

EMPOWERMENT AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: AN INVESTIGATION OF
WOMEN'S BELIEFS ABOUT WIFE-BEATING IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the role of culture in women's empowerment in Kenya. Kenya serves as an ideal case study because it has strong ethnic and cultural diversity and a high proportion of men and women who justify the patriarchal practice of wife-beating. This investigation employs the women's surveys from the 2014 round of the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in Kenya to perform logistic regressions of factors shaping a woman's justification of wife-beating across five hypothetical scenarios that can occur between a husband and wife. Results reveal that there are significant differences in women's beliefs about wife-beating across ethnic groups, educational categories, and experience migrating. I draw on Swidler's theory of culture to draw two conclusions from these findings. First, Kenyan ethnic groups are a source of culture that women draw on to form their repertoire of patterned action and belief during periods of *settled life*. Second, education and migration represent Kenyan women's encounters with new gender ideology and experiences with resocialization during periods of *unsettled life*. These experiences offer opportunities for women to gain *critical consciousness*, or a reflexive vantage point from which they can assess whether their culture's gender beliefs about wife-beating are, indeed, unjust.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
IPV	Intimate partner violence

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the United Nations established women's empowerment as a Millennium Development Goal, bringing the concept to international attention (United Nations 2006). Women's empowerment has since become a highly contested 'buzzword,' robbed of its original political intent, strategic value, and feminist conceptual roots as it has become mainstreamed and simplified in international development discourse (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall 2007). Despite feminist scholars' original intent that empowerment be understood within its local, cultural context (Kandiyoti 1988; Rowlands 1997), general empowerment strategies continue to be applied as a universal panacea (Cornwall 2016). Thus, understanding the role of cultural variability in stimulating empowerment remains a central obstacle to progressing women's empowerment initiatives.

Empowerment is a 'multidimensional processes of change' in four main aspects of a woman's life, including her conscious social identity, ability to question her subordinate status, capacity to strategically control her own life, and ability to reshape society by participating on equal terms with men (Kabeer 2011:499). Each society's constraining structures uniquely shape women's 'pathways to empowerment' through these four components (Kabeer 2011; Kandiyoti 1988). Because women often internalize their subordinate social status, they can recognize unequal gender relations but not perceive such disparities as unjust, leading them to accept and perpetuate gender norms that do not support their well-being (Kabeer 1999). Thus, women must recognize gender injustice before they reject their complicit role in its reproduction (Kabeer 2011; Stromquist and Gischman 2009). I will investigate how the first aspect of empowerment, social identity, influences the second component, a woman's ability to recognize unjust patriarchal norms.

Domestic violence is one kind of patriarchal relationship that spans a variety of contexts, to which, despite its detrimental effect on their own well-being, women sometimes acquiesce because they have internalized a lesser status (Linos, Khawaja, and Al-Nsour 2010; Uthman et al. 2009). Wife-beating is a specific form of domestic violence most commonly practiced by men to control and discipline wives who transgress their ascribed gender responsibilities (Lawoko 2008; Simister 2010; Wekwete et al. 2014). Studies have found that condoning intimate partner violence (IPV) is strongly associated with being a perpetrator or victim of IPV (Hanson et al. 1997; Stith et al. 2004). These findings support the theory that the ability to choose conditions that support one's own well-being is dependent on the willingness to reject those unjust relations (Guiné 2014; Kabeer 2011; Stromquist and Gischman 2009).

Studies of empowerment have found a strong relationship between a woman's capacity to leverage resources such as micro-credit, land deeds, or membership in a women's group and her ability to control her own life and participate on equal terms with men (Allendorf 2007; Boateng et al. 2014; Lesser Blumberg 1984; Mishra and Sam 2016). Less clear, however, is the link between a woman's *social identity*, the socially-constructed beliefs a woman holds about her position, roles, and responsibilities, and *critical consciousness*, the reflexive perspective of questioning the 'natural' patriarchal social order (Freire 1993; Kabeer 2011).

A woman's justification of wife-beating is one way of measuring critical consciousness (Linos et al. 2010; Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya, Witte, and Ernst 2015; Rani, Bonu, and Diop-Sidibe 2004). Studies have found ethnicity to be a key social driver of a woman's justification of wife-beating in a study of ten ethnic groups in Kenya (Mugoya et al. 2015; Simister 2010) and five in Ghana (Mann and Takyi 2009). Upon discovery of this association, these studies have hypothesized that ethnic groups' customs, such as matrilineal and patrilineal

inheritance (Mann and Takyi 2009), polygamy, and dowry payments (Mugoya et al. 2015) create varied patriarchal structures of gender norms. Mugoya et al. (2015) argue that ethnic groups in Kenya serve as a proxy for ‘culture,’ but conclude their article by suggesting that future research parse how ethnicity shapes women’s beliefs about IPV. Low education has also been found to be associated with the justification of wife-beating in sub-Saharan Africa (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Simister 2010). Yet studies have yet to interrogate how interactions with social fields beyond one’s place-of-birth, such education and migration, affect women’s perceptions of the patriarchal practice of wife-beating.

Because Kenya is very ethnically diverse (Mugoya et al. 2015) and because Kenyan men and women are among the most likely in sub-Saharan Africa to justify wife-beating (Lawoko 2008; Uthman et al. 2009), I use Kenya as a case study for investigating the relationship between social identity, ethnicity, and the justification of wife-beating. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey’s (DHS) includes women’s justification of wife-beating and, as this is a strong measure of women’s beliefs about patriarchal practices, this data set is particularly appropriate for this analysis (USAID 2013). This paper examines how women’s culturally-shaped social identity and periods of unsettled life influence their critical consciousness. I do so by examining whether Kenyan women’s ethnicity affects their justification of wife-beating. I also investigate how interactions with competing cultural ideology through education or migration provide women with ideological vantage points from which they can critically examine whether the social interaction of wife-beating is, indeed, unjust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resistance to Patriarchal Constraints

Patriarchy and Social Identity. It was Simone de Beauvoir who first stated that “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (de Beauvoir 2009:330). A person’s sense of gender identity is bound to their incessant performance of gendered norms, regardless of whether they are ‘willing’ or ‘knowing’ participants in the practice of ‘doing gender’ (Butler 2004:1). Individuals are always socialized to perform gender in a given context. Sandra Harding argues that “masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race, and culture in the sense that women’s and men’s experiences, desires, and interests differ within every class, race, and culture” (Harding 1987:7). Yet, because societies construct gender as endowed with unequal roles and resources, a society’s understanding of gender always incorporates power inequality.

Patriarchy is the structure that transmits and perpetuates unequal gender relations. Kandiyoti (1988) posits that gender identity is formed within a society’s distinct arrangement of patriarchal constraints that vary across space, time, class, and culture. This arrangement, termed a ‘patriarchal bargain,’ is a set of strategies and gender scripts that are the means and manifestations of how men and women “resist, accommodate, adapt and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities” (Kandiyoti 1988:285).

Patriarchy is both material and relational, as it relies on an unequal distribution of resources, yet is embedded within communities’ relationships, which determine who has access, control, and rights over resources, and allow for the flow of material power toward men (Agarwal 1997; Kabeer 2011; Malhotra and Mather 1997). Because patriarchy is relational, a woman’s social identity, or her position within society’s system of social relations, dependent on race, class, and ethnicity, determine the patriarchal constraints that shape her gender

consciousness, or her subjective perceptions of and beliefs about her roles and responsibilities (Batliwala 1993; Collins 1991; Kabeer 1999, 2011).

Power for Resistance. The concept of women's empowerment rests on the assumption that patriarchal structures can be changed to achieve greater equality between men and women (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall 2016; Kabeer 1999). Empowerment is defined as "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer 1999:435). Empowerment does not mean that women are always using their expanded power to renegotiate their 'patriarchal bargain.' Kandiyoti (1988) explains that women can exercise power even within the context of patriarchal constraint. They draw on resources, strategies, and scripts that enable them to bargain with, deceive, manipulate, or resist men and women to improve their own well-being (Agarwal 1997; Kabeer 1999; Kandiyoti 1988). Sometimes women even exercise power to perpetuate patriarchal constraints for other women.

There are also times when women use their power to renegotiate their society's patriarchal bargain (Kibria 1990). Renegotiation involves resistance, or "refusing to act in conventional ways" and transgression, or "acting in new ways and towards new realities" (Stromquist and Gischman 2009:468). However, for a woman to engage in resistance and transgression she must realize the existence of those gendered constraints (Cornwall 2016; Kabeer 2011).

Theories of Empowerment. Rowlands (1997) recognizes power as a process whereby women gain understanding and consciousness, or *power within*, enabling them to expand their *power with* others through collective action, gain the *power to* challenge unjust gender norms and improve their own lives, and gain *power over* people and resources (Rowlands 1997:13). One vein of empowerment theory focuses on a woman's *power over*. This perspective is rooted

in a materialist understanding of power, which assumes that women need improved economic and human capital to resist patriarchal constraints (Parpart, Rai, and Staudt 2002; Wright and Annes 2016). It emphasizes how women can leverage their power over economic resources, positions within institutions, and decision-making to gain *power over* (Agarwal 1997; Lesser Blumberg 1984; Mishra and Sam 2016). However, this approach is criticized for overlooking the dynamic social processes by which women activate their internal critical consciousness, or *power within*, that enables them to expand their *power to* work *with* others to improve their own lives (Parpart et al. 2002; Wright and Annes 2016).

An alternative understanding of the empowerment process draws on a Foucauldian understanding of power (Batliwala 1994; Cornwall 2016; Kabeer 1999). This conceptualization recognizes that power is not only material, but also “fluid, relational and connected to control over discourses/knowledge” (Parpart et al. 2002:1964). The approach emphasizes the centrality of women’s self-perception, the importance of a conscious understanding of unequal gender relations, and the recognition of unjust gender norms and ideology as being a key starting point for empowerment (Batliwala 1993; Rowlands 1997). A woman must recognize unequal gender relations and regard them as unjust before she is willing to leverage her assets to resist oppressive gender norms and responsibilities (Kabeer 2011).

Critical consciousness is thought to be the mechanism that develops this *power within* (Batliwala 1994; Cornwall 2016; Freire 1993; Stromquist and Gischman 2009). Patricia Hill Collins argues that a fundamental form of empowering change occurs “in the private, personal space of an individual woman’s consciousness” (Collins 1991:111). When a woman’s sense of self is constructed within a community’s web of unjust gender relations, she receives and internalizes a subordinate social identity (Batliwala 1993). It is by participating in expanded

social relationships that a woman can gain “a reflexive vantage point from which to evaluate these relationships” (Kabeer 2011:503) and cultivate her critical consciousness.

These theories focus on education and general consciousness-raising initiatives as a means of stimulating critical consciousness (Cornwall 2016; Freire 1993; Guiné 2014).

Education is thought to expand women’s chances to reflect on gender relations and provide them with the tools to demand a better position in society (Stromquist and Gischman 2009). However, because these approaches focus on how interaction with non-traditional ideology through formal education encourages critical consciousness, they have neglected to consider how interaction with new cultural ideology through other means shapes consciousness. Swidler’s sociological concept of ‘unsettled lives’ helps to address this gap.

The Cultivation of Consciousness through ‘Unsettled Lives’

Swidler (1986) defines culture as “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (Swidler 1986:273). I subscribe to Swidler’s understanding of culture as the means by which agents construct a repertoire, or ‘cultural tool-kit,’ comprised of ‘strategies of action.’ Women draw on these strategies to decide how to act to creatively solve problems. Culture provides actors with a patterned means of solving institutional problems, giving culture a causal role in shaping beliefs and action (Swidler 1986, 2001).

Swidler (1986) accounts for *cultural change* in her contrast of ‘settled’ and ‘unsettled lives.’ She argues that agents with settled lives reflect little on the meaning of their norms and it appears that social structure and cultural strategies are fused, as both co-constitute one another. However, those with *unsettled lives* are living in a moment of rapid social transformation, in which ideology, defined as a “highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system,”

provides agents with new blueprints of cultural strategies (Swidler 1986:278–79). This is a period when individuals grapple with traditions, sets of cultural beliefs and practices that they take for granted because they have become so ingrained into daily life. They also reconsider their common sense, or the ‘unselfconscious’ assumptions that seem ‘natural’ and ‘undeniable.’ Periods of *unsettled life* produce moments when individuals, confronted with new ideology and patterns of action, can choose, based on their current concrete situation, to apply a new cultural framework to transform their personal lives and possibly even restructure their old cultural framework (Swidler 1986).

Similar to a contextual ‘patriarchal bargain’ (Kandiyoti 1988), culture shapes the development of women’s ideas about their roles and responsibilities by providing them with repertoires of strategies and an understanding of when and how to creatively apply those strategies. However, the introduction of a new culture’s gender discourse creates a period of unsettled life, disrupting the old culture’s effect and creating the opportunity for the cultivation of critical consciousness. The next section explores what past studies have found about the relationship between culture and women’s beliefs of whether the patriarchal act of wife-beating is ever justifiable.

Cultural Influences on the Justification of Wife-Beating

A women’s household wealth, a DHS index of household assets, has been found to be significantly associated with the justification of wife-beating across sub-Saharan African countries, where a high concentration of empowerment initiatives are focused (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Simister 2010; Uthman et al. 2009). Generally, women with fewer household resources to draw upon may be less able to leave an abusive relationship, and thus more likely to find reasons to accept the relational constraint of wife-

beating (Simister 2010). However, the act of resisting an abusive, patriarchal relationship is “predicated on her understanding and belief that what is occurring is not appropriate” (Mann and Takyi 2009:333). Thus, both material and ideological conditions should play a role in shaping whether a woman justifies or accepts the constraint of wife-beating.

Increase in age is also found to have the effect of decreasing a woman’s risk of justifying wife-beating across sub-Saharan African countries (Linos et al. 2010; Mann and Takyi 2009; Rani et al. 2004; Uthman et al. 2009). This is likely because as a woman ages, she gains more varied and mature perspectives from which she can see the unequal power relations inherent in IPV (Stromquist and Gischman 2009). Being in a polygynous union is also found to significantly increase a woman’s justification of wife-beating, probably because it is a patriarchal custom that frames a wife’s gender roles (Rani et al. 2004).

Education is consistently cited as one of the main influences on a woman’s rejection of wife-beating, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Linos et al. 2010; Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Simister 2010; Uthman et al. 2009). Two complementary explanations of education’s role emerge in these studies. First, a woman’s education is viewed as a *resource* that later supplies her with economic capital through employment (Simister 2010). Second, education is regarded as providing men and women with *ideology* that is opposed to wife-beating (Mann and Takyi 2009:333), which supplies new gender norms and democratic problem-solving strategies and opens up new cultural strategies of action (Rani et al. 2004; Stromquist and Gischman 2009).

Finally, ethnicity has been found to have a consistently significant influence on a woman’s justification of wife-beating in several sub-Saharan African countries (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Simister 2010). It is postulated that each ethnic group presents a

different set of patriarchal constraints because each has its own unique cultural customs such as a matrilineal or patrilineal inheritance; whether, upon her husband's death, a wife is free to remarry at will or must re-marry her husband's brother; whether polygamy is practiced; whether a wife can divorce her husband and, if she does, whether her dowry will be returned; and whether an ethnic group practices female circumcision and child marriage (Mburugu and Adams 2005; Mugoya et al. 2015; Simister 2010). For example, the significance of ethnic identity in Ghana is attributed to the differences between the matrilineal Akan group and other patrilineal groups, as the Akan pass property down through the matrilineal line, affording women more power over resources (Mann and Takyi 2009). Thus, each group provides women with a unique cultural toolkit from which they select a line of action that allows them to navigate such customs.

Ethnicity as a Unit of Culture in Kenya

Kenya presents an optimal case for studying the effect of ethnicity on beliefs about wife-beating (Mugoya et al. 2015; Simister 2010). Kenya is very ethnically diverse, as it is home to 42 ethnic groups, each with their own language, customs, and gender norms (Mugoya et al. 2015). Ethnic groups are divided along linguistic lines (Mburugu and Adams 2005) and the region where one lives (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014), meaning each ethnic group has its own linguistic and spatial boundaries that allows for ethnicity to be treated as a unit of culture (Mugoya et al. 2015).

Kenya's 42 ethnic groups fall under three linguistic categories: Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushite. Only ten ethnic groups make up at least one percent of Kenya's total population, with the four largest ethnic groups being the Kikuyu (Bantu), Luhya (Bantu), Kalenjin (Nilotic), and Luo (Nilotic) (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014). The largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu, mainly live in the highland regions in the Rift Valley's highlands and constitute a large part of

the country's political and economic elite (Kanyinga 2009). The Luhya and Luo ethnic groups live mainly in western Kenya near Lake Victoria. A large population of ethnic Somalis, as well as several small groups that are also Cushite-speaking, inhabit Kenya's northeast border with Somalia. The Kalenjin and other Nilotic language-speaking groups such as the Samburu, Turkana, and Maasai, mainly populate the semi-arid lowlands of the Rift Valley, which cuts across the country from north to south (USAID 2013) and, aside from some Kalenjin sub-groups that live in the fertile highlands, have traditionally been semi-nomadic pastoralists (Mburugu and Adams 2005; Mugoya et al. 2015).

Groups that are located far from the capital of Nairobi and on less fertile land, such as the Samburu and Turkana, were neglected during the colonial era (Mburugu and Adams 2005), and continued to be overlooked by the post-colonial state until power was devolved from the central government to the local county government under the new 2010 Constitution (D'Arcy and Cornell 2016). At present, those neglected groups retain a legacy of low economic and infrastructure development, low education rates, and overall less societal change than other regions of Kenya have undergone (D'Arcy and Cornell 2016; USAID 2013). Ethnic boundaries continue to be reinforced through ethnic politics (Kanyinga 2009). Ethnic identity has been found to play a significant role in determining how people will vote (Taylor 2017), how the government distributes aid money in the country (Briggs 2014) and levels of local violence (Okumu et al. 2017). Regardless of the socially-constructed nature of these ethnic groups, Kenyans uphold and experience the material consequences of ethnicity as real. Thus, one may postulate that ethnicity plays a strong role in shaping whether women reject wife-beating

Ethnicity, Education, and Migration as Cultural Tools

One study of Kenya suggests that justifying wife-beating may be a ‘coping mechanism’ for women who are under high cultural constraints that prevent them from leaving an abusive marriage (Mugoya et al. 2015). Upon discovery of the significance of ethnic identity and education in Ghana, Mann and Tayki (2009) state that their “analysis supports a much larger role for perceptions of value, self-worth, and identity than has been previously suggested” (333). Still, neither study attempts to untangle the relationship between ethnicity and education as competing sources of gender discourse. Nor do they consider how migration, as an opportunity to interact with the gender ideology of other ethnic groups (Kibria 1990), might influence beliefs about wife-beating. Yet both conclude that it is the task of future research to probe the relationship between ethnicity and education (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015).

What, then, is the effect of ethnicity, education, and migration on a woman’s beliefs about the justifiability of wife-beating? If ethnicity is, indeed, a cultural source of customs that transmit women’s strategies of action, then ethnic identity should influence beliefs about wife-beating. Additionally, because education and migration beyond one’s place-of-birth *unsettle* one’s taken-for-granted realities through the learning and witnessing of competing ‘common sense’ beliefs and patterns of action, both should be related to the justification of wife-beating. Given that I expect differences in justification of wife-beating across ethnicity and that education and migration will contribute to the experience of having an unsettled life, thus affecting beliefs related to wife-beating, I investigate the following three hypotheses in the Kenyan context:

Hypothesis 1: The justification of wife-beating is uniform across all ethnic groups

Hypothesis 2: Education has no effect on the justification of wife-beating

Hypothesis 3: Migration has no effect on the justification of wife-beating

DATA AND METHODS

Data

This study uses data from the Kenya DHS conducted in 2014 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014). This is a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey conducted in households. The DHS has conducted six rounds of questionnaires in Kenya since 1989; this data draws on the latest round. The DHS includes a household survey, and men's and women's short and long-form surveys. Data about perceptions of wife-beating are in the women's long-form survey. Thus, this study uses data from the women's long-form surveys of 14,741 women between the ages of 15-49, and the household survey data that corresponds with each of the women's surveys. The women's long-form survey had a response rate of 96.2%. I merged the two data sets using the household ID number assigned to each woman and household. Because the justification of wife-beating takes place between husbands and wives, I restrict my sample to women who currently live in marital unions, resulting in a sample size of 7,901 women after dropping missing data.

Measures

Dependent Variables. I have six models total. For the first five models, I use five binary dependent variables to see how ethnicity, education, and migration effect the justification of wife-beating across five hypothetical conditions. Each variable is related to the five survey questions asked in the Kenya DHS about the justification of wife-beating. In the survey, respondents respond to the question, "In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: (1) If she goes out without telling him? (2) If she neglects the children? (3) If she argues with him? (4) If she refuses to have sex with him? (5) If she burns the food?" Responses to the questions were "yes," "no," or "don't know" (USAID 2013). I exclude

‘don’t know’ responses, which totaled 318 women, or about 3% of the observations. For each of the five outcome measures, I constructed binary variables coded 1 if the woman responded that the situation justified wife-beating, and 0 otherwise.

Following past studies of wife-beating, for my sixth model, I construct one binary variable that measures whether a woman believes that there is *any* reason for wife-beating, coded 0 if a woman provides no justifications for wife-beating, or 1 if a woman justifies one or more reasons (Linos et al. 2010; Mann and Takyi 2009; Rani et al. 2004; Uthman et al. 2009). While the five former binary variables capture how context influences the conditional justification of wife-beating, the latter estimates the risk factor of any tolerant attitudes towards wife-beating (Mann and Takyi 2009).

Independent Variables. The Kenyan DHS asks respondents, “What is your ethnic group/tribe” to collect information on ethnicity. Of the 42 ethnic groups in Kenya, 14 are large enough to be an official group recorded in the DHS’ 2014 survey, and all else are labeled ‘other’ ethnic groups (Mugoya et al. 2015; USAID 2013, see page 32). Mugoya et al. (2015) retain eight ethnic groups, including the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Kamba, Kisii, Luhya, Luo, Embu/Meru, and Mijikenda/Swahili, while coding all else as ‘other’ groups, though Simister (2010) retains ten ethnic groups and drops ethnic groups with ‘small samples.’ Because these ‘other’ groups each constitute their own unique culture with diverse languages, livelihoods, and places of residence, it is neither appropriate to treat them as one category of homogenous ethnic identities, nor analytically helpful to retain an ‘other’ category. Therefore, I drop the DHS’ ‘other’ group category and the Taita/Taveta ethnic group, which is only 1.49% of the sample. I drop a total of 973 cases, or 9.3% of the total sample. I also collapse the Embu and Meru into one group,

following Mugoya et al. (2015), since these groups are considered to have remarkably similar customs. The twelve remaining ethnic group categories are at least 2% of the final sample.

In order to measure a woman's exposure to competing ideology, I measure the respondent's highest *level of education* (Linoss et al. 2010; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Simister 2010; Uthman et al. 2009). I also measure whether a woman has *ever moved* outside her place-of-birth by using the response to the question, "How long have you been living in [this] current place?" Women who respond "always" are coded 0, or 1 otherwise.

Following past studies, I use the DHS' variables to control for whether the respondent is in a *polygynous union* (Rani et al. 2004); their *age* in years (Mann and Takyi 2009); their *number of children* (Rani et al. 2004; Wekwete et al. 2014); and their *household wealth index*, which serves as a proxy of socio-economic status (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Simister 2010; Uthman et al. 2009). The household wealth index is a variable constructed by the DHS based on responses in the household survey to questions about household assets, and produces five wealth quintiles ranging from poorest to richest (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014).

Methods

I analyzed all data with STATA Version 15.1. The six dependent variables are all binary variables; therefore, I use logistic models for all six models (Hoffmann 2016). Model 1 is a logistic regression of the effect of the ethnicity variable on whether it is *ever* justifiable for a husband to beat his wife, holding education, whether a wife has ever moved, her household wealth index, age, number of children, and if she is in a polygynous union constant. Models 2 through 6 are all logistic regressions of the effect of the ethnicity variable on whether a defined reason for wife-beating is justifiable, holding all else constant. The ethnicity, education, and

migration variables are included in all models to see what their effect is on the justification of wife-beating in one or more situation (Model 1) and under specific situations (Models 2 through 6). The models were tested for multicollinearity and all VIF values were found to be within an acceptable range, all below 5.00 (Hoffmann 2016).

Model 1 is a logistic regression of whether a woman justifies *any* reason for wife-beating. This model does not measure why a woman justifies a given *condition* of wife-beating, but the underlying idea that wife-beating is *ever* acceptable. Models 2 through 6 investigate whether women of certain cultural backgrounds perceive the five constraints presented in the wife-beating question differently. For example, in one ethnic group, women may perceive their responsibility to care for their children as very important, though cooking the food properly is unimportant, while in another ethnic group the opposite is true. These models investigate how women apply the underlying script that it is justifiable for a man to decrease his wife's well-being in different situations, depending on her social background.

The following logistic regression equation is used for all six models (Hoffmann 2016):

$$\ln \frac{P}{(1-P)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k$$

I calculated odds ratios for the six models using the following formula:

$$\frac{P}{(1-P)} = e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k}$$

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics. Table 1 and Figure 1 display the descriptive statistics of the six dependent variables used in the six models. Forty-eight percent of women in the sample justify at least one of these five reasons. The most common reason that a woman would justify wife-beating is if she neglects the children (38%), followed by if she goes out without telling her partner (26%), argues with her partner (25%), refuses sex with her partner (19%), and burns the

food (8%). Of the all the ethnic groups, the Kikuyu ethnic group is the largest, most politically and economically dominant group, thus I use it as the reference variable in all models.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of women in unions ages 15-49 in Kenya in 2014 (N=8534)

	Proportion	Standard Error
<i>Justifications for Wife-Beating</i>		
Justifies at least one reason	48	0.006
Neglects the children	38	0.005
Goes out without telling partner	26	0.005
Argues with partner	25	0.005
Refuses sex	19	0.004
Burns the food	8	0.003
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Ethnicity		
Kikuyu	17	0.004
Kalenjin	14	0.004
Kamba	10	0.003
Kisii	7	0.003
Luhya	13	0.004
Luo	11	0.003
Maasai	3	0.002
Embu/Meru	7	0.003
Mijikenda/Swahili	6	0.003
Somali	7	0.003
Turkana	3	0.002
Samburu	2	0.002
Education		
None	15	0.004
Primary	53	0.006
Secondary	34	0.005
Higher	9	0.003
Ever moved	79	0.005
Household Wealth Index		
Poorest	23	0.005
Poorer	20	0.004
Middle	19	0.004
Richer	20	0.004
Richest	19	0.004
Woman's age	md: 31.8	sd: 8.070
Number of Children	md: 3.3	sd: 2.132
Polygynous Union	15	0.004

Figure 1. Percent of women who justify wife-beating by reason

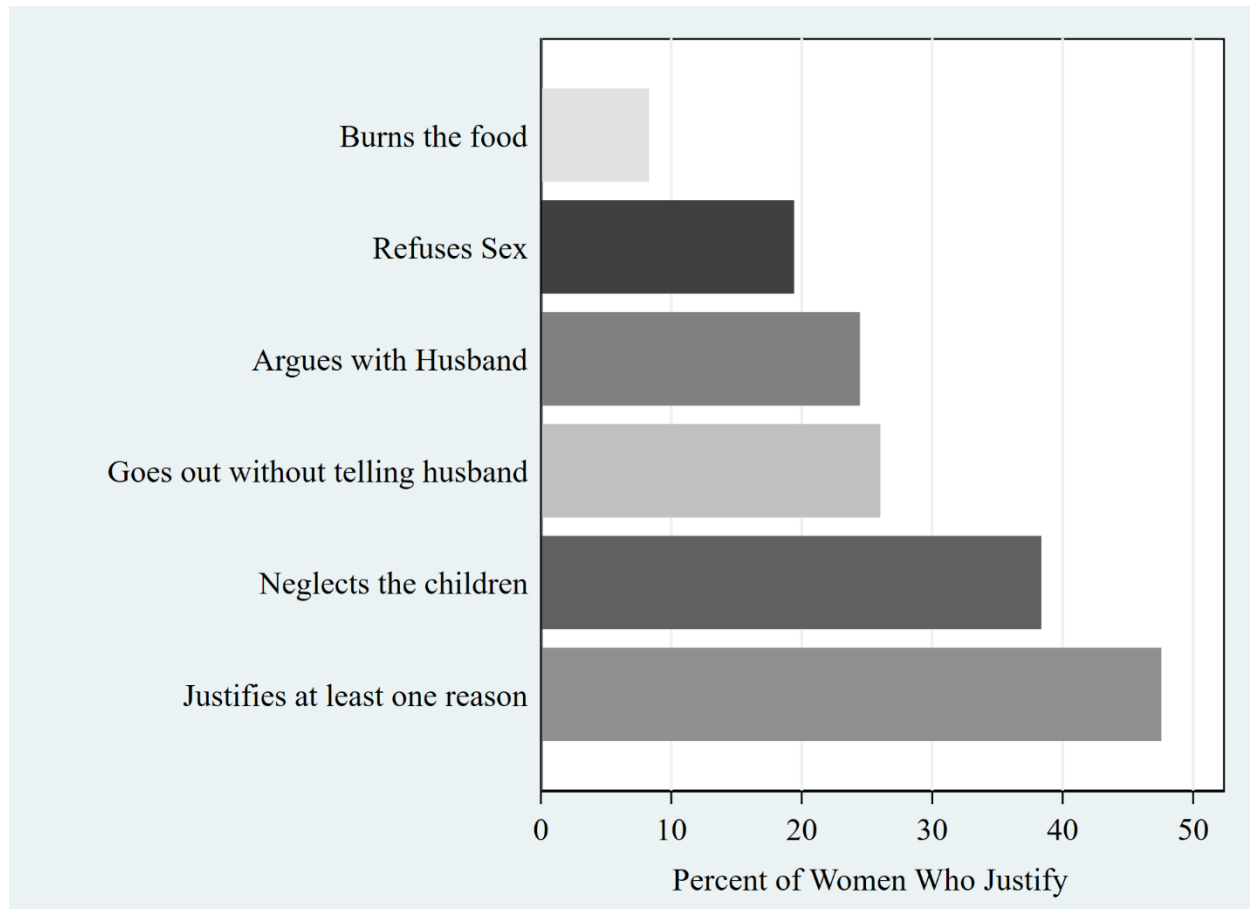


Table 2 provides more insight into women's justification of wife-beating by providing a cross-tabulation of the percentage of women of each ethnicity who justify wife-beating by reason. A strikingly high number of women claim that they would justify at least one reason for wife-beating in the Maasai (75%), Turkana (67%), Kalenjin (66%), and Samburu (59%) ethnic groups. Women in the Maasai, Turkana, and Samburu also have the largest percent of women who would justify wife-beating across all five reasons. Furthermore, the Maasai are the group with the largest percent of women who would justify all reasons for wife-beating, except burning the food. The Embu/Meru ethnic groups have the smallest proportion of women who justify at least one reason (33%) and have the smallest percentage of women who justify wife-beating

under three of the specified circumstances. Based on these descriptive statistics, ethnic identity appears to be related to whether a woman justifies wife-beating in any and all conditions.

Table 2. Percent of women who justify wife beating, by reason

Ethnic Group	At least one reason	Neglects the children	Goes out without telling partner	Argues with partner	Refuses sex with partner	Burns the food
Kikuyu	36%	29%	16%	13%	14%	4%
Kalenjin	66%	58%	41%	27%	20%	14%
Kamba	42%	31%	20%	24%	16%	4%
Kisii	36%	30%	19%	18%	12%	3%
Luhya	51%	41%	25%	30%	19%	9%
Luo	45%	32%	23%	32%	18%	8%
Maasai	75%	64%	45%	52%	49%	24%
Embu/Meru	33%	26%	15%	15%	12%	2%
Mijikenda/Swahili	36%	24%	23%	19%	18%	5%
Somali	57%	46%	32%	21%	31%	8%
Turkana	67%	58%	45%	44%	37%	20%
Samburu	59%	53%	42%	38%	42%	32%

Ethnicity and Justification of Wife-Beating. Table 3 displays the six logistic regression models. Across all models, women of at least five ethnic groups have statistically different odds of justifying wife-beating when compared to those of Kikuyu women, holding all else constant. This analysis substantiates a statistically significant relationship at the $\alpha=.05$ level. Models 2 through 6, of the specific reasons for justifying wife-beating, show that every ethnic group but the Somalis have statistically different odds than the Kikuyus of justifying wife-beating in at least one situation. Based on the data in Table 2, it is not surprising that Maasai and Turkana women have a significantly higher odds of justifying wife-beating across all six models in comparison to the Kikuyus' odds at the $p<.01$ level. The Maasai and Turkana, two pastoralist Nilotic groups that fall under the classification of Plain Nilotes, live in marginalized regions and that have been neglected by the government. These are the only groups of 11 comparison groups that have *consistently* higher odds of justifying wife-beating across all six models.

Table 3. Odds ratios of logistic regression models of five reasons for justifying wife beating among women ages 15-49 living in unions in Kenya in 2014

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Justifies at least one reason	Neglects the children	Argues with partner	Goes out without telling partner	Refuses sex with partner	Burns the food
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
Kikuyu	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Kalenjin	2.644***	2.643***	1.752***	2.817***	1.070	2.422***
Kamba	0.960	0.863	1.698***	1.022	0.902	0.631*
Kisii	0.861	0.929	1.295	1.094	0.699*	0.643
Luhya	1.412***	1.333**	2.232***	1.371**	1.077	1.631**
Luo	1.085	0.895	2.415***	1.143	1.072	1.391
Maasai	2.933***	2.596***	3.905***	2.195***	3.058***	3.236***
Embu/Meru	0.750*	0.765*	1.060	0.804	0.716*	0.409**
Mijikenda/Swahili	0.626***	0.505***	1.012	0.989	0.848	0.731
Somali	1.137	1.098	0.854	1.092	1.213	0.763
Turkana	1.799**	1.836***	2.590***	1.974***	1.659**	2.320***
Samburu	1.095	1.317	1.759**	1.499*	1.823**	3.906***
<i>Education</i>						
None	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Primary	0.890	0.890	0.830	0.838	0.737**	0.708*
Secondary	0.673**	0.704**	0.645***	0.567***	0.464***	0.415***
Higher	0.302***	0.297***	0.245***	0.228***	0.186***	0.273***
<i>Ever moved</i>	0.853*	0.881*	0.874	0.820**	0.953	0.900
<i>Household Wealth Index</i>						
Poorest	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Poorer	0.919	0.982	0.983	1.004	1.072	1.132
Middle	0.956	1.013	0.972	0.919	1.016	0.850
Richer	0.715***	0.834*	0.676***	0.697***	0.699***	0.649**
Richest	0.459***	0.545***	0.473***	0.541***	0.351***	0.347***
<i>Woman's age</i>	0.990*	0.990*	0.985**	0.987**	1.003	1.003
<i>Number of Children</i>	1.045**	1.051**	1.050**	1.053**	1.046*	1.003
<i>Polygynous Union</i>	1.198**	1.215**	1.218**	1.279***	1.208*	1.162
Observations	7901	7901	7901	7901	7901	7901
Pseudo R-squared	0.086	0.079	0.074	0.081	0.088	0.104

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Across models 2 through 6, eight categories, the Kalenjin, Kamba, Kisii, Luo, Embu/Meru, Mijikenda/Swahili, Somali, and Samburu all have odds ratios which are statistically different than the Kikuyu at the $p < .05$ level, though their odds are not statistically different from the Kikuyus' in other models. For example, Luo women have 2.415 times greater odds of justifying wife-beating than the Kikuyu at $p < .001$ under the condition that a woman has argued with her partner. However, Luo women do not have statistically different odds in comparison to the Kikuyu in any other situation.

Interestingly, Kamba women have 1.698 greater odds of justifying wife-beating than the Kikuyus' at $p < .001$ under the condition that a woman has argued with her partner. However, they have .631 lower odds of justifying wife-beating than the Kikuyus' at the $p < .05$ level under the condition that a woman has burned the food. In the situations presented in model 2, 4, and 5, Kamba women do not have statistically different odds than the Kikuyus do. This is the only ethnic group which, in one model, has statistically greater odds than the Kikuyus do, and statistically lower odds in another model.

Furthermore, results from model 1 reveal that, though the Kamba have statistically different odds from the Kikuyu in two models, their odds of justifying at least one reason for wife-beating are not statistically different from the Kikuyu. It is also the case among the Kisii, Luo, and Samburu that women do not have statistically different odds of justifying one or more reasons for wife-beating in comparison to the Kikuyu. Yet, in the Models 2 through 5 of specific reasons for wife-beating, these three groups also have at least one reason for which they have either statistically higher or lower odds of justifying than the Kikuyu. This would indicate that women in these ethnic groups generally have the same odds of justifying wife-beating when

compared with the Kikuyu. Yet, the groups differ by which cases of wife-beating they have greater or lesser odds of justifying.

Education. Across all 6 models, in comparison to women with no education, women with a secondary or higher education have significantly lower odds of justifying wife-beating when holding all else constant. For example, in Model 2 women with a secondary education have 29.6% lower odds of justifying wife-beating in cases when a wife neglects her children than women with no education at the $p < .01$ level. Additionally, women with any education higher than the secondary level will have 70.3% lower odds of justifying wife-beating than women with no education at the $p < .001$ level. For Models 5 and 6, women with a primary education also have significantly lower odds of justifying wife-beating than women who have no education. Unlike ethnic identity, women's increased education has a consistently negative effect across all six models. In all six models, any increase in education decreases the odds of justifying wife-beating, though this effect is only consistently significant at the secondary and higher levels.

Migration. The variable *ever moved* indicates that migration from one's place-of-birth has a consistently negative effect on women's odds of justifying wife-beating across all six models. Yet, this relationship is only statistically significant in determining whether wife-beating is justifiable when a woman neglects the children ($p < .05$), goes out without telling her partner ($p < .01$), and whether she justifies at least one reason for wife-beating ($p < .05$). For example, in model 1, women who have migrated from their place-of-birth have 14.7% lower odds of justifying wife-beating in one or more situations when compared with women who have never migrated. While less significant than the effects of secondary and higher education, moving does also have a consistent effect across all six models.

Control Variables. Women in the richer or richest household wealth category have consistently lower odds of justifying one and any specific reason for wife-beating. For each year that a woman increases in age, she has significantly lower odds of justifying wife-beating when a wife neglects the children, argues with her partner, goes out without telling her partner, or justifies at least one reason for wife-beating. For each additional living child, women have significantly higher odds of justifying wife-beating in all situations but when a wife burns the food. Being in a polygynous union also has a consistently positive effect on a woman's odds of justifying wife-beating in comparison to being in a monogamous union, though the effect is also not significant in influencing whether a wife justifies wife-beating when she burns the food.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: Justification of wife-beating is uniform across all ethnic groups. The results of ethnicity's statistical significance in all six models indicate that Kenyan ethnic groups, at least in comparison to the Kikuyu, do have significantly different odds of justifying wife-beating. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis that the justification of wife-beating is uniform.

The results from Model 1, a logistic regression of a woman's justification of wife-beating in one or more scenario supports Mann and Takyi (2009) findings on ethnicity's effect on this outcome variable in Ghana. I find that in Kenya ethnicity also influences whether a woman will justify *at least one* reason for wife-beating. Furthermore, while Mugoya et al. (2015) also argued that ethnicity plays a major role in determining perceptions of wife-beating in Kenya, they did so by looking at the count of reasons a woman would justify wife-beating, effectively measuring the *degree* of patriarchy's pervasiveness in women's interactions. However, this paper's analysis goes beyond both Mann and Takyi (2009) and Mugoya et al.'s (2015) studies by looking at the *specific conditions* under which ethnicity influences a woman's justification of wife-beating.

Models 2 through 6 parse whether women across all ethnic groups have greater odds of justifying one condition over another in comparison to the Kikuyu group. When compared with Model 1, it becomes apparent that ethnic groups do not just differ by *whether* they will justify one or more cases of wife-beating, but by *which* cases they have different odds of justifying. Among women who do justify wife-beating, women's ethnic identity does not have a uniform effect, providing them with consistently higher odds of justifying all the cases of wife-beating in comparison to the Kikuyu group. Rather, in several ethnic groups, women's odds of justifying wife-beating in comparison to Kikuyu women do not vary in a consistent direction. Women in

some groups, such as the Kamba, are more likely than the Kikuyu to justify wife-beating in one scenario yet are less likely to justify wife-beating than the Kikuyu under another circumstance.

This suggests that each ethnic culture offers to its female members a different repertoire of tools and worldviews for when it is appropriate to apply tools of acceptance or rejection of wife-beating, supporting the conceptualization of patriarchy as being a context-dependent ‘bargain’ (Kandiyoti 1988), and the idea that culture shapes worldviews and action (Swidler 1986). In both frameworks, women depend on their community’s ‘blueprints’ of patterned action that instruct them to follow scripts of complicity in or rejection of wife-beating. These scripts are closely tied to that community’s gender ideology.

Nevertheless, some groups in Kenya, particularly the Maasai, Samburu, and Turkana, do have consistently higher justification of wife-beating in comparison to the Kikuyu. These three groups mainly inhabit the semi-arid lowlands of the Rift Valley, were neglected during the colonial era and the period before the Kenyan government decentralized (D’Arcy and Cornell 2016; Kanyinga 2009; Mburugu and Adams 2005), and have lower rates of education and lower levels of household wealth (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014). Therefore, because women in these groups have had fewer chances to cultivate critical consciousness through the exchange and comparison their own cultures’ gender ideologies to that of other cultures, it is unsurprising that women from the Turkana, Samburu, and Maasai have much higher odds of justifying wife-beating under any situation than other ethnic groups.

Hypothesis 2: Education has no effect on the justification of wife-beating. The results across all six models indicate that both secondary and higher education levels, in comparison to no education, decreases a woman’s odds of justifying wife-beating. Across all models, any

increase in level of education consistently decreases a woman's odds of justifying wife-beating. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis that education has no effect.

Hypothesis 3: Migration has no effect on the justification of wife-beating. The results indicate that moving to a new place, in comparison to living in the same place for one's whole life, consistently decreases a woman's odds of justifying wife-beating. However, the effect is only statistically significant in determining whether a woman justifies wife-beating when a wife neglects the children, goes out without telling her partner, or when wife-beating is justifiable in at least one situation. Yet I am still able to reject the null hypothesis that migration has no effect on the justification of wife-beating.

These significant findings alone are not sufficient to argue that education and migration trigger a woman's critical consciousness and reflection on the acceptability of gender-based violence. However, when one considers these interactions to be moments of unsettled life nested within a relational theory of empowerment, they contribute to the strengthening of our understanding about how a woman's critical consciousness can be developed. The concept of critical consciousness suggests that women who gain a reflexive vantage point from which they can critically assess their place-of-birth's gender roles are then able to reject and resist unjust norms (Cornwall 2016; Kabeer 2011). Swidler (1986) suggests that we only question and reject the traditions and common sense of our culture when our lives become unsettled by a confrontation with competing ideology. When a woman moves to a new place or attends school, she immerses herself in new cultural ideology that presents her with new worldviews and strategies, tools with which she can decide whether her culture's gender norms are just. It is in the learning of these conflicting tools and frames, which create the possibility for reflexive and critical periods of *unsettled life*, that I suggest a woman can cultivate her critical consciousness.

The results affirm that education and migration both empower women to be able to reject their culture's 'common sense' beliefs about their complicit role in wife-beating. Increased education prolongs a woman's exposure to a new cultural ideology, which allows her to have greater odds of rejecting any and all reasons for wife-beating. Thus, education is not just a resource that improves a woman's economic condition (Simister 2010), or a form of cultural capital that teaches a woman how to reject wife-beating and apply new strategies of action (Rani et al. 2004; Stromquist and Gischman 2009). These findings support the idea that education is *also* a tool that women can use to cultivate critical consciousness (Cornwall 2016; Freire 1993; Guiné 2014; Kabeer 1999).

The variable *ever moved* affirms and *further*s what we know about how ideology forms critical consciousness. This variable does not account for if a woman is moving from a place with more traditional beliefs about wife-beating to a more progressive place, or vice versa, but simply whether a new vantage point influences a woman's beliefs about wife-beating. It indicates that simply moving from one place to another, irrespective of what kind of new ideology women encounter, increases a woman's odds of rejecting wife-beating. I suggest that this is because migration is a period of unsettled life during which women's new vantage point allows them to develop a critical gender consciousness.

Finally, the findings that the control variables, a woman's household wealth index, age, number of children, and whether she is in a polygynous union reaffirm and are supported by the literature (Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Uthman et al. 2009).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have sought to untangle the role of culture in stimulating women's willingness to resist the patriarchal constraint of wife-beating. In order to resist the idea that wife-beating is acceptable, critical consciousness, or the realization of the unjust nature of one's subordinate status through reflexive thought, must precede the struggle against it. Swidler's (1986) theory of culture suggests that ethnicity, a proxy of culture, plays a significant role in forming a woman's perception of self, and that interaction with new ideology of any kind during periods of unsettled life can disrupt and reshape her beliefs about justifiable gender norms. This paper has investigated how ethnicity shapes a woman's beliefs about wife-beating.

I have found that culture relates to the rejection/acceptance of wife-beating in two key ways. First, culture informs a woman's strategies of action and her understanding of how and when they can apply those strategies. In Kenya, a woman's ethnic group does not simply determine the structure of patriarchal interests and constraints that she faces but provides her with strategies of action and an understanding about when she can apply those strategies. This is evident in the findings from models that indicate what conditions justify wife-beating. THESE Results suggest that a woman's ethnic identity does not consistently raise or lower her odds of justifying any given reason for wife-beating, but that each ethnic identity has its own repertoire of more and less justifiable reasons in comparison to the Kikuyu group's repertoire.

Second, exposure to new cultural ideology allows women to reshape their understandings of gender by comparing and reflecting on their own culture, thereby cultivating critical consciousness. This study affirms the large body of literature that claims that increased levels of education affect a decrease in the probability of a woman justifying wife-beating (Linos et al. 2010; Mann and Takyi 2009; Mugoya et al. 2015; Rani et al. 2004; Simister 2010; Stromquist

and Gischman 2009; Uthman et al. 2009). I support the idea that education is not just the means through which women increase their access to resources and skills, but also of gaining the critical vantage point necessary to reflect on their own culture's gender norms.

I also employ a new variable, whether a woman has ever migrated from her place-of-birth, to the analysis of a woman's perceptions of wife-beating. The effect of this variable is marginal, but it has a consistently negative effect on the odds of a woman justifying wife-beating. This indicates that exposure to a new culture does not simply mean that a woman will be re-socialized to that culture. I concur with Swidler that humans are not "passive 'cultural dopes'" ready to be refashioned in the image of whatever new ideology confounds their current one (Swidler 1986:277). Instead, women's exposure to new ideology and 'strategies of action,' regardless of whether the ideology is progressive or traditional, improves the odds that she will critically reflect on her subordinate position within society.

In studying the relationship between ethnicity, social identity, and beliefs about wife-beating, this study has several limitations. First, the DHS questionnaire does not have a question that specifically measures whether a woman has actively reflected and still chose to believe that wife-beating is justifiable. This hides an important population of women who have developed critical consciousness but justify wife-beating as a way of maneuvering within constraints. These women are not 'cultural dopes,' just following their culture's gender scripts. Rather, they understand that the cost of resistance is high. Rejecting wife-beating might mean running away from an abusive husband, and simultaneously, from the only family, community, and resources one has. Future qualitative research may be able to parse why unsettled experiences do not always lead to empowered beliefs.

Furthermore, this paper did not address why some women who believe that wife-beating is not justifiable do not act in resistance to the practice. The Kenya DHS has an intimate partner violence module that measures actual experiences with wife-beating. Future research could use this data to investigate why empowered beliefs do not always translate to empowered action. Especially because intimate partner violence is such an invasive topic, future studies should thoroughly analyze these studies before qualitative work ensues.

It is theorized that after developing critical consciousness, women choose which ideological framework of patterned actions to apply to their lives based on their *material* conditions (Kabeer 1999; Swidler 1986). The choice to believe or act in resistance is interwoven with women's material conditions. This paper has controlled for household wealth index but has not investigated how one's material position affects which patterned action women go on to apply to their lives. It also does not discuss religion, as past studies have not found religion to be a significant determinant of wife-beating in Kenya. Future research should probe how, in other contexts, the intersection of ethnic, class, and religious identity affects wife-beating perceptions.

Overall, this study supports the idea that interaction with new discourses about gender ideology, whether more or less conservative, create the opportunity for women to think critically about the nature of gender relations. This is a hopeful perspective; education and consciousness-raising initiatives are not the only means by which women can develop this reflexive thinking tool. In a world of increased migration and access to competing discourses on gender relations, these findings suggest that women will have greater opportunities to question and resist gender norms that they find unjust. However, we should take heed that women who have restricted means of traveling and accessing new information are not neglected from these opportunities.

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