)

Pinar shows that she and her family/husband have equal responsibilities and creates doubt by contradicting that everyone lives by traditional gendered roles. Pinar maneuvers the cooperation she created at home with her husband as a way of gaining value and sharing that attained value to confront her male colleagues, and in doing so to change the conversation and their minds. Compliance and resistance by undoing bias are tightly entangled providing contradicting evidence against societal expectations in the form of cooperation, she is able to shift the negotiation of societal

gender role norms among her peers at work and ask them the same question they had once asked her.

Struggling against multiple compliant controls on military suitability through resisting and undoing bias

The observation of gender-work suitability among the wider social context reinforces the organizational inequalities TFS experience within TAF, due to gender role and ideal worker norm expectations. Ferda points out that Turkish people in general are against the idea of women in combat. She points out that people around her (e.g. neighbors, friends, relatives) express these opinions and mention war as not being suitable for women.

Female soldiers cannot fight in war actively. My friends, relatives and neighbors remind me of this as it comes up in our conversations. They say, 'women's physical conditions are not suitable and that they are very emotional'. Men usually say 'believe me, you do not want to be there, it is not a place for women' and most of them themselves have never been in combat other than serving in basic military service (Ferda, Captain, Air Force)

Ferda adheres to challenging and undoing the societal view that women should not take part in combat. With her circle of neighbors, friends and relatives, she challenges their views by giving examples of women who are already in combat roles, demonstrating that this practice exists.

Ferda continues by stating,

I challenge them to change their minds. I give examples of women who do participate in military combat, I talk about the US model, Israeli model ... I give examples of women participating in sports – combat sports, etc. I try to explain how women can and do take part especially with all the new technology. They say stuff like well we don't need women to fight in war we have enough soldiers (men) (Ferda, Captain, Air Force)

By giving examples of women who participate in combat sports and sports in general, Ferda is reinforcing the image that women are physically capable of combat conditions. This controversial topic on women taking part in combat missions continues at work.

Some of my male colleagues say stuff like 'I wouldn't want my wife or daughter on the battle field even though I know the model of combat and roles have changed.' ... this really happened, I responded by saying 'you are talking like people on the street who have no idea about the military and combat ... you should be ashamed of yourself ... you know the history of women in war in the past and what we see around us in other countries today.' ... Would you like it if I said 'I couldn't trust your daughter capabilities as a doctor just because she is a woman.' These conversations are useful ... change does not happen right away but it allows women to gain more space (Ferda, Captain, Air Force)

When discussing these issues with her peers who also are generally against this idea Ferda uses the gender norms put forward by society (the people around her) as a way to manage the preconceptions existing outside the military in order to maneuver her colleague's thoughts on women's position in combat and the military as informed subjects. She explains that people in the community outside of the military have preconceived perceptions and do not know what combat entails or looks like today (the advanced technological side of war through technology rather than boots on the ground); however, you do as military officers serving in TAF. Ferda mentions that some of her colleagues do eventually agree with her on many of the points, as they discuss these issues further. Consequently, institutional changes could increase understanding and reduce the effects of these practices; however, what happens on the ground is often quite the opposite: rather than working to diminish the force of 'tradition', institutions more often than not invoke it (Kogacioglu 2004). The narratives have identified TFS experiences with organizational controls as a means of constraining their visibility through mechanisms within TAF along with the societal expectations confronted with as women soldiers. TFS experiences showcase the subtlety of women's rights backsliding and transforming gender equality both in the public and private sphere. Yet, through narrative analysis, we examined how TFS interpreted these controls, expectations and observations in order to maneuver through them to gain visibility.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we explored the connections between gender roles and ideal worker norm expectations along with mechanisms of organizational control and the impact they have on women's visibility. Although patriarchal/conservative and modernist/liberalist discourses coexist in Türkiye, the kinds of contextual and legal pressures as the ones described previously do not at the same extent (Bolak, Fisek, and Eslen-Ziya 2014). In fact, gender hierarchy, while stretching some, remains a norm in Türkiye (Ataca and Sunar 1999; Sunar and Fisek 2005). With that said, we examined TFS experiences in interpreting and maneuvering managerial and peer observation of control along with the pressures of society in relation to gender role and ideal worker norm expectations.

Our findings fill in a gap demonstrating that control mechanisms within TAF and TFS' experiences in relation to their superiors and peers complemented by the pressures of gender role and ideal worker norm expectations, reinforced by the community (i.e. family, friends and neighbors) function as a conforming whole creating a hyper-masculine context. Masculinities in Türkiye are constructed via certain judgments about what it means to be a man, customs, religious norms, as well as certain behaviors and courses of life events (like being an adult, completing the military service, having an occupation, etc.) (Eslen-Ziya, Fisek, and Bolak 2021). Hence, compliance to traditional gender roles and the ideal worker image is deeply rooted within the discourse of Turkish society and the military. Subsequently, for over a century displays of bureaucratic controls, selection based on the female body and the role of motherhood, along with ideological policies and legal arrangements that have taken place over the last decade in combination with socio-cultural expectations have limited women's membership and constrained their sense of belonging within TAF. It is through these practices of control observed by managers and peers along with the pressures of gender role and the ideal worker norm expectations regulated by family, friends and neighbors, women's visibility is inhibited. Yet, within this hyper-masculine setting, TFS are able to maneuver the boundaries of control and the tensions of observation through consent, compliance and resistance. More so, by strategically managing the boundaries of complying and resisting together as a means of maneuvering the controls and their controllers in order to gain visibility.

Our contributions are threefold. Firstly, we contribute to understanding how women's agency in strategically conforming and resisting in hyper-masculine contexts such as the military facilitate their empowerment and visibility. We found that TFS were able to maneuver through, mechanisms of control inhibiting their visibility to enabling it (Buchanan and Settles 2019; Simpson and Lewis 2005) in three ways. In the first way, TFS managed their visibility by complying with gender role and ideal worker norm expectations and certain mechanisms of control. Here, TFS cooperated with the observation of expectations and controls as a means to create neutrality and decrease tension with supervisors, peers, alongside family and friends in order to retain harmony regardless of contradictory expectations. For instance, they complied with the concept of proper woman and the burden of being solely responsible for balancing work and home life while also complying with the expectations of the ideal-type worker norm. In doing so, they constrained femininity to neutralize their gender in the ideal worker image expectations, while at the same time they complied to initiate feminine gender role expectations of proper woman to maintain work and home life harmony. In the second way, to gain visibility TFS strategically resisted and complied together when confronted with control. They resisted internalized beliefs by engaging in 'undoing gender bias' in which they were confronted with in order to enhance their productivity (a form of resisting gender stereotyping). At the same time, they complied with 'sexual visibility' expectations of others by conforming to the ideal-type worker image (e.g. distancing femininity) in order to be favored as a productive member while neutralizing female visibility to do so. This aligns with the understanding that compliance and resistance simultaneously involve visibility and invisibility, since women are required to clearly display their compliance, but in return conceal invisible actions that challenge traditional power relations (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020). In a third way, to gain visibility TFS strategically maneuvered the surveillance of multiple controls from within the organization (e.g. peers)

and from the community (e.g. neighbors) in compliance to a particular control reinforced by position to gender roles and the ideal worker norm. Here, TFS identified the contradiction(s) within the control(s) and observations to undo the bias taking place within these interactions. This allowed TFS to facilitate dialogue pointing to contradictions and the opportunity to negotiate and maneuver into overcoming these challenges.

Overall, our findings in relation to the above revealed that TFS manage the impact of organizational control in relation to bureaucracy, selective recruitment, masculine norms, gender roles, issues of legitimacy, indirect sexism and organizing relations by not only complying to the status quo or to the pressures of sexual visibility, but sometimes by de-gendering. As often, TFS maneuvered these controls by resisting and undoing bias while also displaying capability and assertiveness and more strategically they used both compliancy and resistance strategies together in order to overcome multiple compliant controls on military suitability. More specifically, on one hand, TFS aligned their compliance by de-gendering their femininity and sexual visibility while consenting to the status quo, while on the other hand, they actualized their resistance by undoing the biased opinions and thoughts of their supervisors, peers and the community through displaying contradictory information, challenging controls while displaying their capabilities and strong work ethics. Our findings broaden our understanding of agency within hyper-masculine environments, Wasserman and Frenkel (2020) found that – managerial, peer, community – control is ‘contradictory and competing’ with one another in order to ‘enhance productivity and compliance with an ideal-type employee’. We add on that also in instances of – managerial, peer and community – control being ‘coherent and compliant’ with one-another ‘women’s agency to gain visibility enhances productivity while strategically complying and resisting to an ideal-type employee’. Although the hyper-masculine context continues to remain with controls on gender roles and the ideal worker norm compliance, we extend that resistance may be enabled by consent (Ashcraft 2005), and compliance with multiple, contradictory surveillance mechanisms (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020), as well as through strategically resisting consent and compliance in settings of multiple, compliant surveillance mechanisms.

Secondly, we contribute a framework that has responded to the call that there is a need to expose the cultural embeddedness of control (Ball 2010; Sewell and Barker 2006), and the multiplicity of perceptions, aspirations, and experiences of women from different cultures, and give voice to them (Fotaki and Harding 2018). In doing so, we displayed organizational mechanisms of control imposed by superiors and peers as the biological, ideological and cultural inflictions of the ideal worker norm. Moreover, how heavily embedded they are within societal and gendered practices, continuously reinforcing women’s invisibility. To strengthen our claim, we have analyzed practices of control within narratives highlighting inequalities based on biological, cultural and ideological practices within TAF and the wider social context. Here, we provided a contextualized framework of control and displayed the contemporary and gendered aspects of visibility practices taking place. Thus, in attempting to theorize these findings and construct generalizations in other cultural contexts, as Wasserman and Frenkel (2020) state specific meanings assigned to surveillance, visibility and control need to be investigated to understand the normative values placed on these notions within specific cultural context. They rightfully point out the need to define ‘what is being controlled’ and ‘what is acceptable’ within these settings (Wasserman and Frenkel 2020). Along these lines, in our study, we identified how biological, cultural and ideological practices reinforced one another along with the embeddedness of controls in organizations and their communities. In addition, we explored how it influenced women’s agency in how they could manage and maneuver the boundaries of control. Thus, how far they could resist and push the boundaries through cooperation and confrontation.

Thirdly, we presented top-down policy implications to decision-makers to support women’s agency for visibility and fairness. Towards this effort we claim that women’s agency and the bottom-up struggle to gain visibility needs to be equally supported by top-down changes to ensure gender-based barriers hindering women’s career within patriarchal organizations are addressed and removed. Currently, lacking the financial resources to sustain fully professionalized

armed forces, Türkiye has a vigorously enforced compulsory military service requirement for all male citizens, and a large portion of the Turkish military personnel is maintained by an influx of annually drafted enlistees (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015). Hence, we recommend relooking at the Turkish Military Service Law (2016) on compulsory service, in order to include women rather than prohibit them from such service. In this system, educational attainment shortens men's conscription period, the usual time-range from eight months to sixteen months. There are also exceptional circumstances such as permanent residency abroad, which can reduce the service to the bare minimum of twenty-one days of basic training (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015). Accommodations of this sort may be modified to incorporate a wider spectrum of opportunities for all citizens. Certain policies and legislation related to gender practices outlined within the National Report of NATO Member and Partner Nations (see NATO 2017) requires changing the hardened, conformist and order-preserving (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015) subjectivity that is prevalent.

The current situation does not reflect practices taking place in most other NATO member's armed forces. There is a need to develop policies that promote women's recruitment, allowing positions in the Special Forces, reconsidering combat positions, creating gender-related training programs, developing family-friendly maternity and paternity leave structures along with flexible hours and improved child-care policies. Besides making changes in the aforementioned policies, Czarniawska (2006) mentions to stop workplace discrimination and negative practices, habits of conduct must change as well. She states that in order to facilitate such a change, researchers need to demonstrate how this discrimination occurs and examine the dynamics of the social practices that constitute such practices to show how gender discrimination is a part of modern organizations and is reproduced in daily organizational life (Czarniawska 2006). Our findings respond to Czarniawska's call, in the context of Türkiye, especially from 2010 onwards with democratic backsliding (Arat 2022) and the 2011 general elections (Cindoglu and Ünal 2017) a number of severe attacks were brought towards gender policies, asserting conservative gender norms by restricting women's choices (Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu 2020). We find, gender-segregated discourses developed at this time defined women as mothers and sisters, assigning them reproductive, homemaking, and nurturing duties. Furthermore, moral and religious duties of citizens became the discursive tools used by the government to micro-manage society and push it to conform to conservative gender norms (Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu 2020). In this study, we have revealed these as mechanism of control and the surveillance of women's visibility demonstrating the cultural embeddedness of control and surveillance, and unveiled women's agency in maneuvering these inhibitors through compliance and resistance in order to enable visibility gains as a part of their daily life and career development. These findings may guide and demonstrate to women elsewhere that they too can control their environment by strategically managing their visibility within their own environment as well as help decision-makers in TAF and legislation in removing certain controls.

Findings from our Middle Eastern, highly conservative and hyper-masculine setting may provide insight and change into the dynamics of organizational and social practices that constitute invisibility, and further advance the understanding of how marginalized members in similar settings relate, manage and navigate their careers in both daily and organizational life elsewhere.

We have displayed the experiences of TFS within TAF, unveiling how they interpreted and managed embedded and contextualized controls and expectations within the margins of gender performativity. Overall, we provided a glimpse into TFS agency in not only interpreting controls and the expectations that exist within their context, but how they maneuver through these struggles against the visibility. In conclusion, the article extends understanding of women's position in TAF and displays TFS agency in managing their daily lives and careers against their visibility in relation to gender roles, ideal worker norms and organizational mechanisms of control.

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