

The 'Literary Local' in Pakistan:
The Role of Representation and Interactive Media in the Formation of Identities
Cara Cilano

My contribution to the AIPS "Locally Sourced in Pakistan" Workshop focuses on the media and 'events' that facilitate and prompt the representation of local cultures and identities. More specifically, I will explore the representational forms and settings—including language—that frame localities in literary and social media 'texts' to analyze what constitutes the local and how it functions. In effect, then, my participation in the workshop attempts to imagine a definition of 'local' that is not entirely grounded in geography and to address the stakes operating in specific 'local configurations,' especially if/when those configurations are exclusionary.

Representations of the annual Karachi Literary Festival serve as one example of the types of texts I will be discussing at the workshop. According to a [New York Times op-ed by Bina Shah](#) on the 2014 Festival, civil society's attempts to "highlight stories from our culture that remind us of who we all were before the Taliban and our current divisions" can occur outside the direct workings of the state and thereby avoid the perception or the reality of the political appropriation of a 'suitable' past to animate prescribed ideas of Pakistani identity. These efforts amount to a construction of the 'local,' especially since other major Pakistani cities, like Lahore and Islamabad, also sponsor annual literary festivals. In addition to the framings of these events, such as that Shah's op-ed conducts, I will also analyze the publicity materials and social media presences of these festivals with an eye toward sketching the 'local' characteristics they promote and identifying their intended audiences. This investigation of the festivals' publicity materials showcases how the 'local' extends beyond immediate geography and seeks to work conceptually through cultural values that may (or may not) cross-cut other identity markers.