Session I:

Conceptual Frames of Democratic Resilience

28 April 15:00–16:50

Despoina Kotsi

Engineering Democracy in Crisis: Liberal Constitutionalism between Resilience and Effectiveness

Contemporary democracies are increasingly confronted with crises that test not only their political responsiveness but also their constitutional identity. Environmental disruption, public health emergencies, migratory pressures, and security threats challenge states and supranational entities alike to act decisively, often under conditions of urgency and uncertainty. From the perspective of public law theory, these conditions invite renewed reflection on what might be described as a *mechanics of democracy*—or, more precisely, a form of *democracy engineering* oriented toward resilience and repair rather than exception and erosion. This proposal argues that democracy engineering cannot be understood as a technocratic recalibration of governance instruments detached from constitutional commitments. On the contrary, it must proceed from respect for the foundational organizational bases of democratic order, with the protection of individual rights as its normative apex. Classical constitutional theory identifies three such bases: the guarantee of fundamental rights, representative government, and the separation of powers. Together, these elements constitute the structural grammar through which democratic authority is legitimized and exercised. Any attempt to enhance democratic effectiveness in times of crisis must therefore remain internal to this grammar, rather than suspend or override it. The central tension addressed in this contribution is the endogenous challenge faced by liberal democracy: can it remain both liberal and effective under conditions of acute crisis? Is it possible to reconcile constitutional restraint with the demand for rapid and coordinated action in the face of environmental, health-related, or migratory emergencies? Rather than framing this tension as a zero-sum conflict between freedom and efficiency, the above concept proposes a longitudinal and structural reading of democratic organization, examining how constitutional democracies have historically adapted their internal mechanics without abandoning their liberal core. Special attention is paid to supranational governance, with the European Union serving as a paradigmatic case of a "post-sovereign" constitutional order. As a polity founded upon treaty-based commitments to democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights, the EU exemplifies both the promise and the fragility of liberal democracy beyond the nation-state. The proposed engineering assesses whether—and under what conditions—such a supranational formation can respond effectively to systemic crises without generating democratic deficits or reconfiguring the citizen–authority relationship to the detriment of individual liberty. Ultimately, it contends that democratic resilience depends not on loosening constitutional constraints, but on deepening their functional integration. Democracy engineering, properly understood, is not a project of exception, but one of internal repair: a recalibration of democratic structures that preserves liberal legitimacy while enhancing collective problem-solving capacity in an age of permanent crisis.

Daniel Kawecki and Sanna Salo

Liberal democracy and the violence of positivity

Contemporary discussion about challenges to liberal democracy is frequently framed as a contest between "liberal democracy" and various "illiberal" or "majoritarian" alternatives, often associated with the rise of populist challengers. This framing is usually accompanied by a normative differentiation between a liberal democratic "us" and a threatening, illiberal "them". This, we argue, restricts scholarly inquiry about the crisis of liberal democracy and discourages critical perspectives that could possibly overcome, rather than reinforce, current challenges. We attempt to go beyond this polarized dichotomy by interpreting challenges to liberal democracy through Byung-Chul Han's (2015) concept of "violence of positivity".

Han argues that while the 20thcentury "disciplinary society" was characterized by confrontation with "the other" through the violence of the negative–that which is not oneself –contemporary "achievement society" is rather characterized by the "violence of positivity". This violence emerges from an internalized drive towards ever-increasing growth and achievement. The positive –that is, more of the same–destroys by exhaustion and saturation rather than through mechanisms such as coercion or infiltration, which are mechanisms of the "negative".

We extend Han's observations to 21stcentury liberal democracy, which has attempted to turn "the negative other" into the positive "same" through processes of inclusion, expanding minority rights and through the elimination of physical and normative boundaries. We argue that this "positivization" is endogenous to liberal democracy and results in increasing expectations on citizens at both the psychological and societal level, as well as on the political decision-making processes and bureaucratic apparatus itself. These tendencies combine to overwhelm citizens and the liberal democratic systemin a way that is akin to "violence of positivity".

Han further links this type of self-exploitative violence to the onset of depression and burnout as the logical end point. We believe that this makes democracy vulnerable to the temptation of returning to the politics of negativity as means to escape this process of democratic burnout. The allure of illiberal populism thus lies in the re-introduction of negative confrontation dynamics: re-shaping the sphere of the "positive" by re-introducing the excludable "other" in the form of, say, unwanted immigrants. However, liberal democrats may also attempt to escape the positivization of society by framing populists and other critics of liberal democracy as the "dangerous other", thus creating a "necessary enemy" which allows them to resist the violence of positivity, while simultaneously perpetrating it at a systematic level. Left unchecked, these two tendencies will reinforce each other without recognizing that they both address the same root problem. We argue that this polarized dynamic can be resolved by recognizing that liberal democracy has failed to acknowledge the importance of "the negative" in human psychology and society, relegating it to the "shadow" of democratic discourse. However, left unacknowledged, the negative now re-asserts itself in unpredictable and dangerous ways. With this paper, we initiate a discussion about how the politics of the negative can be re-integrated into our understanding of democracy, while not losing sight of the dangers that liberal democracy was constructed to protect against.

Rogier van der Wal

The power of civil disobedience and civil resistance

Normally, in a democratic society decision making run smoothly and according to plan, with the rule of law as a guarantee of correct procedures. But sometimes opinions are divided, either on a single issue or concerning the general state of affairs, and then citizens may show what is called 'civil disobedience'. In her essay on this intriguing topic, written in1972, a time of turmoil in the United States, with Vietnam, Cambodja and in the background a growing influence of the secret services, Hannah Arendt argues in favour of the protection of the freedom of expression and of the freedom to act. The person who practices civil disobedience deliberately breaks the law, but unlike a criminal, does so for noble reasons: out of sincere care for the general wellbeing and a more just world. The essay of Arendt I will combine with the recent interesting study of Erica Chenoweth on what she calls 'civil resistance' (OUP, 2021). What can we learn from her? Chenoweth has studied over 600 cases from over 120 years and is thus able to share with us useful lessons on how civil resistance works, why it sometimes fails and the long-term impacts of such movements. One hopeful sign is that Chenoweth shows that if you want to create a starting point for meaningful change, to have only 3.5 % of the population on your side would already be sufficient.

Another scholar who emphasized the power and importance of institutions is Bonnie Honig, who is well known from the agonistic model of democracy. Honig last year received an honorary doctorate from Leyden University. In her eyes, democratic theory is too narrowly focused on procedures and citizens, but neglects the public things, which she sees as constitutive for our democracy. Many of these public things were privatized or outsourced, letting profit take the place of public values like accessibility and equality. In a nutshell, public things bring people together to do something in common, they inspire positive collective action. They provide stability, orientation and sustainability, a kind of 'holding environment' where people love to go to and where they return. They form a kind of antidote to the continuous stream of news, often fake news, with a dominantly negative tone, a kind of sinkhole where people get sucked into, and create and enhance democratic resilience and resistance.

I will show what inspiration we can derive from Arendt, Chenoweth and Honig –and from a couple of stimulating young Dutch authors: Ewout Kieft, Eva Rovers and Roel Meijvis.

Dag Petersson

Hannah Arendt Reconciling the Ends of Democracy

In June 1950, one year prior to the publication of The Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt began a diary of thought, a Denktagebuch. The first entry is a meditation on reconciliation. Framing the concept in response to questions of guilt she had raised in Origins, the entry is the beginning of a thought that she often returned to and never brought to a close. About guilt, she had asked: how was it possible that so many Germans had so willingly and thoughtlessly abandoned not only democracy but even politics as such? And how could it be, that even after the horrid crimes of the Third Reich had become well-known, many people stayed loyal and got used to the state of affairs? And finally, what does it mean to live with the knowledge that intelligent humans are so easily accustomed to evil and so little prone to think about it?

Hannah Arendt is one of the most inspiring and relevant political thinkers to return to today, not least because of her atunement to classical Greek culture and thought. Her notion of reconciliation is profound, and, as Roger Berkowitz has shown, one of the most important, if admittedly also one of the least finalized concept of her work. It does not mean to forgive and forget, to move on and leave a breach behind. Rather than healing, it means to come to terms with crimes committed. One reconciles a deed, she specifies, not a doer, who may or may not have understood or intended a transgression. While guilt attaches to a person, not to a people, reconciliation aims at the act that a person has committed. Even so, Arendt insists that for reconciliation to happen, the guilty one must admit the injury they have done. To reconcile is to come to terms with the world as it is, with all its flaws, marvels and horrors, and to prefer it, because it exists, to one that does not. Reconciliation keeps politics on the ground.

The term "democratic backsliding" refers among many things to the circumstance that democracy includes the power to undo itself. Self-dissolution reveals democracy's fragility but also its non-antithetical relation to authoritarianism. Its resilience hinges upon this non-antithesis: some political scientists speak of its ability to "develop coping mechanisms" under authoritarian rule. In Bangladesh, Nepal, Madagascar, fargone backslided democracies have been overthrown by a generation that seeks to restitute democracy on their own terms. There is much scholarly interest in how these budding democracies emerge from their respective coping mechanisms. From an Arendtian perspective, this would include critical examinations of how democratic forces are coming to terms with their own subsistence under autocracy. One would likely focus on storytelling, orally and in books, films and exhibitions for attempts at reconciling with an often not-so-heroic past. Less studied are expressions of reconciliation during and after backsliding. I would like to start a conversation about this, and point to a few examples from young architects as possible points of departure.

Session II:

Ancient Democracies and Practises of Repair

29 April 9:30–11:50

Edward M. Harris

Democracy and Resilience at Athens in 403 BCE

The greatest challenge to Athenian democracy in the Classical period was the rule of the Thirty from 404 to 403, and the greatest sign of its resilience was the overthrow of the Thirty and the restoration of the democracy in 403. There has been some debate about the nature of the reforms enacted in 403: did they fundamentally alter the nature of Athenian democracy or did they accept the basic foundations of Athenian democracy and attempt to strengthen them? This issue is still relevant today.

M. H. Hansen and M. Ostwald believed that the Athenians made fundamental changes in the nature of their political system in 403 and shifted from popular sovereignty to the sovereignty of law. This contribution will show that this view is based first on a misunderstanding of the concept of the rule of law, second on mistaken interpretations of the evidence, and third on the neglect of key evidence for the continuation of popular sovereignty. For the Athenians the rule of law meant equality before the law (Euripides *Suppliants* 433-4; Thuc. 2.37.1), the accountability of officials (Aeschin. 3.5-30), trials before impartial judges selected by lot (Boeghold) 1995, and fairness in procedure such as informing defendants about the charges before trial (Harris 2013). All these principles were already implemented in the fifth century and not an innovation introduced in 403. Hansen and Ostwald also thought that the Assembly lost the right to enact legislation in 403, which was transferred to 1,000 judges, but recent work has shown that contemporary evidence reveals the Assembly retained this key power. (Aeschin. 3.39-41; Dem. 20.92-94) Finally, the Athenians instituted pay for attendance at meetings of the Assembly in the 390s, and expanded the capacity of the Pnyx to increase attendance in the fourth century BCE. Even though the courts could rescind decrees that violated the laws through the *graphe paranomon*, the Assembly could also annul verdicts of the courts in the fourth century. Finally, there is no evidence that the Areopagus gained new powers at the expense of the Assembly. Even though the Areopagus could make recommendations through reports (*apophaseis*) submitted after investigations (*zeteseis*), these recommendations were subject to the final approval of the Assembly and courts. Hansen claimed that in cases of *eisangelia*, the Assembly lost the right to try defendants around 360 and that such cases were transferred to the courts. A recent study has shown that the Assembly retained the right to try defendants in exceptional cases to the end of the fourth century (Harris with Esu 2021).

What the Athenians did in 403 was to strengthen both democracy and the rule of law. They did not abandon their core values, but looked for ways to make their political system more orderly while at the same time promoting popular participation. Even though citizens in modern democracies do not share their views about slavery and the position of women, the Athenian approach to renewing democracy and the rule of law deserves our attention.

Triantafyllos Zacharakis

Democracy beyond Polis: Redefining the Democratic Practice in the Greek Federal States (Koina)

Democracy and oligarchy were the two main and opposite constitutions of ancient Greek *poleis*. However, applying this dichotomy to Greek federal states (*Koina*) based on the presence of a primary assembly (*ecclesia*), the main qualifier of a polis democracy, seems problematic. In contrast with *poleis*, in *Koina* primary assemblies had some deficiencies which undermined their democratic character. Does this mean that federal structures were not designed to be democratic and that democracy was a concept compatible only to *poleis*?

Political thought on federalism was scarce in Antiquity. Nevertheless, Polybius associates explicitly democracy with federalism with regards to the Achaean *Koinon* (280–146 BC). However, according to him, democracy in *Koinon* is defined mainly by the existence of *isotis* (equality) between member-states of the *Koinon* (Pol. II 38, 5-9). Therefore, could we say that the main criterion of qualifying a *Koinon* as democracy is *isotis* between member-states and not the existence of a primary assembly? In fact, if in a polis the unit of democracy is the individual citizen who participates in the assembly, in a federal state the unit of democracy is rather the member city-state.

The principle of *isotis* in conjunction with federalism can be traced before Polybius in the work of the Oxyrhynchus historian who gives a detailed account of the Boeotian *Koinon*'s organization at the beginning of the 4th c. BC (*Hell. Oxy.* 16, 3-4). Moreover, the political organization of major *Koina* of the Classical and Hellenistic periods (Achaean, Aetolian, Boeotian, Lycian, Arcadian, Thessalian) proves that *isotis* between member-states was a core element of the federal system.

However, their political organization proves also that *isotis* in *Koina* was not numerical equality, but proportional equality (or equity) which entailed the share of benefits (rights) and burdens (obligations) between member-states according to their population size and importance. According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 5, 1301b), proportional equality is associated with oligarchy. This in turn challenges the democratic character of federal structures proving that the relationship between democracy and federalism in the ancient Greek world was more complicated than we thought. In this context, we should finally wonder if the dichotomy between democracy and oligarchy makes sense for federal states.

Gerjan Borneman

Examining the Absence of Civil Disobedience in Classical Athens

This contribution examines resistance, resilience, and democratic self-repair in Classical Athens by reassessing the frequently invoked claim that ancient Greek history contains early examples of civil disobedience. Modern political theory and historical writing often portray figures such as Antigone and Socrates as examples of early civil disobedience, positioning them as ancient counterparts to modern actors who resisted unjust laws and governments. By revisiting these claims through a historically grounded lens, this paper argues that such interpretations obscure rather than illuminate how democratic Athens understood and managed dissent during moments of political strain.

The roundtable contribution advances two interconnected arguments. First, it contends that neither Sophokles' *Antigone* nor Socrates' life and death should be classified as instances of civil disobedience in the sense articulated by modern theorists such as John Rawls –that is, as a "public, nonviolent breach of a law, in order to oppose said law, a decision by a government, or even the validity of the government itself." Instead, both cases are better understood as forms of conscientious objection rooted in personal moral or divine obligation, rather than civic strategies intended to provoke democratic correction. Recognizing this distinction is essential for avoiding anachronistic readings of ancient political behavior and for appreciating the specificity of democratic resistance in different historical contexts. Moreover, and more broady, it emphasizes the caution one must take when applying modern concepts to ancient democracies.

Second, and more centrally aligned with the roundtable's theme of democratic resilience and repair, this contribution explores why Classical Athens appears to lack clear historical examples of civil disobedience altogether. Rather than interpreting this absence as a democratic failure, it argues that the Athenian political system actively incorporated mechanisms that channelled dissent into legal and institutional forms. Central to this culture was *parrhesia*, the civic right and obligation to speak freely against injustice and the misuse of democratic power. Far from being a purely rhetorical ideal, *parrhesia* was embedded in legal practices that encouraged critique without requiring citizens to step outside the law.

A focal point of the discussion is the *graphe paranomon*, a legal procedure allowing citizens to challenge allegedly unlawful or anti-democratic legislative proposals. Drawing on examples from Demosthenes' speeches, my research shows how this mechanism functioned as a form of democratic self-correction, enabling resistance within the system rather than against it. In this sense, Athens addressed democratic crises not by valorizing illegal defiance, but by institutionalizing dissent as part of its constitutional fabric.

By situating resistance within its historical and institutional context, this contribution invites reflection on how democracies–ancient and modern–respond to internal challenges, and how legal avenues for dissent may serve as instruments of democratic resilience and repair rather than signs of weakness.

Antonio Iacoviello

Beyond Decline and Survival: Rethinking Democratic Power in the Hellenistic Greek *Polis*

Greek democracy in the Hellenistic period (fourth to first century BCE) remains an elusive and deeply contested subject—as well as one that aptly exemplifies the issue of resilience and reconciliation of democracy across ages. Scholarship on Hellenistic democracy has developed through a plurality of methodological approaches that are often difficult to reconcile. These range from the application of modern political theory—most notably the work of Robert Dahl and, in its relevance to the Greek world, Eric W. Robinson (Carlsson 2010)—to more formal institutional analyses rooted in the pioneering research of the French school (Robert, Gauthier), which investigates the functioning and social embeddedness of civic institutions, particularly the interplay between *eleutheria*, *autonomia*, and *dēmokratia* (Grieb 2008). This approach intersects with the phenomenon of institutional convergence toward Athenian models—the so-called "Great Convergence" (Ma 2024)—which is frequently interpreted as evidence of democratic continuity. A further key strand of research has focused on the growing importance of euergetism and social agonism, and on the increasing political weight of *régimes des notables*, especially from the Late Hellenistic period onwards (Hamon 2009).

This paper addresses continuity and change in Hellenistic democracy through a twofold approach. First, this paper takes the problem of Athenocentrism as a methodological challenge rather than a conclusion. Drawing on cognitive and philosophical-semantic approaches—most notably Wittgenstein's notion of Family Resemblance—it addresses the central question of whether the Athenian democratic model (as opposed to those of cities such as Argosand Syracuse) functioned as an unavoidable conceptual reference point for Hellenistic *poleis* on a psychological level. The paper asks whether, by the early third century BCE, Athenian democracy had become so deeply entrenched as a cognitive and political prototype that the adoption of its institutional forms elsewhere inevitably evoked Athens itself—shaped not only by constitutional imitation but also by trade, cultural circulation, and shared political imagination (cf. Canevaro and Gray 2018). Secondly, the paper examines how the exercise of democratic power—the power of the *dēmos*—can be meaningfully assessed in Hellenistic *poleis*; in other words, on which analytical benchmarks such an assessment should rest. Rather than asking whether democracy simply survived or declined after the Classical period, the paper investigates to what extent Hellenistic democracy developed distinctive features of its own or, alternatively, maintained continuity with Classical models. To this end, the paper proposes an approach that places institutional evidence in sustained dialogue with social, economic, and cultural dynamics. While acknowledging that formal institutional characteristics alone cannot account for democratic practice, much recent scholarship continues to evaluate democracy primarily through institutional modification (for example, the disappearance of non-problematic decrees in Athens after the Chremonidean War). By contrast, this paper examines institutions as embedded within—and responsive to—broader societal structures (cf., e.g., popular revolts and class struggle in Hellenistic cities—Heller 2025) aiming to identify more nuanced indicators of popular power in the Hellenistic *polis*.

Session III:

Comparative Case Studies of Democratic Crisis and Reconstruction

29 April 15:00–16:40

Jorunn Økland

Expansion of citizen rights as repair of vulnerable democracies: A recipe for resilience?

The paper will explore the connection between democratization and resilience, using as a case study the extension of citizen rights (including the right to vote) to women in the Nordic countries in particular. Two Nordic countries, Finland and Norway, were among the first three globally to extend universal suffrage to women. For these three countries (the two Nordic countries plus New Zealand), struggles for woman suffrage coincided and interacted with strategies for full independence–the countries in question also gained independence as nation states around the same time. Woman suffrage was thus part of a broader process of democratic repair (including for some countries also repair also after World War 1).

During the second half of the19th-early 20th centuries there were very close contacts between the suffragette movements of different European countries and those of their (former) colonies. The paper highlights the crucial importance of international travel and collaboration between various national women's movements during the early years of the campaigns for universal suffrage (19th-early 20thcentury). The paper will thus demonstrate how discussions of woman suffrage and democratic participation were embedded in broader discourses of nation building, economy, etc.. The paper will in particular focus on the importance of the trans-Atlantic connections between the Nordic countries and North America, as illustrated e.g. by Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al.'s multivolume A History of Woman Suffrage (1881-), especially volume 6 (1922).

Although the argument in favour of universal suffrage was initially rights-based, and based on normative argumentation (moral, political, and to a certain extent religious),extending full citizen rights to women had other, longer-term side effects such as strengthening the resilience –and gradually also the GNP -of the countries in question. In 2012, around 100 years afterthe introduction of women's vote in Norway, the economist Jens Stoltenberg (then Norwegian Prime Minister, later SG of NATO), said that "the Minister of Finance should thank Norwegian women every day!" His point was that contrary to common belief, Norwegian wealth was not built on revenues from North Sea oil, but rather on the near full participation of women in the paid workforce: "If the participation of Norwegian women in the work force had been reduced to the OECD average, the value loss would exceed the value of the Norwegian oil fund combined with the projected future value of the oil still under the seabed."1The paper will end with this illustration of how democratization can lead to resilience in the longer term.

Nuno Grancho

Architecture and the Democratic Imagination: Building, Breaking, and Rebuilding Civic Space

Democracy does not exist as an abstraction, it materializes in stone, steel, and public space. This paper examines how architecture both embodies and shapes democratic practice, serving as a lens through which to understand the physical manifestations of political crisis, collapse, and reconstruction. From the Athenian agora to bombed-out parliamentary chambers rebuilt after war, from segregated city planning to the contested memorialization of authoritarian pasts, architectural history reveals democracy's fragility and resilience as they are inscribed in the built environment.

Architecture serves as both a democratic symbol and a tool simultaneously. Monuments shape the collective memory of democratic victories or betrayals; public buildings define who belongs in civic life; and urban planning defines whose movements are unrestricted or restricted. These physical structures become flashpoints that are either occupied, destroyed, appropriated, or abandoned when democracies fall apart. Their ensuing rebuilding or metamorphosis illustrates how societies balance opposing ideas of democratic reinvention versus restoration. This paper explores three architectural modalities of democratic crisis and repair. First, rupture: how revolutions, civil wars, and regime changes manifest in the destruction or violent repurposing of civic space, from the storming of bastilles to the toppling of statues. Second, continuity: how architectural preservation and reconstruction after a crisis attempt to restore democratic legitimacy through material connection to an idealized past, as seen in post-war rebuilding efforts that meticulously recreated destroyed legislative chambers. Third, transformation: how democratic renewal sometimes requires architectural reimagining and integrating previously excluded populations through accessible design, creating spaces for truth and reconciliation, or converting authoritarian monuments into sites of democratic contestation.

Drawing on examples spanning ancient Athens, Weimar Germany, postcolonial capitals, and contemporary movements to reclaim public space, this contribution argues that architecture is neither a neutral backdrop nor a simple metaphor for democracy. Instead, the built environment constitutes an active participant in democratic practice by enabling assembly, constraining dissent, preserving memory, or facilitating erasure. By attending to brick-and-mortar structures alongside constitutional documents, we gain crucial insight into how democratic communities physically negotiate the distance between ideal and reality, and how material decisions about space shape possibilities for political reconciliation or continued fracture.

Alexandra Vasilou

“From the Constitution of Medina to the Abrahamic Family House: Resilience, Reconciliation, and the Management of Religious Diversity in Islamic Contexts”

Focusing on two emblematic moments of history, the Constitution of Medina (622) and the contemporary Abrahamic Family House in the United Arab Emirates, this paper examines how plural societies negotiate coexistence, legitimacy, and participation in the aftermath of social rupture.

The Constitution of Medina represents one of the earliest attempts in Islamic world to formalize a political community composed of multiple religious and tribal groups. By codifying mutual obligations, collective security, and mechanisms of consultation, it articulated a framework that enabled social cohesion without erasing difference. While no democratic in a modern institutional sense, the Charter introduced participatory principles-such as consultation, shared responsibility, and legal recognition of religious identities-that functioned as mechanisms of political resilience in a fragmented social environment.

Rather than tracing a linear institutional continuity, this paper approaches Islamic political history through the lens of resilience beyond repair. It argues that although later historical developments often diverged from these early participatory frameworks, the underlying principles of pluralism and negotiated coexistence persisted as normative reference points. These principles re-emerge in contemporary initiatives that seek to manage religious diversity through symbolic constitutional means.

The Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi (and the upcoming House of One in Berlin) serves as contemporary case study of such reactivation. Housing a mosque, a church, and a synagogue within a single architectural and institutional complex, it promotes interreligious coexistence and equal recognition. This initiative raises critical questions about the nature of participation, legitimacy, and inclusion: To what extend do such institutions foster substantive engagement rather than symbolic reconciliation? Who participates in these frameworks, and whose voices remain excluded?

By placing early Islamic political arrangements and contemporary state-sponsored initiatives in dialogue, this paper contributes to broader debates on democratic resilience, post-democratic forms, and the politics of reconciliation. It suggests that Islamic contexts offer historically grounded models for managing religious diversity that complicate rigid distinctions between democratic and non-democratic systems. Ultimately, the study how resilience, when mediated through religious pluralism, can serve both as a mechanism of social repair and as a site of ongoing political tension.

Güldeniz Kıbrıs

Democracy without Elections: Popular Cinema and Democratic Repair in Cold War Turkey

This paper explores how popular cinema in Cold War Turkey functioned as a cultural space of democratic repair during periods when formal democratic institutions were fragile, suspended, or deeply contested. Rather than focusing on electoral politics or constitutional frameworks, the study examines how films articulated ideas of justice, popular sovereignty, legitimacy, and moral authority at moments of political crisis.

During the Cold War, Turkey experienced repeated interruptions of democratic governance, including military interventions and restrictions on political participation. In these contexts, cinema emerged as a widely accessible medium through which political values could be expressed, negotiated, and reimagined. This paper argues that Turkish popular films did not merely reflect political conditions but actively participated in sustaining democratic imaginaries when institutional democracy was weakened.

Focusing on war films and political melodramas from the 1950s to the 1970s, the paper analyzes how cinematic narratives constructed moral communities centered on the people (halk), justice (adalet), and collective responsibility. Even in the absence of elections or parliamentary representation, films staged scenes of judgment, sacrifice, and popular consent, offering audiences symbolic forms of democratic participation.

By treating cinema as a site of democratic repair rather than propaganda or escapism, the paper contributes to broader debates on democracy in crisis. It suggests that democratic values can persist and be reworked through cultural practices even when political institutions fail. The Turkish case demonstrates how popular culture can serve as an alternative arena for democratic expression, revealing forms of resilience that remain invisible in institutional accounts of democracy.