

**Abstract for Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association
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Paper Title: *Quranic Legibility: Inscribing Devotion in Contemporary Pakistan*

Abstract:

This paper examines inscriptional practices that are considered integral to reflecting on the Quran's meaning among women participants of Quranic study in urban Pakistan. Over the last two decades, the call to understand the meaning of Quranic word as essential to the correct performance of religious rituals has gained traction among women in urban centers of Pakistan. As such women participate in specialized programs of learning to cultivate competencies for translation and interpretation of the Quranic text (in Urdu). In particular, reading comprehension is braced and performed by the act of inscribing the meaning of the Quran through one's interpretive labor. This paper ethnographically explores how inscriptional practices that record the translation and interpretation of the Quran are discursively framed as the necessary condition for a 'truer' reading of the Quran to be undertaken. In particular, it examines how inscribing an understanding of the text "in one's own words" is framed as essential to generating a 'reading' of the Quran that is im-mediate and therefore more 'authentic'. Such "graphic ideologies" (Hull, 2003), I argue, not only perceive of writing as a functional enterprise that preserves meaning on paper but also imbue it with a potentiality for actualizing 'appropriate' desires and habits of reading and reflection that are seen as integral to virtuous conduct. Focusing on the material practices of writing that are deployed in making the Quran legible, this paper highlights how such inscriptional practices are implicated in making the Quran an object that must be 'read'.