



Centre for Western Armenian Studies

Արեւմտահայագիտական Ուսմանց Կեդրոն



GHENT
UNIVERSITY

TANIEL VAROUZHAN ANNUAL LECTURE



**17 MAY
2025
GHENT
BELGIUM**

The Centre for Western Armenian Studies and Ghent University are delighted to present this year's Taniel Varouzhan Annual Lecture, which will be held at Ghent University.

Please note that this lecture will be delivered in English.

Annihilating Leadership: The Destruction of Elites in the Armenian Genocide and Beyond

Prof. Uğur Ü. Üngör
Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Amsterdam

This lecture examines the systematic targeting of elites as a defining feature of genocidal campaigns, with a particular focus on the Armenian genocide of 1915. Genocides often begin with the deliberate assault on the victim group's intellectual, cultural, economic, religious, and political leadership, aiming to dismantle resistance, prevent documentation, and erode communal cohesion. The Armenian case vividly demonstrates this pattern: on 24 April 1915, hundreds of intellectuals, politicians, clergy, and community leaders were arrested and later executed, inaugurating the broader campaign of annihilation. This lecture explores the motives behind this strategy, its execution, and its devastating consequences for the victimized groups. Using the Armenian genocide as a central case study, it also incorporates comparative analysis of other genocides, to highlight the recurring nature of elite destruction in mass violence. By analysing a range of primary sources, including perpetrator records and survivor testimonies, this lecture elucidates how the removal of elites not only accelerates the physical destruction of a group but also obliterates its cultural and institutional foundations. Üngör underscores the critical

role of leadership in maintaining societal identity and stability, as well as the profound long-term impacts of its eradication for the victimized community. This exploration offers an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the strategic logic of genocidal violence and its enduring implications.

Uğur Ümit Üngör is Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Amsterdam and the NIOD Institute. His main areas of interest are genocide and mass violence, with a particular focus on the modern and contemporary Middle East. He has published widely on the Armenian Genocide, including *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (Continuum, 2011), and the award-winning *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1950-1913* (Oxford University Press, 2011). His other publications include the monograph *Paramilitarism: Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and its follow-up monograph *Assad's Militias and Mass Violence in Syria* (forthcoming, 2025). He is also co-author of *Syrian Gulag: Inside Assad's Prisons, 2020-1970* (I.B. Tauris, 2022).

Full programme

Welcoming remarks:
Prof. Peter van Nuffelen

Expression of thanks
Dr. Krikor Moskofian

Speaker
Prof. Uğur Ü. Üngör

Date
17 May 2025

Time
5 PM (local time)

Venue
**Paviljoen Charles Vandenhove, Universiteit Gent,
Rozier 1, 9000 Gent**

This event will be livestreamed.

Registration link -
<https://event.ugent.be/registration/Varoujan2025>