

## **AIPS Travel Grant Final Report**

### 1. Significance of Presentation on Pakistan Studies

My aim in organizing the panel Old/New Media Cultures in Modern Asia was to highlight the intermingling and/or coexistence of various forms of modern media (both 'old' and 'new') in Asia. In particular, the goal of this panel was to illustrate how modern media forms are implicated in sites of cultural production in very specific and innovative ways that are dependent on the context as much as the nature of the media forms themselves.

My presentation for this conference, "The Quran Workbook: Materiality and Devotion in Contemporary Pakistan" examines how new practices of literacy (reading and writing) have shifted the modalities and ways in which women's engagement with religious textual sources is undertaken in urban centers of Pakistan. While practices of literacy (reading and writing) are often understood and necessitated within a discourse of individual empowerment especially for women, my focus in this paper was to examine how such practices and materials of reading and writing unfold within the realm of religious education. As I have highlighted in the paper, religious education for laypersons has conventionally been undertaken through a recitational modality where the emphasis has been on being able to pronounce the Quranic word in a prescribed fashion. However, over the last two decades, there has been a shift in emphasis from reciting the Quran to reading it. In this paper I explore how the "Quran Workbook" has become a standard material form through which this new engagement with the Quran is mediated and the ways in which it shapes how women come to experience the book.

The presentation is based on a larger ethnographic project on women's religious learning in Pakistan. The paper, and the larger project examine the proliferation of new forms of religious education in urban centers like Karachi to highlight 1) the emergence of new and competing narratives of what constitutes an "authentic Islam" as highlighted through the lens of religious education for women, and 2) how state-led secular projects like mass schooling and literacy have provided both the structure and capacities (reading and writing) on which such religious pedagogical projects are modeled. For Pakistan (and possibly in other parts of the world), this brings to the fore the manner in which the spheres deemed secular or religious cross-over to produce new formations, and subjectivities that are often not easily reduced to either the sphere of the secular or to that of the religious.