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CULTURAL REVITALIZATION AS A SYMBOLIC INSURGENCE: EXPERIENCES OF SIONA WOMEN IN PRACTICES WITH ANCESTRAL TEXTILES

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Resumen

La Nacionalidad Siona habita en la provincia de Sucumbíos, en el norte de la región amazónica, y tiene una presencia binacional en Ecuador y Colombia. En Ecuador, aproximadamente 680 personas viven en ocho comunidades: cuatro a orillas del río Aguarico y cuatro a orillas del río Cuyabeno.

Las mujeres sionas de las comunidades del río Aguarico lideran el proyecto denominado "Macuri: tejidos ancestrales". Este proyecto no solo busca generar ingresos económicos, sino también revitalizar la sabiduría ancestral mediante la enseñanza de la elaboración de artesanías con fibra de chambira (*Astrocaryum chambira*). El Nacionalidad Siona ha tejido desde tiempos ancestrales collares, pulseras, *shigras* (bolsas), hamacas, cedazos y otros utensilios; estas artesanías son de uso cotidiano y, en menor medida, se comercializan. El proceso de elaboración de estas artesanías comprende varias etapas: la recolección de las palmas de chambira; la obtención de la fibra; la elaboración del hilo; el teñido de la fibra con plantas nativas; y el tejido. Este artículo tiene como objetivo demostrar que el proyecto "Macuri: tejidos ancestrales" representa una forma de educación intergeneracional y de intercambio de saberes. Asimismo, constituye una práctica de resistencia y re-existencia (Walsh, 2013) orientada a revitalizar los conocimientos sionas frente a los procesos de colonialidad del ser y del saber (Guerrero, 2010) que afectan a las comunidades sionas.

Analizo el proceso de elaboración de las artesanías en chambira y las formas de revitalización cultural a partir de las narrativas de las mujeres sionas que participan en el proyecto y de mis registros de observación participante. Sostengo que este reaprendizaje de saberes, a través del tejido, posee una dimensión política que habilita posibles formas de insurgencia simbólica (Guerrero, 2018).

Palabras clave: etnografía educativa, mujeres sionas, tejidos ancestrales, saberes, re-existencias.

Abstract

The Siona nationality lives in the Sucumbíos province, in the northern part of the Amazon region, and has a bi-national presence in Ecuador and Colombia. In Ecuador, approximately 680 people live in eight communities: four on the Aguarico River and four on the Cuyabeno River.

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The Siona women of the Aguarico River communities are leading a project called '*Macuri*: ancestral weavings.' This project not only seeks to generate economic income but also to revitalize ancestral wisdom by teaching how to handicraft with chambira fiber (*astrocaryum chambira*). The Siona people have woven necklaces, bracelets, *shigras* (bags), hammocks, sieves, and other utensils since ancient times; these handicrafts are used daily and, to a lesser extent, are marketed. The elaboration process of these handicrafts has several stages: harvesting the chambira palms; obtaining the fiber; making the thread; dyeing the fiber with native plants; and weaving.
This paper aims to demonstrate that the '*Macuri*: ancestral weavings' project represents a form of intergenerational education and exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, it constitutes a practice of resistance and re-existence (Walsh, 2013) to revitalize Siona knowledge in the face of the processes of coloniality of being and of knowledge (Guerrero, 2010) affecting Siona communities.
I analyze the process of elaboration of handicrafts in chambira and the forms of cultural revitalization, based on the narratives of Siona women who participate in the project and from my participatory observation records. I argue that this re-learning of wisdom through weaving has a political dimension that allows possible forms of symbolic insurgency (Guerrero, 2018).

Keywords: educational ethnography, Siona women, ancestral weavings, wisdoms, re-existences.

Introduction

The Ecuadorian Amazon covers an area of 120,000 km², composed of vegetation, humid-tropical forests, rivers, and human settlements. It has a total population of 956,699 (National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2020), and is made up of six provinces, Zamora Chinchipe, Sucumbíos, Pastaza, Orellana, Napo and Morona Santiago, where ten Indigenous nationalities coexist: A'i Cofán, Siekopai, Siona, Waorani, Shiwiar, Zápara, Achuar, Andoa, Shuar, Amazonian Kichwa, in addition to two peoples in voluntary isolation, the Tagaeri and Taromenane.[2] The number of Indigenous inhabitants in the Amazon is approximately 264,000 (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2020).

The Siona Indigenous population lives in the province of Sucumbíos, in northeastern Ecuador, specifically in the Putumayo, Shushufindi and Cuyabeno cantons. According to research conducted by the Technical Team of the National Indigenous Organization of Ecuador (ONISE) in 2020, the Siona population in Ecuador is 638 people, comprising eight

[2] According to the IACHR, people in voluntary isolation are Indigenous peoples who do not maintain regular contact with the non-indigenous majority population and generally avoid any form of interaction with outsiders (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2013, p. 4). In Ecuador, the Tagaeri and Taromenane are family-clans of the Waorani people.

communities: four settled on the banks of the Aguarico River and the other four within the Cuyabeno Fauna Production Reserve. The territory of the Siona nationality covers a total area of 175,031.00 hectares.

The current configuration of Siona territory was imposed first by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) who arrived there in 1953. The lands were further depleted in the 1970s, when the government of Ecuador opened the area for mestizo settlement and oil extraction.

In the 1950s, SIL facilitated the incorporation of the Siona into salaried work, since the evangelizers paid those who collaborated in cleaning and cooking tasks. However, the SIL also had a significant impact on the transformation of their ceremonial practices, accusing the ancestral sages of being sorcerers and indoctrinating them in the gospel (Solórzano 2021). As a result, many wise men abandoned the ceremonies of *yagé* (ayahuasca) and other sacred plants to profess the Christian faith in their communities. Despite this colonial legacy, some grandparents still retain certain cultural and identity practices such as the use of medicinal plants, ancestral weavings, and healing songs.[3]

At the same time, in 1973, the Ecuadorian government of that time issued the Colonization Law for the Amazon region. This law declared all Amazonian territories uncultivated, which allowed the invasion of lands belonging to Indigenous populations by mestizo populations coming from the Andean and the Coast region. In addition, the Colonization Law opened the way for the extraction of oil discovered in the northern region of the Ecuadorian Amazon.[4]

The religious indoctrination promoted by SIL and the deterritorialization promoted by the oil industry generated profound and accelerated changes in the identity and cultural practices of the Siona people. Despite these transformations, the chambira weavings elaborated by Siona women remain referents of ancestral identity that express what Guerrero (2018) refers

[3] '*Uja*' is the name in *Baicoca* (Siona language) for these healing chants, which the ILV translated as prayers. These chants are softly repeated expressions of the communication and interaction between humans and spirits. There are specific chants for healing snakebite wounds, ensuring a good hunt, assisting in childbirth, and for curing various illnesses, among others. Similar practices exist among other Ecuadorian Amazonian Indigenous groups. Descola ([1993] 2005), for instance, documented comparable chants among the Achuar nationality, pointing to a shared regional logic where sound connects visible and invisible worlds.

[4] Since the 1970s, oil has been Ecuador's main export product. However, oil exploitation has had severe consequences and has led to socio-environmental debts, primarily due to the dispossession and displacement of Amazonian peoples and nationalities.

to as their "cosmo-existences"—epistemological and ontological frameworks in which spiritual, ecological, and affective dimensions are intertwined. Through colors, patterns, and plant selection, each weaving materializes their relational world and connection to the rainforest.

Therefore, this paper aims to evidence the project '*Macuri*: ancestral weavings'[5] as a form of exchange of knowledge, resistance, and re-existence (Walsh 2013) that contributes to the preservation of Siona cultural practices in the face of coloniality processes. To this end, I revisit the concept of symbolic insurgency proposed by Guerrero (2018) which I use to analyze the practices of education and learning through weavings, understood as referents and expressions with a deep political sense of resistance in the face of processes of colonization, racism, and commodification of knowledge. In addition, I resort to Walsh's (2013) proposal of decolonial pedagogy to affirm that the exchange of knowledge, based on the memory inscribed in the weavings, challenges and dismantles the Eurocentric epistemological structures that dominate the educational systems, opening the way to the recognition of the validity of their own educational processes.

In this paper, I argue that *chambira* weaving among the Siona is not only a material practice, but a living pedagogical and political process where ancestral knowledge, intergenerational relationships, and responses to external pressures are continuously renegotiated. Through a situated, collaborative methodology and my active participation in the project '*Macuri: ancestral weavings'*, I examine how weaving functions as a space of embodied resistance and affective knowledge transmission, where Siona women mobilize memory, care, and relational ties to sustain their cultural practices amid ongoing pressures of extractivism and colonialism.

My fieldwork began with my participation in a series of workshops led by Siona grandmothers and women, where children and young people were taught how to collect, dye, and weave chambira fiber. These gatherings were not merely instructional; they were acts of memory, care, and cultural transmission. Taking part in these workshops allowed me to witness how ancestral techniques are not only passed down but also reinterpreted by younger

[5] *Macuri* is a word in Baicoca, Siona language, which refers to a dye plant-seed with a deep red or brown color. The 'Macuri project' emerged in 2021 as a cultural revitalization initiative led by Siona women from the Aguarico communities. It aims to revitalize their weaving practices and serves as a bioeconomy project that combines cultural continuity with sustainable income generation. This project was funded by two NGOs.

generations, who navigate between inherited practices and new aspirations.

I also analyze the encounters between Siona weavers and women from other Indigenous nationalities, where techniques, stories, and designs were shared. Such moments make visible how identity is not fixed, but continuously constructed, negotiated, and defended through material practices like weaving.

Another dimension of this process involved the so-called 'improvement' workshops organized by the NGO funding the project. These sessions introduced external expectations related to design and commercialization, often framed in terms of increasing market value. Rather than passively accepting these interventions, the women negotiated them—sometimes incorporating new elements, sometimes resisting them. I, too, found myself implicated in these negotiations, questioning my own assumptions about innovation and cultural preservation.

This process led me to a deeper reflexive engagement with the project. Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant's notion of reflexivity (1995), I analyzed how my prolonged engagement with the community shaped my understanding—not only of weaving as craft, but of weaving as a social and political practice. Participating in every stage of the chambira process allowed me to see how each gathering was also a space of cultural affirmation, where stories, memories, and strategies for the future were woven together, thread by thread.

Beginning of the '*Macuri*: Ancestral Textiles' Project

In 2015, I had my first approach with the Siona nationality as a teacher-researcher, with the objective of analyzing the political participation of young people in the Indigenous movement of Ecuador. In 2016, I began my doctoral process with the proposal to investigate the spirituality and assemblages that shape their territory.

The more I lived with the Siona, especially in the community of *Soto Tsiaya*, the more their perception of me as a 'cultural advisor' for the Organization of the Siona Indigenous Nationality of Ecuador (ONISE) solidified. In 2020, the ONISE leadership invited me to participate as a Technical Specialist in Culture to update their 'Life Plan'.[6]

In early 2021, I met with several Siona women to discuss strategies for revitalizing cultural and identity practices aligned with the objectives of their 'Life Plan.' During our

[6] *'Life Plans'* are planning tools used by Indigenous peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon. These instruments are recognized by local governments as they reflect the needs and aspirations of communities through five constitutive elements: pluriverses, bioeconomy, worldview, territory, and autonomy and governance.

conversation, one of the women was weaving a shigra (bag) by hand. I asked if this practice was still common, and they explained that only a few women continue the tradition due to the intensive labor involved -from harvesting and processing chambira fiber, to preparing natural dyes from local plants, and weaving each piece by hand-. Several women shared stories of how their grandmothers taught them to weave while narrating myths or planning collective activities. Inspired by this, they proposed creating a project called 'Macuri: Ancestral Weavings,' a bio-entrepreneurship initiative aimed at generating income, conserving the chambira palm, and revitalizing ancestral knowledge. To bring the project to life, we sought support from two NGOs.

Several activities were planned to meet these objectives: a) conduct training workshops by Siona grandmothers for young women on the process of dyeing the fiber using their own plants; b) organize workshops to exchange knowledge with other indigenous women who have experience in weaving with chambira or other textiles; c) provide training to women on finance and communication; d) design and implement a management plan for chambira and dyeing plants.

I accompanied the women in each of the activities, but I did not limit myself to recording the cultural values present in the Siona culture; I participated during the whole process of elaboration of the handicrafts in the *Soto Tsiaya* community. My coexistence for more than eight years in the Siona communities implied a deep involvement in their daily life, paying attention to their practices and their stories (Guber 2001). I activated my listening skills, guided by the memory of the Siona grandmothers and women, to retrospectively reconstruct their history and analyze their present, since their life stories not only refer to the past, but also encompass the present and project the future of their community.

As Jorge Aceves (1993) mentions, in ethnographic research, oral sources were discriminated in the field of 'minor' sciences and were associated with illiterate or 'inferior' subjects. However, critical anthropology revitalizes orality and narratives, promoting research based on listening and ethical commitments with the interlocutors where the 'story constitutes a totality of collective experiences' (Bertaux 1993, 146).

In this way, each of the events described in this text reflects, as well as the others, an academic-political exercise that implies a dialogue and a polyphonic sense between the interlocutors, the theory and my intersubjectivities. I believe that it is necessary to 'let ourselves be affected' - in the sense proposed by Jeanne Favret-Saada (1990) - by the realities lived and

experienced by our interlocutors, ‘abandoning our ethnocentric principle of orientation as the only measure of reality and of the theories we elaborate’ (Zapata and Genovesi 2013, 7).

In this paper, I argue that chambira weaving among the Siona is not merely a craft but a pedagogical and political process through which ancestral knowledge is transmitted via embodied and corporeal learning. As María Lugones asserts, political and cultural resistance is inscribed in the body, and decolonial pedagogy recognizes the body as both a subject of knowledge and an agent of resistance (Lugones 2010), emphasizing the body as a living site of transmission and transformation.

Learning about the chambira weaving process

The chambira palm is found throughout the Amazon rainforest, especially in flood zones, and can reach a height of up to 30 meters. Its trunk and leaves are covered with thorns, which makes the extraction of the buds an arduous process, although Siona women have great expertise in this task.

The elaboration of the handicrafts begins with the collection of the buds of the plant, from which the chambira fiber is extracted. From the *Soto Tsiaya* community to the place where the chambira palm is located is about a 3-hour walk. These walks are done at least once a week. Generally, when the Siona are in the rainforest to hunt, they take the opportunity to collect buds, seeds, dye plants and medicinal plants.

Walking with the Siona women through the rainforest, accompanied by the sounds of monkeys and birds, I experience a constant dialogue, a blend of practical advice on which plants to pick and which to avoid, along with casual conversations about daily life, community events, and the dreams they had the night before. The children are also part of this scene, running ahead to explore, their laughter echoing through the rainforest as they learn through observation and listening. The elders frequently share stories about the forest's stories, teaching the younger generation about the significance of each plant and tree, and nurturing a deep sense of respect and for their land.

The collection of chambira involves a careful selection of plants, which requires knowledge of their growth cycles and ecological roles. The Siona people select large and thick buds to obtain quality fiber. The bud is cut from the base of the palm, shaken so that its thorns and leaves open, and then the leaves are arranged and unified between the tips and the bases. These leaves are folded and tied to be taken to the community.


Figure1: In the photo on the left, a woman can be seen cutting the buds of the palm. In the photo on the right, another woman is carrying the freshly harvested buds.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

The next step is to take each chambira leaf and shred it one by one.


Figure 2: Siona woman demonstrating how to shred chambira fiber in the *Soto Tsiaya* community
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

The fiber is left to soak overnight and then dried in the sun. Afterwards, it is dyed using natural colorants prepared from a variety of plants and seeds. To apply the dye, the selected plant material is boiled in water along with the fiber, allowing the color to be absorbed during the process. The fiber is dried once again in the sun.

Figure 3: In the image on the left, Siona women are seen preparing the dyeing of the fiber, using seeds and turmeric plants to achieve a yellow color. In the photo on the right, the fiber is drying under the sun at *Soto Tsiaya* community.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team. 2022

The next step is to 'twist the chambira'. This technique consists of joining two fibers of similar sizes, squeezing them at the ends to prevent them from coming apart. The twisting of the fiber is done with both hands, on the thigh of one leg. This process is strenuous and requires a lot of patience and time.

Figure 4: Siona grandmother twisting the chambira, joining the dyed fibers on her thigh.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

The last process in the elaboration of handicrafts is weaving, a practice that has been a

daily part of the lives of the Siona people since the time of their grandmothers and grandfathers. Weaving has a profound meaning in different moments of individual and community life. For example, the Siona man must learn to weave his own hammocks, as they represent strength and connection to his place-space as head of the household. The hammocks of the ancestral sages are objects where the spirits summoned during the *yagé* (ayahuasca) ceremony are incarnated, making them sacred objects. In the past, when a wise grandfather died, he was buried with all his belongings, especially his hammock.

Figure 5: Ernestina and Alicia weaving *shigras* (bags) with their hands.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

There are at least ten variations in weaving, allowing women to use their own creativity or, imitate designs passed down from their grandmothers to create necklaces, bracelets, bags and hammocks.[7] For the Siona women, weaving symbolizes the learning transmitted by their ancestors during their transition to maturity. Thus, chambira weaving is a process of transmission of wisdom, knowledge, and learning.

This process described in the elaboration of handicrafts in chambira reflects a profound interrelationship with the natural environment. Siona nationality lives, feels, knows, understands, dialogues, and interacts with his territory through the learning of the properties of

[7] The hammocks are woven by Siona men. There are only a few men who weave their own hammocks, as it requires extensive time and daily dedication.

the flora, which is useful in weaving, health and in their daily lives.

Each weaving goes beyond mere physical labor and technique; it intertwines their knowledge of local plants into patterns rich with cultural significance. The finished textiles are not just the result of craftsmanship, they embody how the Siona live, feel, and thrive in their environment. Each piece of the handicraft narrates a story of their daily interactions with nature, reflecting their traditions and their deep connection to the land.

The entire process of crafting these handicrafts constitutes both a pedagogical and political act, wherein ancestral knowledge is transmitted through embodied learning. The body functions as a fundamental medium for the transmission of knowledge that is not necessarily articulated through writing or formal education but is inscribed within everyday praxis, as exemplified in weaving. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) emphasizes the necessity of decolonizing our bodies, our senses, and our ways of knowing, for they are bearers of a memory that resists the linearity of colonial time. In this regard, the body can be understood as a living archive, a space where memories and practices of resistance are inscribed, challenging dominant epistemologies and reaffirming its central role in the preservation and transmission of ancestral knowledge.

Among the Siona, learning often begins with the act of walking. Siona women and children traverse several hours to reach the chambira forests. This physical activity is not just about resource extraction; it reaffirms territorial presence. Through these walks, knowledge is transmitted through gestures and storytelling. As they collect plants, elders teach which palms to cut and why, what each plant is used for, and how the rainforest itself must be cared for. In this way, this act resists the static notion of conservation imposed by NGOs asserting instead that that movement through territory is itself a form of territorial belonging.

Fiber preparation is a multisensory learning practice. The extraction and twisting of chambira on the thigh are an inherited bodily memory, involving precise hand movements learned through repetition. Workshops led by elders provide a collective environment where this transmission unfolds.

Proposals from NGOs to mechanize this step were collectively rejected because they risked erasing the embodied know-how central to this practice. Alicia, one of the leaders, expressed: ‘We feel with our hands, machines don’t know which fiber is ready’, illustrating how bodily expertise is claimed as a political knowledge system. Jane Bennett (2022) helps us understand this better: the chambira fiber is not just passive material but has its own qualities—its softness,

moisture, and strength—that interact with the weaver's body. This means the learning happens through a close, active relationship between people and fiber, something that machines cannot replace.

Also, dyeing involves ancestral plant knowledge. The classification of dye plants in Baicoca language and their associated symbolisms -such as *macuri* (red) or *huasi hue'oco* (blue)- are shared during workshops, reinforcing linguistic and ecological knowledge. By planting nurseries together, women resist agro-industrial logic and assert their right to care for their landscapes, challenging the separation of production and ecology.

Finally, weaving is memory in motion. Each design is an act of remembering; patterns are drawn from what the hands remember, not from standardized models.

These embodied practices—walking, weaving, preparing fibers, and dyeing—are not only acts of cultural continuity but also affective and micropolitical forms of resistance. Following Suely Rolnik (2019), these gestures can be understood as "insurrectional spheres", where memory and desire flow through the body to resist the colonization of being. Within this framework, ancestral practices do not merely reproduce tradition; they activate a vital force that sustains life against the politics of dispossession. The hands that weave, the bodies that walk, and the stories that circulate through movement and touch constitute a living archive that refuses to be silenced.

Weaving knowledge, spinning voices

This project emerged with the objective of revitalizing the teaching-learning process of chambira handicrafts, as well as promoting the sustainable management of the chambira palm and dye plants. In addition, the project was conceived as a bio-enterprise to develop skills in finance, communication, and marketing of handicrafts, with the goal of generating income for Siona families.

At the beginning of 2021, we organized a technical team to seek funding for the execution of the programmed activities, and we were able to count on the sponsorship of two non-governmental organizations with experience in indigenous bio-enterprises in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Thus, the Siona leaders and the technical team joined forces to make the '*Macuri*' project into reality.

In its first phase, this initiative was carried out in the communities of *Aboquehuira* and *Soto Tsiaya*, where 17 women weavers participated, four of whom are grandmothers with

knowledge of the handicraft production process. In addition, several men participated in specific activities such as preparing food during the knowledge exchange workshops and collaborating in the *minga*[8] for the cleaning and maintenance of chambira and dye plant nurseries.

As mentioned above, to meet the objectives of the project, several activities were programmed, such as the implementation of a management plan for the chambira palm and dye plants, workshops on finance and digital communication, workshops for the exchange of knowledge on weaving, training in pruning techniques, among others.

In this paper I analyze three events: a) the workshops on the process of making handicrafts, given by grandmothers to adult women, youth and children; b) the exchange of knowledge workshops among Indigenous women weavers; and c) the workshops on 'handicraft improvement' organized by the NGOs.

In this section I analyze the knowledge exchange workshops as a method of learning and teaching that seeks to break with colonial and hegemonic knowledge structures, promoting a horizontal dialogue between different forms of knowledge.

The process of colonization of the Indigenous territories of the northern Amazon of Ecuador meant a coloniality of knowledge manifested through evangelization, extractivism and racism. Rationalist and capitalist perspective have subordinated the knowledge and spirituality of Indigenous peoples, and marginalized ancestral wisdom and practices.

The knowledge exchange workshops allow the revitalization of ancestral wisdoms as an educational alternative to the colonial domination in Amazon territories. These workshops offer an opportunity to challenge and disrupt dominant knowledge and power structures. The revitalization of wisdoms is a form of learning and teaching that brings us closer to a life of interdependence, coexistence, interrelations and otherness with nature. Ancestral wisdom and spiritualities maintain their 'insurgent and transforming force to de-structure, overcome and transform the dominating reason to open possibilities and sow another type of knowledge' (Guerrero 2018, 77).

In this sense, in the community of *Soto Tsiaya*, several workshops were held by the

[8] *'Minga'* is a Kichwa word that defines the process of communal work among Indigenous peoples, referring to community gatherings for collective tasks. The use of the Kichwa word 'minga' among the Siona reflects cultural exchange with the Kichwa Amazon Indigenous nationality, who live in the same province. Although the Siona have their own language, they adopt shared terms like '*minga*' to describe similar communal work practices across neighboring communities.

weaving grandmothers for the new generations. Each of these meetings was attended by women between 12 to 18 years old; as well as adult women and children. The learning and teaching involved getting close to the chambira palm, harvesting the buds, learning about the dye plants, dyeing, twisting the fiber and weaving.

On October 23, 2021, Yolanda Piyaguaje, one of the project leaders, said that living with the grandmothers during the workshops made it possible to remember what she had learned as a child at home. 'When I was a child, I played while watching my grandmother and mother twist and weave the chambira. When I grew up, I wove very little, but I did know how necklaces were made. These workshops helped me remember how to weave' (personal communication, October 23, 2021).

Figure 6: In the image on the left, Siona women are walking into the rainforest in search of chambira and dye plants. In the image on the right, a woman is holding plants used for dyeing chambira fiber.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

Memory is always social, contextualized, and relational and manifests itself through deeply experiential, affective, and emotional events. Hence, memory is the social accumulation of the existence of a people, contributing to the construction of remembering and forgetting. These workshops express the power of memory felt and lived in the hands of women as a continuous experience of re-learning. In these workshops, the process of making their crafts was recalled, lived, and felt from the memory of the grandmothers.

In each of the workshops with the women, I immersed myself in the rhythm of their hands weaving chambira fibers. The murmur of their voices, filled with stories, blended with the laughter of the children as I learned about dye plants and weaving techniques. I observed

how the older women would occasionally pause to guide the younger ones, offering instructions with a combination of patience and precision, emphasizing the importance of preserving this tradition.

Similarly, the grandmothers shared their knowledge about the diversity of dye plants and chambira fiber, which made it possible to create, by the end of 2021, a document for the implementation of the Management Plan for the chambira palm and inventory of dye plants. In this document it was determined that the dye plants come from five species; according to the meaning in *Baicoca* (Siona language) they are: *macuri* (intense red, brown color), *mabõsa* (red color), *huasi hue'oco* (blue color), *nea ucu'si* (black color) and *jaoaomaña* (yellow color). Thanks to funding from non-governmental organizations, two nurseries were built in the *Soto Tsiaya* community and one nursery in the *Aboquehuira* community to conserve the chambira palm and dye plants. Each of the nurseries involved community work for their cleaning, care, and maintenance.

It is important to mention that, in each *minga* and workshop, there was a majority participation of children, which would allow keeping the memory alive. This is what Ernestina Piyaguaje pointed out in the workshop held in September 2021:

> The most beautiful thing about the workshops was the participation of our children. They are always at every meeting, and that is the way to teach them to recognize the chambira plant and the plants that give color. Just as I learned from my grandmother, our children will learn to weave because they see us, because they listen to our conversations and because they know that we must look after the nurseries.

Returning to Valentina Glockner's (2007) perspective, it is crucial to recognize children ‘as generators of knowledge, creators and transformers of culture; therefore, they have an active role of co-authorship’ (70). It was not necessary to explain to them the process of elaboration of the handicrafts or the implementation of the nurseries, because they lived, experienced, enjoyed and apprehended the process day by day. In other words, children learn by doing.

Figure 7: The two images show the nurseries for dye plants and chambira, which are tended by both children and adults.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

In this way, the wisdom of the Siona is an action-thinking that deconstructs a logos of objectifiable rationality. In other words, the process of making chambira crafts is deeply rooted in their cultural and spiritual connection to the rainforest. This practice is not merely about producing textiles to sell; it is an ongoing dialogue with nature, where each decision—whether in selecting materials or choosing weaving techniques—embodies a holistic perception of their environment. 'Wisdom is a holistic form of knowledge; it shows a potential to go beyond mere abstraction and conceptualization. For wisdom there is no separation between subject and object, as the principle of interrelationship and interdependence makes the subject part of the cosmos' (Guerrero 2018, 108).

In addition to implementing the nurseries and the workshops taught by the weaving grandmothers, some meetings were organized to exchange knowledge with women from the Waorani and the Kichwa nationality[9]. The meeting between Siona and Waorani women was held on October 8, 2021, where they discussed weaving techniques, the incorporation of new dye plants from the region, and a financial course.

This alliance with the Waorani women was significant, as Yolanda Piyaguaje mentioned during the workshop: 'We came to meet our Waorani sisters. We are relatives, we have the same customs, we use the chambira and weave our handicrafts. They taught us about dye plants, and

[9] The Waorani and Kichwa nationalities were chosen as interlocutors for the workshops due to their extensive experience with ancestral weaving projects. On one hand, the Kichwa nationality from the highlands—particularly the Otavalo community—is internationally renowned for its textile traditions. On the other hand, Waorani women have organized an association that has been commercializing chambira weavings since 2005. Their combined expertise made them valuable participants in the workshops, enriching the exchange of knowledge and practices around ancestral textile production.

so did we. We learned from each other'.

This encounter between Siona and Waorani[10] women reflect the vital exchanges that take place within the great Amazonian territory. In this sense, it is important to mention the concept of 'exchange value,' as proposed by Magdalena Villarreal, 'so that it is not limited to monetary values and the market' (Villarreal 2004, 29). Market transactions and market production also contemplate non-market relations and values that vary according to the field of activity (production, distribution, consumption, exchange), as well as the ways in which 'different social domains intersect, for example, based on family, community or socio-political interests' (29).

A meeting was also held with Otavalo Kichwa artisan women from the community of Peguche.[11] This experience represented a dialogue and mutual learning among women from different regions. This is how leader Yolanda Piyaguaje described her experience during the exchanges on October 15 and 16, 2021:

> Most of the women who traveled to the community of Peguche almost never left our communities, we only went to the nearest towns in the Amazon. Traveling to the Andean Region was a new experience because we got to know other territories, but above all we got to know the work of the artisans of Otavalo, who are recognized throughout the world. They have a reputation for being good weavers and for traveling all over the world. We wanted to know how they make their bags, their shoes, their necklaces. We came back happy because we know we have learned a lot.

[10] In 2005, the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE) was established to create alternative income sources for their families. Since then, the association has launched various initiatives, including cacao production and chambira handicrafts.

[11] Otavalo city is considered the largest indigenous crafts market in the country.

Figure 8: In the photo on the left side, Siona and Waorani women can be seen, with dyed fibers visible behind them. In the photo on the right side, an Andean Kichwa woman and a Siona woman can be seen weaving together.
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

Siona weavers, who lead the project, attended these workshops to exchange knowledge with Waorani and Kichwa women. These weavers, in turn, shared and replicated their learning with the other women in the communities. This demonstrates that the knowledge acquired is not individual, but collective learning. The workshops contributed to the manufacture of handicrafts, specifically in the production of small bags with details and bright colors, as well as in the creation of sandals and belts.

Figure 9: Handicrafts ready for sale
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

These learnings and teachings between other indigenous people allow us to affirm that ancestral wisdoms are forms of resistance and re-existence (Walsh 2013) to preserve life in the face of processes of coloniality; that is, wisdom has a political dimension that becomes a method of insurgency. Thus, the art of weaving is a potent form of resistance, preserving and celebrating indigenous knowledge in the modern era. These textiles are far more than decorative objects; they embody centuries of ancestral wisdom and cultural identity that have endured despite historical efforts at cultural suppression and colonial interference.

Asymmetrical Expressions in the Amazon rainforest

Ethnoecology affirms that there are various worlds and schemes for constructing thought and understanding the relationship between human beings and their environment, which implies diverse ontologies. With the so-called 'ontological turn,' many researchers are focusing their efforts on positioning these 'other ontologies.' Many ethnographies of the Amazon demonstrate that, to understand the Indigenous peoples' own conceptions, it is necessary to eliminate the distinction between nature and culture (Escobar 2016).

Animism (Descola [1993] 2005), perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2002), and identity-territory (Escobar 2010) are starting points for understanding the proposal of bio-cosmic otherness (Guerrero 2018); that is, the interrelationships and interdependencies that Amazonian Indigenous peoples, feel, and practice with their territory.

Beyond what might be seen as an anthropological 'fashion,' the significance of the 'ontological turn' lies in its challenge to the boundaries and categories inherent to Western modernity and dualistic rationality. To analyze the meaning of the weavings of Siona women, it is important to begin with the theoretical position to which I subscribe: transcending the dichotomy between culture and nature prevalent in modern thought.[12]

The Siona territory is part of an extensive set of social interactions where the human being is only one actor among many others; that is, plants and animals are included in the community and have identical attributes to human beings. Thus, the chambira palm and the dye plants symbolize a deep relationship with their territory that transcends their use in the elaboration of handicrafts. This relationship contradicts the utilitarian and extractive vision of the capitalist market. This affirmation is supported by the reactions to the proposals made by the NGOs financing the project. In the first phase of the project, the NGO proposed activities that were questioned by the Siona women because they did not respond to their identity practices.

One of the first activities requested was the designation of a single leader for the project; however, the Siona women decided that this position would rotate among all the participants, thus questioning the hierarchical structure common in development projects. At the June 2021 assembly, Grandmother Alicia mentioned: 'All of us must participate in the project because

[12] By modern thought, I refer to the perspective that divides the world into humans and non-humans, nature and society. This is what Bruno Latour (2007) characterizes this as the duality of the world: the foundational dualism of modernity.

there cannot be only one person who leads. ‘We must all learn from everything and do everything,’ which reaffirms her sense of community.

Another activity proposed by the NGO was the implementation of a tool to speed up the pruning of chambira, which was not accepted by the artisans. As Yolanda Piyaguaje said: ‘They gave us these pruning shears, we tried to use them, but they did not work very well. We need to climb the chambira tree to know which bud to cut, while with the scissors and from the ground we cannot see well which bud is ready’. When the NGO introduced pruning shears for harvesting plants, the Siona women quickly realized that the tools were not effective for their needs. The shears were cumbersome and often damaged the delicate plants. The women preferred to use their hands, a method they had refined over generations, which allowed them to feel the plants and select the best parts without causing harm. This preference reveals a practical expertise shaped by direct, lived experience with their environment. It also highlights the NGO’s lack of understanding of the local context and the profound value of hands-on, experiential knowledge.

Another attempt by the NGO to simplify chambira collection was the construction of nurseries near the communities. However, the Siona women prefer to make long walks to the chambira forests because it is a time when they take advantage of the opportunity to monitor their territory, as well as collect fruits, plants, and seeds. In this way, each chambira gathering expedition builds and reconstructs these interrelationships between the Siona and their territory.

Another activity proposed by the NGO to continue funding the project was the requirement that the weavings be symmetrical. In March 2021, we had a personal dialogue with a technician, who mentioned:

> If they want to sell the bags and straps at a better price, they must improve the weaving. The Siona artisans still have a lot to learn to sell, so it is necessary to hold several workshops to help them create more aesthetic handicrafts, with more even weaves and colors.

Figure 10: These asymmetrical textiles were criticized by NGO technicians
Photograph by: ONISE Technical Team, 2022

A significant budget was allocated for the 'weaving improvement' activity, which consisted of hiring weaving 'experts' to teach the artisans how to use accessories such as crochet, needles, fasteners, snaps and pyrographs. The hired workshop leader pointed out that 'the Sion artisans do not count the stitches while weaving, so their weavings are not uniform like normal weavings; they simply weave without any structure'.

Several 'weaving improvement' workshops were held, and greater quality control was implemented in each of the handicrafts to determine that the weavings would be toward the production of bags and belts. Although the handicrafts became more attractive to buyers and Siona women's participation in bio-entrepreneurship fairs increased, the fact is that the artisans continue weaving necklaces, bracelets and *shigras* with their hands, maintaining their traditional techniques and lack of formal structure. Their crafts remain asymmetrical, much like their territory, which does not adhere to a symmetrical planting pattern. Instead, it blends a variety of plants essential for nourishment and healing, reflecting their holistic and organic relationship with nature.

The ontological turn in anthropology has opened critical pathways for interrogating dominant epistemic regimes; yet its political vitality becomes most tangible when grounded in lived, embodied practices of resistance. In this context, the responses of Siona women during weaving workshops are not merely technical disagreements with NGO-imposed methods—they are micropolitical enactments of ontological resistance (Suely Rolnik, 2019).

As Escobar (2016) emphasizes, ontological politics concern 'different ways of worlding', which resist the universalizing logic of modernity by affirming pluriversal modes of being and knowing. Thus, the practice of weaving with *chambira* among Siona women can be understood as a mode of ontological enactment rooted in relational epistemologies. Far from being a simple artisanal activity, weaving becomes a form of world-making in which knowledge emerges through embodied engagement with the forest, the plants, and ancestral memory. As women collect, prepare, and weave *chambira*, they enter into affective and ecological relationships that transform both the body and the material.

Following de la Cadena (2015), these practices defend relational worlds in which humans, non-humans, and spirits co-constitute existence. Within the workshops, the resistance

of Siona women to imposed techniques—especially those that prioritize symmetry, uniformity, or efficiency—emerges as a defense of a cosmology in which texture, rhythm, and irregularity are not flaws, but expressions of memory, affect, and vitality. Weaving with *chambira* thus becomes a way of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016): refusing simplification, asserting the value of place-based knowledge, and honoring the body as a site of ancestral continuity.

Artisan women and community entrepreneurs

The '*Macuri* project' cannot be understood merely as a productive initiative or an artisanal entrepreneurship effort. From its inception, it has been a political, affective, and epistemic process aimed at reactivating embodied memories, ways of life, and territorial relations profoundly affected by extractivism and coloniality.

In this era of post-colonial capitalism, land continues to be exploited by a variety of actors, both legal and illegal, including State and corporate entities. These actors pose a threat to nature and communities. In the face of this reality, many women globally have led processes to reappropriate land, foster subsistence economies and fully utilize natural resources. These global efforts are valuable 'because they point us to the changes we need to make if we want to build a society where our reproduction is not at the expense of other people and also does not mean a threat to the continuity of life on this planet' (Federici 2019, 95).

In this context, the project '*Macuri*: ancestral weavings' is part of a global struggle led by women to sustain life. Initially, Siona women were involved in learning chambira weaving under the guidance of grandmothers, assuming the role of apprentices. Later, they took on roles as spokeswomen, leaders, and teachers. At the beginning of 2023, they began to participate in fairs for the commercialization of their handicrafts, as well as in training workshops for community entrepreneurs.

This reflects the interest in creating a new type of society where solidarity and the exchange of wisdom are the central axes to create 'another' economy in defense of life (Federici 2019, 117). Weaving becomes a powerful category to illustrate the richness and complexity of what is created through this process, since the bodies of diverse women are intertwined with historical memory and, at the same time, territories are interwoven. Thus, commented leader Yolanda Piyaguaje in a personal conversation in May 2023:

> The '*Macuri*' project has been a learning experience for me in every sense. I remembered how my mother and grandmother used to weave with chambira, I learned about the dye plants, I learned how to register sales. Now I am participating in many fairs, I have been in the cities of

> Quito, El Puyo, Baños, Lago Agrio to sell our handicrafts. I also learn from other experiences, since we are always with different artisan women, and we attend training talks that I can then pass on to my community. I am very grateful for everything I have learned.

In May 2023, Estela Piyaguaje mentioned that:

> At the beginning of the project my participation was challenging because I had to be in all the workshops, and in the *minga* to build the nurseries, I had to go to look for chambira, to color the fiber. It took me a long time to twist the chambira and weave, but I was happy because I learned to make bags, belts, and rugs. I met Waorani and Kichwa women, I traveled to their communities. I now feel better prepared and capable of teaching the women in my community to reclaim the skills that our grandmothers once practiced. This project is also beneficial because it provides the women with resources for our expenses. Even if it's only a small amount at a time, we've been able to sell what we produce.

The weaving therefore connects bodies, territories, memory, life strategies, struggles and resistances (Critical Perspectives on Territory from Feminism Collective 2017). Today, the women who participate in the project are the protagonists in the entire process of producing chambira handicrafts. They go to the Amazon rainforest to collect the palm and dye plants, prepare the dyes, and spend several hours at night twisting the fiber on their legs to create beautiful bags and straps.

As a member of ONISE's technical team, I am responsible for establishing contacts to participate in entrepreneurship fairs and for marketing the handicrafts in various stores across the country. Over these three years of collaboration, we have strengthened the project by establishing the '*Macuri*' brand, which represents ancestral weavings and is actively promoted through social media. We have also installed nurseries to preserve the chambira palm and dye plants, and we have built a house-workshop in the *Soto Tsiaya* community to reactivate the ancestral memory and revitalize the weavings. It has been a joint work process between the Siona women, the technical team, the leadership of the Siona Nationality Organization and the NGOs that financed the consolidation of this project.

However, there are aspects where the coloniality of being and knowledge are evident in the intimacy of culture: men have stopped weaving. They have distanced themselves from this intersubjectively sacred activity. In recent years, male artisans have preferred to use synthetic fiber (*piola*), which is foreign to their cultural and environmental context.

The historical links between the violent patriarchal system and the coloniality of being and knowledge are manifested in what Silvia Federici ([2004] 2016) has called pacts of domination. These pacts have accumulated differences between men and women, where

violence has been consented to by society in general and by the State apparatus. Thus, gender differences have been a crucial element of the coloniality of being and knowledge, disorganizing social processes of material and symbolic insurgencies. These links have been revealed differently in each historical cycle. The sexual division of labor, as well as gender violence, are elements that have prevented the consolidation of radical social changes.

In parallel, the women who sustain the weaving tradition face multiple forms of inequality. Many women involved in weaving are also responsible for domestic chores and childcare, which limits the time they can dedicate to their handicraft. Additionally, the gendered division of labor often means that their contributions to the revival effort are undervalued compared to men's roles in other economic activities. This internal dynamic sometimes leads to a lack of support from family members, who may not fully appreciate or prioritize the significance of the weaving efforts. Furthermore, some community members, influenced by work in the oil industry, question the value of investing time in traditional weaving, as it appears less lucrative compared to other economic opportunities. As Catherine Walsh (2010) has pointed out, these conditions reaffirm the need to conceptualize the body as a contested territory and knowledge as an embodied practice that challenges both the coloniality of knowledge and gender hierarchies

Despite these tensions, the project has reactivated spaces where weaving is not merely a form of material production but a practice of healing, memory, and resistance. Although its impact has been non-linear, the initiative has contributed to strengthening the intergenerational transmission of textile knowledge and to challenging the gender hierarchies that have historically rendered women's roles in the symbolic and material production of the community invisible. Sharing weaving knowledge, defending irregular forms, and revaluing slow and affective processes have become gestures of quiet insurgency—ontopolitical practices in which the world is not represented but woven.

Final Considerations on Cultural Revitalization and Pedagogies of Resistance

My question in this paper is how to understand the education processes as a form of resistance and insurgency of the Siona people in the face of the processes of coloniality imposed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the territorial dispossession carried out by extractivist projects.

The results of this ethnography suggest that the elaboration of chambira handicrafts

does not only preserve the ancestral memory, but also constitutes an act of resistance and re-existence against colonial processes in the Siona territory. Currently, the concept of re-existence, defended by various authors (Walsh 2013; Albán 2013) is understood as a process in which communities create and develop mechanisms to reinvent their daily lives and confront the reality imposed by hegemonic projects (Albán 2013). In this context, re-existence represents how subaltern populations reclaim their ancestral practices and knowledge to forge new forms of defense. These are 'methodologies produced in the contexts of struggle, marginalization, resistance (...) pedagogies as insurgent practices that crack modernity/coloniality and make possible very other ways of being, being, thinking, knowing, feeling, existing and living-with' (Walsh 2013, 19). Resistance and re-existence through the revitalization of ancestral weavings represent a commitment to life, allowing native peoples to sustain themselves in the face of domination.

I argue that ancestral wisdom has a political dimension that manifests itself in forms of symbolic insurgency. Against the hegemony of Western sciences, the wisdoms of Indigenous peoples emerge as practices of political resistance. In this context, Siona women assert themselves as political subjects, challenging and questioning colonial processes of knowledge. Siona women walk into the rainforest to collect chambira fibers, carefully selecting only the mature leaves to ensure sustainable growth. As they work, they share stories about the spirits of the rainforest and discuss the best weaving techniques with their daughters and granddaughters. This practice not only teaches technical skills but also communicates a profound understanding of their symbiotic relationship with the land, highlighting the importance of respecting and caring for the rainforest as a living entity.

It is important to highlight that NGO projects aimed at supporting the revival of chambira weaving sometimes impose external models or practices that do not align with traditional methods, creating additional friction and complicating the integration of these efforts with local practices. Thus, the ethnographic study of the '*Macuri*' project offers profound insights into the intersection of cultural practices and education. This disruptive pedagogy is not confined to the classroom; it is present within the family and the community. Everyone (children, adults, and young people and myself) learns by walking through the rainforest, identifying palm trees and dye plants, and weaving.

The chambira project highlights the critical role of education in preserving and revitalizing cultural practices. The process of passing down weaving techniques from one

generation to the next is not merely a technical transfer but also a deeply educational experience. It involves teaching younger generations not only the skills required for weaving but also the cultural significance behind each design and technique.

Each stage of the handicraft production process (collecting, dyeing, twisting, and weaving the chambira) involves the bodily, cognitive, and meaningful work of Siona women, rooted in their interrelationship with the Amazon rainforest. Thus, this form or education is evidence of the unwavering will of Siona women to continue their practices. They are determined to continue weaving their lives and celebrating their existence. They still come together to share their dreams and plan activities while knitting the chambira.

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