Journal of Futures Studies
2026,Vol. 30(4) 07-22
DOI: 10.6531/JFS.202606_30(4).0002

Article

Stitching Peace: Craft as a Feminist Technology for Inclusive Futures

Adina-Iuliana Deacu[1,2*]

[1]*Research Institute for Sustainability at GFZ (RIFS), Potsdam, Germany*
[2]*Tianmei World Academy, Shanghai, China*

Abstract

In an era of polarization and cultural fragmentation, this paper argues that textile crafts can function as feminist technologies for peacebuilding, inclusion, and futures-making. Reframing embroidery, quilting, weaving, and related practices as embodied forms of worldbuilding rather than decorative nostalgia, the article shows how slow, relational making transmits intergenerational knowledge, resists erasure, and cultivates care. Drawing on feminist, decolonial, and futures studies frameworks, it examines three cases: Chilean arpilleras created under dictatorship, African American quilting traditions, and Hmong story cloths narrating displacement and resilience. Together, these cases reveal craft as both archive and speculation: a material practice through which communities transform trauma into testimony, belonging, and ethical imagination. The paper concludes that craft offers futures studies a tactile and care-centered methodology for rehearsing inclusive, regenerative, and peaceful futures.

Keywords

Feminist Futures; Textile Craft; Embodied Epistemology; Care Ethics; Speculative Worldbuilding

Introduction: Threads in a Frayed World

In recent years, public discourse has become marked by escalating polarization, deepening nationalism, and intensifying conflict. As democratic institutions are strained, and as digital infrastructures amplify division rather than dialogue, the question of how we imagine inclusive futures becomes urgent. At the same time, traditional practices of care, memory, and community are being eroded by extractive economic models that privilege speed, efficiency, and profit over relationality and belonging. Against this backdrop, the threads of our shared social fabric feel increasingly frayed.

What practices might allow us to reweave those threads, creating futures that are not only more inclusive but also more peaceful? While dominant conversations about futures often gravitate toward technological innovation, policy design, or economic forecasting, this paper argues that quiet, embodied, and relational practices—specifically textile crafts—hold untapped potential for cultivating futures rooted in peace and plurality.

Embroidery, quilting, weaving, and related practices have historically been relegated to the margins: dismissed as "women's work," categorized as decorative rather than artistic, and valued for domestic utility rather than epistemic or political significance. Yet such practices have long served as powerful mediums of resistance, intergenerational transmission, and community-building. Textile arts carry encoded memories of grief and survival, transmit cultural motifs of identity and belonging, and invite practices of slow, attentive care.

In this paper, textile crafts are framed as feminist technologies for futures-making. By technology, I draw not on the narrow understanding of mechanical devices or digital infrastructures, but on feminist theorist Donna Haraway's (1998) definition of technologies as practices and apparatuses that shape how humans and nonhumans become-with each other. Textile crafts are technologies of peace: feminist because they privilege care, relationality, and embodied

* *Corresponding author*.
E-mail address: tianmeisworld@outlook.com

Received: 6 October 2025 and Accepted: 3 November 2025

knowledge (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993); futures-oriented because they provide methods of imagining, rehearsing, and materializing inclusive futures (Candy & Dunagan, 2017; Dunne & Raby, 2013).

The feminist framework adopted in this paper draws specifically on traditions of care-centered, relational, and ethics-oriented feminism, rather than universalist or purely rights-based feminist approaches. Feminist scholars of care have long argued that care is not a private, apolitical sentiment but a fundamental social, ethical, and political practice that sustains life and enables justice (Gilligan, 2003; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). From this perspective, care becomes a way of knowing and organizing futures, foregrounding interdependence, vulnerability, and responsibility across generations. This lineage is particularly relevant for feminist futures, as it challenges extractive, competitive, and instrumentalist models of progress, proposing instead futures rooted in maintenance, repair, and collective well-being. While some feminist traditions prioritize autonomy, equality, or institutional representation (Fraser, 1997; Okin, 1998; Tong, 2009), care-centered feminism emphasizes relational survival and ethical attention (Gilligan, 2003; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993)—an orientation that aligns closely with the embodied, collective practices explored in this article.

This argument also resonates with the author's ongoing research which interrogates how extractive logics of profit fracture social fabrics and explores how alternative, care-centered practices can serve as foundations for regenerative futures (Deacu, 2026c, 2026b). In both craft and systemic design, the question is not only how to resist harm but how to reimagine belonging, inclusion, and sustainability.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework by positioning craft as a feminist technology, an embodied epistemology, a peacebuilding practice, and a futures-oriented methodology. Section 3 then examines three case studies: Chilean arpilleras, African American quilting traditions, and Hmong story cloths, showing how textile practices have operated across different cultural and historical contexts as forms of testimony, resistance, memory, and belonging. Section 4 brings these insights into dialogue with futures studies by exploring spiral temporality, Ethnographic Experiential Futures, and speculative textiles. Section 5 expands the argument by proposing care and slowness as methodological principles for foresight. Section 6 discusses the broader implications of craft for inclusive and peaceful futures, while Section 7 concludes by reflecting on stitching as a small but cumulative practice of collective repair.

Craft as Feminist Technology

Rethinking Technology Through Feminist Lenses

Mainstream discourses about "technology" are often techno-centric in a narrow, digital-industrial sense, privileging platforms, artificial intelligence, automation, and military innovation (Wajcman, 2004; Winner, 1980). In this framing, technology is understood primarily as instrumental infrastructure designed to accelerate production, consolidate power, and enhance control, reflecting patriarchal, capitalist, and militarized imaginaries of progress. By contrast, feminist theorists have long called for a broader conception of technology that recognizes practices, tools, and embodied forms of knowledge involved in sustaining life and social relations (Haraway, 1988; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Donna Haraway (1998), in her Cyborg Manifesto, provocatively argued that technologies are not neutral tools but relational assemblages that mediate how humans and nonhumans co-constitute each other. Technologies, in this broader sense, include practices and artifacts that reshape how we relate, imagine, and care. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (2019) emphasizes posthuman understandings of technology as entanglements of matter, meaning, and ethics.

Within this frame, textile crafts emerge not as "pre-modern remnants" but as living technologies that actively configure futures (Adamson, 2007). They are technologies because they mobilize materials, symbols, and practices to shape meaning, social relations, and ethical orientation. They are feminist in the specific sense used in this article: aligned with care-centered and relational feminist traditions that foreground embodied knowledge, interdependence, and the work of sustaining life (Gilligan, 2003; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). Rather than privileging domination, abstraction, or extraction, this feminist orientation values maintenance, repair, and collective responsibility, which are all qualities that resonate deeply with the practices of stitching, mending, and making together. In this sense, textile crafts enact a feminist politics of technology grounded not in mastery over the future,

but in the careful cultivation of conditions for shared survival and flourishing.

Craft as Embodied Epistemology

Textile practices encode knowledge in hands and gestures, in rhythms of repetition and improvisation. Embroidery patterns often carry protective symbols, quilting motifs record family or community histories, and weaving structures embody cosmological relationships. As Rozsika Parker (2010) argued in The Subversive Stitch, embroidery historically expressed women's agency within constrained social roles, offering both conformity and subversion.

This paper draws on a Feminist Futures perspective rooted in feminist futures studies (Gunnarsson-Östling, 2011; Milojević et al., 2008) and critical foresight scholarship (Inayatullah, 1998; Slaughter, 1996), which emerged in response to the limits of dominant, technocratic, and growth-oriented futures paradigms. Feminist Futures approaches interrogate how power, gender, race, colonial histories, and care shape both the production of futures knowledge and the futures that are imagined (Inayatullah, 2007, 2010). Rather than treating the future as a neutral extension of present trends, Feminist Futures foreground situated knowledges, embodied experience, and ethical responsibility. They ask whose futures are being envisioned, who is excluded from futures-making processes, and which forms of knowledge are legitimized in foresight practices. Central to this perspective is the recognition that imagination itself is political and that alternative futures emerge through relational, participatory, and care-centered practices rather than through abstraction alone.

From this Feminist Futures perspective, embodied epistemologies matter precisely because they preserve and transmit ways of knowing that are routinely marginalized within patriarchal and colonial systems. Knowledge is not produced only through texts, data, or formal analysis; it is also generated through material engagement in the feel of fabric, the rhythm of stitching, and the stories exchanged in communal making. Such knowledge resists abstraction. It is situated, relational, and intergenerational, qualities that resonate strongly with Feminist Futures scholarship's emphasis on collaborative world-making, inclusivity, intergenerational wisdom, plural perspectives, and life-sustaining forms of care (Haraway, 1988; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Craft and Peacebuilding

To link craft with peace requires broadening our understanding of peace beyond the absence of war. Johan Galtung (1969) distinguishes between negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (presence of justice, equity, and harmony). Textile practices contribute to positive peace by cultivating capacities that reduce conflict and foster coexistence: patience, empathy, intercultural dialogue, and shared memory.

Craft also resists the violence of erasure. As Anzaldúa (2012) argued in Borderlands/La Frontera, marginalized communities must continually reclaim memory against dominant erasures. Craft provides a material medium for this reclamation: a quilt stitched with ancestral motifs, an embroidered cloth carrying testimony, a woven pattern that encodes cosmology. By preserving these threads, crafts counter epistemic violence and affirm plural ways of being.

From Heritage to Futures Technology

Crucially, this paper does not treat craft merely as cultural heritage to be preserved in museums or folkloric festivals. While such preservation is important, it risks confining craft to the past. Instead, the author argues for recognizing craft as a futures technology: an active, evolving methodology for imagining and enacting alternative worlds.

By crafting, communities do more than remember—they speculate. Each motif can be a vision of justice, each shared stitching circle a rehearsal of coexistence. As Milojević (2025) has argued in her piece Beyond Hesitancy: Dialogues and Reflections on Feminist Futures, feminist foresight requires methods that are not only analytical but also embodied, relational, and hopeful. Craft aligns with this call, offering futures methodologies that center care as both method and outcome.

Case Studies – Threads of Resistance and Belonging

Having established the theoretical framework that positions craft as a feminist technology, this section turns to three case studies that illustrate how textile practices have historically and contemporarily functioned as tools for peacebuilding, inclusion, and futures-making. The cases span distinct geographies and histories: Chilean arpilleras created under dictatorship as acts of testimony and resistance; African American quilting traditions that emerged from slavery and evolved into intergenerational practices of memory and liberation; and Hmong story cloths that narrate displacement, survival, and cultural continuity across refugee and diasporic contexts. Each demonstrates how textile crafts operate as embodied foresight, transmitting memory, cultivating solidarity, and rehearsing more inclusive futures.

Chilean Arpilleras: Embroidered Protest and Future Memory

During the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990), thousands of Chileans were detained, tortured, or disappeared by state forces. Official channels of communication were censored, and the voices of victims' families were systematically silenced. In this context, a remarkable form of resistance emerged through textile art: arpilleras—colorful appliquéd and embroidered scenes stitched onto coarse burlap cloth (see Figure 1). Created predominantly by women from working-class backgrounds, arpilleras became both testimony and lifeline, preserving truth when words were forbidden.

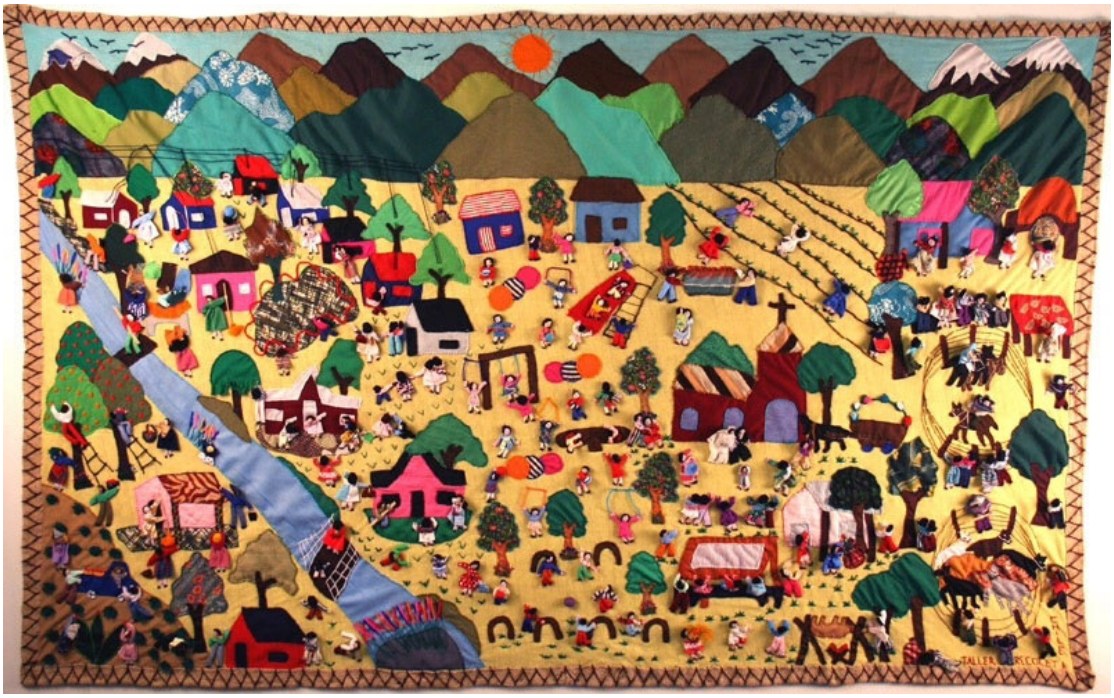

Fig. 1. Arpillera from Chile, shown at an exhibition in Derry in 2008. Source: TRC Leiden, Arpillera from Chile, shown at exhibition in Derry, 2008 (2016), TRC Leiden – Textiles Research Center. https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-needles/regional-traditions/middle-and-south-america/arpillera

Embroidery as Testimony and Survival

The first arpillera workshops began in the mid-1970s under the auspices of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, a human rights office established by the Catholic Church in Santiago. These workshops offered women not only material support but also emotional refuge and collective agency. Many participants were mothers, wives, or daughters of the detenidos desaparecidos (the disappeared), who found in stitching a way to voice their grief and outrage. Using discarded fabric, old clothing, and even flour sacks, they depicted scenes of everyday life under repression: empty

dinner tables, soldiers on patrol, demonstrations in the streets, and images of missing loved ones. (University of New Mexico Latin American & Iberian Institute, n.d.).

Each arpillera was a hand-sewn record of lived experience. Because official documentation of violence was often destroyed or denied, these textiles became alternative archives of truth. The act of sewing transformed domestic labor—traditionally undervalued and invisible—into a quiet but potent form of political testimony. As Marjorie Agosín (1996) notes, the arpilleristas turned threads and scraps into instruments of memory and resistance, creating small windows into the moral imagination of a nation under fear.

Collective Healing and Solidarity Networks

The workshops fostered solidarity among women who might otherwise have remained isolated in their grief. Within the safety of these communal spaces, they shared stories, prayed, and planned. The process of stitching was meditative and therapeutic, allowing participants to channel pain into creation. While dangerous—given constant state surveillance—these gatherings also cultivated hope. The women learned to draw strength from one another, transforming private sorrow into collective resilience.

Church networks and international solidarity organizations soon recognized the power of these textiles. With help from clergy and volunteers, arpilleras were smuggled out of Chile and exhibited abroad in Europe and North America. These exhibitions gave international visibility to human rights abuses and helped mobilize global condemnation of the dictatorship. Sales of arpilleras also provided income for the women's families, allowing acts of survival and resistance to intertwine (Agosín, 1996).

Arpilleras as Futures Practice

Viewed through the lens of Feminist Futures, arpilleras exemplify how craft can function as a technology of care and foresight. Each stitched scene bore witness to the present yet gestured toward a more just Chile—one where the disappeared would be remembered, and truth and reconciliation might one day prevail. In their small acts of making, the arpilleristas rehearsed futures grounded in compassion and justice rather than fear and silence.

This legacy continues today. Contemporary Chilean artists and educators reinterpret the arpillera as a participatory tool for truth-telling and civic education. The practice has evolved into a living archive, bridging generations and reminding us that peacebuilding often begins not in institutions, but in the tender, persistent labor of the hands, as described in the Stitching Resistance: An Educator's Guide to Chilean Arpilleras Manual published by the University of New Mexico Latin American & Iberian Institute (University of New Mexico Latin American & Iberian Institute, n.d.). From an environmental and psychological perspective, arpilleras illustrate how embodied, community-based creativity transforms trauma into testimony and resistance into renewal, stitching futures where care, memory, and justice are interwoven.

African American Quilting: Diasporic Memory and Speculative Futures

African American quilting traditions offer a profound example of how craft can serve as both an archive of resistance and a speculative technology of hope. From the antebellum South to the present, quilting has functioned as a vessel for intergenerational storytelling, coded communication, and cultural survival. Through cloth, needle, and thread, African American women transformed acts of domestic labor into enduring forms of social critique and imaginative worldbuilding (Fry, 1990; Turner, 2009).

Quilts of the Antebellum South and Underground Railroad Narratives

During the period of legal slavery in the United States, particularly in the antebellum South (c. 1619–1865), quiltmaking was both a domestic necessity and a constrained yet powerful form of creative expression for enslaved African American women. Denied legal personhood and ownership, enslaved women repurposed discarded fabrics from plantation households to construct quilts for warmth and daily use. Under these conditions, textile making also functioned as a practice of cultural memory and aesthetic agency. Gladys-Marie Fry's (1990) research in Stitched from the Soul documents numerous surviving quilts attributed to enslaved artisans, revealing bold improvisations

of color, geometry, and pattern. These quilts draw on African diasporic design sensibilities and vernacular innovation, subtly asserting humanity, skill, and continuity of selfhood in the face of systemic dehumanization.

One of the most persistent oral traditions associated with African American quilting is the notion that certain quilt patterns served as coded guides along the Underground Railroad. Designs such as Log Cabin or Flying Geese were said to signal safe houses or directions to freedom (Tobin & Dobard, 2011). Although scholars like Patricia Turner (2009) caution that historical evidence for such codes remains contested, the enduring narrative underscores how quilts have come to symbolize both physical and spiritual escape. Whether or not they literally functioned as maps, these quilts embodied the aspiration toward liberation, the fabric itself becoming a carrier of hope, courage, and community solidarity.

Harriet Powers and the Story Quilt Tradition

Among the most renowned African American quilters is Harriet Powers (1837–1910), born into slavery in Georgia. Her two surviving works—the Bible Quilt (Smithsonian Institution) (see Figure 2) and Pictorial Quilt (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)—combine appliqué, piecework, and narrative imagery to depict biblical stories, celestial symbols, and cosmological motifs (Callahan, 2005). Powers's quilts exemplify what Susan Meeske terms "quilting as storytelling" (Meeske, n.d), where each block becomes a visual sermon and an educational tool. Her integration of West African symbolic structures and Christian iconography illustrates the continuity between ancestral knowledge and diasporic creativity. Although she may have been unable to read or write, Powers used fabric to teach, record, and imagine—a form of literacy inscribed in stitches rather than words.

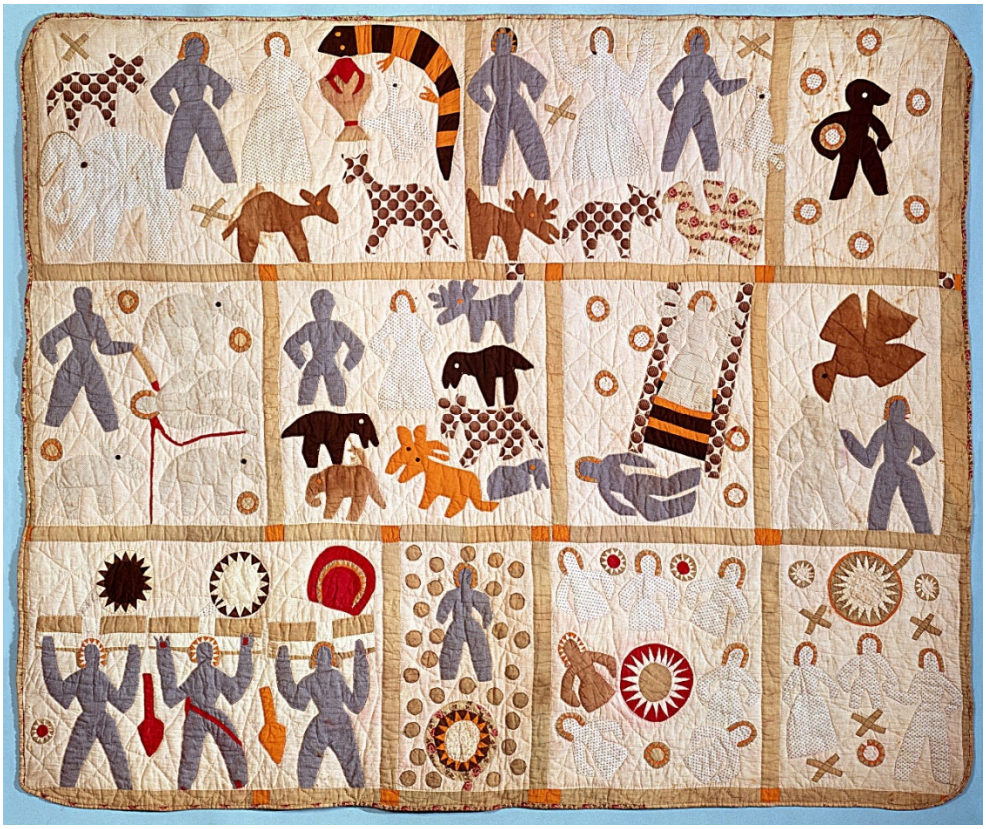

Fig. 2. Bible Quilt (1885–1886) by Harriet Powers, cotton textile, Source: National Museum of American History (n.d.). https://www.si.edu/object/1885-1886-harriet-powerss-bible-quilt%3Anmah_556462

From a Feminist Futures perspective, Powers's quilts represent early forms of speculative design. They weave

together cosmology, pedagogy, and survival, demonstrating what Candy and Dunagan (2017) describe as experiential futures: tangible artifacts that allow communities to rehearse desired futures. Powers's work, with its cyclical patterns and spiritual symbolism, exemplifies the spiral temporality central to African diasporic epistemologies—time that loops back to heal, remember, and reimagine.

Quilting Circles, Memory, and Community Today

The legacy of quilting as resistance and renewal continues in the present through intergenerational quilting circles and networks that sustain African American women's creative labor. Patricia Turner's Crafted Lives (2009) chronicles how contemporary quilters navigate questions of authorship, ownership, and identity, using fabric to express both personal history and collective struggle. For many, quilting is an act of reclaiming lineage—an assertion that their grandmothers' and mothers' artistry belongs in the canon of American cultural heritage.

Organizations such as the Women of Color Quilters Network (WCQN), founded in 1985 by Carolyn L. Mazloomi (Women of Color Quilters Network, n.d.), have played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting this heritage. The WCQN's exhibitions and archives highlight how quilts continue to address themes of racial injustice, gender equity, and environmental care. As Potente Susurro (2009) writes, African American women quilters act as "herstorians and keepers of our dreams," transforming cloth into repositories of lived experience and collective aspiration.

Quilting as Diasporic Futures Practice

Viewed through a Feminist Futures lens, African American quilting demonstrates how textile practices can function simultaneously as testimony and as future-oriented worldmaking. Quilts stitch together ancestral trauma and present resilience not only symbolically, but through concrete practices of collective making that have long sustained African American communities (Fry, 1990; Turner, 2009). Belonging is enacted in quilting circles where women gather across generations to share stories, labor, and knowledge, transforming domestic spaces into sites of cultural continuity and mutual care (Turner, 2009). Scraps of worn clothing, inherited fabrics, and vernacular patterns are assembled into shared material narratives that affirm communal presence in the face of historical displacement and exclusion (Fry, 1990). Narrative quilts such as those by Harriet Powers further illustrate this practice: her appliquéd scenes visually positioned African American cosmologies, biblical interpretation, and lived experience within a society that systematically denied their legitimacy, asserting continuity and authorship through cloth (Callahan, 2005). In this sense, quilts envision futures of liberation and belonging by materially affirming whose stories matter and who is included within the social fabric. As in the regenerative logic explored in the author's current research, inherited wounds are not erased but transformed into sources of creative and relational strength (Deacu, 2026a, 2026b). Just as stitches repair torn fabric, so too can communities mend their social fabrics, crafting futures that honor memory while imagining freedom anew.

Hmong Story Cloths (Paj Ntaub): Narrating Displacement and Survival

The textile traditions of the Hmong people of Laos, Vietnam, and southern China illustrate how embroidery functions simultaneously as cultural archive, livelihood strategy, and speculative practice of survival. Known broadly as paj ntaub ("flower cloth"), Hmong embroidery is characterized by intricate geometric patterns, vibrant color contrasts, and detailed stitching techniques (see Figure 3). Historically used to decorate clothing, ritual textiles, and dowry pieces, paj ntaub has long embodied intergenerational knowledge and community identity (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993).

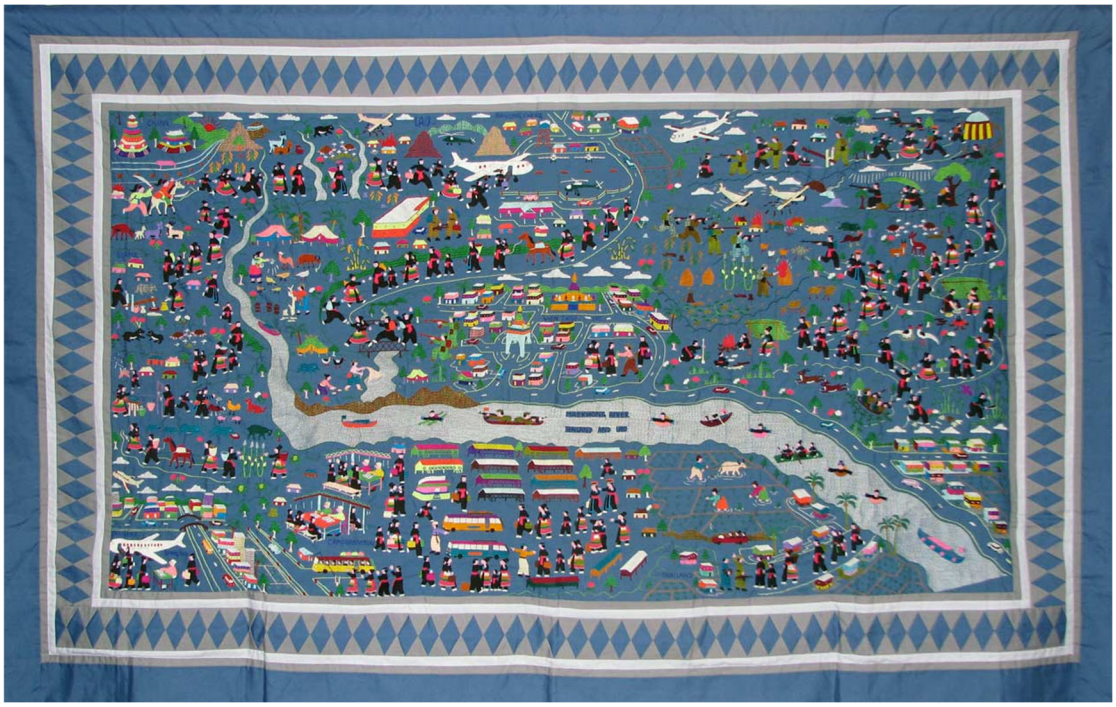

Fig. 3. Example of a Hmong paj ntaub (story cloth). Source: Hmong American Partnership, Hmong paj ntaub (story cloth) (n.d.). https://hmong.org/hap-impact-areas/hmong-paj-ntaub-storycloth/

Testimony and Livelihood

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the "Secret War" in Laos (1961–1975), Hmong communities experienced widespread displacement, with thousands forced to flee across the Mekong River into Thai refugee camps. In these precarious settings, women adapted traditional paj ntaub embroidery to create "story cloths"—large panels that depicted agricultural life, flight from villages, armed conflict, and perilous crossings. Departing from the geometric abstraction of earlier paj ntaub, these cloths employed figurative motifs to record lived experience, becoming testimonial archives that stitched into fabric histories rarely written in official records (Gerdner, 2015).

Diasporic Continuities and Reimaginings

As Hmong refugees resettled in the United States, Australia, France, and other countries, story cloths traveled with them. Today, they are displayed in homes, museums, and community centers as powerful symbols of identity and heritage. They also serve as intergenerational teaching tools, enabling younger Hmong, many born outside Southeast Asia, to learn about ancestral histories and cultural practices (Faderman & Xiong, 1998).

Contemporary Hmong artists have expanded the form, adapting embroidery to narrate new diasporic experiences such as racism, cultural hybridity, and transnational belonging. Scholars note that these works extend the testimonial role of story cloths into the present, transforming them into evolving cultural texts that speak simultaneously to memory and to futures of resilience and adaptation (Magliveras, 2020; Shi, 2023; Vang, 2021). In these adaptations, story cloths continue to function as speculative tools—projecting visions of survival and continuity into uncertain times.

Story Cloths as Futures Practice

From a futures perspective, story cloths can be read as early experiential futures artifacts (Candy & Dunagan, 2017): textiles that not only testified to past trauma but also materialized visions of survival, continuity, and hope. In this sense, the stitches hold together not only memories of displacement but also speculative threads of futures yet to

come. They stitch traumatic pasts into fabric while ensuring that cultural identity persists across displacement and resettlement. Like Chilean arpilleras and African American quilts, story cloths function as both testimony and vision for alternative futures: they preserve memory while imagining survival and continuity.

In this way, story cloths highlight the capacity of textile craft to enact futures that are inclusive, plural, and resilient. They demonstrate how women's creative labor, often dismissed as decorative, becomes a feminist technology of hope in contexts of war, displacement, and diaspora.

Comparative Insights: Threads Across Geographies

Though rooted in distinct historical, political, and cultural contexts, the textile practices of Chilean arpilleristas, African American quilters, and Hmong embroiderers share a profound kinship. Across continents, these traditions demonstrate how craft operates as both archive and vision for alternative futures. They represent a feminist technology that transforms domestic labor into testimony, care, and worldmaking. Each thread, in its specificity, contributes to a larger tapestry of resistance, healing, and future imagination.

Craft as Testimony and Archive

In all three cases, textiles become counter-archives—records of experience that dominant historical narratives have sought to erase. The arpilleras of Chile documented disappearances, repression, and collective grief during the Pinochet dictatorship, stitching truth into burlap when speech was silenced (Adams, 2013). African American quilts preserved the unrecorded histories of enslavement and survival, their colors and patterns encoding cosmologies of resilience that carried ancestral knowledge forward (Fry, 1990; Turner, 2009). Hmong story cloths, born in refugee camps after the Vietnam and Secret Wars, narrated displacement, endurance, and cultural continuity in the absence of written language (Gerdner, 2015). Across geographies, the act of sewing became a form of remembering otherwise—an embodied archive that holds what institutions neglect or deny.

Craft as Resistance and Agency

Beyond documentation, these textiles are acts of defiance. Chilean women gathered under church protection to sew arpilleras that denounced state violence, smuggling them abroad to awaken international solidarity (Agosín, 1987). African American women stitched quilts that affirmed humanity and creativity under slavery's dehumanizing regime, later transforming quilting circles into intergenerational spaces for political and cultural renewal (Susurro, 2009; Turner, 2009). Hmong women, displaced and dispossessed, turned embroidery into both livelihood and testimony, asserting voice through the patient rhythm of the needle (Gerdner, 2015; Vang, 2021). In all these contexts, craft offered women a mode of agency where public protest was forbidden, transforming silence into visibility and vulnerability into strength.

Craft as Futures Technology

While grounded in suffering, these textile traditions are profoundly forward-looking because they actively materialize alternative social imaginaries through practice. The Chilean arpilleras envisioned a Chile grounded in truth and justice by publicly stitching scenes of disappearance, protest, and everyday survival at a time when such realities were officially denied, thereby asserting a future in which these truths could be acknowledged and addressed (Adams, 2013; Agosín, 1996). African American quilts projected liberation and continuity beyond oppression by assembling ancestral symbols, spiritual cosmologies, and communal histories into shared objects that affirmed dignity and belonging within a society structured by racial exclusion (Fry, 1990; Turner, 2009). Hmong story cloths carried cultural continuity and hope across borders by visually narrating displacement, survival, and resettlement, transforming refugee experience into a portable archive that could sustain identity in diaspora (Gerdner, 2015; Vang, 2021).

Together, these practices demonstrate that craft is not only a means of remembrance but also a method of anticipation. The textiles do not merely depict hoped-for futures; they perform them in the present by cultivating collective agency, sustaining social bonds, and rehearsing forms of care, recognition, and inclusion largely absent

from dominant political and historical narratives (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this sense, the act of making becomes a seed of the future itself: through stitching, communities enact the values—truth, belonging, continuity, and mutual care—that define the more just and regenerative futures they seek to bring into being.

Threads of a Shared Future

Taken together, these case studies reveal that textile crafts are not passive remnants of heritage but dynamic, living methodologies for peacebuilding and social transformation. Through care, patience, and collaboration, makers reweave torn social fabrics and enact new relational ethics. The arpilleristas, quilters, and embroiderers each teach that hope can be handmade: a future stitched slowly, tenderly, one thread at a time. These feminist technologies remind us that the smallest gestures—needle, fabric, story—can hold the power to mend worlds and imagine more just and connected futures.

Futures Thinking Through Craft: Care and the Work of Stitching Futures

Having examined how textile practices have historically and contemporarily served as testimony, protest, and dialogue, this final section turns explicitly to the field of futures studies. How might craft intersect with foresight methodologies? What epistemic contributions does craft make to Feminist Futures? And how can care, as both methodology and ethic, reshape the practice of imagining inclusive futures?

Spiral Temporality and Ancestral Rhythms

Mainstream futurist discourses often rely on linear temporalities: trajectories of progress, growth, or decline projected forward. These models risk reproducing patriarchal and colonial logics of time, which privilege acceleration, extraction, and domination (Milojević et al., 2008). By contrast, craft practices embody temporalities that are cyclical, spiral, and interwoven.

Each stitch repeats yet differs; each motif recurs across generations with variations. Embroidery patterns passed from grandmother to granddaughter are both ancient and new. Quilts incorporate fabric scraps from past lives into present designs, ensuring continuity amid change. Weaving has long functioned as a metaphor for time and fate, from the ancient Greek Moirai—female figures who spun, measured, and cut the threads of life—to contemporary feminist reimaginings of temporal continuity beyond linear progress (Irigaray, 2004; Starhawk, 1989).

This spiral temporality resonates with Indigenous and feminist visions of futures that reject teleological progress. As Anzaldúa (2012) suggests, time can be a spiral of continuities, where ancestral knowledge informs present struggles and future possibilities. Craft practices thus invite foresight practitioners to rethink time not as linear projection but as spiral weaving, where past, present, and future are entangled threads.

Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF)

Candy and Kornet (2019) proposed Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) as a method for bringing futures to life through tangible artifacts and immersive scenarios. Instead of only theorizing or forecasting, EXF creates experiences that allow participants to "feel" the future in the present.

Textile crafts align naturally with EXF. A quilt stitched with speculative motifs—a future cityscape interwoven with ancestral symbols—becomes a tactile futures artifact. An embroidered cloth imagining climate-adaptive homes materializes speculative design through thread. A collaboratively woven tapestry that integrates refugee and local motifs embodies a future of coexistence.

Crafted artifacts are not abstract diagrams but sensorial, affective prompts. They invite touch, proximity, and intimacy. This embodied encounter destabilizes cognitive dominance in foresight, opening space for emotional, intuitive, and relational ways of knowing. In this sense, textile crafts expand EXF by grounding futures in tactile and communal practices.

Speculative Garments and Future Artefacts

Speculative design often produces prototypes of future technologies, like gadgets, interfaces, or speculative machines. What happens when we apply speculative design to garments and textiles?

Artists and futurists have experimented with future wearables that respond to climate change, digital surveillance, or environmental collapse (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Yet textile crafts offer an alternative approach: speculative garments stitched by communities to embody desired futures. For example, a "garment of peace" might incorporate protective motifs from multiple cultural traditions, symbolizing unity in diversity. A future quilt might weave together narratives of healing after ecological disaster. These speculative textiles serve not only as art objects but as futures pedagogies. They allow participants to engage in making futures with their hands, rather than only imagining them cognitively.

Care as Methodology

From Foresight as Prediction to Foresight as Care

Traditional foresight methods often prioritize prediction, trend analysis, or scenario planning. While valuable, such approaches can inadvertently reinforce technocratic logics of control. Feminist Futures scholars have argued for alternative methodologies that center relationality, empathy, and justice (Inayatullah, 2015; Milojević, 2025).

Craft offers a model of foresight as care. To stitch is to attend: to notice small details, to patiently repair, to hold fragments together. This ethos of care contrasts sharply with extractive logics of efficiency or dominance. Craft teaches that futures are not to be predicted or controlled but patiently nurtured, repaired, and co-created.

The Slow Methodology of Stitching

The slowness of stitching is itself instructive. In contrast to the speed of digital futures production, stitching demands time. Each stitch is small, yet cumulatively powerful. This mirrors futures work: small interventions today accumulate into large-scale transformations.

Slowness also fosters dialogue. In stitching circles, conversation flows because hands are busy, silence is acceptable, and time is abundant. Futures practice informed by stitching might similarly prioritize slowness, allowing ideas to emerge gradually rather than forcing premature consensus.

Care, Trauma, and Healing

Craft also operates as a methodology of trauma healing (Bukhave et al., 2025). In the arpilleras workshops, women stitched grief into cloth, transforming trauma into testimony. In refugee stitching circles, embroidery can provide a therapeutic outlet, calming anxiety and grounding displaced bodies. If foresight is to serve communities living with trauma—whether political, ecological, or cultural—it must integrate practices of care and healing. Textile crafts offer concrete methods for this integration: workshops that combine futures dialogue with stitching, projects that co-create speculative textiles as collective therapy.

Discussion: Crafting Inclusive and Peaceful Futures

The convergence of Feminist Futures theory, case study evidence, and methodological reflection underscores three key contributions of craft to futures practice. When viewed together, the traditions of Chilean arpilleras, African American quilting, and Hmong story cloths illuminate how textile crafts function not only as archives of suffering but also as materially resilient and portable practices of survival, capable of traveling with communities through displacement, flight, and social rupture.

Across all three cases, the futures-oriented capacity of textile craft is inseparable from its material durability and portability. Textiles can be folded, hidden, carried, repaired, and reused; they survive moisture, compression, and movement in ways that rigid artifacts cannot. These properties make them especially suited to contexts of displacement, forced migration, and precarity. Arpilleras were concealed and smuggled across borders; quilts

accompanied families through enslavement, migration, and resettlement; Hmong story cloths traveled with refugees as portable archives of memory. In this sense, textiles operate as mobile infrastructures of survival, which are forms of futures-making that move with bodies rather than remaining fixed in place. Their resurgence in contemporary decorative and cultural contexts may similarly reflect a desire for materials that can anchor meaning amid instability, offering continuity in a world shaped by mobility and uncertainty.

Craft as Testimony and Speculation

Craft holds memory while also projecting futures. Arpilleras documented repression while imagining justice-to-come. Quilts preserved diasporic cosmologies while envisioning liberation beyond enslavement. Hmong story cloths stitched traumatic displacement into fabric while simultaneously narrating survival and cultural continuity in diaspora. In each case, textile crafts bridged testimony and speculation, anchoring futures in lived realities while keeping hope alive.

Craft as Relational Worldbuilding

Textile practices are fundamentally communal and intergenerational. The clandestine arpilleras workshops in Chile created solidarity under dictatorship. African American quilting circles became intergenerational spaces of healing, where ancestral stories were preserved alongside new struggles for justice. Hmong story cloths connected refugee mothers with diasporic children, ensuring that memory and identity endured across disrupted geographies. In all three contexts, craft fostered relational bonds that modeled inclusive futures—plural tapestries where diverse voices coexist without erasure.

Risks and Responsibilities

Yet craft is not inherently emancipatory. While arpilleras, quilts, and story cloths often resisted domination, textile traditions can also be appropriated or commodified in ways that dilute their political force. Quilts, for instance, have at times been aestheticized without acknowledgment of their origins in resistance (Fry, 1990). Hmong story cloths, widely circulated in Western markets, risk being read as exotic commodities rather than as living archives of displacement and resilience (Gerdner, 2022). For craft to function as feminist technology of futures, practitioners and scholars must remain attentive to these risks, ensuring that the practices remain oriented toward inclusion, care, and plurality.

Toward a Shared Cloth of Futures

Despite contextual differences, what unites arpilleras, quilts, and story cloths is their ability to weave memory, agency, and imagination into tangible form. Each textile tradition exemplifies how futures are not only theorized in academic discourse or projected in policy but also enacted in everyday practices of making. In this sense, they invite futures studies to expand its methodologies, recognizing craft as a legitimate site of foresight, capable of enacting inclusive and peaceful futures.

Conclusion: One Stitch at a Time

At a time when global futures feel fractured by polarization, conflict, and ecological crisis, textile crafts offer a quiet yet powerful resource for reweaving social fabrics. As feminist technologies, they preserve memory, resist erasure, and cultivate belonging. As futures methodologies, they embody spiral temporality, materialize speculative visions, and enact care as a guiding ethic.

The case studies explored here demonstrate this vividly. Chilean arpilleras transformed grief into testimony, stitching absence into presence and imagining futures of justice. African American quilts preserved cosmologies of survival, carrying ancestral wisdom into visions of liberation and belonging. Hmong story cloths narrated displacement and resilience, ensuring that cultural continuity persisted across refugee camps and diasporic geographies. Each tradition, born of suffering and struggle, also pointed beyond the present toward futures of

dignity, peace, and inclusion.

Taken together, these textile practices reveal that futures are not only written in manifestos or engineered in laboratories, but also stitched in fabric, exchanged in circles, and carried in hands. They remind us that to craft is to care, to resist despair, and to keep imagining otherwise.

To stitch is to remember, but also to anticipate, because every act of making is already a gesture toward a future in which the object will be handled, worn, displayed, or passed on. To stitch together is to practice coexistence in advance. Each small stitch, fragile in isolation, becomes durable when joined with others, just as individual lives gain resilience through collective care. As the threads of arpilleras, quilts, and story cloths intertwine, they invite us into a shared act of futures-making not as distant speculation but as embodied inhabitation. In this slow, attentive labor—where usefulness, memory, and relation are inseparable—we may discover how to craft inclusive and peaceful futures, one stitch at a time.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written during the author's 2025 – 2026 Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellowship at Research Institute for Sustainability at GFZ (RIFS), Potsdam, Germany.

References

Adams, J. (2013). *Art Against Dictatorship: Making and Exporting Arpilleras Under Pinochet.* University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/743823

Adamson, G. (2007). Thinking through craft. *Berg*. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350036062

Agosín, M. (1987). *Scraps of life: Chilean arpilleras: Chilean women and the Pinochet dictatorship* (C. Franzen, Trans.). Red Sea Press.

Agosín, M. (1996). *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The arpillera movement in Chile, 1974-1994 (1st ed)*. University of New Mexico Press.

Anzalduá, G. (2012). *Borderlands: The new mestiza = La frontera (Fourth edition, 25th anniversary)*. Aunt Lute Books.

Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman knowledge.* Polity press.

Bukhave, E. B., Creek, J., Linstad, A. K., & Frandsen, T. F. (2025). The effects of crafts-based interventions on mental health and well-being: A systematic review. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 72(1), e70001. https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.70001

Callahan, A. (2005). *New Georgia Encyclopedia. Harriet Powers (1837-1910)*. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/harriet-powers-1837-1910/

Candy, S., & Dunagan, J. (2017). Designing an experiential scenario: The People Who Vanished. *Futures*, 86, 136–153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.05.006

Candy, S., & Kornet, K. (2019). Turning Foresight Inside Out: An Introduction to Ethnographic Experiential Futures. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 23(3). https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.201903_23(3).0002

Deacu, A.-I. (2026a). *Designing Agency: Tools for Regenerative Business Practice [RIFS Discussion Paper]*. Research Institute for Sustainability at GFZ. https://doi.org/10.48481/rifs.2026.010

Deacu, A.-I. (2026b). *Rehumanizing Profit: A Paradigm Intervention for Regenerative Futures [RIFS Discussion Paper]*. Research Institute for Sustainability at GFZ. https://doi.org/10.48481/RIFS.2026.004

Deacu, A.-I. (2026c). *When Business Shapes Minds and Cities: How Profit-Centric Economies Influence Human and Planetary Wellbeing [RIFS Discussion Paper]*. Research Institute for Sustainability at GFZ. https://doi.org/10.48481/RIFS.2026.003

Dunne, A., & Raby, F. (2013). Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming. MIT Press.

Faderman, L., & Xiong, G. (Eds.). (1998). *I begin my life all over: The Hmong and the American immigrant experience [collection of oral stories]*. Beacon Press.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the "postsocialist" condition.* Routledge.

Fry, G.-M. (1990). *Stitched from the soul: Slave quilts from the ante-bellum South.* Dutton Studio Books [u.a.].

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Gerdner, L. (2015). *Hmong story cloths: Preserving historical & cultural treasures.* Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Gerdner, L. (2022). *Hmong reverse applique: Cultural meaning and significance.* Pizzicato Press.

Gilligan, C. (2003). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development (38. print)*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Gunnarsson-Östling, U. (2011). Gender in futures: A study of gender and feminist papers published in Futures, 1969–2009. *Futures*, 43(9), 1029–1039. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2011.07.002

Hamilton-Merritt, J. (1993). *Tragic mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the secret wars for Laos, 1942-1992*. Indiana University Press.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Haraway, D. (1998). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature* (Reprinted). FAB, Free Association Books.

Inayatullah, S. (1998). Causal layered analysis. *Futures*, 30(8), 815–829. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(98)00086-X

Inayatullah, S. (2007). *Questioning the Future. Methods and Tools for Organizational and Societal Transformation (3rd ed.)*. Tamkang University Press.

Inayatullah, S. (2010). Epistemological pluralism in futures studies: The CLA–Integral debates. *Futures*, 42(2), 99–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2009.09.001

Inayatullah, S. (2015). Intuiting the Future(s). *Journal of Futures Studies*, 20(1). https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.2015.20(1).S115

Irigaray, L. (2004). *An ethics of sexual difference* (C. Burke & G. Gill, Trans.). Continuum.

Magliveras, S. S. (2020). Hmong Textiles, Symmetries, Perception and Culture. *Symmetry*, 12(11), 1829. https://doi.org/10.3390/sym12111829

Meeske, S. (n.d). *Quilt Me a Story*. https://1yearofquilts.weebly.com/uploads/3/6/0/0/3600737/quilt_me_a_story_by_susan_meeke.pdf

Milojević, I. (2025). Beyond Hesitancy: Dialogues and Reflections on Feminist Futures. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 29(3). https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.202503_29(3).0001

Milojević, I., Hurley, K., & Jenkins, A. (2008). Futures of feminism. *Futures*, 40(4), 313–318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2007.08.010

Okin, S. M. (1998). *Justice, gender, and the family (15. Dr.)*. Basic Books.

Parker, R. (2010). *The subversive stitch*. I. B. Tauris.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds.* University of Minnesota Press.

Shi, T. (2023). Local fashion, global imagination: Agency, identity, and aspiration in the diasporic Hmong community. *Journal of Material Culture*, 28(2), 175–198. https://doi.org/10.1177/13591835221125113

Slaughter, R. A. (1996). The knowledge base of futures studies as an evolving process. *Futures*, 28(9), 799–812. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(96)00043-2

Starhawk. (1989). *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess: 10th Anniversary Edition.* HarperCollins Publishers.

Susurro, P. (2009, February 25). *BHM: African American Women Quilters as Herstorians and Keepers of Our Dreams. Like a Whisper*. https://likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/bhm-african-american-women-quilters-as-herstorians-and-keepers-of-our-dreams/

Tobin, J. L., & Dobard, R. G. (2011). *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Tong, R. (2009). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction (3. ed)*. Westview.

Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.

Turner, P. A. (2009). *Crafted lives: Stories and studies of African American quilters*. University Press of Mississippi.

University of New Mexico Latin American & Iberian Institute. (n.d.). *Stitching Resistance: An Educator's Guide to Chilean Arpilleras*. https://laii.unm.edu/info/k-12-educators/assets/documents/stitching-resistance/complete-guide.pdf

Vang, M. (2021). *History on the Run: Secrecy, Fugitivity, and Hmong Refugee Epistemologies*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478012849

Wajcman, J. (2004). *TechnoFeminism*. Polity.

Winner, L. (1980). Do Artifacts Have Politics? *Daedalus*, 109(1), 121–136.

Women of Color Quilters Network. (n.d.). https://wcqn.org/