

**A Living Ritual, Triumphant Chants, and Songs of Redemption:
First Conference on *Ashenda/Ayni-Wari/Maria*
(August 28, 2022; 9:00 a.m.-5:00p.m.)**

In her work *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, the cultural critic Lila Abu-Lughod describes women's ritualized performances and arts as translational machines. Rituals crack the doors for women to express emotions, modesty, and resistance to authorities. Asking what kind of women's potential can be made possible within violent contexts, Abu-Lughod's account shows the complex and transformative significance of rituals in understanding and challenging multifarious layers of violence. In circumstances where gender-based oppression and violence are prevalent, women strive to use all means including socially constructed cultural norms and practices to challenge systemic injustices, structural marginalization, and armed violence. *Ashenda* (also known as *Mariya/Ayni Wari* depending on where it is performed), constitutes one such ancient cultural reverberation allowing Tigrayan women to expose and resist oppression and injustice in a complex, assertive and joyous manner. In the past two years, Tigrayan women were using *Ashenda* specially to fight the use of gang rape as a tool of genocide and assert their perseverance in the midst of the multifarious violence they endured.

This conference aims to advocate for and advance the struggle of Tigrayan women in the face of the multifarious challenges they face through reflection on the discursive constructs and symbolic meaning of *Ashenda's* significance in the Tigrayan social and cultural matrix. It will expound the need for social change and reimagining the role of *Ashenda* in creating possibilities for Tigrayan women to thrive despite the challenges. Furthermore, this conference will offer insights into areas beyond just rituals and will address a crucial question: what does this performative and celebratory ritual contribute to the creation of a future on the ruins of the genocidal assault? By interrogating the social constructs of *Ashenda* as one of the most prestigious rites of passages, this conference will serve as a platform to reimagine life between genocidal destruction and restorative ritual as a requisite for reconstituting Tigrayan life afresh.

Papers will reflect *Ashenda's* considerable prominence of the geographic, religious, temporal and cultural values of Tigray situating its significance in the diverse generative dynamics organic to Tigrayan vernacular culture. Situating it within contemporary cultural political economy, we will also discuss *Ashenda* both as popular culture and epistemological endeavor. We envisage to have serious conversations seeking broader understandings of *Ashenda* as a world heritage asset of humanity and a cultural practice convertible into socially important therapeutic schema.

There will be two types of submissions to be considered for this conference: Paper and oral presentation, oral presentation only. Oral Sessions are divided into 15 minutes time slots of paper presentation and an additional 15 minutes for discussions and reflections. If a presenter prefers to read from a written text, the paper should be about 4-7 double spaced pages. Presenters can use PowerPoint to visualize their speeches.

The conference will create a platform for Tigrayan policy makers, researchers, and practitioners to share their experiences and perspectives and plan a collaborative project in the future. The conference will also document, produce and share technical papers and deliberation of the conference to be widely available for various users broadly.

Please send your questions and papers to cats.tcf@gmail.com

Organizers!