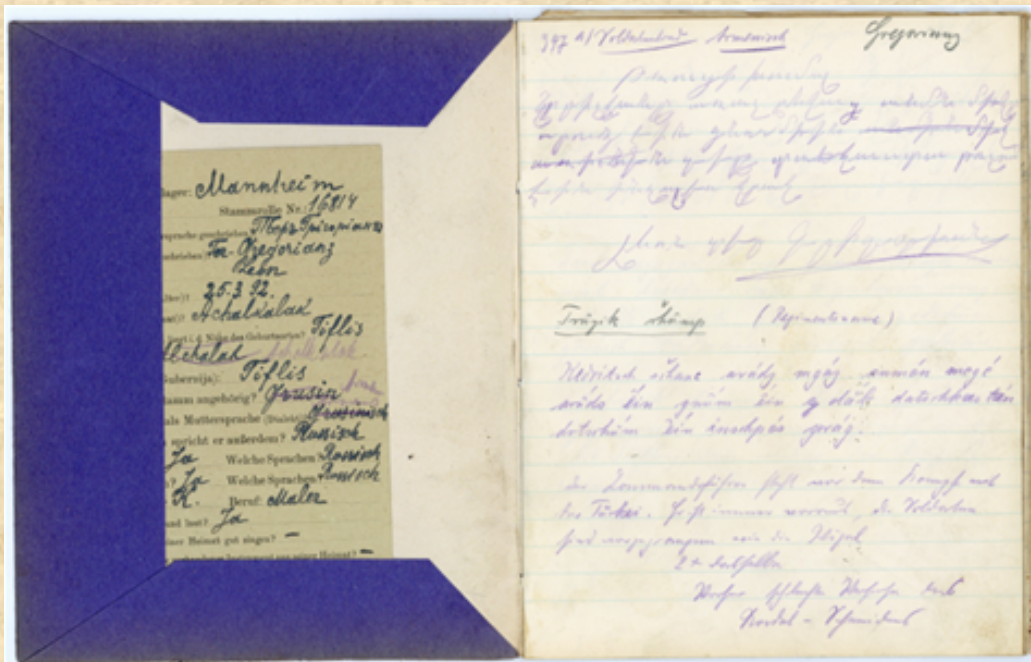


# THE RICHARD HOVANNISIAN CHAIR OF MODERN ARMENIAN HISTORY AT UCLA

(ESTABLISHED BY THE ARMENIAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION)

## Voice Signatures: Recordings of Russian Armenian POWs in German Camps, 1916-1918

*A lecture by Melissa Bilal (University of Chicago)*



**Thursday, May 10**  
**6:00-7:30 PM**  
**1234 Public Policy**

During WWI, the initially secret Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission (Königlich-Preußische Phonographische Kommission) made recordings from the prisoners of war held in various different camps across German territories. Among the interns detained in these camps were Russian Armenian soldiers. In my talk, I will present samples of songs and speech in Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish captured a century ago from these men by the use of the phonograph and gramophone technologies. I will also share the pieces of information we have on the lives of these soldiers. My talk will contextualize these recording sessions held in POW camps within the history of wartime anthropology. It will critically address the large-scale imperial, colonial, and racialized knowledge production endeavor by musicologists, linguists, ethnographers, and physical anthropologists that regarded the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian internment camps as "laboratories." While questioning the conditions under which captives were turned into research subjects, it will interpret the repertoire through which the Armenian soldiers expressed themselves in the specific historical moment of 1916-1918. I will argue that the written documents and the voices passed onto us by the phonographic commission challenge the idea of an "archive" and/or a "museum" that the commission originally intended to put together.

Melissa Bilal is Dumanian Visiting Professor of Armenian Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. She is currently working on her monograph *The Wake Up Lullaby: Gender and the Song of the Armenian Revolution* and co-working with Lerna Ekmekcioglu on *Feminism in Armenian: An Interpretive Anthology and Digital Archive*.

Nearby self-parking available in lots 2 & 3

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