Knowing Otherwise: The Armenian Community of Istanbul and Grandmothers’ Lullabies

talk and presentation by

Melissa Bilal

In the Armenian community of Bolis (Istanbul), lullabies contribute to the construction of a particular sense of the past in relation to the present. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Dr. Bilal argues that the lullabies grandmothers sing and the stories they narrate transmit both their desire to speak and to remain silent. Consequently, elderly Armenian women powerfully shape a genuine mode of knowing and being in a world where their presence and absence in Turkey is denied.

Melissa Bilal is a Mellon postdoctoral teaching fellow at Columbia University, Department of Music. She received her Ph.D. in Music from the University of Chicago in 2013. Her dissertation analyzes the history of Armenian lullabies from mid-19th century to the present. She is the author, with Lerna Ekmeckioğlu, Bir Adalet Feryadi, Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar (1862–1933) [A Cry for Justice: Five Armenian Feminist Writers from the Ottomans to the Republic (1862–1933)]. Currently, she is researching on the Armenian ethnographic movement at the turn of the 20th century and the collection of early songs.