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## Visions of Modernity in the Islamic Middle East ISIM-CNWS masterclass

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**Between 21 and 24 February 2000 a joint masterclass was held in Leiden, the Netherlands, organized by the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies and ISIM. The theme of the class was ‘visions of modernity in the Islamic Middle East.’ The objective of the class was to gain an understanding of the quest for the elusive concept of ‘modernity’ which has played such a dominant role in the political projects of intellectuals, governments and social movements in the Middle East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.**

The class was open to students in the Advanced Master’s Programme of the research school, students in ISIM’s Mphil programme and Ph.D. students. During the class, four prominent authorities in the field gave lectures while the students presented papers on the basis of required reading. The students had prepared themselves by reading and discussing a set of articles and chapters dealing with the problems of modernity and modernization in different contexts and from different theoretical angles before the start of the masterclass. This set, with texts by Bearman, Appadurai, Eisenstadt, Keyder, Göle gave rise to lively discussions in preparatory tutorial meetings.

The convener of the class was Erik-Jan Zürcher (Turkish studies, Leiden University) and the guest lecturers were Professor Khaled Fahmy (Hagop Kevorkian Centre, New York University); Professor Shükrü Han-

ioglu (Near Eastern studies, Princeton University); Dr Alexander H. de Groot (Middle East Studies, Leiden University) and Dr Touraj Atabaki (Oriental studies, Utrecht University).

The class started with a lecture by Khaled Fahmy in which he illustrated the process of modernisation and the different concepts of modernity in nineteenth-century Egypt on the basis of the efforts to introduce European-style healthcare and hygiene in Cairo. A comparative aspect was introduced in the shape of the nineteenth-century development of Paris as a ‘healthy’ city described by Alain Corbin in his famous *The Foul and the Fragrant*. The second lecture was by Shükrü Hanioglu. It concerned the vision of modernity of the most radical

section of the Young Turk movement, the ‘Westernists’ whose ideas were realized only in the Turkish Republic from the mid-nineteen twenties onwards. Alexander de Groot treated the last generation of high-ranking religious scholars of the Ottoman Empire, who were in search of a ‘liberal’ religious culture and many of whom had no problem in transferring their allegiance to the government of the republic, which they served until the nineteen fifties. The final lecture, by Touraj Atabaki, was entitled ‘Modernization or Pseudo-Modernization in Iran? The advocates and their opponents’. In it the speaker drew attention to the close relationship between visions of modernity and nationalism in late Qajar and early Pahlavi Iran.

The class gave rise to lively debates, particularly on issues like the validity of the modernization paradigm, with its black and white opposition between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ sections of society, the relevance of theories of incorporation and dependency and the uses of post-modernist discourse analysis and deconstruction. ◆

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