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GEORG-COCH-PLATZ 2, 1010 VIENNA

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

JUST A DREAM: AMBIGUITY, MATERIALITY, AND MODERNIST EPISTEMOLOGIES IN ISLAMIC JAVA

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The category of the Islamic modernist has pervaded identity politics throughout the Muslim world for the last century. Normally, Islamic modernists are understood to be influenced — often quite consciously so — by the epistemic norms of western modernity that enforce rational coherence and display, in Thomas Bauer's language, a very low tolerance of ambiguity. This lecture critically examines this notion of modernists' intolerance of ambiguity based on ethnographic field research among self-identified modernists in Central Java, Indonesia. It focuses on interlocutors' accounts of their own dreams as a site that is transected by incommensurable understandings of the nature of dreams and their epistemic status. Rather than an inherent limitation of modernist discourse, it argues that Islamic modernists make productive use of such tensions and paradoxes normally associated with pre-modern Islam, even as they self-consciously deploy the trope of their own modernist intolerance of ambiguity.



Before joining MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Verena Meyer received her PhD and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Columbia University's Department of Religion. Trained in Islamic Studies and specializing in Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world, her research has focused on the construction of self-consciously pious Islamic identities in Indonesia and their situatedness in transnational intellectual networks, popular culture, and the politics of knowledge of postcolonial Indonesia. She is currently working on her first book, *Future's Past: The Politics of Memory in Islamic Java*, which examines historical memory as a conceptual framework for articulating normative visions and identities for the present and future in different groups of Muslims. In addition to her ethnographic work on contemporary Islam, she has also published on the reception of Arabic philosophical traditions in classical Malay and Javanese literature.

