



Introduction

Weaving Threads of Hope as Feminizing Futures

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Abstract

This editorial introduction frames the Threads of Hope: Ancestral Knowledge and Feminist Futures Symposium as a continuation of the Journal of Futures Studies Feminist Futures series. Emerging from a Futures Studies Channel Community of Practice gathering on International Vyshyvanka Day, the Symposium explores how embroidery, weaving, sewing, mending, and other ancestral craft practices can serve as methods of memory, care, healing, resistance, and future-making. Drawing on contributions across diverse cultural and geographical contexts, the Introduction positions textile and craft practices as embodied forms of knowledge that challenge the marginalisation of women's work, domestic labour, and intergenerational wisdom. It argues that feminist futures require not only inclusion, but a revaluing of relationality, care, cultural recognition, and ethical responsibility. The Symposium also attends to the tensions within inherited practices, recognising that craft traditions may carry both continuity and constraint. Rather than romanticising the past, the contributions ask what should be carried forward, what must be loosened, and what can be reimagined with honesty and care. In doing so, Threads of Hope creates a space for grounded hope and healing, inviting readers to understand futures not only through concepts, scenarios, and strategic plans, but through cloth, bodies, memory, community, and the persistent labour of care.

Keywords

Feminist Futures, ancestral knowledge, collective knowledge-building, healing and resistance, craft as worldbuilding

Introduction

The Threads of Hope Symposium began with a Futures Studies Channel Community of Practice gathering held on International Vyshyvanka Day, 15 May 2025, where Kelly Kornet Weber invited participants to reflect on Ukrainian embroidery, ancestral memory, and embodied foresight practice. The session quickly became more than a presentation on Vyshyvka. It opened a tender communal space where participants connected textile traditions across cultures, from embroidery and quilting to sewing, family objects, and inherited stories. The discussion surfaced questions of memory, migration, loss, cultural continuity, and the fragile ways hopes are passed forward, sometimes through cloth, stories, photographs, gestures, or the deliberate saving of meaningful things. It also brought necessary caution: ancestral practices can connect and heal, but cultural revival must be held carefully so that it does not become entangled with exclusionary or patriarchal narratives. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) reminds us that learning from elders and ancestors is a profound act of resistance. For hooks, knowledge emerges from lived experience, and the histories, wisdom, and survival strategies passed down through generations provide a vital foundation for healing, resilience, and hope in the face of erasure and oppression. Hope, in this sense, is not passive optimism, but a practice of remembering, valuing collective knowledge, and grounding future visions in the struggles and triumphs of those who came before us. What began as a conversation about Vyshyvka soon opened into a wider inquiry: what do we inherit through cloth, craft, touch, rhythm, repetition, and care? What kinds of futures are already being held in the hands of women, elders, mothers, artists, migrants, daughters, teachers, and communities whose knowledge has too often been dismissed as domestic, decorative, or

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secondary? The session did not end with a tidy conclusion, but with an open thread, reminding us that futures work can be tender, intuitive, grounded in memory, and lovingly made one thread at a time.

Threads of Hope: Ancestral Knowledge and Feminist Futures is the second Symposium in the Feminist Futures series. The first, *The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future Symposium* (Journal of Futures Studies, 2025), affirmed the continuing relevance of feminist thought to Futures Studies, not as a narrow concern with women alone, but as a broader ethical, political, and methodological commitment to more inclusive, relational, and life-sustaining futures. This second Symposium continues that commitment, but shifts attention towards craft, material memory, ancestral knowledge, and embodied ways of knowing. If the first Symposium asked what it means to feminise futures, this collection asks what becomes possible when futures are stitched, woven, mended, held, and passed on through acts of care.

Reading the contributions to Threads of Hope, I felt as though I was being invited into a shared cloth of memory, care, and imagination. Each work carried its own texture: slow stitching as self-repair, *çeyiz* as inheritance and transformation, *phulkari* as feminist commons, *sawali* as decolonial methodology, weaving as youth futures practice, and textile work as a quiet but powerful way of carrying futures forward. Across these different textures, the Symposium extends a question I explored in *Feminizing Futures* (Abdullah, 2025): how might futures work change when care, relationality, cultural recognition, and ethical responsibility become central to how we imagine and act?

In *Feminizing Futures*, I used metaphors such as listening wildflower beds, seeds of change, the web of life, and wise old women to describe more relational and inclusive approaches to futures work. The contributions in this Symposium feel like an extension of those metaphors into material practice. They are listening wildflower beds in practice: plural, uneven, culturally rooted, and alive with different forms of knowledge. They are seeds of change because they show how small gestures, repeated with care, may grow into wider social transformation. They are part of the web of life because they refuse to separate body, memory, culture, ecology, and future. They also honour the wise old women, grandmothers, mothers, aunties, ancestors, and community keepers whose knowledge has too often travelled without formal recognition.

Yet the Symposium does not romanticise craft. The contributions understand that inherited practices can carry both care and constraint. A textile tradition may offer beauty, belonging, and continuity, while also carrying gendered expectations. A domestic object may support women, yet also define the roles expected of them. Handmade objects may be cherished, while the labour behind them remains unseen. This tension matters. Feminist futures are not created by idealising the past. They are shaped by asking what we choose to carry forward, what we need to loosen, and what must be reimagined with honesty and care.

What moved me most is that textile is rarely treated here as a finished object. It appears instead as process, relation, and method. A stitch is never only a stitch. A woven cloth is never only cloth. A hope chest is never only a household object. These materials carry memory, expectation, grief, care, gendered labour, and future possibility. They hold what formal archives often overlook: the body's knowledge, the quiet story, the inherited gesture, and the everyday act of making life liveable.

The contributions show that futures can be imagined through the hand as much as through the concept, through the body as much as through method, and through inherited craft as much as through formal foresight. Craft, in this Symposium, is not an object of study alone. It is a way of knowing, remembering, healing, and becoming. Cloth, thread, bamboo, dye, lace, household objects, and repaired garments become methods through which the self, the community, and the future are quietly reworked.

Feminist futures, in this sense, ask for more than inclusion. They ask us to name what is preferable, for whom, and from whose position. The works in this Symposium resist the idea of a single universal future. They are plural, situated, and attentive to difference. They question whose knowledge has been treated as legitimate, whose labour has been made invisible, and why care, tenderness, reciprocity, and maintenance have so often been treated as private duties rather than public goods. Through this lens, craft becomes more than heritage. It becomes a practice for revaluing the capacities needed to imagine and sustain more caring, just, and accountable futures.

Threads of Hope shifts attention from abstract futures to lived, material, and relational futures. Against a futures practice that can too easily privilege speed, expertise, abstraction, and control, the Symposium offers another rhythm: slower, tactile, attentive, and relational. It reminds us that futures are not only imagined through concepts, models, reports, workshops, or scenarios. They are also held in cloth, folded into drawers, worn on bodies, prepared

in kitchens, passed through families, and remade through the everyday labour of care. Hope in this Symposium feels grounded rather than abstract because it is worked through the hands, made slowly from remnants, fragments, inherited patterns, and shared practices. Loss and uncertainty remain present, yet so does the quiet insistence that people continue to make meaning, beauty, and relation when life feels frayed.

For Futures Studies, this offers a profound reminder: the future is not only a question of what may happen, but also of what forms of knowledge we trust, whose practices we honour, and what kinds of relationships we cultivate in the present. To feminise futures, then, is to widen what counts as futures thinking. It is to recognise the grandmother's cloth, the hope chest, the embroidered panel, the repaired garment, the woven wall, and the communal act of making as serious sites of imagination and inquiry.

The responses gathered here move across geographies, traditions, and forms. They take us from Ukrainian vyshyvka to Bengal's nakshi kantha, from Punjabi phulkari to Filipino sawali, from Luo sisal weaving in Kenya to Andean textile epistemologies in Chile, from Egyptian weaving performance to Turkish çeyiz, from diaspora textile practices to fashion futures in Ghana and the United Kingdom. They move through grief, displacement, memory, ecology, maternal love, youth futures, cultural continuity, and political resistance. What they share is a refusal to treat textile work as merely ornamental. Again and again, the authors show that craft is thought, archive, method, relation, and future-making practice.

Adina-Iuliana Deacu's article, "Stitching Peace: Craft as a Feminist Technology for Inclusive Futures", opens this conversation by reframing textile crafts as "feminist technologies for peacebuilding, inclusion, and futures-making". Embroidery, quilting, weaving, and related practices are not "pre-modern remnants", she argues, but "living technologies" that mobilise materials, symbols, and practices to shape meaning and social relations. Through Chilean arpilleras, African American quilting traditions, and Hmong story cloths, Deacu shows how textile practices transform trauma into testimony, belonging, and ethical imagination. Here, craft does not simply remember the past. It repairs the social fabric through patience, empathy, and shared memory.

Chiara Bottarelli, Victoria Rodriguez Schon, and Manuela Celi take us into another intimate tradition in "Intergenerational Hope: Detaching Embroidery from the 'Tradwife' Phenomenon". Their article asks how embroidery can be reclaimed from patriarchal nostalgia and repositioned as a care-centred futures practice. Through the corredo, they explore how ancestral practices challenge linear time and how futures can be "stitched forward". Their work is especially important because it attends to a tension running through the Symposium: cultural revival can sustain memory and female lineage, but it can also be entangled with patriarchal expectation. The task, then, is not simply to preserve tradition, but to ask what must be carried forward, what must be reimagined, and what forms of freedom can emerge from practices once used to contain women.

Bea Rodriguez-Fransen's "Sawali Weaving as Decolonial Design Futures Practice" offers sawali, traditional Filipino bamboo weaving, as both metaphor and methodology. Her Decolonial Design Futures framework brings Indigenous Filipino concepts such as kapwa into conversation with foresight methods such as the Futures Triangle. The essay is also profoundly personal. Writing through grief and motherhood, Rodriguez-Fransen reflects that her mother's "Maternal Love continues to breathe through me, across time and space". Sawali, then, is not only shelter. It is a breathing structure of relation, a practice of interweaving past, present, and future stories with collective values, imagination, and action.

Samantha Willcocks, in "Weaving, Worlding and Reimagining Youth Futures in Africa", brings us to Luo lands in Kenya, where sisal weaving becomes a pathway for reconnecting youth with land, culture, elders, and futures imagination. Her work introduces the concept of "intergenerational intuition", a somatic mode of knowing through which ancestral memory and anticipatory consciousness become perceptible during rhythmic, embodied practice. The voices of young people in this piece are especially moving. Asked about their hopes, they speak not first of wealth or status, but of reciprocity: "My dream is to help the needy because I've been helped in my life and I want to give back to others." In these responses, futures are not abstract images. They are responsibilities to community, elders, land, and those who have cared for us.

Kacper Andruszczak and Jacopo Battisti's "Textile Practices, Gendered Labor, and the Politics of Care in Displacement and Diaspora" turns to communities uprooted by conflict, climate crisis, and systemic marginalisation. Their article frames textile practices as "technologies of affect" that sustain cultural identity and counter the invisibility imposed on displaced people. Fashion, in their analysis, is not spectacle or novelty. It is

survival, social reproduction, and political refusal. Their formulation that “joy is not escapism, but strategy; not sentimentality, but structure” captures one of the deepest insights of this Symposium. Hope is not naïve. Joy is not decorative. Care is not soft in the sense of being weak. These are disciplined, embodied, and collective practices of endurance.

Kelly Kornet Weber’s essay, “A Stitch in Time”, returns us to the beginning of this Symposium. Her journey begins in a pysanka workshop in Kitchener, sixty-six days after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and unfolds through Ukrainian folk arts, family memory, and strategic foresight. Working on her own vyshyvanka, she encounters the tree of life motif, where ancestors are represented by fruit, the living by flowers, and future generations by buds. Through her great-grandmother’s embroidered rushnyk, she recognises anticipation as a family-level practice: “bestowing hopes and dreams for our loved ones and the futures they will inherit.” This essay reminds us that futures thinking did not begin in formal institutions. It has long lived in ritual, story, blessing, cloth, and care.

Camila Vicencio Pérez’s essay on Chilean artist, educator, and researcher Paulina Brugnoli Bailoni extends this insight into the Global South. Brugnoli’s five decades of weaving, teaching, and research show that feminist futures are not distant abstractions, but “concrete, patient, and materially grounded realities, already being woven in workshops, classrooms, and community gatherings”. Through Andean textile epistemologies, *ch’ixi*, pedagogy, and artistic practice, Brugnoli’s work demonstrates how the past can remain available, not as nostalgia, but as a resource for creating alternatives to neoliberal presents. Her casa-taller becomes a space of intergenerational care, where knowledge is built through reciprocity with materials, communities, and traditions.

Katerina Don’s “Running Stitch of Hope: The Nakshi Kantha Tradition Embroidering the Future” brings us to Bengal, where nakshi kantha becomes a hope-making device. The essay moves, as Don writes, like the running stitch itself, connecting fieldwork, literature, personal reflection, feminist utopia, and climate reality. Her parable of the disappearing lungī offers a powerful rethinking of abundance. A worn garment becomes towel, cleaning cloth, mop, fire kindling, ash, fertiliser, and even a tool for cleaning utensils. In this cycle, value is extended until exhaustion. Against fast fashion and development narratives that equate progress with consumption, Don asks us to see wealth differently: as the capacity to transform scraps into continuity. Hope, here, is “a practical orientation rather than passive optimism”.

Lara Ferris’s “Threaded Together: Makers Camp ‘The Ghana Project’ and the Networked Future of Fashion” takes this critique into the global fashion system. Through an embodied futures intervention with young designers, the essay shows how discarded garments and textile waste can become materials for systems awareness and collective imagination. Makers Camp invited participants to reimagine fashion as a network of relationships rather than a product-driven industry. The conclusion is both modest and important: the pilot does not solve fashion’s extractive structures, but it demonstrates how practice-based thinking can make harmful systems visible and open new conversations about transparency, equity, and shared responsibility.

Hazal Gümüş Çiftçi and Seçil Uğur Yavuz’s “Çeyizlab: Women’s Solidarity through Designing the Future of Hope Chests” explores the Turkish tradition of *çeyiz*, or hope chests. Once a material expression of maternal care and women’s solidarity, *çeyiz* has also carried the weight of gendered expectations and domestic confinement. Through design research, focus groups, object interviews, auto-ethnography, and a co-imagining workshop, the authors ask how this tradition might become a future-oriented repository of women’s knowledge. Their proposed digital archive of women’s wisdom reimagines *çeyiz* not as a wooden chest of household goods, but as a living platform for memory, trust, learning, and solidarity.

Marie Akoury’s “Threads of Resistance: The Emancipatory and Performative Potential of Weaving in Postcolonial Egypt” brings weaving into relation with performance, memory, and decolonial feminist practice. Her *Copula* series explores weaving as an archival and temporal act, interlacing sound, family documents, photographs, movement, and material. In Egypt, where industrialised modernity and traditional Masr coexist in tension, weaving becomes a way to reconnect body, time, culture, and agency. Akoury writes that weaving “reintroduces slowness and relationality” in a world shaped by digital acceleration and mechanised production. It is not merely craft, but an emancipatory and performative tool of feminist existence.

Rubina Singh’s “Phulkari Futures: Collective Stitching as Feminist Futuring and Healing” reimagines Punjabi phulkari as a method for collective healing and justice. Rooted in women’s communal making, phulkari has long

carried stories, hopes, and quiet resistance. Singh's workshops invited participants to sit with the histories of 1984 while collectively stitching futures of healing for Punjab, Delhi, and the wider Sikh and Hindu communities. She writes that phulkari was "never just decorative. It was a way to imagine the future". In her hands, each stitch becomes an enactment of memory, resistance, and hope, linking rupture and repair through collective making.

Finally, Petra Brown's "Becoming the Marine Lover: Stitching Myself into Feminist Futures" draws us inward, into the self as a site of stitching, remaking, and feminist inquiry. Through slow stitching, collage, Irigaray's *Marine Lover*, Milojević's hesitant feminism, and the story of Johanna Wintch, Brown reflects on how the needle can become "a tool for self expression" that enables individuals and communities "to remake themselves and the world around them". Her essay is tender and searching. It does not claim certainty. Instead, it honours the unfinished nature of feminist futures, which are always interdependent, relational, and made through "the tactile work of making and imagining together".

This Symposium shows that ancestral craft practices are not marginal to Futures Studies. They ask some of the field's most searching questions. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) reminds us that learning from elders and ancestors is a profound act of resistance, because their histories, wisdom, and survival strategies offer resources for healing, resilience, and hope. This insight speaks directly to the works gathered here, where craft becomes a way of receiving collective knowledge without being held captive by the past. How do we remember without repeating harm? How do we inherit without reproducing what has constrained us? How do we preserve what is sacred while allowing inherited practices to become more liberating? How do bodies come to know futures? How do materials carry thought, memory, and possibility? How might hope be made slowly, repetitively, imperfectly, and collectively?

The contributions gathered here remind us that feminist futures are not only written in policy documents, strategic plans, or scenario reports. They are also stitched into garments, woven into walls, folded into hope chests, patched into quilts, embroidered into cloths, and carried in the hands. They live in workshops, kitchens, community museums, refugee settlements, classrooms, studios, weaving circles, women's archives, and intergenerational gatherings. They live wherever people gather to remember, repair, and reimagine. Many of the authors write from lived experience, showing how craft becomes a way of moving through grief, displacement, rupture, inheritance, and uncertainty. Their practices do not erase pain, but they offer ways to sit with it, transform it, and make something that can be held, shared, and passed on.

This Symposium also carries a deep debt to Ivana Milojević, whose work has inspired and sustained this *Feminist Futures* series. *Threads of Hope* was born from the intellectual and ethical ground she has cultivated over many years: a commitment to feminist futures that is inclusive, reflective, courageous, and attentive to lived experience. Her generosity has also shaped the editorial process itself. She has given considerable time, care, and energy to reading, reviewing, advising, and helping guide the pieces towards publication. The response to the call was deeply encouraging and, in many ways, overwhelming. The range, depth, and tenderness of the submissions showed how strongly this theme resonated across communities, disciplines, and geographies. Yet, as with every journal Symposium, the feminist wish to include as many voices as possible had to be held alongside the practical limits of space, editorial capacity, and publication format. Not every article or essay could be included, but the works gathered here reflect the richness of the wider conversation that emerged. They carry forward the spirit of the series and honour the many hands, memories, and hopes that made this Symposium possible.

At a time when many futures feel frayed, *Threads of Hope* creates a space for hope and healing. It offers a communal cloth, not seamless and not pretending to be whole, but strengthened by its many textures: grief and joy, inheritance and critique, memory and possibility, local knowledge and planetary care. In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks reminds us that healing our woundedness requires love as the practice of freedom. Love, in this sense, is not only a private feeling, but a collective act that nurtures connection, wholeness, and shared responsibility. The articles and essays in this Symposium carry that spirit. They invite readers not only to think differently about futures, but to feel, remember, mend, and imagine alongside others. To stitch futures forward is not to escape the present. It is to stay with what has been torn, to handle it with care, and to ask what might still be made from the fragments.

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