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Article

Weaving, Worlding and Reimagining Youth Futures in Africa

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Abstract

This paper explores how the ancestral practice of sisal weaving in Luo lands of Kenya can become a regenerative thread connecting to the lived realities of youth. Drawing on my work as a practitioner-researcher in eco-somatic and adaptive resilience fields, I position weaving as a feminist and Indigenous relational practice of hope, memory, care, and transformation. The plant and fiber offer a pathway for reconnecting youth with land, community, and ancestral knowledge systems. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining (1) embodied ethnographic engagement with weaving practices and (2) futures-oriented sense-making, where youth learn from elders and re-imagine their lives. I argue that craft-based pathways can activate embodied cognition, intergenerational intuition, self-as-nature connection, and collective improvisation of future selves, thereby reducing disengagement and enhancing resilience. Weaving thus functions as cultural revitalization, ecological attunement, and anticipatory practice, reconnecting youth to identity, belonging, and futures imagination.

Keywords

Embodied Ethnography, Youth Futures, Africa

Introduction

This paper argues that weaving functions simultaneously as cultural revitalization, Indigenous and feminist praxis, ecological attunement, and anticipatory method, offering a powerful medium for reconnecting African youth to cultural identity, belonging, resilience, and futures imagination. First, I discuss the epistemological foundations of ethnography and its limitations, leading to the adopted methodology of embodied ethnography. Next, drawing on my work as a practitioner-researcher in eco-somatic and adaptive resilience fields, I reflect on weaving as an Indigenous and feminist, relational practice of hope, memory, care and transformation. I explore how the ancestral practice of sisal weaving in the Luo land of Kenya becomes a regenerative thread, connecting to the lived realities of disengaged youth, and introduce the concept of intergenerational intuition. Together with youth in the Kochieng region, I engage in futures-oriented sense-making, where youth can re-imagine their lives. I argue that craft and cultural based pathways can activate embodied cognition, intergenerational intuition, self-as-nature connection, and group improvisation of future selves, therefore reducing disengagement and enhancing resilience.

Ethnography and Its Epistemological Foundations

Ethnography has long been a central methodology within anthropology and the social sciences, grounded in prolonged immersion, participant observation, and the interpretive study of lived experience. As Clifford Geertz (1973) famously described, ethnography offers a “thick description” of culture, revealing the webs of meaning that people themselves have spun (Geertz, 1973). Classic ethnographers have emphasized the relational and situated nature of knowledge, arguing that ethnographic insights arise only through continuous engagement with communities, environments, and every-day experiences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Ingold, 2011). Over the

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past two decades, ethnography has expanded-beyond observation to include phenomenology, multispecies studies, and posthumanist perspectives, all of which highlight the entanglement of human life with ecological, material, and more-than-human worlds (Amador-Jimenez & Millner, 2024; Gentile, 2020; Haraway, 2016; Paul et al., 2021; Tsing, 2015). This shift closely aligns with developments in futures studies, where scholars such as Sohail Inayatullah (2008) and Karen Barad (2007) emphasize relationality, entanglement, and the co-constitution of possible worlds (Barad, 2007; Inayatullah, 2008). As futures theorists argue, understanding the present requires attention to the cultural narratives and embodied practices that shape anticipatory orientations (Bussey, 2014, 2017a; Floyd et al., 2008; Inayatullah, 2019; Miller et al., 2018). These convergences demonstrate that ethnography is cognitive intellectual observation, and point to the additional embodied, affective, and sensory nature of encounters embedded within relationality and the temporal horizons of past–present–future.

However, there are always limitations of disembodied traditions. Despite its interpretive richness, traditional ethnography has been critiqued for prioritizing intellectual cognition over embodiment, and representation over relational experience. Scholars such as Sarah Pink (2015) and Tim Ingold (2011) argue that earlier models often position the ethnographer as a detached observer whose authority is derived from observation, rationality, and textual investigation, qualities aligned with Western epistemologies (Ingold, 2011; Pink, 2015). This disembodied stance has been shown to obscure the multisensory, kinetic, intuitive and emotional dimensions of human–environment interaction, particularly in contexts involving craft, ritual, and ecological engagement. Decolonial and Indigenous scholars highlight that ethnographic distance reproduces hierarchies of knowledge and reinforces extractive forms of research (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2012). These critiques are echoed in futures studies, where calls for anticipatory justice (Whyte, 2018), decolonial and narrative foresight (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015) and creative and embodied imaginaries (Floyd et al., 2008; Hochachka, 2021) demonstrate that futures work grounded solely in mind-based cognitive abstraction fails to account for the lived, sensory, and relational dimensions of how communities imagine and enact futures. Together, these critiques reveal the need for approaches that recognize the body as a site of knowledge production and acknowledge the ways people inhabit, sense, imagine and enact emergent futures, as key points of consideration for futures scholarship.

Rationale for an Embodied Ethnographic Approach

An embodied ethnography responds to these limitations by foregrounding the researcher's sensorial, affective, and corporeal participation in the field. Building on phenomenological insights of being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2012) and contemporary eco-somatic scholarship (Laidlaw, 2021), this approach positions the body as both data instrument and site of knowing. Embodied ethnography is particularly suited to research on weaving practices, such as African sisal craft, where movement, rhythm, material texture, and muscle memory hold cultural meaning that cannot be fully understood through observation alone. Scholars working in embodied and material anthropology demonstrate that learning through doing – feeling fibers against the palms, sensing tension, and joining communal rhythms – produces forms of tacit, situated knowledge essential for interpreting crafting as a cultural, ecological, and relational practice (Ingold, 2013; Marchand, 2010). Integrating futures studies further strengthens this rationale through, for example, integral and embodied futures (Floyd et al., 2008; Jakonen, 2021; Voros, 2008), the inclusion of the futures senses, pheromones and metaphors of entanglement (Bussey, 2017a; Bussey & McNicholl, 2025), examples of positive community and climate futures (Celermajer et al., 2024; Cretney et al., 2025; Tschakert et al., 2021) transformative imaginaries (Ketonen-Oksi & Vigren, 2024), and experiential foresight practices like EXF (Candy & Dunagan, 2017; Candy & Kornet Weber, 2020), which all show that futures are not simply imagined cognitively but enacted somatically and materially, individually and collectively, through gestures, rituals, and practices, to help us find ways forward in the global emergency (Gidley, 2017; Slaughter, 2020).

In this research, I connect with Luo weaving in an embodied ethnography that allows me, the eco-cultural researcher, to inhabit the tactile, symbolic, and communal dimensions of making, generating insights into how craft fosters resilience, belonging, and future imagination across cultural contexts, thus increasing agency at personal and collective scales. This methodological stance ensures that knowledge emerges from literature and data analysis, as well as from lived, somatic participation in the worlds and practices being studied, and from attentiveness to how the entanglement of humans, nature and culture weave futures into being.

Methodology: Embodied Ethnography and Anticipatory Action Research

During a one-year fieldwork study in Africa, I – an Australian student-researcher – sought to deepen my understanding of the human-nature-culture nexus and its influences on resilience and transformation through ethnographic and Anticipatory Action Research (AAR) in Kochieng villages of Kenya, Africa. This approach respectfully engaged the Luo community in culturally authentic and appropriate ways. Anticipatory Action Research, like Participatory Action Research (PAR), involves collaborative research, education and action oriented towards social change, representing a major epistemological challenge to mainstream research traditions (Kindon et al., 2007). AAR has foundations in the principles of strategic foresight and empowering preferred futures, including future-oriented study of trends, risks and scenarios to inform present-day decisions (Stevenson, 2002). It is anticipation of the future combined with participation with the stakeholders involved. These participatory approaches are positioned as ethical responses to power imbalances in knowledge production and colonial legacies (Haller et al., 2020). Grounded in a holistic, Indigenous centered worldview, this methodology acknowledges the community and cultural protocols, values, and needs as an integral part of research, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Williams, 2023; Wilson, 2020).

My positionality as student-researcher is deepened by my long-cultivated family and cultural connections within the case study community. Since 2012, I have been accepted into the local Luo tribe as a 'daughter of the village' through my relationship with one of their sons and our six African-Australian children. This acceptance and welcome provide a unique position for me to connect with and learn from (and with) the people of this region. My increasing grasp of 'mother tongue', the Dholuo language, has enabled data analysis and reflection to be nuanced and relevant to the local cultural contexts. When I speak with people in their own language it builds trust and connection. My efforts to speak Dholuo show that I respect and value the culture. It has also allowed community members to feel more comfortable expressing themselves to me, as many are not confident speaking English, so using their mother-tongue allows sharing to be more animated and true. Using English as a second (or often third or fourth) language can inhibit creativity and thinking in some exchanges, while the use of native language has been found to promote excitement and playfulness when exploring futures (Bussey, 2014).

Utilizing an embodied ethnographic approach, I was not only observing the 'other' but also using my own body as an instrument of somatic awareness and data collection. This meant a combination of ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methodologies. Using lived experience as sense-making can provide valuable insights into cultural, social and ecological entanglements (Moon, 2025; Mooney, 2012). This view comes from the understanding that perception is the background of experience which guides every conscious action. The world is a field for perception, and human consciousness assigns meaning to the world; therefore we cannot separate ourselves from our perceptions of the world (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2012). We can, however, look for blind spots and interrogate assumptions. Bringing awareness into the felt experiences of the body, rather than confined to the cerebral realms of the mind, enables a more wholistic and full representation of reality. This stance is grounded in the ontological premise that reality is not static but continually constituted through emergent and relational phenomena, where the researcher is an embedded participant in the ongoing co-creation of method, self and world (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019; Moon, 2025).

During this embodied auto-ethnography approach, I asked questions such as: (i) What do I notice in my body before entering the field? (ii) What practices help me ground and become present? And (iii) How do my internal rhythms (heartbeat, breath, tension) shift as I arrive? These questions build interoceptive awareness by bringing attention to lived and felt experience as a valid site of knowledge production.

In a structural equation model analysis, emotional awareness is the dimension of interoceptive awareness that most significantly predicts nature connection, suggesting that the more aware a person is of the connection between inner bodily sensations and emotions, the more likely they can bond with nature (Branham, 2024). In addition to body-based cognition, emotion was also used as a signal and method within embodied ethnography. I explored the following questions: (i) What emotions surface as I engage with this space and community? (ii) Where in my body do I feel these emotions? (iii) Which emotions belong to me, and which may belong to the field? And (iv) How can I record these emotions ethically, without imposing meaning prematurely? Ethnographic observations as well as embodied and emotional insights were recorded through digital field notes, journaling, photography and videography, to capture my experiential perspectives and interoceptive awareness. The main methodological

components in this research include embodied ethnography and futures-oriented sense-making, represented by the 'hands' weaving the threads in Figure 1. The fabric represents weaving as Indigenous and feminist praxis.

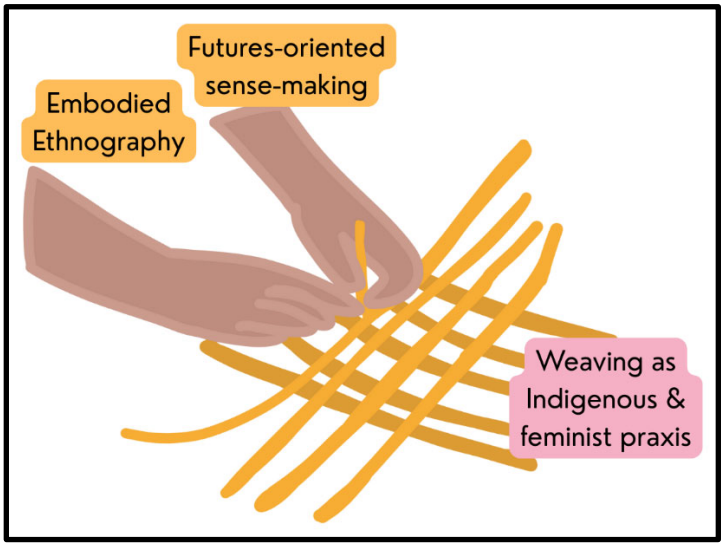

Fig. 1: Methodology to explore weaving as Indigenous and feminist praxis

During my 12-month embodied ethnographic study in Western Kenya, I observed and participated in sisal fibre collection and weaving as part of day-to-day livelihood and worlding activities, in addition to co-designed group sessions with village youth led by elder weaving mentors (Table 1).

Table 1: Weaving connected activities during embodied ethnography

Activity	Frequency	Connection
Nyangidi Elder Sisal weaver, "Jairo".	Visits 1-4 times per month over 12-month period.	Mutual extended family members in Nyangidi. He is considered a 'father' and wanted to share his craftmaking.
Owalo Skirt Making and 'Cultural School' with Riw Rok Luo Collective in Kochieng.	15-30 youth attending 1-3 times per week over 6-month period. Including excursions to local sites.	Natural development of community connections after discussions with elders and village leaders concerned about youth disengagement and loss of culture. Attendance was by word of mouth and fluctuated depending on day and activity.
Additional Sisal Collection from multi-generational homestead.	3 visits to collect extra sisal fibers for group weaving sessions.	Village to village connections. I was pointed in the direction of a homestead and followed the landmarks (trees, rocks, colours of roof) described.

Craft Based Contributions: Weaving and Worlding

Crafting, and specifically weaving, is both an Indigenous and feminist (Milojevic, 2024), relational practice of hope, memory, care and transformation. Weaving is recognized within feminist and Indigenous scholarship as a generative site of relational knowledge, care, and intergenerational memory, where craft can become both practice and metaphor for social transformation. Feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway (2016) and María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) emphasize that practices involving fiber, thread, and material enact a form of "worlding" in which relationships are made, maintained, and reimagined through embodied labour (De La Bellacasa, 2017; Haraway, 2016). Worlds emerge through the relations one cultivates with environments, materials, ancestors, and communities. Through this lens, weaving is more than a technical, practical activity, it is also a world-making practice. The rhythmic movements, material textures, and interlacing of fibers enact relational ontologies, bringing forth ways of knowing and being that are embedded in land, culture, and ecological memory.

Weaving is an Indigenous methodology in which people, plants and culture intersect with respect, relationality and reciprocity. In Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, weaving mentor John says, *"many people think it's 'just' basket weaving, but 80% of the work comes long before you weave."* Here he is referencing the important art of first finding the tree/plant that has, *"honoured you with its life"* and the relational connection to that plant, as well as the respect that must be cultivated, and the reciprocity of giving and receiving to create something with nature (Kimmerer, 2013). Indigenous methodologies value intergenerational knowledge transfer, often transmitted through practice rather than textual forms (Wilson, 2020; Yunkaporta, 2019). Therefore, weaving can be a site of embodied intergenerational pedagogy where knowledge of plants, harvesting cycles, cultural symbols, kinship obligations, and communal ethics such as respect and reciprocity can be passed from elders to youth (Hemmings, 2012; Kimmerer, 2013; Schneider, 1987).

Weaving as a cultural practice helps to shape identity and reconnect weavers to themselves, with others and nature, creating a sense of belonging (Bodman & Garista, 2025a, 2025b; Riley, 2008). Where youth are mentored in weaving by older generations, there are opportunities to pass down stories, knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, weaving becomes an intergenerational process of "worlding" that reproduces relations of responsibility, kinship, and continuity. I observed grandmothers collecting from the plant, uncles threshing the leaves and three generations – grandmother, mother and daughter weaving the sisal fibers. In this sense, worlding is a political, spiritual, and ontological process; a refusal of colonial erasure and an affirmation of alternative ways of living, knowing, and imagining futures (Simpson, 2017; Tuck, 2012). Consequently, craft-based cultural interventions hold promise to reconnect youth with cultural practices and intergenerational knowledge transfer. From the perspective of futures studies, worlding becomes an anticipatory act because communities generate worlds from inherited knowledge of the past and also through imaginative projection, crafting possibilities that guide behaviour, identity, and collective orientation (Bussey, 2017c; Haraway, 2016). Craft-based worlding, such as weaving, therefore operates as a relational foresight method, materially enacting desired worlds through the slow, rhythmic practice of binding fibers into form (Bussey, 2017b; Floyd et al., 2008).

Weaving enacts transformation by cultivating forms of embodied cognition and ecological attunement that foreground interdependence and care. As documented by textile scholars, weaving is an affective practice that remembers through the hands; it is a medium through which stories, identities, and hopes are encoded in the material structure of cloth (Hemmings, 2012; Vinebaum, 2020). Weaving has been theorized as a feminist methodology of hope because it is a practice that binds together fragments and ruptures into new compositions that gesture toward possible futures (Mamidipuri, 2016). Scholars examining textile handcrafts in contexts of social struggle argue that weaving offers a critical lens on resilience and futurity by foregrounding endurance, repair, and the capacity to create beauty and coherence amid challenges (Vinebaum, 2020). The act of weaving, with its interplay of tension and release, order and improvisation, mirrors forms of social repair and collective imagining that are central to feminist futures studies (Milojević et al., 2008). Weaving is therefore a practice of hope. It is not naive optimism, but a situated, material commitment to reconstructing relations differently. Through repetitive, embodied gestures, weavers engage in what Barad (2007) terms "intra-action": the co-emergence of meaning, matter, and possibility through relational exchange (Barad, 2007). Such futures are crafted through the sensorial, grounded labour of hands, threads, and community.

As discussed earlier, interoceptive awareness is an indicator of nature connection (Branham, 2024), and the practice of weaving connects the weaver to themselves, others and the ecosystems from which fibers are sourced. Anthropologists of craft note, weaving is never solely about producing an object; it is a relational event that binds bodies to materials, materials to landscapes, and individuals to communal rhythm (Marchand, 2010; Schneider, 1987). This relationality forms a counter-narrative to dominant capitalist development logics of extraction and linear productivity, instead privileging slowness, reciprocity, ecological empathy and embodied presence (Lambert, 2024; Pyles, 2024). Because weaving operates through relational, embodied, community-held knowledge, it directly challenges the extractive, hierarchical, and text-centered assumptions of Western research paradigms.

Indigenous scholars argue that methodologies must be accountable to community, centered in reciprocity, and oriented toward cultural resurgence (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2012; Wilson, 2020). Weaving as method satisfies these criteria: it is cooperative, restorative, culturally rooted and contributes to community wellbeing. When incorporated into research contexts, weaving can transform both methodology and researcher by foregrounding

Indigenous value systems rather than imposing external forms of knowledge extraction. From both a feminist and Indigenous perspective, weaving thus becomes a relational modality of resistance and resurgence, promoting values of respect and reciprocity, sustaining ancestral knowledge systems while fostering new social imaginaries grounded in care and mutuality.

Sisal Weaving and Youth Workshops

Sisal comes from the Agave Sisalana plant, a drought-resistant succulent that thrives in semi-arid climates, see figure 2. It is native to Mexico but grows extensively in Africa, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania. Sisal is extremely durable and is traditionally used for making ropes, carpets, and coarse fabrics. More recently, its use has expanded to include decorative items like baskets, bags, and mats. The sisal industry declined significantly due to falling world prices and the rise of synthetic materials like nylon, though in recent years, there has been a renewed interest and investment by the Kenyan government and NGO's in the sisal industry through policy, regulation, and institutional support to revive this cultural practice of weaving and add value to the Kenyan economy. Sisal is Kenya's sixth most important cash crop after tea, coffee, sugar, pyrethrum and cotton, and part of the increase in demand can be attributed to the growing awareness of the need to use eco-friendly materials (Phologolo et al., 2012).

Sisal weaving and related sisal-based products (e.g., ropes, twine, mats, baskets) make an important though often under-recognized contribution to household and local livelihoods in Kenya, especially in semi-arid regions where alternative income sources are limited. This is increasingly important as climate impacts affect rural subsistence farming peoples and their livelihoods. Kenya remains one of the world's leading producers and exporters of sisal fiber, and the sector provides employment in cultivation, decortication, processing and craft production for tens of thousands of rural residents, including women and youth. Income from sisal fiber and sisal handicrafts is used to purchase food, pay school fees, meet health expenses and smooth seasonal income gaps, thereby contributing to livelihood diversification and resilience at the household level (Phologolo et al., 2012). Research into African Indigenous Vegetables (AIV) value chains found that advances in land rights, as well as improvements in women's education, have the potential to strengthen female empowerment, improving their chances of maintaining control of AIV revenues even during commercialization, enhancing their control over income and also contributing to broader household welfare (Deißler et al., 2025). Similarly research on basketry and mat-making in coastal and eastern Kenya indicates that sisal weaving provides vital cash income for women's groups and small producers, particularly when organized through cooperatives or community-based enterprises that improve market access and bargaining power (Wanduara, 2021). Therefore, these initiatives of AIV and sisal weaving can support critical sustainable development goals, such as gender equality and food security, within the agricultural sector.

Fig. 2: Left shows Young sisal plants. Right shows an older plant with leaves cut away to be harvested into fiber.

Sisal's hard spikes can be used as needles or splinter excavators. These spikes must first be removed. Then the plant is taken through a process of decortication, where leaves are crushed, beaten, and brushed away, then separated using knife edges attached to a post, so that only fibers remain. By hand - the method I witnessed - this is a long process that the craftsmen-or-women undertake over several days or weeks. When the long strands of sisal fibers remain, they can be dyed or used in their natural colour for multiple weaving projects or purposes. I witnessed one grandfather complete this process from plant to colourful mat over many months, figure 3. He also made baskets and rope. Every item he sells helps to buy food for his large extended family or support his children in their education. In this way, the intentional practice of weaving is remembered through each twist of his agile aging hands and serves as a tangible gift of sustenance and learning for future generations.

Fig. 3: Uncle Jairo presents his colourful sisal weaving techniques.

During my collaborations with the Riw-Rok Luo Collective of Kochieng we engaged in regular community outreach sessions with the village youth. In several community meetings, local elders, leaders and parents had voiced concerns that youth were disengaged during the school holidays, and this led to increased crime in the village and surrounding areas. As a response we co-designed the regular community outreach sessions as a flexible, anticipatory action to engage youth before they disengaged and participated in antisocial behaviour. In these sessions the young people were encouraged to sing and dance as a group with a focus on traditional songs and dance styles. They had access to instruments such as guitars, keyboard and handpan drum which they enjoyed learning to play, seen in figure 4. Motivational speaking and listening were part of the sessions, as well as making and eating food together. For some kids who knew well the feeling of hunger, this was an appreciated part of the day. The programs helped to keep young people busy and have something to look forward to and promoted Indigenous cultural values such as respect and reciprocity. The program demonstrates anticipatory action learning whereby a potential future - youth disengagement and crime - was identified by the community, and proactive action was taken to support alternative futures of creativity, connection, cultural revitalization and care.

Fig. 4: Local village youth enjoy music lessons.

For five of the program sessions, sponsors supported the purchase of sisal fibers and the time of a local elder and a local mother to teach the youth weaving techniques, figure 5. They made traditional 'Owalo' sisal fiber skirts to wear when singing and dancing, figure 6. The energy in the space took on a distinctly different quality during the weaving sessions compared to the extroverted and excitable music and dancing classes. The participants became more 'inward', quiet and focused as they watched the elder move her nimble fingers rhythmically to prepare and weave the sisal fibers. When asked what they were learning, responses included: "We are learning weaving and how to sing and dance"; and *"We are learning patience to persevere with this thing."*

Some youth found the practice easy and set to work on their own pieces right away. Others found it more challenging and spent more time watching and learning the technique. For the group of youth and elders there was a clear sentiment of pride connecting to their culture through this craft-based medium. One young person said, *"We are learning to preserve our culture."* Some older participants reflected on stories of using the weaving practice to make a spherical rope net that would then be stuffed with plastic bags and rubbish to make a ball. Laughter and support were shared as the group participated in the weaving activities.

Fig. 5: Images of the weaving process with elders and youth.

Intergenerational Intuition

In many cultural settings, weaving carries genealogies of ancestral knowledge, transmitting memory through gesture, pattern, and repetition, also described as a "correspondence of movement" that links past and present, people and environment through rhythm and material continuity (Ingold, 2013). During this process I observed temporal awareness of myself, and participants shifting between past, present and future, with some aspects arising simultaneously. Consciousness is connected to the past, through the cultural practice and stories told during weaving. Consciousness is in the present engaged in the process of twisting and weaving fibers. While awareness also extends to the future as anticipatory consciousness imagines where the next fiber will connect, and how the self or community might become in the future. I experienced this multiple times during the embodied ethnographic process. When engaging in repetitive practices such as weaving, digging, fetching water or sorting seeds I felt an expansive awareness that stretched back to my many lineages of ancestors. During these cultural and life-sustaining activities where the body is engaged in rhythmic and repetitive motions, the conscious mind can enter a space of presence that is open, it is free to wander through past and future without attachment. Time passes differently, where an hour seemed like a few minutes, and I often received memories or insights that felt profoundly spiritual. I use the term *Intergenerational Intuition* to describe these interoceptive experiences that felt like ancestral knowledge awakening within me as my hands and body were engaged in specific practices that my ancestors also participated in. Additionally, I received visions of the future in feelings and thoughts that came from my future selves or the field itself. Some of these visions were in the near future, like the coming of a storm or the garden being full of tall maize stalks and thriving bean plants. While other visions were further away, such as my young children being grown and the sapling trees we had just planted being tall over their heads. Some insights came as feelings only, a sense of peace, or foreboding without context - though often these feelings would make sense in hindsight. The concept of intergenerational intuition can be understood as past and futures felt through the body, it refers to a somatic mode of knowing through which ancestral memory and anticipatory consciousness become perceptible during rhythmic, embodied engagement in life-sustaining and cultural practices such as weaving. As one participant said*, "Making these things, twisting these strands we can get knowledge from those people behind us, our ancestors."* (Owalo weaving participant.)

Fig. 6: Completed 'Owalo' skirts.

Intergenerational Intuition can also be understood cognitively through concepts such as 'Deep Time Humility' and 'Cathedral Thinking' described by Roman Krznaric in his book: The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription for Long-Term Thinking. Deep time humility is the recognition that human existence is an 'eyeblink in cosmic time' and involves cultivating a cosmic perspective that is responsible and challenges human arrogance (Krznaric, 2020). Cathedral thinking is the practice of envisioning and embarking on projects that have time horizons stretching decades or even centuries into the future, beyond one human lifespan. It is closely linked to a legacy mindset, but goes beyond egoistic or familial inheritance to focus on a transcendent legacy for the benefit of future universal strangers (Krznaric, 2020). These concepts connect to intergenerational intuition in that all three offer perspectives beyond the immediate now and motivate inspiration and action for the future.

Youth Future Threads of Hope: Findings from the Field

During my one year of embodied ethnography with the Luo people, I witnessed weaving as a source of pride, connection to culture and community, and an opportunity to discuss sensitive community issues. Through futures oriented sensemaking utilizing the futures senses – memory, foresight, voice, optimism, and yearning – as human capacities for making sense of the future (Bussey, 2017a), youth participating in the Owalo weaving program were encouraged to reflect on their visions the future.

While weaving we asked, "*What are your hopes and dreams for the future?"*

Reciprocity, solidarity and wellbeing were key themes, with the participating youth often referencing an intention to give back to their community and serve others. Other Owalo weaving participants said, *"In the future dream is to help orphans and people who cannot help themselves"*; and *"My dream is to help the needy because I've been helped in my life and I want to give back to others"*; and *"My hopes is to help the community and the elderly."*

The responses were distinctly social and not materially driven. When speaking about development, participants talked of community values including care for others and the land, not about roads and buildings, things that would be considered as development in dominant discourse. Questioning what constitutes 'development' interrogates post-colonial power structures, perpetuated by capitalist values of extraction and growth, as most investment in

development centres on things that are considered important for economic development (roads, buildings), rather than social development (connection). Weaving participants spoke of their futures with themes of getting employment and working hard, further supporting the notion of reciprocity and 'giving back' to the community that has raised them.

For example, the Owalo weaving participants noted, *"I want to work hard to achieve my dreams. Then come back and change my community"*; and *"I want to go and work in another country so I can help my parents back at home"*; and *"When I am big, I want a good job to help people. I want to give back to people who have given me."*

Youth identity is torn between worlds (Bussey et al., 2020). In the villages, things are no longer the same as they were for their parents or grandparents, and young people feel the calls of the digital revolution, even if they do not have easy access to digital technology in rural areas. Tensions exist between the old 'world' and the new 'world', with embodied horizons of possibility calling these young people into the future. Overall, despite challenging circumstances of predominantly subsistence lifestyles constrained by climate change, youth were positive about their futures: "I want to live a blessed life ahead"; "I want to be charitable, if someone doesn't have a house, I want to make it for them"; and "My dream is to have a better life. I want to be hardworking." (Owalo weaving participants.)

The sessions were inspiring for the youth and provided positive role models for the young people that enabled them to imagine alternative futures. As one participating youth commented: *"My dream is to one day be like you (mentor) so I can teach some children the way you're teaching us."* The weaving sessions also provided space for the elders to speak and be heard. One grandmother mentoring in the weaving sessions lamented: *"I fear because the youth are going out to parties and things. They get caught up in bad lifestyle and hack each other to death without knowing why. I want them to look deep within their hearts, to know themselves and why they are doing what they do. I want these kids to be enterprising and productive for the community."* A participating mother echoed this sentiment: *"Now youth come and tell each other to go to parties, but it is dangerous. You need to think about what you are doing if you go out to those places. What we are doing now (weaving) learning these cultural things will safeguard your lives. I want you to learn many things because these days you cannot just know one thing. Times are changing."*

Weaving in an intergenerational group offers a powerful methodological and symbolic resource. It is a material articulation of memory, a space for discussion and healing, and both an Indigenous and feminist technology of imagining alternative futures. The positive cultural pride generated supports, identity creation and cultural preservation. As one youth participant commented*, "It's good because we can teach others to make Owalo now." The process enabled youth to imagine alternate futures and dream big for themselves, figure 7.*

Fig. 7: They called themselves 'Owalo International' and imagined performing in different regions and countries.

By engaging in shared cultural activities such as weaving, storytelling, music, dance and dialogue, youth participate in worlding as co-creation of relational futures rooted in care, reciprocity, and cultural continuity (Haraway, 2016). Such programs strengthen the futures capacity of young people in their ability to imagine, desire, and enact life pathways different from those already prescribed (Gidley, 2017). By reconnecting with African elders, youth encounter intergenerational knowledge systems that support resilience, ancestral identity, and grounded belonging. These encounters can shift self-perception, provide role models, and help rewrite futures one strand at a time, much like weaving, where each thread contributes to a larger, coherent pattern of becoming. Consequently, weaving can result in outcomes of youth futures transformations containing intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural revitalization, the reimagining of identities, promotion of engagement, enhanced resilience and a deepened sense of community belonging (Figure 2). These connections are detailed in Figure 8, the woven threads with the graphic of diverse youth building on Figure 1 to show the expanded potential when we engage in research and action with others. The arrows show the process of weaving contributing to these outcomes.

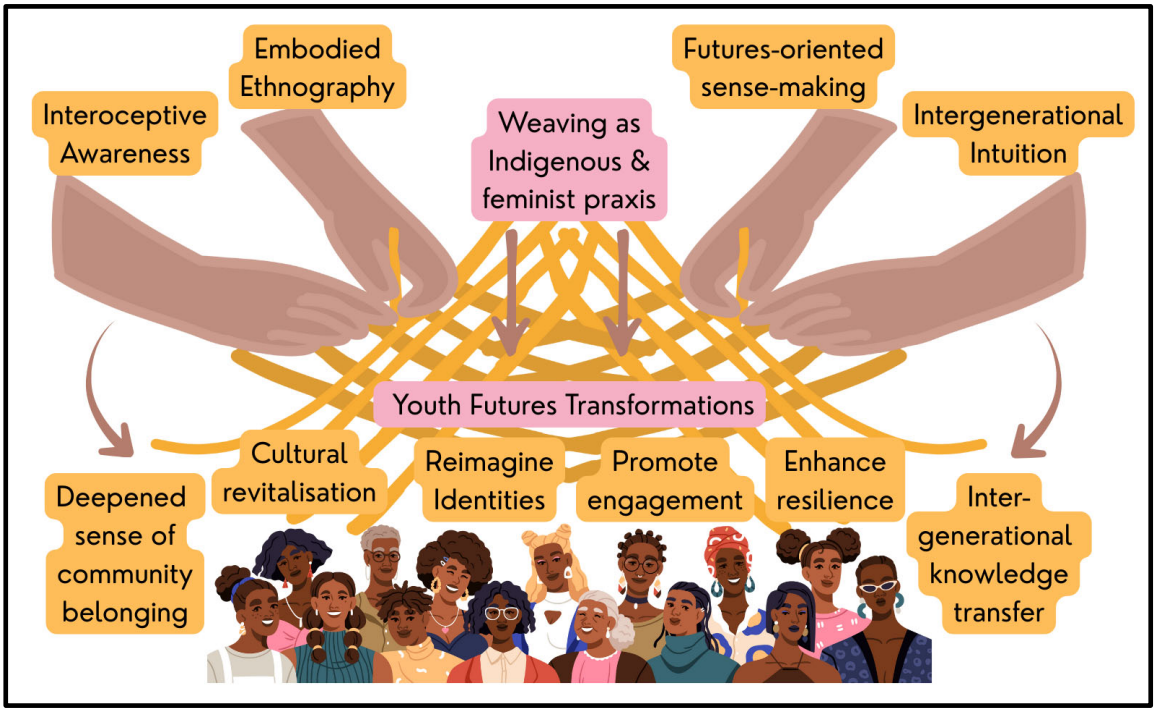

Fig. 8: Interrelationship between weaving as Indigenous and feminist practice and youth futures transformation

Reconnecting youth with cultural practices such as weaving provides an opportunity to inspire positive cultural identities, deepening self-determination, and therefore reducing disengagement and enhancing resilience. Areas for future research include examining the potential of weaving interventions to mitigate justice involvement in youth anti-social behaviour, using craft to co-create alternative community futures that counter disengagement and cultural marginalization. Weaving in collaboration with others while asking questions such as, how can we re-weave ourselves as a community, promotes agency and belonging for individuals and communities. This reflection underscores eco-feminist and Indigenous futures that honour ancestral knowledges and aim to re-weave connections across land, generations and culture.

Conclusion

This research found that youth futures transformations are possible through targeted weaving interventions. Through intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural revitalization, the reimagining of identities, engagement, resilience and sense of community belonging is enhanced. This paper makes three key contributions. First, it describes the embodied ethnographic approach and provides a rationale for its use. Second, intergenerational intuition is introduced as a new concept to describe a somatic mode of knowing through which ancestral memory and anticipatory consciousness become perceptible during rhythmic, embodied engagement in life-sustaining and cultural practices such as weaving. Third, weaving is positioned as an Indigenous and feminist praxis of hope and transformation that contributes to cultural revitalization, intergenerational knowledge transfer and ecological attunement, offering a powerful medium for reconnecting African youth to identity, belonging, resilience, and futures imagination. Weaving can help youth reimagine themselves differently, restore cultural identity, offer relational belonging, and finally, foster resilience and alternative futures.

Declaration of AI-assisted technologies in the preparation process

During the preparation of this work the author used Google's 'Gemini AI Overviews', and 'Chat-GPT' in order to help summarise concepts, brainstorm ideas, rephrase sentences for clarity, identify useful sources of further reading and check the endnote reference list. At no point was AI used to generate original findings, perform analysis, or replace the author's own voice, synthesis, or interpretive labour. Final insights, critical reflections, and conceptual framings emerge from the author's embodied experiences, scholarly engagement, and ongoing relational dialogues with the literature, community participants, land, ancestors, and mentors. I recognise that AI systems are trained on historically biased and extractive models of knowledge that often marginalise Indigenous, spiritual, somatic, and non-Western epistemologies. As such, use of AI was accompanied by critical discernment, with an understanding that these tools are not ethically neutral.

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