“My Body, My Decision!”

Abortion, Bodily Autonomy, and Reproductive Rights Activism in Turkey

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ABSTRACT This article examines the discourses and strategies used by reproductive rights activists in Turkey to counter the state’s antiabortion policies. Drawing on a critical genealogical analysis, the article first traces the concept of “bodily autonomy” in feminist mobilizations against sexual and ethnoracial violence from the 1980s to the first decade of the 2000s. It then focuses on the slogan of the 2012 abortion rights mobilizations, “My body, my decision!,” which relies on bodily autonomy as the central trope of claim making. The article argues that the slogan is limited, not because it draws on a liberal, individualistic framework but because it represents the bodily autonomy of the white reproductive subject, assuming that it is an ethnoracially unmarked, universal subject. In doing so, the article demonstrates how feminist strategies that build on bodily autonomy obscure the state’s stratified reproductive policies, which have historically promoted a Turkish majority at the expense of non-Turkish lives.

KEYWORDS abortion, activism, reproductive rights, reproductive justice, Turkey

In May 2012, in the closing remarks at the International Conference on Population and Development in Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then the prime minister, unexpectedly stated that he considered abortion murder and that no one should have the right to allow murder to happen. Until then abortion was legal up to ten weeks of gestation, and the legal period would be extended in cases of medical complications. While Erdoğan’s speech dominated the news the following days, he repeated his antiabortion statements during the annual conference of the Women’s Branch of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). In this second speech, he

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equated abortion with a recent air strike on the Kurdish border village of Roboski. During this attack, also known as the Uludere Massacre, the Turkish military killed thirty-four Kurdish civilians, most of them children, in the name of the "war on terror" (Yağmur 2011).[1] In response to the ongoing public criticism of the attack, Erdoğan stated in his speech: "You live and breathe Uludere. I say every abortion is an Uludere" (*Hürriyet* 2012). In the following week, Recep Akdağ, then minister of health, announced that the AKP cabinet, on Erdoğan's orders, would draft a new abortion bill in Parliament. The new legislation, Akdağ continued, would change the ten-week statutory period. He added that there needed to be a discussion about the rights of the baby rather than the rights of the woman (*Bianet* 2012b).

Fear of a possible setback in the abortion legislation started an ongoing public debate and fueled an era of unprecedented reproductive rights activism in Turkey. In the days after the ruling government's antiabortion statements, hundreds of women's and feminist groups throughout the country mobilized and organized countrywide demonstrations. Istanbul-based feminist activists later established an initiative called Kürtaj Haktır, Karar Kadınların Platformu (Abortion Is a Right, Decision Belongs to Women Platform) to coordinate these mobilizations and initiate a large-scale abortion rights campaign. The platform set the political framework of reproductive rights activism by producing campaign materials and played a leading role in the withdrawal of the government's antiabortion proposal that same year. The most prominent slogans of this era were "Kürtaj haktır, Uludere katliam" (Abortion is a right, Uludere is a massacre) and "Benim bedenim, benim kararım!" (My body, my decision!). The first slogan, which simultaneously highlighted the right not to be forced into pregnancy and the right to life, disappeared from the mobilizations over time. The second slogan, "My body, my decision!," which relied on personal bodily autonomy as the central trope of claim making, later became the most circulated one.

Frameworks such as "rights," "choice," and "autonomy" have long occupied a contested space among feminist activists in Turkey and elsewhere fighting for access to safe and affordable reproductive health services. The global struggle to promote women's reproductive rights dates back to the 1984 International Women and Health Meeting in Amsterdam, which developed the term *reproductive rights* to link gender equality to reproductive freedoms (Briggs 2022). The struggle gained momentum with the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. These meetings have facilitated the view of reproductive rights as a universal human rights issue, replacing earlier Cold War logics that primarily focused on population control measures (Morgan and Roberts 2012; Singer 2019). Although abortion was part of the agenda in these meetings, it was primarily discussed as a public health issue rather than in terms of women's agency and autonomy, and the discussion was limited to preventing unsafe abortions (Zampas 2016). Despite these early efforts to expand the

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scope of reproductive rights, elective termination of pregnancies remained criminalized by states and religious actors in many parts of the world. Women's and feminist groups continued to fight against repressive abortion policies, arguing that the choice not to have children was a fundamental human rights issue.

Some of these early abortion rights mobilizations ignored that choice as a framework was embedded in a consumerist paradigm and did not apply to all women in the same way (Briggs 2022). Also known as prochoice activism, these mobilizations were predominantly led by middle-class, white feminists in the global North. Frustrated by the limited approach of the prochoice framework within the mainstream reproductive rights movement, Black and women-of-color activists in the United States coined the term *reproductive justice* in 1994 and called themselves the movement for reproductive justice. Reproductive justice as a framework for political activism was broadly defined as "the right not to have a child; the right to have a child; and the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments" (Ross and Solinger 2017: 9). The main goal of reproductive justice activists was to move beyond liberal feminism's singular focus on abortion and draw attention to how reproductive rights were intimately connected to other social issues such as housing, employment, immigration, and the environment (Ross 2006; Ross and Solinger 2017; Silliman et al. 2004).

Reproductive justice activists also argued that the fight for reproductive freedoms should shift the debate about autonomy away from the reductionist rhetoric of choice and toward the recognition that individual "choices" were always made under particular social, political, and economic conditions. They built their activism on the pillars of collective liberation and communal autonomy as opposed to an individualistic understanding of bodily autonomy (Ross et al. 2017). Feminist activism and scholarship on abortion rights have since moved away from liberal frameworks such as "choice" that do not consider how interlocking systems of oppression limit securing women's reproductive freedoms. Instead, they have foregrounded an intersectional social justice approach to emphasize how gender and sexuality interact with race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and disability to affect people's reproductive experiences (Fried 2008; Price 2010). Yet bodily autonomy has remained a pillar of abortion rights discussions to signal the importance of governing one's own body and the transformative potential of individual action (Denbow 2015). Although critical of the liberal assumptions underlying bodily autonomy, many feminist activists and scholars still consider the concept an essential part of reproductive rights struggles.

This article builds on and contributes to reproductive justice activists' and scholars' critiques of liberal feminism and its overemphasis on abortion rights and personal bodily autonomy. It argues, however, that the concept of bodily autonomy is limited when it comes to expanding reproductive freedoms in Turkey not because it relies on a liberal, individualistic framework but because it represents the bodily

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autonomy of the white reproductive subject, assuming that it is an ethnoracially unmarked, universal subject. Unlike reproductive rights activists elsewhere, feminists and women's groups in Turkey have used the concept mostly through a more communal, collectivist framework since the early 1980s. The language of bodily autonomy has helped draw attention to the state-sanctioned restrictions on women's sexual and reproductive freedoms, especially when discussing the limitations in abortion legislation. Yet it has been insufficient to acknowledge how women's experiences with reproductive discourses and policies have been unevenly shaped across the lines of race and ethnicity. While feminist claims of the right to bodily autonomy have helped articulate the right not to have children, they have ignored the right to have children and raise them in safe and healthy environments—a fundamental right that Kurdish women have been stripped of due to long-standing state violence. As a result, the language of bodily autonomy has obscured the Turkish state's stratified reproductive policies that have historically promoted a Turkish majority at the expense of non-Turkish lives.

Methodologically, I draw on a critical genealogical analysis of the concept of "bodily autonomy" in feminist debates in Turkey from the late 1980s to the present. Building on Michel Foucault's (1984) work, genealogical analysis is a methodology that deploys a historical and discursive analysis model to critically interrogate the origin and emergence of a commonly accepted phenomenon to problematize its present. In other words, it uses "historical [and discursive analysis] . . . to disturb contemporary conceptions" (Garland 2014: 371). A genealogical analysis starts with a present-day phenomenon and examines continuities and discontinuities in its historical trajectory. It reveals how the phenomenon evolved through time, what was emphasized and omitted, and how it emerged from specific exercises of power. Therefore a critical genealogy of bodily autonomy explores the concept's historical and discursive precursors and trajectory to defamiliarize (and problematize) what might be taken for granted in contemporary debates about reproductive rights and freedoms.

To do this, I compile an archive of activist texts, including, among others, feminist journals from different periods, such as *Amargi*, *Feminist Politika*, *Jineoloji*, *Jujin*, *Pazartesi*, and *Yazko*; online blogs and websites such as Amargi Istanbul, Çatlak Zemin, and Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif; and campaign materials of the Istanbul-based Abortion Is a Right Platform, which became a pivotal actor in the abortion rights struggle in 2012. These are texts produced by women's and feminist groups that grew out of the leftist tradition in the 1980s but organized independently outside state institutions and political parties. Bringing together this wide range of texts from different historical periods, I map out and trace when and how feminist activists have used the language of bodily autonomy, how this language has shifted over time, and what other concepts and frameworks have accompanied this language. This analysis illuminates the taken-for-granted yet problematic aspects of the slogan "My body, my decision!," which relies on bodily autonomy as the central frame of reference.

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In the following pages, I first trace the notion of bodily autonomy in feminist mobilizations against sexual and ethnoracial violence from the 1980s to the 2000s. I then focus on the slogan “My body, my decision!,” which draws on bodily autonomy as the primary trope of claim making. After discussing this slogan’s history and current uses, I reflect on the following questions: What kind of political subject does this slogan imagine? What possibilities and alternative visions does it create or foreclose? What role does the individual body (and bodily autonomy) play in people’s fight for reproductive rights and freedoms?

“Our Bodies Belong to Us”: Early Feminist Mobilizations around Bodily Autonomy

While the history of the women’s movement in Turkey dates back to the late Ottoman era, many feminist scholars view the 1980s as a turning point. The early 1980s was a time of state repression, and feminists started to organize independently from the state and leftist groups. This resulted in the emergence of the women’s movement as an important civil society actor in Turkey by the late 1980s (Arat 1994). Many formerly taboo subjects such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and abortion came to public discussion with the help of translations, journals, and street protests of feminist groups organized particularly in Ankara and Istanbul (Öztürkmen 2013; Sirman 1989). Slogans using bodily autonomy as an overarching framework date to early feminist writings of this period. These writings highlighted women’s bodily autonomy and argued that reproductive health matters, such as the right to abortion, should be considered a societal issue.

Unlike in other countries (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, or Brazil), in Turkey the popular demand for reproductive health services such as abortion, birth control, or humanized birth did not happen as part of the broader feminist movement. Regulations in reproductive health were often designed by republican elites, populist politicians, and modernist physicians, legitimized by religious leaders, and carried out as state-imposed top-down policies (Benezra 2014). Abortion was legalized in Turkey in 1983, after the 1980 coup d’état, as part of the state’s antinatalist population policies. Women’s and feminist groups at the time approached the legalization of abortion with suspicion. They argued that the ruling government changed the law not because they wanted to give women the right to be agents of their own destinies or because women themselves fought to legalize abortion. Abortion was legalized, feminists claimed, only to curb population growth in the country for economic and social reasons (Günel 2013; Gürsoy 1996; Tekeli 1983).

Feminists first used the notion of bodily autonomy in their mobilization within the context of the newly passed abortion law in 1983. They opposed the law by saying, “Kadın, bedeninin sahibi olmalıdır” (A woman should own her body). The 1983 law that legalized abortion in Turkey made it mandatory for married women to have their husbands’ permission before undergoing abortion (Gürsoy 1996; Tekeli 2012). When feminist groups discussed the law, they drew attention to the problems

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of this requirement: women first had to be married and then ask permission from their husbands. This requirement, feminists argued, prohibited or ignored all nonmarital sexual relationships and pushed the problems that might arise from such relationships outside society's responsibility. They also argued that the restrictions in the abortion law should be seen as part of a larger attack on women's integrity, similar to cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment (Aytaç 2013).

In later years the right to bodily autonomy became a central organizing strategy for the feminist movement as part of campaigns against sexual harassment. In February 1989 feminists from different cities gathered in Ankara for a meeting called Feminist Hafta Sonu (Feminist Weekend). Attendees discussed various issues that affected women such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape legislation, and strategies for broader feminist organizing. One meeting agenda item was to organize a nationwide campaign against sexual harassment. The campaign idea was put into practice during the fall of the same year, first in Ankara in October and then in Istanbul in November (Karakuş 2022b; Timisi and Gevrek 2002).

Following the Feminist Weekend, Istanbul-based feminists started to gather in awareness-raising groups and organized two major campaigns. The first was Siyah Protesto (Black Protest) in August 1989, during which they dressed in black and organized marches to protest increasing state violence toward leftist political prisoners. The second was a campaign against sexual harassment in November 1989 titled "Bedenimiz bizimdir; cinsel tacize hayır!" (Our bodies belong to us; no to sexual harassment!). Also known as the Mor İğne Kampanyası (Purple Needle Campaign), this second campaign included performative protests selling purple needles on public transportation; making collective visits to places dominated mostly by men, such as coffeehouses and taverns; and printing and distributing bulletins on sexual harassment on the streets. The campaign organizers explained that they chose a purple needle as the symbol of the campaign because "purple is a color that symbolizes women's freedom all over the world, and the needle has been used [by women] against sexual harassment for a long time" (Karakuş 2021).

After the Purple Needle Campaign, the slogan "Our bodies belong to us" became popular among independent, Turkish-majority feminist circles to raise awareness of violence against women. It was used in many ways, for instance, during the mass protests of 1992 against state-imposed virginity examinations in high schools, dormitories, and hospitals (Altınay 2002). These protests, which were organized against the virginity examinations routinely performed on young women charged with "immoral" behavior by the state, used the slogan "Our bodies belong to us; no to virginity examinations!" (Karakuş 2022a; Parla 2001). Right-wing groups at the time were also using a similar slogan, "Our bodies belong to God," to attack the sexual empowerment motto of the feminist movement. "Our bodies belong to us," therefore, was also a response to these conservative movements (Koç 2006).

At first glance, the slogan "Our bodies belong to us" resembles the name of the famous feminist health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, published by the Boston

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Women's Health Book Collective in the 1970s. The early feminist groups in Turkey had considered translating the book into Turkish in the late 1980s but decided against it (Özdemir 2016). A different feminist group called Mavi Kalem Derneği (Blue Pen Association) took up the project once again in 2007. The book is still being translated, but the project website titles the book in translation as *Bedenim ve ben* (*My Body and I*) (Olgun 2007). Interestingly, though initially framed and circulated as a more collectivized motto in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the slogan had become individual based by the early 2000s. Rather than merely being a translation issue, this change reflects the individualization of sexual and reproductive health politics at the time. Although the initial framework was a more collectivist one, feminist activists later prioritized women as autonomous individuals as opposed to socially embedded subjects.[2]

When feminist activists opposed state-sanctioned violence against Kurdish women in the 1990s, they reinvoked the right to bodily autonomy in their mobilization. This time, however, they framed the subject on the receiving end of the violence as women other than themselves. In 1994 a group of feminists and human rights activists adopted the slogan to draw attention to the forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Turkey's Kurdistan. They launched a campaign titled "Against war, nationalism, and racism: Do not touch my friend" (Günaysu 2014). The campaign was a gesture of solidarity among women whose experiences with state violence were unevenly shaped across race and ethnicity. Yet the slogan "Do not touch my friend" signaled that the gendered and ethnoracialized state intervention into bodily autonomy was happening to "other" women's bodies.

Stratified Reproduction and the Limits of Claims for Bodily Autonomy

A close look at the above-mentioned early feminist mobilizations around bodily autonomy demonstrates that feminist activists in Turkey have often approached issues of sexual, reproductive, and ethnoracial violence separately rather than in conversation with each other. However, categories of difference such as gender, race, and ethnicity have historically been mutually constitutive of reproductive policies and practices. In other words, gendered and gendering reproductive politics in Turkey, as elsewhere, have always been entangled with ethnoracialized inequalities (Saluk 2023). This situation eventually entered the broader feminist movement's agenda through Kurdish women's writings and activism.

By the 1980s Kurdish feminists, both in and outside the Kurdish liberation movement, had also started to organize around women's issues. The 1990s in Turkey were marked by an intense war between the Turkish state and the PKK, the Kurdish guerrilla organization, and the war magnified state violence toward Kurdish communities. As a result, Kurdish women struggled during this period not only against domestic violence and sexual harassment but also against ongoing forms of state violence, such as the ban on the Kurdish language, forced displacement and disappearances, mass incarceration and torture, and sexual assault and rape in custody

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(Çağlayan 2007, 2013). Simultaneously, they voiced their criticisms of Turkish feminists' "Turkishness" and partial approach to gender-based violence, as the latter largely ignored or dismissed the violence to which the Turkish state subjected Kurdish women.[3]

By the mid-1990s the Turkish state's demographic concerns and "replacement anxieties" (Marchesi 2012) around Kurdish families' perceived high fertility rates accelerated. In 1996 the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* reported that the National Security Council had prepared an eighty-page report on the Kurdish issue and submitted it to the government in a closed meeting. The report argued that the population rates in Kurdish-inhabited areas exceeded those of other parts of the country and that the Kurdish population would increase to more than 50 percent of the overall population by 2025. This situation, the report claimed, would, in the long run, create a hierarchical superiority in the number of Kurdish deputies and politicians in Parliament. The suggested solution in the report was to carry out selective population planning campaigns in Turkey's Kurdistan, such as granting bonuses to families with fewer children and taxing those with more than three children (Kul 1996; Şahin 2011).[4]

The same period also witnessed a mushrooming of state-run mother and child health and family planning centers (Ana Çocuk Sağlığı ve Aile Planlaması Merkezi; AÇSAP) and multipurpose community centers (Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezi; ÇATOM) in Turkey's Kurdistan. These institutions aimed to decrease population rates in the region by promoting and distributing family planning services. Similarly, nongovernmental organizations of the time played an essential role in disseminating contraceptive methods and knowledge through projects run especially in the Kurdish region or Kurdish-populated neighborhoods of big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara (Saluk 2009). Sometimes these organizations granted financial aid packages to young Kurdish girls for their education provided their mothers received birth control training and documented their use of one method of family planning (Alataş and Cerav 2001; Koçali 2003). Akin to many state-sponsored modernization projects in different parts of the world (Bridges 2011; Chaparro-Buitrago 2019; Kanaaneh 2002), these state and nonstate entities were accomplishing what Shellee Colen (1995) calls "stratified reproduction," framing Kurdish women's reproduction as "less than desirable" for the Turkish nation.

In the 1990s these issues were discussed at length in Turkish and Kurdish feminist journals such as *Pazartesi* and *Jujin*. While some Turkish feminists viewed the multipurpose community centers' Turkish-language classes and sterilization services as assimilationist state projects (Düzkan 1998), others celebrated these centers for providing free language education and birth control materials to Kurdish women (Karayazgan 1998). Kurdish feminists later criticized the celebratory accounts for aligning themselves with the Turkish state's colonialist policies (Sema 1998). They argued that these institutions' promotion of birth control and

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sterilization in Kurdish regions should be seen as part of ethnoracialized state violence toward their bodies (Canan 1998). In their writings Kurdish feminists also criticized Turkish feminists for equating procreation, motherhood, and childbearing with traditional and patriarchal values. They argued that Turkish feminists should not frame their antinatalist stance as a universal feminist claim. Inspired by Black feminism's critiques toward second-wave white feminism, Kurdish feminists claimed that the debates on reproductive rights should consider women's ethnoracialized as well as gendered experiences regarding reproduction and mothering (Açık 2002; Kutluata 2002).

In 1995 and 1996, respectively, the Cumartesi Anneleri (Saturday Mothers) and the Barış Anneleri (Peace Mothers) were founded in Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Inspired by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Saturday Mothers demanded the truth about their children who had been forcibly disappeared or killed by the Turkish military regime for their participation in leftist organizations. Similarly, the Peace Mothers gathered in protests and sit-ins to demand peace and justice for their children who had been killed during the fight against the Turkish state as members of the PKK (Karaman 2016; Üstündağ 2019). Both groups have faced criminalization by the state and Turkish media, yet they have also made a long-lasting impact on the feminist movement. Although neither the Saturday Mothers nor the Peace Mothers explicitly articulate their demands in terms of reproductive rights and freedoms, their claims are similar to the claims of the reproductive justice movement in the United States. Their activism reveals how some women strive for the right to have children and raise them in a safe and healthy environment free from state violence rather than the right not to have children. In other words, the Saturday Mothers' and the Peace Mothers' activism shows how the fight for the lives of children historically deemed expendable should be a central part of the fight for reproductive rights and freedoms.

"Abortion Is a Right, Uludere Is a Massacre": Reproductive Rights at the Nexus of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

The 2000s witnessed increasing conversations between Kurdish and Turkish women, particularly during the Kadın Sığınakları Kurultayı (Women's Shelters Assembly) organized annually by the Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı (Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation), during the International Women's Day demonstrations in different parts of the country every year on March 8, and within feminist initiatives such as Amargi Kadın Akademisi (Amargi Women's Academy) and Barış için Kadın Girişimi (Women's Peace Initiative). These encounters and Kurdish women's anticolonial struggles have reshaped the women's movement in Turkey and brought the issue of war to the center of feminist activism (Al-Ali and Taş 2017, 2019; Diner and Toktaş 2010). The 2012 mobilizations after Erdoğan's statement equating abortion with the Uludere Massacre built on this long and contested intersectional feminist history.

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When Erdoğan's comparison of abortion to the Uludere Massacre dropped like a bombshell in the media, the future was still uncertain. In the days after the speech, nobody was sure about what would come next concerning abortion regulations. However, women's and feminist groups immediately mobilized and launched several countrywide campaigns. They knew that abortion legislation would be retracted if nobody responded to the government officials' growing antiabortion sentiments. The Istanbul Feminist Kolektif (Istanbul Feminist Collective), an independent feminist organization, was the first to take to the streets. On May 27, 2012, more than fifty women from the collective interrupted traffic and organized a sit-in in front of the Prime Ministry's Office in the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul (Şakir 2018). They issued a press statement criticizing the government's attack on women's abortion rights in front of a banner saying, "Kürtaj hakkımdan başbakana ne?" (What has my right to abortion got to do with the prime minister?). They also carried protest signs such as "Uludere, not abortion, is murder," condemning the state violence in Roboski (Tarlığ 2012).

This first protest received little attention from the media, but feminists and women's groups continued to strategize against the government's attacks on abortion rights. On May 30 several Istanbul-based organizations came together again and decided to launch a website and circulate an online petition titled "Kürtaj Yasaklanamaz" ("Abortion Cannot Be Banned"). The petition opposing the impending antiabortion legislation was soon signed by thousands of individuals and organizations around the country and later sent to members of Parliament (Ekmekci et al. 2013). The activist network Abortion Is a Right, Decision Belongs to Women Platform was founded around the same time after a meeting organized by various women's groups in Istanbul. The platform launched a countrywide campaign titled "Kürtaj Yasağına Hayır" ("Say No to the Abortion Ban"). On the invitation of the campaign organizers, hundreds of individuals, grassroots groups, and civil society organizations took to the streets throughout Turkey in June 2012. Chanting "Kürtaj haktır, Uludere katliam" (Abortion is a right, Uludere is a massacre) and "Benim bedenim, benim kararım!" (My body, my decision!), they condemned both the government's attack on women's abortion rights and the state violence toward Kurdish lives in Roboski. These protests received widespread attention from the media, and public support for abortion rights activists grew exponentially (Ekmekci et al. 2013).

The slogan "My body, my decision!," which quickly became one of the most circulated ones during the summer of 2012, did not come directly from the members of the Abortion Is a Right Platform. It was coined by a group of journalists who had decided to launch a campaign on May 31 to counter the AKP government's antiabortion statements. After researching protests against similar situations elsewhere, the journalists, working for the independent news platform Bianet, decided to use visuals to make their campaigns more visible. They called on their readers to photograph themselves with the slogan and send the photos to the newspaper (Bianet 2012a). The campaign organizers extended the same invitation to celebri-

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ties, including artists, actresses, and other public figures. The invitation to support women's ownership of their bodies and lives attracted countless responses in a short amount of time. People flooded the newspaper's email account and social media with colorful images showing the slogan written on different parts of their bodies.

The international media followed the issue closely at the time, reporting Erdoğan's statements and the activists' claims. This was before similarly conservative and authoritarian leaders in Poland, Hungary, and the United States took to the world's stage just a decade later with the same antiabortion rhetoric. Many international news outlets approached the abortion debate in Turkey through the prism of the "cultural difference" of a non-Western, Muslim country. They attributed the impending abortion ban to the Islamist inclination of Erdoğan's government. According to them, there was a culture war between the religious government and secular groups. The message was that the current moment constituted a direct break from the country's earlier secular-nationalist regimes (Christie-Miller 2012; Matthews 2012; Tuysuz and Ozbek 2012). The international media fell into the typical Orientalist tropes that pit Islamist against secular-nationalist gender ideologies and flattened out the nuances of the situation. In their coverage, international news outlets also mistranslated the activists' famous slogan as "My body, my choice!" instead of "My body, my decision!" However, *karar* (decision) in Turkish is different from *tercih* and *seçenek*, which both mean "choice." While *karar* implies an act of making up one's mind, *tercih* and *seçenek* refer to a right or opportunity to choose.

Activists of the Abortion Is a Right Platform produced more nuanced analyses in their activism. They moved beyond the widely used "Islamic versus secular" dichotomies (Frank and Çelik 2017; Korkman 2016) and restrictive "choice" frameworks (Mutlu and Saluk 2021; Özgüler and Yarar 2017). From the very beginning, they drew attention to the neoliberal policies of the AKP government, which has long promoted childbirth and mothering while defunding public health services as part of its health care reforms. They also highlighted the intertwined nature of heteropatriarchal and ethnoracialized state violence toward nonnormative lives. In their press statements, which were made in Turkish and Kurdish, the platform members drew attention to the discriminatory and militarist nature of Erdoğan's declaration, "Every abortion is an Uludere," a statement that "calls into question the human rights of both Kurds and women." They argued that "the primary responsibility of any state should be to ensure that its citizens lead a decent life and to guarantee equal rights and freedoms to all" (*Amargi Istanbul* 2012). In their written materials, they claimed that the connection Erdoğan made between Roboski and abortion resulted from racism and misogyny. The slogan "Abortion is a right, Uludere is a massacre," as a result, was "meaningful and unifying" as "discrimination against women and discrimination against Kurds [were] so blatantly linked" (Baytok 2012).

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"My Body, My Decision!": The Making of the Liberal-Secular, White Reproductive Subject

These multilayered responses, however, later disappeared from the abortion rights protests. The slogan "Abortion is a right, Uludere is a massacre" faded; instead, "My body, my decision!" became the central slogan of feminist mobilizations. The initial campaigns of the summer of 2012 included many constituencies at the front line of the protests, including the Kurdish Peace Mothers, as an intentional feminist strategy to build a broad and inclusive coalition. The protests lost this multiconstituency approach over time, as the issue of abortion rights fell off the agenda of activist groups later when the proposed antiabortion legislation did not materialize. The abortion rights protests in later years featured exclusively the bodies of middle-class, secular, supposedly unmarked feminists as the vehicles for representing the reproductive subject under attack.

Despite its success in mobilizing large crowds within a short amount of time, the slogan "My body, my decision!" failed to acknowledge how women's conceptualizations of "body" and "autonomy" differ based on their class, race, ethnicity, and religion. As a result, abortion rights activists drew criticism due to their reliance on a middle-class, secular-liberal understanding of the body and autonomy. Some feminist scholars criticized the activists' mobilization strategies and argued that they approached abortion through the prism of individual-based rights, which has close ties to the liberal tradition. According to them, abortion should have been considered a societal health issue rather than a matter of individual rights. Therefore, they argued, the activists should have foregrounded their discussion on class-based stratifications and (un)equal access to free and safe abortion services rather than exclusively focusing on legal regulations (Bora 2012a; E. Demir 2012).

When abortion rights activism used an individualized rights rhetoric, it positioned women's groups in opposition to the state and triggered specific moral claims. Arguments favoring a woman's right to abortion were confronted with arguments supporting the unborn's right to life. When the slogan "My body, my decision!" gained traction, Erdoğan argued that the "body is mine" approach had no moral, philosophical, or religious basis: "The body is yours, but the embryo is not yours anymore. It is a life and a person from now on. You cannot kill it; it becomes murder when you kill" (*Bloomberg HT* 2012). Following this statement, newspaper columnists, TV hosts, and progovernment associations discussed various ideas about when life begins. They argued that the embryo's rights ranked as equal in priority with the mother's (*Dünya Bülteni* 2012). In a way, right-bearing subjects were created and pitted against each other as a perfect example of "reproductive governance" (Morgan and Roberts 2012), which ultimately limited the public discussion to individualized rights claims.

Pious Muslim women activists criticized the ontological underpinnings of the slogan "My body, my decision!" Although they also opposed the governmental attack

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on abortion rights, they were not on board with the slogan's secular-liberal approach to the body. "Our body is nobody's; it is entrusted to us by Allah," they said, and argued that, since they had not created this body, it was against their beliefs to think they could use it as they saw fit. In other words, they claimed that the slogan did not acknowledge their understanding of the body as a creation of and a sacred gift from Allah. They pointed out that the abortion rights activists' discursive strategies framed the body as individual property by stressing bodily autonomy. Therefore it was not inclusive of everybody (Kubilay 2014; Unal 2019).

The slogan "My body, my decision!" also assumed that the body under attack by the government's pronatalist discourses and practices was an ethnoracially unmarked, universal body. However, these attacks were not new nor applied to all bodies in the same way, as was evident in the Uludere Massacre, which took the lives of Kurdish children (Ayhan 2012; Bora 2012a, 2012b). Although the government's antiabortion rhetoric might seem to apply to all women on a discursive level, the stratified nature of reproductive citizenship in Turkey continues, as not all women are encouraged to be mothers in the same way, nor are all children considered equally valuable. State officials, popular media, and medical professionals, for instance, often marginalize the perceived hyperfertility of non-Turkish women and cast their reproduction as a threat to the nation (Erten 2015; Kılıçtepe 2021; Saluk 2022; Terzioğlu 2018). The supposedly ethnoracially unmarked, universal reproductive subject defined by the slogan "My body, my decision!" signals an ethnoracially marked, white Turkish subject. Therefore it does not sufficiently address how women's experiences with stratified reproductive politics are differently shaped depending on their race and ethnicity.

Furthermore, the slogan and feminist strategies around bodily autonomy confined reproductive rights debates within an antinatalist feminist stance, ignoring that not all women share this stance. The slogan could be read as part of a long lineage of antinatalist Turkish feminism that considers procreation and childbearing as the subordination of women. This antinatalist feminist tradition, which dates back to Istanbul-based feminist groups of the 1980s, concentrates on questioning and problematizing motherhood (Sirman 2016, 2020). While this tradition has long opposed the state- and society-imposed mandatory motherhood ideology, it has never discussed the right to mother and the right to give birth and raise children in safe environments. A close reading of current Kurdish feminist journals reveals that Kurdish women continue to pose their critiques of Turkish feminists' antinatalist tendencies in the early 2000s, similar to those in the 1990s. In the Kurdish feminist journal *Jineoloji*'s most recent issues, several authors discuss mainstream feminist campaigns and their tendency to put womanhood and motherhood in opposition to each other. "This narrow feminist approach," one argues, "assumes that it will overcome sexist ideologies and institutions with a harsh rejection" (Emek 2020: 24). The solution, according to the author, is neither accepting the imposed

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roles nor being against them. Instead, she invites the feminist movement not to reject motherhood but to politicize it and turn it into a central issue of the political struggle (Emek 2020).

Although the slogan and the activism that revolved around it had limitations, they also produced critical insights and lessons for organizing in the long run. In November 2012 a group of Kurdish and Turkish feminists left the Amargi Women's Academy with a public statement in which they criticized the organization for drifting away from its initial antimilitarist, intersectional stance and adopting a (white) liberal framework over the recent years (Al-Ali and Taṣ 2019; *Fakfukfon* 2012). Amargi closed its organization following these departures and published a declaration agreeing with the earlier critiques. It stated that the organization had become embedded in the hegemonic system and could not produce new, radical politics, for example, when defining abortion as an individual right and reducing freedom to gaining "liberty." Amargi concluded its declaration by saying that the organization's disbanding should be read as a new beginning for the feminist movement in Turkey rather than a failure and that their self-reflections should contribute to productive discussions for the future (*Amargi Istanbul* 2013). Similarly, in a workshop in Ankara in 2012, different feminist groups came together to discuss that year's abortion rights mobilizations and brainstorm future strategies to fight against state pronatalism. The workshop discussions highlighted the need to establish more inclusive networks by considering women's various experiences and concerns based on their class, ethnic, and religious positionalities. Without this, the workshop participants claimed, the abortion rights movement in Turkey could not move beyond being a "polarizing group formed by middle-class white women" (Y. Demir 2012).

Conclusion: In Pursuit of Reproductive Justice

What does the trajectory of the slogan "My body, my decision!" tell us about using bodily autonomy as a central trope of claim making for reproductive rights struggles? This article has shown that the concept of bodily autonomy was initially used through a more collectivist framework within the feminist movement in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s. With the slogan "My body, my decision!," however, it turned into an individualistic, atomistic framework by the 2000s. The slogan has situated a middle-class, liberal-secular reproductive subject at the center of abortion discussions. The discursive formation of the individualized rights language has limited the ways to critique the historically ingrained and already existing stratifications in reproductive health policy and practice. However, I have argued that the slogan is limited not because it draws on a liberal, individualizing framework but because it represents the bodily autonomy of the white reproductive subject, assuming that it is an ethnoracially unmarked, universal subject. The slogan confined reproductive rights debates within an antinatalist feminist framework while neglecting that not

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all women hold this viewpoint due to their differential experiences with the state's stratified reproductive policies. As a result, claims to individual bodily autonomy foreclosed the possibility of forming more extensive and inclusive coalitions that could acknowledge marginalized experiences and voices.

Despite its drawbacks and limitations, the slogan also paved the way for fruitful discussions and self-reflection, opening future possibilities for creating alternative discourses and new ways of collective action. For this reason, I would like to conclude with hope rather than depict the 2012 reproductive rights mobilizations through the prism of success or failure. I have chosen to do so not despite the slogan but because of it, as Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz (2009: 281) suggest, "in the hopes to better describe actually existing and potential [feminist] worlds that thrive with, through and because of the negative." To fulfill this hope, however, feminist strategies using bodily autonomy as the central trope of claim making need to take into account the mutually constitutive nature of gender, race, and ethnicity in reproductive policies and practices. Acknowledging how reproductive politics have always been entangled with ethnoracialized inequalities remains essential in emergent reproductive rights struggles, especially in the context of Turkey's selective state pronatalism.

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Notes

1. Government officials later announced that the military forces had mistaken the group for members of the Kurdish guerrilla organization Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party; PKK). The border has long witnessed an informal trade of goods by a vast number of villagers between Iraq and Turkey, in an area where employment is scarce. The authorities on both sides usually deliberately ignore these villagers and the socioeconomic conditions that render "smuggling" the only source of income for them. Immediately after the attack, Erdoğan claimed that the "villagers and smugglers have been in touch with terrorists, helping them and carrying guns instead of small goods" (*Milliyet* 2012).

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2. This transformation also reflects Turkey's recent "neoliberal turn" (Acar and Altunok 2013), which crystallized in the health care sector by the early 2000s. The Turkish Ministry of Health launched the Health Transformation Program in 2003 with funds from the World Bank. As a perfect example of neoliberal transformation, the program resulted in a significant reorganization of the public health care system, transferred public funds to the private sector, introduced market-driven performance measures, and paved the way for a patient-as-consumer model of health care (Dayı 2019; Saluk 2022).
3. Similarly, pious Muslim women's struggle against the long-standing attacks on their bodies in the form of the headscarf ban received little attention from secular feminists at that time (Eraslan 2002). Although there were occasional conversations and solidarities between secular and Islamist women's groups in the 1990s (Arat 2016; Düzkan 1997; *Pazartesi* 1995), by the early 2000s the headscarf ban was recognized as gender-based violence and became part of a collective women's struggle through groups such as Amargi, Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz (We Are Looking after Each Other), and Feministler Uyumuyor (Feminists Are Not Sleeping) (Akınerdem 2012).
4. The Turkish state's demographic anxieties around non-Turkish populations date to the late Ottoman and early Republican eras and should be read as part of a long history of eugenics in Turkey's nation building (Alemdaroğlu 2005). In 1936 Abidin Özmen, a high-ranking state official working in Turkey's Kurdistan, prepared a similar report and presented his findings to the Turkish government. The report argued that the Kurdish population had been increasing at an "abnormal rate," drew attention to "the magnitude and urgency of the Kurdish problem," and claimed that the assimilation of Kurds should be accelerated through the state's education and settlement policies (Dündar 2012: 79).

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