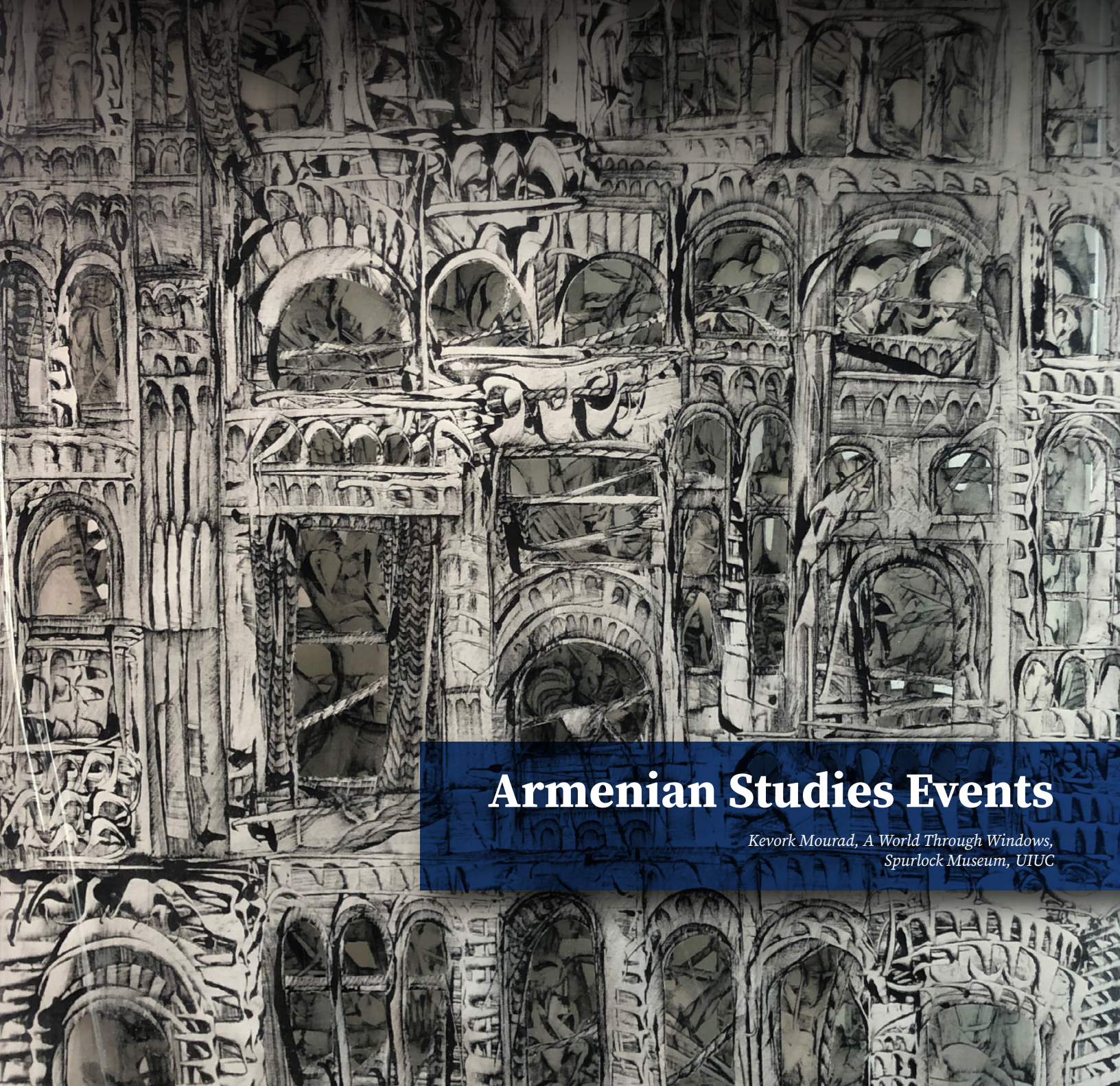


# PROGRAM IN JEWISH CULTURE & SOCIETY



THE INITIATIVE IN HOLOCAUST, GENOCIDE, AND MEMORY STUDIES



## Armenian Studies Events

*Kevork Mourad, A World Through Windows,  
Spurlock Museum, UIUC*



*On April 24, 2021, President Biden made history by declaring the murder of more than a million Armenians genocide. He issued the statement on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, and you'll immediately see that while multitudes of Armenians in diaspora and millions of others, including Holocaust studies scholars, have understood this mass killing as genocide for a very long time, it is not universally recognized as such.*

*Biden's declaration gives strength to many Armenians and their allies who feel that the U.S. should have recognized the genocide sometime quite a bit sooner than 106 years after the brutal, traumatizing events occurred. But we welcome the declaration and hope that it will affirm our collective commitment to annual commemoration on or around Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.*

## Introduction

BY BRETT ASHLEY KAPLAN, DIRECTOR,  
INITIATIVE IN HOLOCAUST, GENOCIDE,  
MEMORY STUDIES

*The Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies (HGMS) is firmly committed to hosting an Armenian studies event every April, and we hope you will read on to find out more about the moving, scintillating events we've organized in this compendium of our activities thus far.*

English Ph.D. **Helen Makhdounian** catalyzed this rich tradition several years ago and it has included visits from Peter Balakian, Nancy Kricorian, Silvina der Meguerditchian, Melissa Bilal, and many other scintillating voices from the Armenian diaspora. Helen has just completed her dissertation, *A Map of This Place: Memory and the Afterlives of Removal*, which “proffers the rubric of nested memory through a contrapuntal study of Armenian American, Palestinian American, and American Indian/First Nations novels and memoirs. Nested memory articulates the structure of the multigenerational transmission of memory in the face of the recursivity of collective trauma.” She will be the Manoogian Postdoctoral Fellow in Armenian Studies at the University of Michigan for the 2021-2022 academic year. Helen has been a proven trailblazer on campus and has done an enormous service to the university and the larger community to expand and enrich our programming around the Armenian genocide and trauma and memory studies more broadly. HGMS will miss her very much.

The April 2021 Armenian studies event, a conversation between and Kevork Mourad and Helen, was more than a year in the making. An enormous thank you to Elizabeth Sutton, director of the Spurlock Museum, for working



Helen Makhdounian

with us so thoughtfully on the original conception of the visit, which, in the beforetimes, was to include a large on-site installation at Spurlock. We are also grateful to Elizabeth for commissioning Kevork's wonderful piece. “A World through Windows,” which is currently on view at the museum — and it's open! Videos about the making of the exhibit are also available on the Spurlock website, and I urge you to check those out here: <https://www.spurlock.illinois.edu/exhibits/profiles/world-through-windows.html>.

**Kevork Mourad** is an active and diverse artist and many of his projects are on view here: [www.kevorkmourad.com](http://www.kevorkmourad.com). Kevork was born in Syria, studied art in Yerevan, Armenia, and now lives in Brooklyn. His intensely evocative, beautiful work explores migration, memory, and place; trauma, community, and isolation. History and its often violent over-writing, the competing claims of inheritance and presence, the motherland and the

currentland. Time, engagement, and distance. He collaborates with dancers, musicians, and other visual artists to create stunning multimedia projects. He has worked with Yo-Yo Ma, Kinan Azmeh, Kim Kashkashian, and exhibited and/or performed at Carnegie Hall, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tabari Art Space in Dubai, and many other august museums and performance spaces all over the world.

There's an invitation in all of his projects to see and feel the spaces he evokes but also to come in, to experience your own — our own — memories, reactions, and emotions as we travel through the work. As Kevork said in one of his many videos, "I'm interested in knowing what you're going to feel when you are in front of the piece, as a citizen of the world."

We are very much hoping to bring Kevork to campus in person in April 2023 to (finally) construct, with the help of UIUC art students, the on-site installation at the Spurlock Museum he had originally envisioned.

Thanks to generous support from MillerComm, we look forward to a rich, multidisciplinary visit from **Sato Moughalian** on April 25th, 2022. Moughalian, an award-winning flutist and author of a highly lauded 2019 book, *A Feast of Ashes: The Life and Art of David Ohannessian*, plans to offer a talk entitled "Material Culture in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide." For her MillerComm talk Moughalian will address multiple aspects of how material culture has impacted Armenian studies and the Armenian diaspora. Bringing in a broadly comparative interdisciplinary lens, Moughalian will relate the Armenian diaspora to larger themes. In addition, Moughalian plans to give a flute masterclass, open to the public, about the music of Armenian composer Gomidas Vartabed. She also plans to meet with students and offer a ceramics workshop to make some ceramic tiles similar to those her grandfather produced.

Gomidas amassed an enormous collection of carefully curated and researched Armenian folk songs. He pains-

takingly eliminated foreign musical influences from these songs and has thus constructed an invaluable archive of Armenian music. Many of these carefully arranged Armenian folk songs were lost after the 1915 genocide when Gomidas was forced to flee. Moughalian's grandfather, as she details in *Feast of Ashes*, was able to befriend Gomidas and visited him towards the end of his life. So, when Moughalian offers this open to the public flute masterclass, it's in the spirit of recapturing a sliver of what was lost during the Armenian genocide.

Mourad and Moughalian's visits dovetail beautifully with the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies annual Armenian studies events. Kevork's visit would not have been possible without the incredible energy and dedication of Masumi Iriye, and we thank Masumi; Tamara Chaplin; everyone at Center for Advanced Study; Antoinette Burton and Humanities Research Institute; Rob Rushing and the Program in World & Comparative Literature; Jeff Moore and the Beckman Institute; Kevin Hamilton and the College of Fine & Applied Arts; Bob Markley and the Department of English; John Randolph and Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center; Elena Delgado and School of Literatures, Cultures, & Linguistics; Dara Goldman and the Program in Jewish Culture & Society; Jeff Sposato and the School of Music; Wail Hassan and Center for South Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, for all your crucial support. Enormous thanks to Heidi Bell for making the logistics of the visit possible. HGMS has set up an April 24th Fund to help us continue this annual tradition so please feel free to find that on the HGMS website.



Watch the video of Kevork and Helen's conversation [here](#).



Link to one of the illustrations Kevork made for a stunning dance project [here](#).

If you would like to be added to the HGMS mailing list, please email [hbell@illinois.edu](mailto:hbell@illinois.edu)  
If you'd like to learn more about HGMS, please email Brett Kaplan at [bakaplan@illinois.edu](mailto:bakaplan@illinois.edu)  
If you'd like to support our ongoing Armenian studies programming, please consider:

**The April 24th Fund**  
[jewishculture.illinois.edu/giving/give](http://jewishculture.illinois.edu/giving/give)

# MILLERCOMM2021

## Conceptualizing Migration, Memory and Place Through Art

*There's an invitation in all of Kevork Mourad's projects to see and feel the spaces he evokes but also to come in, to experience your own — our own — memories, reactions, and emotions as we travel through the work.*

*As Kevork said in one of his many videos, "I'm interested in knowing what you're going to feel when you are in front of the piece, as a citizen of the world."*



In conversation with University of Illinois graduate student Helen Makhdounian, Syrian-born Armenian artist Kevork Mourad will discuss how he conceptualizes migration, memory and place-making through his paintings and visual performances. Mourad depicts the Syrian refugee crisis and co-existence in cities like Qamishli, Aleppo and Damascus. He will elucidate how his and his ancestors' memories of the Syrian Civil War and the Armenian genocide inform his representations of upheaval and survival.

Mourad's work, *A World Through Windows*, is on display at the Spurlock Museum of World Cultures. Photos of the work, along with videos and statements by the artist are viewable virtually at: <https://go.illinois.edu/spurlock-mourad>.

Registration is required for this Zoom event:  
Scan the QR code or visit <http://cas.illinois.edu/node/2494>



# CAS

Center for  
Advanced  
Study

## Kevork Mourad

Independent artist

**Wednesday**  
**April 21, 2021**  
**7:00 pm CDT**

Registration is required for this  
Zoom event. See below.

University of Illinois  
at Urbana-Champaign

### HOSTED BY:

Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide and  
Memory Studies  
Spurlock Museum

### IN CONJUNCTION WITH:

Beckman Institute for Advanced  
Science and Technology  
Center for South Asian and Middle  
Eastern Studies  
College of Fine and Applied Arts  
Department of English  
Humanities Research Institute  
Program in Comparative and  
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Eurasian Center  
School of Literatures, Cultures  
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**KNOWLEDGE THAT ILLUMINATES.**

**I ILLINOIS**



# Melissa Bilal Presents Research on Armenian Lullabies, Print Culture, and Remembrance Practices to the UIUC Campus Community

BY HELEN MAKHDOUMIAN

As part of its commitment to hosting an annual Armenian studies event, the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies (HGMS) welcomed **Melissa Bilal** this April. Professor Bilal received her PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Chicago and is currently a visiting assistant professor in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at the American University of Armenia.

Professor Bilal visited with graduate students, undergraduates, and faculty from across campus. Each time that I assumed that we had exhausted her archive of information, I watched as Professor Bilal pointed us towards fascinating sources, raised thoughtful questions because she genuinely loves to learn from others, and taught with a vision that the exchange of knowledge and stories has repercussions beyond the classroom, the library, or the dinner table.

Indeed, Professor Bilal's presentations generated thought-provoking discussions that will undoubtedly influence the research in comparative trauma and memory studies undertaken by HGMS students and faculty. Moreover, for us graduate students who hope to become professors, Professor Bilal provided a wonderful example of mentoring in academia. I trust that at whatever institutions we call home after we graduate, we will put into practice what we witnessed. That is, I cannot wait to see how we champion our own students' intellectual curiosity and model community building between novice and more-experienced scholars from different disciplines.

For the HGMS faculty lecture series, Professor Bilal gave a talk titled "Injuries of Reconciliation: Being an Armenian in Post-Genocide Turkey." Professor Bilal articulated city-level microhistories of Armenian exile, the intertwined histories of dislocated peoples in this early 20th century period of population transfer in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, and connections between Armenians'

**MILLERCOMM2019**

## Historians in Action: How and Why We Reclaim an Armenian Feminist Past

**CAS** Center for Advanced Study

**Melissa Bilal**  
College of Humanities & Social Sciences, American University of Armenia

Tuesday  
April 30, 2019  
7:00 pm

Knight Auditorium, Spurlock Museum  
600 South Gregory, Urbana  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**HOSTED BY:**  
Holocaust, Genocide and Memory Studies

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH:**  
April 24 Fund  
Center for Global Studies  
Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
Department of Gender and Women's Studies  
Department of History  
Department of Political Science  
Department of Sociology  
European Union Center  
Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities  
Program in Jewish Culture & Society  
Program in Women and Gender in Global Perspectives  
School of Literature, Culture and Linguistics  
Spurlock Museum

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For background information, consult [cas.illinois.edu](http://cas.illinois.edu) or call 217-333-6729.

**ILLINOIS**

**KNOWLEDGE THAT ILLUMINATES.**

Professor Bilal will first provide an overall introduction to *Feminism in Armenian: An Interpretive Anthology and Digital Archive*, a collaborative project with Lerna Ekmekcioglu (MIT) that aims to end the ever-present invisibility of activist women in Armenian historiography and collective memory. She will then focus on one of the authors featured in the project, namely Yelbis Gesaratsian (1830 – ?) editor of *Drawing on Gesaratsian's* writings. Professor Bilal will discuss the interrelatedness of discourses on gender, sexuality, body, emotion, culture, history, nation, modernity, land, and music in the nineteenth-century Armenian intellectual narratives.

*"Professor Bilal's presentations generated thought-provoking discussions that will undoubtedly influence the research in comparative trauma and memory studies undertaken by HGMS students and faculty... and provided a wonderful example of mentoring in academia."*



experiences and those of Kurds and Alevis who also continue to face political violence in Turkey. She further called our attention to the affective and embodied elements of memory work and asserted that in narrating silenced histories, storytelling and music are powerful decolonizing modes of knowing constituted by feeling.

Graduate student members of the Future of Trauma and Memory Studies reading group and Professor Bilal then visited the Rare Book and Manuscript Library on campus. Curator Cate Coker pulled out a fantastic selection of Armenian language and Armenian history texts from the library's collections, spanning the 16th through the 20th centuries. We looked at bilingual dictionaries, books on comparative linguistic studies, travel narratives, a translation of Lord Byron's poems into Armenian, a book of sonnets penned by the English poet William Watson about England's response to the Hamidian Massacres of Armenians from 1894 to 1896, a book of letters written by English humanitarian relief workers who witnessed those massacres, and issues of the *Hairenik Weekly* periodical from 1934.

The next day, Professor Bilal visited the Introduction to Poetry undergraduate-level course I taught this semester, which I had themed "Memories, Witnesses, Diasporas." The course culminated in a class discussion on witnessing and bearing witness in our contemporary moment. In preparation, students read Professor Bilal's recent journal article titled "Lullabies and the Memory of Pain: Armenian Women's Remembrance of the Past in Turkey." Students pursuing majors within and beyond the liberal arts and sciences asked Professor Bilal questions regarding communal storytelling practices and history writing, the intergenerational transmission of traumatic cultural memory, and how remembrance practices, including telling narratives about painful pasts through lullabies, can inform the pursuit of justice for victims of mass violence.

In the evening, Professor Bilal gave a Center for Advanced Study/MillerComm lecture titled "Historians in Action: How and Why We Reclaim an Armenian Feminist Past." Professor Bilal provided an overview of *Feminism in Armenian: An Interpretive Anthology and Digital Archive*, a book and digital humanities project that she is working on with Professor Lerna Ekmekçioğlu (MIT). The project recovers work by twelve Ottoman-born Armenian feminist activist writers. It aims to end the ever-present invisibility of activist women in Armenian historiography and collective memory.

These women's writings offer a rich archive of intellectual discourse on social justice concerns. They also register the transatlantic migration of print culture in that these Armenian women writers referenced conversations on abolition and women's rights movements. In her lecture, Professor Bilal focused on Yelbis Gesaratsian (1830-1913). Gesaratsian published seven issues of *Կիթառ/Guitar* (1862-1863), the first Armenian women's journal which fought for women's rights and the second women's journal ever published in the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, the journal was silenced and Gesaratsian's overall intellectual contributions were overlooked during her lifetime. However, Professor Bilal and Ekmekçioğlu's critical return to these twelve women authors' works is paving the way for research on Armenian feminist movements past and present as well as for comparative historiographies.

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**We are grateful for all the programs which made Professor Bilal's visit possible:**

Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies; Program in Jewish Culture & Society; April 24 Fund; Center for Global Studies; Center for South Asian & Middle Eastern Studies; Department of Gender & Women's Studies; Department of History; Department of Political Science; Department of Sociology; European Union Center; Humanities Research Institute; Program in Women & Gender in Global Perspectives; Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, School of Literatures, Cultures, & Linguistics; and Spurlock Museum.



[Video link](#)



# From Events in 2017-18 to Setting up the April 24th Fund: A Reflection on Continuing to Create Space for Armenian Studies through HGMS

BY HELEN MAKHDOUMIAN

*I want to begin this blog post differently than previous ones that I've written regarding programming supported by the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies (HGMS) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I will, of course, still write in detail about the wonderful campus visits we had this year from Khatchig Mouradian (Columbia), Diana Hambarzumyan (Yerevan State Linguistic University), and Victor Pambuccian (Arizona State) as well as other related events. However, to emphasize how a single event has the potential to produce lasting effects beyond sparking fascinating questions, fostering avenues for innovative research, and bringing together a campus community in positive ways, I want to share a brief story.*

A few years ago, as a McNair Scholar at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah, I listened to a panel of graduate students discuss their experiences in academia. Opportunities like these gave me hope for the possibility of being fortunate enough to continue to receive a higher education and invaluable insights that would help me further think through the questions I was asking about the Armenian diaspora and its memory work, the travels of Western Armenia and its potential vibrancy between two mountain ranges locally and across borders globally, and our ever changing transnational community's beautiful artistic and literary production.

Still, with the daunting question in my mind as to whether a space would even welcome me to do just that, I could not have imagined that in the not too distant future, I would participate for the second time as a panelist myself and champion another cohort of McNarians. Indeed, as I think about what I will tell these future graduate students about my journey, I can't help but smile.

Why? Well, it's been incredible (to say the least), and HGMS has played an instrumental role in making it so! As an undergraduate, I had wonderful professors who encouraged me to design directed studies and research projects to pursue my inquiries. It was there that I started to believe in the potential to create spaces for Armenian studies in unexpected places, and it was there that I started to learn the value of mentorship. And, it's been through HGMS that my faith in both of these things has skyrocketed!

In April 2016, HGMS organized a visit from Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, memoirist, and scholar **Peter Balakian** who delivered a CAS/MillerComm lecture titled "The Armenian Genocide, Poetry of Witness, and Postmemory." In April 2017, for the Spaces of Remembering the Armenian Genocide Conference and Film Screening, HGMS was delighted to host a group of talented, sharp, and inspiring scholars and artists: **Silvina Der-Meguerditchian, Nancy Kricorian, Scout Tufankjian, Talar Chahinian, and Myrna Douzjian**. These are some of the events that HGMS has supported me and other graduate students in organizing over the years. Additionally, this year, as part of its commitment to offering an annual, on-campus Armenian studies event in commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, HGMS set up the April 24th Fund. ([jewishculture.illinois.edu/giving/give](http://jewishculture.illinois.edu/giving/give)) From this trajectory of events, I have learned that a workshop, lecture, or conference is more than just an opportunity to exchange knowledge, gain feedback, and engage the public. As the community of faculty and graduate students affiliated with HGMS has led me to see, an event is part of a larger way to "pay it forward." It is this message of paying it forward that I will carry with me and share with students, whether at the upcoming panel or in the classroom.

So, while I now turn to the spaces that wonderful guest lecturers activated this year at UIUC, I hope that this larger context also helps you see, as I do, the following events as more than just events.

*"...a workshop, lecture, or conference is more than just an opportunity to exchange knowledge, gain feedback, and engage the public... an event is part of a larger way to 'pay it forward.'"*

For the HGMS Faculty Seminar Series, **Khatchig Mouradian** first gave a workshop titled "'The Very Limit of Our Endurance': Unarmed Resistance During the Armenian Genocide." Mouradian invited the audience to understand that a "perpetrator driven narrative" has traditionally framed studies of the Armenian genocide. This emphasis, he argued, overlooks victims' voices and resistance



efforts. He further suggested that in contrast, a shift in the discussion to unarmed resistance, such as humanitarian efforts against the will of authorities, allows for a more complex understanding of the catastrophe. For example, looking at this network of acts of resistance, including the formation of relief communities through churches and efforts to document refugees' stories and familial histories, underscores the importance of gender and class as lenses through which to analyze this period.

In the evening, Mouradian also delivered a lecture titled "Internment and Destruction: Concentration Camps During the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917." Mouradian provided a nuanced account of the perpetrators' process of removing populations out of their homes and the combination of circumstances and conditions that undergirded the genocidal project. Specifically, he discussed the administrative infrastructure and daily operations of concentration camps along the Euphrates River. The interdisciplinary community of HGMS faculty and graduate students had several questions for Mouradian, and he deftly responded, often by situating the history of the Armenian genocide in relation to other case studies of mass violence and dispossession. Many of us in HGMS work comparatively within the larger umbrella of trauma and memory studies; thus, Mouradian's careful, thoughtful connective gestures were well-received.

In this vein of comparison and connection, Mouradian's lecture and workshop couldn't have come at a better time. Previously, HGMS hosted an on-campus screening of the 2016 documentary "The Destruction of Memory," which was followed by a Skype Q and A with director Tim Slade. I mention the documentary here because of a point that fellow HGMS graduate student Claire Baytas and I didn't address in our article about the film. Towards the end of the documentary, interviewees connect the experiences of Armenian genocide refugees with those of Syrian civil war refugees. Both through his presentations and conversations with us afterwards, Mouradian helped us return to and refine questions about memory work that the documentary had prompted us to grapple with. It wasn't just through the study of history, though, that we mapped connections and charted comparisons. Indeed, this year, several events on literature and translation brought together diverse audiences and, perhaps, laid the foundations for future student work on campus.

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In November, literary translator, writer, and professor **Diana Hambardzumyan** (Yerevan State Linguistic University) gave a presentation on modern Armenian literature. Specifically, Hambardzumyan discussed her

own writing experiences, her translation of Kurt Vonnegut's Armenian-themed "Bluebeard," and Armenian American writers such as William Saroyan and Peter Najarian. We are deeply grateful for two of our wonderful community members, Tigran Hakobyan and Arpi Arakelyan, who generously arranged for Hambardzumyan to visit our campus. It was Arpi who first approached me about organizing this event, and the enthusiasm and energy she brought to the process still inspires me months later.

A lively conversation followed the presentation and as a graduate student instructor of literature, I especially loved watching undergraduate students pose complex and exigent questions. Hambardzumyan's responses prompted audience members to reflect upon the following: what do we mean when we refer to "Armenian literature," what might we include under that rubric, and what factors inform the rationales behind our selections? Another student asked whether the development of technology in Armenia has played a role in prompting youth to develop an interest in translating literature. Hambardzumyan stressed that despite the proliferation of technological tools, it is still necessary to train individuals to become good translators. She also emphasized both the need for and importance of translating literature from other languages into Armenian and vice versa.

Questions like these led me to view my own research interests from a different angle. That is, I had not thoroughly inquired before if and how literature produced by writers of Armenian descent in dispersion and in a myriad of languages has migrated into public and private spheres within a nation-state formation of Armenia. For me, then, one of the meaningful takeaways from Hambardzumyan's visit was for those of us in the diaspora and those of us in the nation state to ask ourselves, how have we come to understand (or misunderstand) one another through the circulation of our literatures? And, if our literatures are "stuck" in isolated sites, how do we create connective spokes so that, as I've written about in my own work, we "translate" our stories, lived conditions, and memoryscapes to one another and in so doing, better conceptualize the fabric of our transnational kinship?

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Since Hambardzumyan's visit, Assistant Professor **Anush Tserunyan** (mathematics), my dear friend and Western-Eastern Armenian language ally on campus, has been a keen and willing interlocutor and has pushed me to keep asking questions along these routes. Indeed, it was Anush who first got the ball rolling for another event on literature and translation on campus.



Anush had invited professor **Victor Pambuccian** (Arizona State) to give a lecture for the logic seminar that she organizes on campus and in the meantime, she introduced me to some of his translations (including the poetry of Vahe Godel, a Swiss-French writer of Armenian heritage). With Anush's encouragement, I asked Pambuccian if he would be interested in giving an informal talk while he visited campus, and we were thrilled when he said "yes." And, so, that's how we got a Romanian-born, Armenian mathematics professor with a passion for translating poetry to discuss his translations of Romanian avant-garde poetry!

Pambuccian introduced an audience to three generations of poets, many of whom were of different ethnic backgrounds, wrote in languages other than Romanian, and worked outside the territory of Romania. We learned about poets whose works have regularly appeared in anthologies (such as Tristan Tzara and Paul Celan) alongside perhaps less-familiar poets (such as Nora Iuga and Mariana Marin). Pambuccian historicized the poets' work and their contributions to Dadaism, Symbolism, and Onirism. Additionally, Pambuccian read some of his translations, which generated a lively discussion about what we saw in the poems: negotiation of identity, rootlessness, and belonging; thick descriptions of landscape and place; and play with sound.

Despite humbly pointing out that he has not been trained in literary or translation studies, Pambuccian's informal talk sparked thoughtful questions from audience members. We came to see that Romanian avant-garde poetry remains a ripe site through which to return and complicate some of the theories many of us engage as students interested in cosmopolitan, transnational, world, and comparative literatures. I'd like to also think that among the lasting impressions that both talks by Hambarzumyan and Pambuccian left on our campus is some inspiration in us to begin (or continue) our own journeys with translation.

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The final literature- and translation-related event I want to highlight is an annual event organized by the students of the Armenian Association on campus: **a candlelight vigil on April 24th** to commemorate the Armenian genocide. It's been my great pleasure to lead a literary reading as part of this event, which is open to the public. Some volunteer readers come prepared with their own literary selections but in the days leading up, I think critically about picking texts that help us make meaning of that day in relation to the world around us, the present "moment" in which we find ourselves. Last year, I picked poems and short passages of prose that would help us

think about the past and our gathering in the context of what we were hearing about the Syrian civil war, reading about refugee crises globally, and the land on which we were going to hold the then upcoming Spaces of Remembering the Armenian Genocide Conference and Film Screening.

This year, as I watched individuals on campus ask "What's happening in Armenia?" hour-to-hour and as I saw the phrase "revolution" crop up in one news headline after another, I felt we needed to conclude the commemoration that evening with messages in literature about Spring (about change, resilience, upbuilding communities, and ushering in a bright future). Ultimately, I selected texts by the following writers (which we read in Armenian and English): Diana DerHovanessian, Micheline Aharonian Marcom, Michael Arlen, Peter Balakian, Arto Vaun, Yeghishe Charents, and Vahan Tekeyan. Dilara Caliskan also brought and read from an English translation of Zabel Yesayan's prose, and Albert Tamazyan recited poetry by Paruyr Sevag.

So, what's next for HGMS and me? I'll definitely continue to read, think, and write a lot in this next stage of my graduate education (and afterwards, of course). HGMS will continue to work with amazing people who also believe in creating spaces for Armenian studies events on campus. And, as I said earlier, an event is never just an event. Through it all, I know that I'll continue to learn how to become a great mentor and "pay it forward." Դժվար առաջ: Onward we go!





## Reflections on Spaces of Remembering the Armenian Genocide conference and film screening

BY HELEN MAKHDOUMIAN AND DILARA CALISKAN

**O**n April 28, 2017, The Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies (HGMS) and The Future of Trauma and Memory Studies (FTMS) reading group hosted Spaces of Remembering the Armenian Genocide. The atmosphere at the conference was electric, the room was full to bursting, and everyone agreed it was a spectacular event!

Conference speakers included **Myrna Douzjian** (UC Berkeley), **Talar Chahinian** (California State University, Long Beach), **Nancy Kricorian** (New York City-based writer and organizer), and **Scout Tufankjian** (New York City-based photographer). Brett Kaplan also invited us, **Helen Makhdounian** and **Dilara Çalışkan**, to present. The event closed with a screening of “Armenoscope: constructing belonging” and a conversation with the documentary essay’s director, Silvina Der-Meguerditchian (Berlin-based visual artist and artistic director for Houshamadyan).

In this vein, we had both an all-women organizing committee and an all-women lineup of speakers making thought-provoking, critical and artistic contributions to

Armenian studies and the larger fields of trauma, memory, and diaspora studies. Faculty and graduate students across campus introduced each speaker. Brett suggested doing an event on the topic of the Armenian genocide to Helen after learning about a campus conference funding application. Helen proposed inviting inspiring people with diverse academic and creative talents and backgrounds. Because of her exposure to the interdisciplinary and multinational community of promising and more advanced scholars that HGMS has fostered, Helen believes that Armenian literature and art often produce nuanced theories that can be harnessed alongside other methodological frameworks for the study of transnational Armenian experiences. Dilara joined the organizing committee and provided insightful perspectives that continued to shape the committee’s goals for the event.

Alongside speakers and attendees, we actualized our vision for the event: to foster conversations on remembrance practices of the Armenian genocide across time, space, and place; how memories of this genocide travel across



media and form (film, literature, art, and photography); and how Armenians' experiences of victimization and survival are referenced in varied locations and contexts to raise awareness of other histories of traumatic collective violence.

The diverse geographies, backgrounds, and disciplines of both panelists and attendees engendered dynamic and transformative discussions throughout the day. By the afternoon, the room filled to full capacity. The exciting conference program drew an audience of students, faculty, and community members from UIUC and even other Illinois institutions. Attendees actively participated in post-panel discussions, which further facilitated an interdisciplinary atmosphere and opened spaces to think more critically about memory work and its itinerary across borders and generations. Ultimately, Spaces of Remembering the Armenian Genocide demonstrated that collective memory remains a vital source of inspiration for ongoing struggles for justice.

*In 2017, HGMS began the process of establishing the **April 24th Fund**, which will enable the Initiative to host more events to commemorate and study the Armenian genocide.*

To continue the conversations that transformed all of us during the event, HGMS has invited Khatchig Mouradian to give a lecture in January. Furthermore, the comments about the strength of this conference's structure and the energy for continuing to produce innovative scholarship on the memory and representation of the Armenian genocide that it generated inspires us to continue to carry HGMS forward as an internationally recognized venue for research, teaching, and public engagement with diverse histories and memories of collective trauma. To that end, HGMS would like to begin the process of establishing The April 24th Fund, which will enable the Initiative to host more events to commemorate and study the Armenian genocide.

Such opportunities will help us further actualize what HGMS, FTMS, and The Program in Jewish Culture and Society have previously set into motion for us and countless others. That is, an awareness of how a thick understanding of the past can inform how we witness, engage, and respond to contemporaneous acts of mass violence, displacement, and migration and how we address related questions about history-writing processes, remembering, forgetting, and denial, and the securing of social justice for different peoples who resist erasure.



*First Republic Day, Freedom Square, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia photo by Scout Tufankjian*

**Many individuals and organizations made this conference possible, and we are so grateful to all for their generous support.**

We thoroughly enjoyed bringing together the “Dream Team.” Enormous thanks to: Beckman Institute; Center for Advanced Study; Center for South Asian & Middle Eastern Studies; College of Liberal Arts & Sciences; Department of English; Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures; Department of History; European Union Center; Graduate College; National Association for Armenian Studies and Research; Program in Comparative & World Literatures; Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center; School of Literatures, Cultures, & Linguistics.

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More information can be found [here](#)

# Peter Balakian visits the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign

BY HELEN MAKHDOUMIAN

The Program in Jewish Culture and Society and the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies organized a special visit from Peter Balakian, a 2016 Pulitzer Prize-winning Armenian American poet, memoirist, and foremost scholar on the Armenian Genocide. This visit included Balakian delivering the Center for Advanced Study (CAS)/MillerComm lecture (video [here](#)) “The Armenian Genocide, Poetry of Witness, and Postmemory” on April 18, 2016, close to the 101st anniversary of the Armenian genocide. Balakian’s visit generated insightful conversations on history, literature, memory, and artistic representation of genocide and trauma.

Balakian’s work offers scholarship, creative output, and communal activism coming together to secure social justice for victims of mass violence. As the Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities at Colgate University, Balakian delineates the importance of witnessing, remembering, and learning about genocides, both inside and outside of the classroom. He also teaches several courses at Colgate on genocide and writing, specifically examining works on the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. Balakian was awarded the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for his *Ozone Journal*, a poetry collection that deals, in part, with the speaker’s memories of excavating the remains of Armenian genocide victims in the Syrian Desert. During his time at the University of Illinois, Balakian underscored the need for excavating and studying difficult pasts and the need to elucidate histories of collective violence into the general consciousness.

In the culmination of his visit, Balakian’s lecture was equal parts academic, creative, and historical. First, Balakian turned to Yeghishe Charents’s poem “Dantesque Legend.” Charents wrote “Dantesque Legend” based on his experiences as an eighteen-year-old volunteer battalion fighter against the Ottoman military that was massacring Armenians. Balakian argued that in witnessing the atrocities and confronting the trauma through poetry, Charents “ingested violence” in his “stiff-eyed seeing of unimaginable cruelty and violence.” By categorizing Charents’s poem as an example of “poetry that ingests violence,” Balakian emphasized a poetry’s weaving together the complex layers of the traumatic event. Then, Balakian turned to three of his own poems — “The History of Armenia,” “Road to Aleppo, 1915,” and “For My Grandmother, Coming Back” — to discuss his own explorations of Armenian memory, generational transmission of trauma and memory, and poetics. Balakian’s grandmother, a death march survivor, filed a human rights lawsuit against the Turkish government. Balakian learned about the document, which he weaves into his poem “The Claim,” years after his grandmother passed away, and this discovery prompted a lyrical impulse to try and retrieve something of what was lost. In these poems, Balakian explores his grandmother’s recall of the genocide, confronts the harsh reality of deportations and death marches, and imagines a return to a lost homeland.

Balakian also fostered various conversations across campus. Balakian met with creative writing MFA students to discuss the challenges in writing about trauma, violence, and politics as well as pedagogical strategies related to teaching undergraduates about genocide; he also visited with graduate students from The Future of Trauma and Memory Studies Reading Group. At this meeting, we discussed a selection of Balakian’s poems, a chapter from his memoir *Black Dog of Fate*, and a piece from his new essay collection, *Vise and Shadow*. Balakian facilitated cross-disciplinary dialogues that left members energized and excited. During a meeting with the Armenian Association of the University of Illinois we learned about Balakian’s research uncovering his family’s experiences during and after the genocide as well, as how he personally negotiates the inheritance of traumatic memories and speaks about this past. Through his engagement with international communities, Balakian has fascinating insight on memory work that crosses borders, developing dialogues between Armenians and other minority groups in Turkey.



Throughout his visit, Balakian tasked individuals interested in the study of genocides to consider such far-reaching effects of humanitarian efforts. In 2015, during the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide, Balakian recalled watching activists’ global efforts, media coverage of the commemoration and the historic event, and political entities’ formal recognition of the genocide. He asserted that examples like the *New York Times*’s five full-page spread with color plates “represented some acute sense of an ethically meaningful moment” and contrasted recent coverage with historical representations and humanitarian outreach. Balakian argued that the “Armenian case provides us with many interesting vectors of study and exploration” in terms of how “the news stays news” and how “the history’s not dead.”

*The generous support from The Program in Jewish Culture and Society and The Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies made possible Balakian’s lecture and his activities on campus.*



[More information can be found here](#)