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## Co-Creation Through Quilting : Connected Entanglements and Disruptions With Care

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## 2 Co-Creation Through Quilting

### Connected Entanglements and Disruptions With Care

*Vishnu Vardhani Rajan, Shyam Gadhavi  
and Marjaana Jauhola*

#### A Note for the Reader

Our priority with this text is to bring to you the stories of three people who came together because of quilting. In some parts of the world where literacy still is a privilege, writing English ‘correctly’ may not be one of our priorities.

The whole of **language** is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of the history of culture; **language** is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilisations.

Gramsci 1971, quoted in Buey 2015,  
p. 143, emphasis added

#### The Workshop

##### **Quilting Experiences, Affects and Knowledge: Collaborative and Co-Production of Research/Knowledge**

This ‘walk-in’ workshop aims to bring together scholars, artists and activists who engage themselves in collaborative forms of research and/or knowledge production as responses to experiences of inequality and to provide safe spaces for recovering from these experiences and/or solving them.

The aim is to de-centre Eurocentric forms of knowledge practices and neo-liberal universities’ praxis of ranking publications and to reward careers. The way of working in this panel is inspired by the practice of quilting, in which a wide variety of materials, such as recycled clothes and fabrics, colourful threads and fillings, are brought together to create quilts that form essential wealth in many Indigenous communities, each one of the quilts being a unique result of the labouring and creativity of its maker.

Quilting is learned through matrilineal knowledge transfers of everyday skills. Brown (1989) has described the Afro-American quilting practice as a process in which the results are not compared against other quilts, but rather appreciated and acknowledged for their own qualities and standards. Here, we will present a quilt prepared in the Kutch district of Gujarat, India and introduce the idea of quilting as a method of working together at this conference.

Come and join us if you are interested in sharing your experiences of collaborative processes and ways of working; negotiating languages, privileges and power hierarchies; patterns of working and negotiating archives and the use of the knowledge; examples of turning power hierarchies and authorship upside down; ethics of involvement; labouring, recognition and integrity; and the potential conflicts and failures of such processes. We will document the discussion and work towards a collaborative (written/audio-visual) piece.

Workshop organisers:

Marjaana Jauhola, University of Helsinki

Shyam Gadhavi, Prakrit Foundation for Development

Vishnu Vardhani Rajan, body-philosopher

On 28 February 2020, this walk-in workshop at an otherwise conventional academic conference consisting of invited plenary talks and panels with paper presentations of the Finnish Society for Development Research gathered 20 people to explore ways to decentre Eurocentrism and neoliberalised forms of knowledge production. As a temporary, free to join and leave at any time venture, this walk-in workshop gathering, or collective, was a new experience for us three organisers to work together.

Dear Vishnu,

We met at the quilting event in Vallila roughly a week ago. Thank you so much for the experience, it was a lovely evening and experience!

I mentioned there briefly that we (me and my Kutchi research collaborator Shyam also copied in this email) are organising a quilt and quilting-related workshop as part of Development Research Day ([www.kehitystutkimus.fi/conference/panels/wg12](http://www.kehitystutkimus.fi/conference/panels/wg12)), an annual event mostly attended by students and researchers affiliated with Development Studies. Ours is geared towards collective learning about collective knowledge production experiences, and was inspired by quilting done in Shyam's family and community mostly by women—and the connections that quilting has to many, many cultural contexts as a form of recycling, caring and transmitting cultural practices.

It took me a while to get back to you, as I wanted to wait until our proposal was accepted and the organisers published the call.

It would be so lovely to stay connected, and I was wondering if you'd be interested in coming to the event/'our thing' to share all that has happened to your quilting since early October. Sharing that story might be very interesting for others, and I could negotiate you in as an artist invited for the session.

But let's stay connected, and maybe we could meet for tea/coffee at some point! Thank you also sharing the book on anarchiving. It looked really interesting when I had a chance to take a peek last week.

With regards,

Marjaana

Dear Marjaana and Shyam,

Thank you so much for your email. I looked up the event. Yes. It will be a pleasure and an honour to join your session.

In my current quest, along with conflict resolution and sleep, I am also exploring the mental health aspects of quilt making.

As I feel everything is interconnected, all these aspects have a big impact on our living.

How the weight of the quilt has a calming effect, aiding in curing insomnia, which can worsen mental health matters.

Usually, quilts get heavy with layers, these layers provide proprioceptive input, providing your brain with feedback on your body's position in space. With the weight, your brain relaxes, and your body produces 'serotonin—the happy hormone' when you use them to cover yourself.

I am excited.

A poem I wrote as a response to our last meeting.

Indeed the quilt is getting wiser with many hands sewing into it.

Layers of thread as memories and histories unarchived.

This quilt, may it stand as a symbol of what I desire for many countries to be, imperfect, multitude, supportive.

Play of needles, threads, fabrics resolving conflict, creating utopias, this quilt a promise of a new environment.

This poem grows every time the quilt gets heavy.

Sending you my best wishes.

Vishnu Vardhani RAJAN

Body-Philosopher

Thus, our paths crossed on this occasion, and it was through the simultaneous exploration of quilting that brought us together. Vishnu organised a quilting workshop 'Sew a Quilt, Talk Conflict' at Publics, a curatorial and artistic space located in one of the urban neighbourhoods, in which Marjaana participated.

Pixelache's Public Meetings are a new event format for Pixelache in which we open our previously private monthly meetings to the public in the development of our further programming. For the remainder of 2019, a selection of our membership presents new projects, experiments and research for Pixelache that is open to experience by both members and non-members.

Number three in our Public Meetings series will take place in partnership with Publics, a curatorial agency with a dedicated library, event space and reading room in Vallila, Helsinki.

This meeting will be led by Pixelache member Vishnu Vardhani RAJAN and is entitled 'Sew a Quilt, Talk Conflict'.

Let's sew a quilt, talk about conflict.

Quilt = A quilt is a multi-layered textile, traditionally composed of at least three layers of fibre (fabric).

Sew = join, fasten or repair (something) by making stitches with a needle and thread.

Conflict = be incompatible or at variance.

Quilt embodies diverse, mismatched, incompatible pieces of cloth to form a single entity that provides comfort.

With this session, Vishnu wants to address how a restorative act such as sewing surfaces the nuances of embodiment of conflict.

Through this work, Vishnu wants to address the textured expressions of conflict, normalise conversations around conflict, identify it and name it to navigate towards restoration.

‘Sew a Quilt, Talk Conflict’ is an ongoing research project.

Body-Philosopher Vishnu Vardhani RAJAN believes that conflict exists both in and beyond our finitude.

‘We come to the encounter with conflict, it doesn’t happen afterwards’.

Vishnu Vardhani RAJAN has been a member of the board of Pixelache since 2017. She was one of the artistic Directors of the Bi-annual Pixelache Festival ‘Breaking the 5th Wall’, and community building.

Simultaneously, Marjaana had been exploring quilting and patchwork as a metaphor for collaborative writing and academic co-creation practice in feminist peace research (Lyytikäinen et al., 2020). Further, Shyam and Marjaana had explored the quilts in the Kachchh district in Gujarat, India as part of their research collaboration. This was sparked by a confusing and conflicting experience: finding a similar quilting pattern to those used in quilts made in Shyam’s village Zarpara on the shelf of a Swedish lifestyle shop, and later again in an expensive design shop dedicated to the ‘idea of “helping design” to reduce poverty and to increase equality in society’. Yet, in both cases, the quilt pattern was altered and appropriated into Nordic aesthetics using plain light-brown linen and white threads, leading us into conversations about commodification, racialisation and Nordic whiteness as ‘exceptionality’ in the global debate on continuities of coloniality and slavery—slowly, slowly, emerging into public discussion due to the wider media focus on the events in the United States and the #blacklivesmatter movement’s demands.

To follow the quilting workshop video, open using the following QR (quick response) code (Figure 2.1):



*Figure 2.1* To follow the quilting workshop video, open using this QR code.

### Checking In

- How are we feeling in the body?
- How are we feeling in the mind?

### Quilt Play

‘Lali’—comforting—not being shamed for being later, although feeling one has missed maybe something before, embodying affect theory

‘faster’

‘maybe softer’

Singing starts

‘Ah, I am falling asleep

‘They are higher there, you are higher that side’

Ljulja ljulja ljuške, bere majka kruške. Pa je dosta nabrala i dijećici davala. Sad su dijeca vesela, jer su kruške pojela.<sup>1</sup>

Swing swing, my swing, mother is picking pears. She has picked enough now and gave them to the children. Now the children are satisfied/calm because they ate the pears.<sup>2</sup>

### Vishnu’s Song

Lullaby sung by my grandma. A beautiful song. This song is my school. A song about more than human relationships, the ethics of labour and especially women working in the fields. I never managed to sing this lullaby without tears rolling down my cheeks. A surprise that these lyrics were sung as a lullaby.

విట్ట రవ్ విట్ట పల్లెల్ల తల్లి హచ్చి...  
పల్లెలకు పల్లెల పల్లెలకు పల్లె హచ్చి.

‘It is a beautiful challenge to move and sing’

‘We have to be stronger on this side’

‘We can slowly release Shyam’

### How Does Quilting Disrupt the Academic and Office Conventions in a Walk-In Workshop Like This?

I lock my bicycle and walk into the building Google Maps leads me to. I go straight to the third floor. The sense of security feels vigilant, present. No one stops me as I seem to know where I am going. When I arrive at the designated room, Marjaana and Shyam are not there; instead, a diplomat greets me. I am carrying a heavy pink IKEA bag. I set it down. I ask this person where the workshop is. I show the email and ask where Marjaana and Shyam are. They look confused. I call Marjaana. Meanwhile, the diplomat calls the info-desk to check if there is a workshop happening in the space. My pandemonium lifts as I realise that I need to be in the adjacent building. I don’t know what actually happened; I left while still talking to Marjaana on the phone. To me, this was an important prologue to the workshop. How we perceive confidence, knowledge and the right to be in a certain space. Especially, being POC and being in a space that to me, from the outside, seemed white, powerful and impregnable but was actually accessible. I stay with the question of how we process spaces, and if

it's my prejudice of spaces that engenders my feeling of being an imposter. This was translated into the workshop when the patches I carried with me to sew into one quilt got sewn into another, Aashbai's (Shyam's mom's) quilt. The stitches are dissimilar to those of the rest of the quilt.

\* \* \*

The phone calls prior to the workshop day to the event location, House of Science, revealed that the seminar room reserved for us did not allow moving the heavy structured tables and chairs in any way. Second, knowing from previous experiences the temporality of conferences pushes the mind to certain temporalities of 90 minutes, although usually, the invited plenary speakers, often big names in the given scientific discipline, exploit this given framing by taking space and time. This was also the case here. We were setting up the workshop on the third floor, but knew that when 'our time' started, the conference participants would be still sitting in the main hall in the delayed Q&A session. We set up the room, spreading out our quilting materials and as the workshop participants began arriving, extended our spatial boundaries to the corridor, welcoming each participant and inviting them into our circle which was forming and growing little by little.

Yet, we also had a set and limited time frame to follow: 90 minutes were divided into three sections marked by the ringing of a copper bell, which in Kachchh is normally used to recognise the animal when they are grazing in the forest. The bell, which had travelled from the Banni grassland area of Kachchh, had a warm, yet strong, sound that a piece of wood attached to its frame was making when Marjaana held it in her hand, having kept it in her pocket to wait for its turn to ring. During the workshop, we decided to expand our time frame over the lunch break and promised the participants that they could take their time to work on the materials even if our time was officially over.

Disruption of the conference normalcy occurred again when the next session was about to begin. Three people, all super-formally dressed (again, diplomats?) in suits and dresses representing an intergovernmental development organisation, walked in, started setting up their institution's banner stand with development slogans and inserted PowerPoint presentations into the seminar room computer. Non-verbally signing their irritation—or was it just me (Marjaana) who sensed it? no; Shyam sensed it, too, as (Vishnu speaks aloud to one of the participants about activism weaving, knitting and sewing, completely unaware of the irritation) we sensed so strongly that we were breaking some unwritten rules, both physically with our 'being late' bodies, but more so, with the pieces of fabric, threads and quilts spread around the room as we had left them when the workshop participants departed. It was as if two separate worlds had collided or, rather, were forced to co-exist in awkward silence in this encounter with the predominantly white Finnish office culture, during those few minutes when we slowly started packing our materials back into the bags that Vishnu had carried with her through the city, and after which we finally made our way up to the third floor of the House of Science. Although otherwise in full silence, when we tried to wind up quickly so as not to further disturb the newcomers, the copper bell kept moving inside one of the bags, marking with its sound our departure, doing its job and telling what we left unsaid. In our shared imagination, the silence we left behind must have been loud. Recalling the incident of the so-called modern developments, such as mining, salt and mineral extraction, arriving in the Kachchhi forests and the bells tied on the necks of the animals gently sounding as they were displaced from their

previous home in the hope of an open and wide place of opportunities for fresh food, drink and a carefree life. And so did we.

Earlier, prior to the arrival of the newcomers, we had been holding the quilt together in the corridor, a quilt which had created a surface, or cradle, on which the participants were invited to climb on, bringing our bodies and minds to the same shared place that we were creating. Much laughter emerged and a sense of care, responsibility, along with observations that were connected to hierarchies, positions of power (speed, positionalities) and attempts to find responsible positions to work through them—but also to recognise them and silently experience, yet again, how easily whiteness takes up space, explains and demands to be heard as an expert.

Although we have come together to explore the possibilities of quilting, we have also recognised during this process the differences in our thinking about human encounters: Vishnu's workshop on quilts, on one hand, was guided by the idea of people coming together in encounters with a potential conflict; the result of that encounter would depend on those people and whether the conflict would govern their relationship, or if the people would govern the conflict. Shyam, on the other hand, has taught Marjaana during their joint urban ethnographic research (Gadhavi & Jauhola, 2019) to learn to release the predetermined conflict, hierarchies and antagonisms built into situations and focus on possibilities of being surprised, accepting the existence of that person and recognising the situation where we are meeting that person (platform), in order to embrace the idea of living in peace, creating harmony and believing that the person is moving towards positivity, happiness and love. This means that the agenda of life and encounters is moving us towards happiness and peace—the movements and encounters are aiming towards that; they are founded on that basis. However, having experienced hurt or discrimination alters the future possibilities of such encounters. Rebuilding a trust that has been lost is not easily achieved.

### Workshop Notes

Having an orientation of topics. (Quilting and feminism) (Body, clothes shame and quilts)

(Cosmopolitanism and quilting)

(What else did we talk about over lunch?)

- Philosophy of quilting.
- Quilting experiences.
- Touching the fabrics.
- Getting to know the fabrics.
- Sewing.

Few notes on:

- Affects, movements, discussions.
- Anarchiving.
- Knowledge cultivation instead of knowledge production:<sup>3</sup> certain open-ended, non- zero-sum, non-competitive logic of oxygenation from which other insights can grow or resurface <3<3 <3.



- Sewing and talking.
- Anecdotal evidence, insights.
- Quilts as carriers of seeds.

## **Making Poem**

Make it out of the sari that wraps you/in tender celebration/like the mother you longed for/make it out of the mother you got/in all her wounded magnificence

Make it of all the hands that have ever/touched you the hand that grabbed your eighteen-year-old breast/on a Nairobi street/so that weeks after/you still walked hunched over/arms against chest/the hands that slid a needle into your inner elbow/drew up a fat column of liquid red to test if it was/pure enough to get you a green card/hands that taught you how to throw/elbow strikes pull/mouth-rips hands/that sing healing into your muscles hands/that have worshipped you/in ways that leave you/consecrated humbled

Make it for the hands/hacked off the arawaks by columbus and his men/lopped off ohlone children by the spanish priests/baskets of severed hands presented at days's end/to Belgian plantation masters in the congo thumbs/chopped off India weavers by the British/make it because you/still have hands

Make it for everyone/who's ever said/you think too hard/you talk too much you question/more than you need to you're too/intense too serious you're too/angry/lighten UP for chrissake it's not like YOU/have family in Eye-rak!

Make it because you don't have/health insurance/it flashes neon in your brain/each time you take a fall in dance class/ride a road without a bike lane/your close friend/is 53 she has no/health insurance you remember zari/threads of beaten silver woven into saris so that in extremity/a woman could burn her saris/recover the molten silver/you wonder how it feels to touch a lighted match/to your inheritance.

Make it because Iraqis/had free healthcare one of the world's best/before the US invasion/now/children scream ceaselessly four or five to a bed from the pain/of sand parasites for want of/three cents worth of antibiotics/women give birth on the floor/in corners not packed with war victims

Make it from rage/every smug idiotic face you've ever wanted to smash/into the carnage of war every encounter/that's left your throat choked/with what you dared not say excavate/the words that hid in your churning stomach through visa controls/ words you swallowed down/until over the border they are/still there they knew/you would return for them

Make it knowing that art/is not political change/make it a prayer/for real political change/a homage to your heroes a libation/to your gods

Make it for the archaic meaning/of the word maker/poet/for the Greek root/of the word poet/to create

by Shailaja Patel (2010, pp. 122–124)

## **Shyam: obaki thi obaki—The Journey Between the Yawnings**

### *Vishamo—Take Rest*

Dhalki ek jane ke humfala garbh jevu pan chhe jema hu mari jivan nu lagbhag adhdho samay vitavu chhu. E pan evo samay jyare hu sa jag nathi hoto. Maru rakshan, Mari

sahajta. ane savarni te mari paheli 10 mineut jayre hu jagi ne mari te ratni anubhuti ane temate no dhalki no sath mate teno khubj alotine abhar vyakt karu chhu. Vari pachha sanje jaldi malvana promise sathe ke je mari jat pratye ek dilaso ane divas sarukarvani prerna saman hoy chhe.

Dhalki, taro ane maro e sambandh mara janam thi atyar shudhi rahyo chhe. Jyare hu nano hato tayare tu pan nani hati, dhadaklo hati. Pan mari sathe tu pan mothi thai. Apna bane no e samuhik valan adbhut chhe. Jane ke mara sarirno j ek ang. Kem nai tu bani pan to mara perela kpda mathi chho. Ane aagad pan rahevanu. Aapnu e darroj nu sath khatri sathe rahesej. Tane fari malvani e chah mane tyare samjay chhe jyare hu koi karan suvane saksham nathi. To kem nai aaje tari thodik visheh vato karu.

Dhadki kyathi aavi, kyare janmi e kahevu thoduk mushkel chhe kem ke matha ni garam topi hoy athva pag ni chakhdi hoy aakha vishvma badhe ek sathe j janmi lage.

Mane yad chhe ke hu ramto ramto athva amastoj latar marava gar ma jau atle **dhadkiyo** na **damchiya** ne adoti ne j pachho aavu. Kyarek ene bhulthi padi pan deto ane pachi ena upar aloti ne moj pan manto. Ane hu olkhi pan leto ke aa koni dhalki chhe.

\* \* \*

Quilt is like a warm womb in which I am staying almost half of my life and the time which is when I am not awake or conscious. When we are between the quilts, we feel so secure. When I am between the quilts, I feel so natural. First ten minutes of the morning, when I have woken up, all the experiences of the night I remember. For that whole experience I cuddle the quilt again, and appreciate it. With the promise of meeting again in the evening. The cuddle which is also comfort to my heart and inspiration to start the day.

Quilt, the relation of you and me exists since my birth until today. I was small, you were too (you were called *dhadkalo* at that time). But you grew together with me. Our collective attitude is so amazing. Like you are part of my body. And why not? Because you are made of the clothes I wear. And it will also continue like that in the future. Our accompanied existence will continue for sure. My wish to meet you again, I realise, when I am not able to come to sleep with you in my bed. Then why not talk about you today?

From where did the quilt come? When was it born? It is a bit difficult to say. Because the warm cap for the head or shoes to protect the feet looks like they are all born together in the world. Quilt is also born like them. They are all created into such a society and life, where the body was to be protected, more effectively. Then the comfort was added into that.

I remember that either by playing or just as a joke, I would go inside the house, enter the house, and only come out of the house after I had cuddled the corner of the quilts (called *damchiya*). Sometimes by mistake, I dropped all the quilts on the floor and I would roll myself inside the quilts and sleep. I would know which quilt belongs to whom.

Let's learn from Aashbai what quilts are. Open the **વહાલિયું** quilts video using the following QR code (Figure 2.2).

## Exploring the Kachchhi/Gujarati Words for Quilts: Godali and Dhalki

Here we explore some of the Kachchhi and Gujarati words used for quilts. Kachchhi is an oral language; however, today, it is often either written by using standardised Gujarati, or Roman script in chats and text messages.



Figure 2.2 ધગડીયું quilts video. Open using this QR code.

In Gujarati, the quilt is called ગોદાડી written in Roman script Godali or transcribed as Gōdaḍī to express its pronunciation: long ‘o’, S pronounced as ‘d’ but moving the tongue in the middle of the hard palate. To hear the pronunciation, copy the Gujarati scripted word ગોદાડી into Google Translate and play. Try to repeat it. Feel how the sound is created in your mouth with the touch of the tip of the tongue and hard palate.

When the British arrived in India and started to use Roman script for words expressed in different Indian languages, these nuances were missed. Gōdaḍī became scripted as Godali, and similarly, an important location from the history of Indus Valley civilisation, in English known as *Dholavira* (ધોળાવિરા), is in Kachchhi pronounced as Dhōlāvīrā, where Dhōlā means white.

ગોદાડી, Godali or Gōdaḍī derives from the root ‘go’ that otherwise bears the following meanings:

Go: Īndrī, ઈન્દ્રી/ all the senses of human body.

Go-pal: compliance with all the senses of human body.

Go-wardhan: advancement of all the senses of human body.

Go-kul: set, a group, mass of all the senses of human body.

ગોદાડી/Go-daḍī:grind/comminute/refine/polish/calm down to the all senses of human body.

In Kachchhi, the quilt is called ધગડી. The root dhaḍ/ધગ means human body, and dhaḍki/ધગડી has a meaning of human body/for human body/by human body or something that belongs to human body.

Quilts, or any fabrics used by someone, will gain direct connectedness to the body through the vibrations of the body and the connectedness of the particles touching the body. This means that the properties become shared the longer a particular piece of cloth, or quilt, is in the use of one person. In order to become relaxed, we have our favourite places in which to do that. We may not be aware of it, but using the same place to sleep, where our bodies have released fragrances and sensations (*saṅskāra*) of calmness, helps us to relax. ગોદાડી, therefore, helps us to gain sensations of calmness, and filling our senses with wisdom.

## Quilt as an Idiom, Dhalki ek Rudhipryog

Odhvani dhalki ne unchhan kevay ane pathrvani dhalki ne vachhan kevay.

Vichhan sabad e ek idiom tarike pan vaprvama avyo chhe. Koi pan gatna ma sthiti etli vikherai jay ke ene bhagu na krisakay athva ankus karvu khubaj muskel hoy tyare kachchhi ma ene vichhan thi yyo em kevay. Vachhan hamesa vyaktina kad karta motu hoy chhe. The quilt which is used as a cover is called *unchhan*, and the quilt which is used on top of a mattress or a bed on top of which one sleeps is called *vachhan*. The word vachhan is also used as an idiom to describe a situation where chaos is created, and it is defined as an uncontrollable and ungovernable mess. Vachhan is also always bigger than the size of its user.

- Making quilts and connectedness to family relations: a quilt is made for a sister, brother, father, mother, husband, children. The form it takes connects to this relation and caring affect (who is going to use it).
- Memory from childhood: was using a certain quilt that was made for me—also father asking where my quilts are, grandfather—the connectedness of oneself to a quilt: part of who I am (at home), extension of who I am.
- Traditional stories about quilts: a quilt is used as an idiom. If someone sleeps a lot, the person is called a ‘quilt’ (*dhalki*)—quilt transforms into being.
- Arrangement of quilts at home: care is taken for the selection of the place where the quilts are kept, and there is a word for it: *damchio*.
- Quilts as co-creation: examples from the family are how quilts also provided income for a Kshatriya family in economic difficulty (who were ashamed to look for daily labouring outside the household)—but they did not like to be connected to that labour anymore because their situation eventually improved (Aashbai asked them to do quilts recently).
- Different colours used for men and women.
- Different meanings of quilts amongst communities (for example, Gadhavi and Sama).

‘Hu ane mari dhalki’, e ek khubaj shahaj ane sarva many adat che. Hu, mari dhalki kya gai evu kau to e ek nirvivad kabjo chhe. Kem ke e mara mate banava ma aavi chhe. Ema mara mateni kalpana raheli chhe. E banava pehla mari jaruriyat hati. E kalpna ma e badha j kapda hoychhe jema thi te baneli chhe. E kalpana ma mari vastivikta pan chhe je mara kadd ne darshave chhe ane tena parthi teni size naki thay chhe. Mane dhyan chhe ke mane ane mara pita ne mari maa dhalki damchiya upar thi kadhi aape chhe. Ane badhi dhalki ni gothvan ni shrinkhla pan sui javani aadat aadharit rahe che.

Expressing ‘me and my quilt’ will be accepted by everyone. When I ask ‘Where is my quilt?’, it is an unquestionable possession ‘my’ because the quilt was made for me. In that quilt, there is a conception or imagination of me. It became my need even before it was made. In that imagination, all the clothes of which the quilt was made are there. In that imagination, my reality also exists. It expresses my size and from that, the size of the quilt is decided. I remember that my mother takes the quilts every day for me and my father from the damchiya (wooden structure or a table which is the size of a twice folded quilt where the quilts are kept at home). The arrangement or the order of the quilts on the damchiya depends on sleeping habits and the different times when people sleep.

Ketli sambhal, ketli vastvikta, ketli svikruti ane ketlu shahayojan. ek abhuth prakriya raheche jyare avlokan bad rangbe rangi alag alag aakar vala juna kapdana tukdaone shajik vinodthi ane vishvash thi jodvama aavche. Ane kharekhar e dhalki abhuth bane che.

How much care, how much actuality/reality, how much of acceptance and how much co-planning are involved? That remains a wonderful process, when after observation, all clothes of different shapes and colours are sewn/joined in an intuitive way with humour and confidence. Truly, the quilt is amazing.

Ek samaj ni kalpana jema svikruti tatva ena paya ma rahelu chhe. Are darek rang potani samprubhuta lai ane e samajik Rangoli ma sobhit kare. Jyare dhalki ena upyog karta ne pratham var aapva ma aave tyare te eene svikar kari ane nirvivad bheti pade chhe jema lamba bhavishya na sath no sankalp rahelo che. Ane pachhi te khubaj anadayak chhe.

Like an imagination of a society, where acceptance of difference lies at the base of it, every colour gives beauty to that social *rangoli* (patterns that are created on the floor or the ground using materials such as coloured rice, dry flour, coloured sand or flower petals), and all colours bring their own sovereignty and increase the beauty of the rangoli. When a quilt is given to its user for the very first time, at that time, it accepts the person and embraces undeniably the person and signifies a long joined future together. That idea of a long future together is very satisfying for both the quilt and its user: both are receiving and giving care and love.

Amara research darmiyan marjaana ane hu evi ek kalpna sathe aavash jaiye chie. Ane koi sabhy ne malie tyare evo ehsash thay j ke koik karansar ni nakhusi ane fariyad sathe emna raday na khuna ma raheli ek evij rangbe rangi godli jeva samajni kalpna ane asha chalkay chhe. jema darek ne kad, akar, rang, rup, gunvata ane sthan ni vaividhyata ne khula mane swikari levama aave. ane vishvash na ekj tatne jadayela hoy. Jya nyay ane svikruti athva teni laykat mate koi rudhigat biba no astitvaj na hoy. Ek nivas ni kalpana jya juda aakar ane gun ne sthan aapvani dhilans hoy. Agaman ne svikar kari ane pramanik rite fari sthitisthapak ta thay. Jyare varsoni asha aknagsa puri na thayi. to nirasha svbhav nu pratham aavran bani chhe. Saruvati divashvapno ne mrugjal thata joya pachi, samacharpatro, sansthao, netao ane adhikario ni kshanik jigyasavardhit pralobhno ane pachu ej nirash andhakar. emne puchhvama aavela e prashno ane tena javabo. je have temne apekshit rite yad rahigaya chhe ane sahhjik thai gya che. tyare te visheni aruchi pan hoya j. Marjaana e jyare research ne ek novo savrup aapyo, jare ame e prashidh aapatkal ni charcha ane rudhigat prshonotri ke jena aavash na rahevashio aadi chhe, tene dur rakhi ane malya to. E band ane achkata hoth pachha khulya ane emana man ni vato moklas thi kari. Jemke te sakbhaji vala bhai, amne aavta joi emna chehra upar thaknsh ni rekha ubhri aavi ane amari sathe vat karva ma pan achkaya. Pan jyare emne ahesahsh thyo ke ame emni vartman parishthiti ane emni lagni ne khula mane svikar kari chhe. To ame trane sathe mali ane ek eva vatavarn ni rachna kari ke jema temni nirasha dur thai gai ane teo ek bhangela svabhav thi nikli ane ek ashavadi bani ane potani bahvnao ne vacha aapi.

During our research, Marjaana and I have been visiting Awasi (temporary post-earthquake relocation site in the city of Bhuj initially built in 2001–2002) with this imagination of love, harmony and care. When we met residents of the neighbourhood, we realised that there was unhappiness, for many reasons, and complaints in their hearts. We could also see in the corner of their hearts an imagination and hope for a society like a colourful quilt, one where everyone is intertwined by the thread of trust and accepted with an open mind, regardless if they are of different shapes, colours, forms, qualities,

sizes and locations. There are no pre-decided conservative norms for justice and acceptance of a person. The idea is of a dwelling, or a neighbourhood, where there is a flexibility to place different shapes and qualities, accepting/allowing arrival and honestly regaining resilience when the hopes of the years were not fulfilled. Despair is often the first refuge of those who have experienced disasters. After seeing such dreams becoming a mirage and witnessing the momentary curiosity of temptation created by newspapers, organisations, politicians and government officers, Awas's residents return to the same frustrating darkness. The questions and answers of the residents they now repeat as expected ones. There must be an aversion to it. When Marjaana suggested a new form for research, distancing our meetings from the well-known disaster narratives and the typical conservative questionnaire/survey style which Awas residents are used to experiencing, the closed and hesitant lips and minds opened again, and they talked openly; for example, the vegetable seller when seeing us enter the neighbourhood, first, non-verbally showed tiredness, and a hesitancy to talk to us. After we had adjusted to his current activity and feelings, we (the three of us) created an atmosphere where the hopelessness disappeared, and he was no longer broken, allowing his hopes and spirit to be expressed.

### Marjaana: Quilting Conviviality

Watch 'Friendship Between Sisters' using this QR code (Figure 2.3).

#### *The Tears*

'mä itkin niin kovasti kun Elina vihittiin Eetun kanssa'  
'I cried so much when Elina was married with Eetu'

The scraps of memories and stories are found in compact audio cassettes, letters and quilts by later generations. But I must admit, I never really understood this. I mean, I was not immediately literate to it. It required a process of learning to read anew and to sense conviviality that also had the shades of pain, sorrow and loss.

When I was exploring quilting, then the scraps of these memories started talking to me very loudly. Decentring the intimate story of two sisters, however, also allowed me to connect them and to understand the connection of our current presence in Finland to (post)coloniality, processes of colonisation and enslavement, and the global extraction



Figure 2.3 Watch 'Friendship Between Sisters' using this QR code.

of knowledge, skills, materials and bodies. The following aims at practicing what Gurminder Bhambra (2014) has called connected sociologies. She draws from the work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and his notion of connected histories, which ‘do not derive from a singular standpoint, whether that be a putatively universal standpoint—which postcolonial theorists have demonstrated as being in fact a particular standpoint linked to colonialism—or a standpoint of the generalized subaltern’ (Bhambra, 2014, p. 4).

‘Elina äidin tekemä Petelle/sinulle. Kankaat on tilkkuja [emoji of a green dress], esiliina, yöpaita ym kankaista jotka äiti on ommellut. Vaatteet ovat äidille, Sirkalle, minulle ja lahjaksi Haminaan’.

‘Elina’s mother made it for Pete [my brother]/you. Materials are scraps of [emoji of a red dress], apron, nightdress etc. which mother has sewn. Clothes were made for mother, your aunt, me, and gifts to home in Hamina’ (Figure 2.4).

My mother WhatsApped me when I was preparing for a quilting workshop with Vishnu and Shyam. This dialogue started from a sense of lack of connectedness. What is my connection to quilts? And, why had I lost the connection to this quilt which I, after so many decades, remembered? Fear of having lost it made me think of the loss that I had actively pushed aside: childhood and teenager years wearing clothes my mother had made instead of branded jeans or shirts, and the moment it became possible, moving on to wear what the others did with great relief without paying attention to who had made it for me. I was a class traveller with no global consciousness.



Figure 2.4 ‘Elina äidin tekemä Petelle/sinulle’.

*The Skirt*

‘18.4.1933

Rakas Kulu!

Kiitos kortistasi! Ja nyt vasta minä yritän tätä pikkupakettia rustailla’.

‘18 April 1933

Dearest darlin’!

Thank you for your postcard! And only now I try to send this small parcel to you’.

Sixty years of letters. Sometimes written three times a week. Sharing gossip, detailing the landscape, the people, dreams and connecting the two sisters in ways it is hard to imagine at this time. Meeri kept Elina’s letters, and they have been circulating amongst myself, my mother and my aunt over the last few years when they were discovered after her death.

It was through the recorded stories of Meeri that I felt the meaning of your sisterhood, and friendship and conviviality became real. Why celebrating the marriage felt like a loss, source of tears.

Childhood spent in first missing and absent father working for the Finnish railways in St Petersburg, Russia. Father, who went missing in the 1917 Russian Revolution, and who upon a mysterious return, turned into an absent, alcoholic father, who was feared and avoided until his death. The price of the Russian Revolution was far greater than I could have ever imagined, although each year in December, Finnish people are asked to commemorate and celebrate their independence from Russia.

But the tragedy also tightly connected the two sisters, knitted and sewn into their letters sent to one another.

‘Ja sitten se hamejuttu. Päätimme niin, että minä teen sinulle leningin ja mamma puseron . . . Eikö musliini ole sopivinta? Tästä sorjasta vihreästä leningistä tuli tämännäköinen, kun minä rupesin muotitaitelijaksi! On vähän *hankalaa* kun ei voi lähettää koko mallilehteä. Koeta keksiä!!’

‘And then the skirt issue. We decided that I will make you a dress and mother makes you a skirt . . . Isn’t muslin most suitable fabric? (Figure 2.5)’



Figure 2.5 ‘And then the skirt issue’.



### *The Fabric*

The blood, the violence of slavery and coloniality spills over the pages I am Googling. I thought I could simply search for the facts of the origins of cotton sewn into fabrics in Finland at the time of my grandmother and her sister. And write few sentences on coloniality to add the facts, knowledge, and add a level of seriousness to this.

How innocent these letters describing the colours, the touch and the weaving are! There is no trace of slavery, colonial violence, labouring, or traces of the origin of such beautiful materials transformed into pieces of art and the caring in the hands of my grandmother. How casually was I just going to quote a few statistics and move on.

Had it not been for the British, including James Finlayson, who established the first cotton spinning factory in Finland in 1820 and imported cotton for it from the US (Helsingin Sanomat 2018), it would have been flax or linen she'd been working on: itchy, hard material that had to be worn, washed, worn and washed again before becoming bearable against the white skin.

Indian cotton found its way to the US and the plantations of the slave owners where the labour was done by the African slaves. Later, when Indian cotton fabric was banned from Europe, raw cotton was transported to England, woven in Europe, sold and used as a currency to purchase more slaves (Beckert 2015). This was the intimate, corporeal and violent web that for our white pleasure is distanced, hidden and most preferably, forgotten.

Muslin, the dress my grandmother had promised to sew. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, muslin (*malmal* in Hindi) cotton fabrics consumed in Europe were mostly woven in Bengal and Odisha and transported to Europe as part of the colonial trade partnerships from Gujarat (Bharuch). Later, when the English copied the techniques of weaving from Indians, it was also produced in Scotland and England, and, who knows, maybe also in Finland for my grandmother to purchase for her sister in a small village in Central Finland.

### *The Stitch*

Open the Aashbai quilting video (Figure 2.6a) by using the following QR code (Figure 2.6b).

Sitting side by side, I watch Aashbai go through my old clothes. 'This is too good to be used in a quilt', she says in Kachchhi, and hands the scarf back to me. As for our verbal



Figure 2.6a Aashbai quilting video.



Figure 2.6b Open using this QR code.

communication, we need her children to be simultaneously translating for us; over the next five to six hours, we work through the fabrics by tearing them into quilt materials, design of the quilt, and sewing it together mostly in silence, following each other's non-verbal language and clues and our limited knowledge of Gujarati. I have kept these clothes for this purpose for months, and slight sadness passes through me when I see them being deconstructed by scissors, torn apart and cut into usable sized sections.

I carefully watch Aashbai stitch the pieces together and learn a new way of holding the fabric tightly in one hand, holding the fabrics together, whilst the other hand manages the needle piercing through the fabrics in neat stitches. No need for pins in this hand-stitching technique, which for me meant management and order, yet keeping the material further away from the hands and the touch. Once the pieces are sewn together to form the base of the quilt, the heat of the day, despite the Arabic Sea wind breeze, prompts us to change our location.

It is time to place the quilt base on the floor, unwrap the cotton filling and the left-over pieces of the clothes. Aashbai fetches colourful threads with which we stitch the quilt together. She prepares a finger protector from old jeans fabric and thread, which she places on my left middle finger. I first refuse, thinking I will not need it, but I later thank her for doing that as the quilt is thick, and my finger becomes sore because I have not used it before with such intensity. Aashbai leads by stitching the edges of the quilt together, and then asks me to follow her trail within a thumb's distance. We sit side by side, and as my stitching speed is slower, we switch roles. Continuing from where the other left off and following each other, we move towards the centre of the quilt and change colours as the previous one finishes.

The haptic connection to the quilt, the stitching that changes the fabric into a three-dimensional layer, highlighting the batik details in new ways: the stars, the flowers become alive. The old patterns speak in new ways. Most importantly, I feel connected to this labouring and to my teacher in new ways. I have felt, since we met for the first time, inadequate, as we do not share a common language. But with the threads and the needles, we are able to follow each other, and be guided by each other in a silence that speaks so loudly—without needing another language.

## Vishnu

Articulating my bittersweet relationship to sewing, and sewing ઝોંઝો was initially a task akin to weight training. Shailaja Patel's discerning poem evoked very physical

manifestations of emotions in me. A brand-new atlas awakened in my body. ‘The Making’ brought me to woke.<sup>4</sup>

I wanted to dialogue with Shailaja Patel, a being whom I never knew existed before this poem, who now lives in me, holding me, ‘The Making’ my chant, I respond—I make it.

### I Make it . . .

I make it/ I don’t have to blame groping/common practice in public spaces / hunching to hide breasts/benefits my sewing too

I make it/dexterous needle poke/my clumsy finger draws/clean blood/monthly blood whispers I am here too/I hear dirty/weren’t we made from this dirty blood you and I?

I make it/sometimes/mind rests as hands work/delicate stitches recreate the eleven sutures/from slipping and falling in the bathroom/ needles picked /burdens laid down

I make it/ for the death of mothers/mother lands / mother tongue/that pricking pain turning into patch work of dying languages

I make it/under the everyday security/ adzan recited by muezzin/it’s maghrib time / time for dinner/the hunger pangs call too/ rumbling belly signals the sound/ insecurity of ration cards/screams of silent tears/ stomachs of different faith comprehend each other’s despair /we all know to swallow words / we giggle our secrets away / I eat meat / my body haram on all counts

I make it/each stitch marking/neverending blackouts in Kashmir/even in the dark sartaj/obligation to bejewel Indian map stands/pitiful pride burns the crown

I make it a protest against/citizenship amendment act/turns into CAB/ Klutz-PM’s ceaseless concern with chai/and नमस्ते<sup>5</sup> tramp/desperate migrant workers dehydrate/drenching in/corona care/dry food for dinner /Tuk-tuk a motor for money doubling as semi-shelter/ family friends famished duelling with rain

I make it /an observation/as namo’s flute summons/capitalism a climbable rope/ as most pots expended cracked and leaking/PM funds overflow/tsk ‘he’ never carries a wallet/let us clank plates and spoons and turn off lights

I make it amidst combating yet another episode of depression/for mental health support/that is all for the elite/matter for films/are you mad is still not a slur/in a nation of a billion people/it’s mad in India

I make it /the warmth of mothers lap/an embroidery on the quilt/contact-traces on skin/abortion protocols/all are fading memories/only body remembers traumas

I make it/knowing les amasseurs de fortune/Ça c’est pas moi

I make it/amidst farmers protests/soiled hands/sweetened mouths/correlation between campaign funding and electability/ rights lefts et al eating from that very same platter

I make it/to make maahanmuuttovirasto believe /I can make it / through the day/ the month

I make it /to pay the rent

### Needle, Thread, a Stitch, a Song

I was invited to the carrier bag (thecarrierbag) festival in Copenhagen. I was racking my brain for the most interesting ideas to present there. This was exhausting. I tried

to nap more frequently, but this time naps did not help. ‘To calm your sizzling brain cells, do something with your hands’. My grandma’s words rang loud in my head. As a body-philosopher I picked up the cue to relax in the languorous act of sewing. A simple task. repair, gather and rest with no further affectation. Growing up, I witnessed numerous times how this chore of mending turned into a space of bonding. A venue to gossip. Mainly a care station for the women of the household and the community. As a pundit and a practitioner of procrastination, I switched back and forth from making up debilitating lists of ideas for the festival, self-doubting and sewing to relax.

One afternoon while I was sewing, my mom called, and she was surprised that I was sewing a quilt (*bontha* in the Telugu language). She asked me if I was still ashamed of quilts. I did not realise until then that a quilt could hold a huge class trauma in its folds. While growing up I witnessed my grandmothers hoard everything. She held on to every thread, piece of cloth with dear life. In retrospect I understand how growing up in colonised lands of south India, with scarce resources affected also their later behaviours. My grandmothers did not wear blouses until they migrated to the city (Hyderabad), and I used to be ashamed of their bare chests. These two factors might seem at first very far from each other, but they are intricately joined. My shame was not mine. My personal processes of decolonising was to first recognise that covering the body was imposed in the cities by the British. A bare chest was an offence, and one could be fined heavily; therefore, some women would just stay at home. Over time, this penalty, I feel, brought so many impositions to the women of my household. As I quilt I reimagine a world where people of all genders walking bare chested, as the sun’s heat warms the skin. Quilting is moratorium. An area at once decolonised and depatriarchalised.

At the carrier bag festival, even at the risk of relying on identity politics, an overwhelming indulgence overtook me and I decided to offer a sewing quilt to experience the cartography of hidden (mis)educations situated in my body.

At the workshop, I projected the world map onto the sheet that was tethered, and yet very dear to me, as it was my first acquisition in a place I was recognising more and more as home. I asked the participants to lie down on the sheet and rest where they felt at home. A simple act elevated the sheet to being a space of rest, even a symbol of home. We chose to sew a patch where we felt at home (Figure 2.7). This was, thus, my journey into the manifold aspects of quilt making.

Here is a score—I invite you to interact with the following sentences.

- Sew a patch—or find a patch; by looking at the patch, can you access a conversation? smell? time? Do you also feel that each patch can hold a memory?
- Sarees that cover; sarees that continue to cover you—Please continue this sentence as you feel—as a conversation, a sketch, sewing something that may cover you or any other.
- Imagine all the possible meanings of the word and meditate on the word COVER.
- If you my dear reader could come to this text with a needle, thread and a piece of cloth what would you sew?
- What kind of a quilt is the city you live in?

### **This Is Not a Conclusion: Living Quilts**

Time to conclude? Instead, let us cherish this moment, and these few paragraphs, sentences and lines for having had the opportunity to come together on this occasion,



Figure 2.7 This was, thus, my journey into the manifold aspects of quilt making.

and share experiences about how quilts live and are alive, and how we and our experiences are quilted together through sharing and listening, connecting to one another, beyond politics.

*Shyam:* Few years ago, one buffalo at our farm gave birth during the monsoon at night-time when there was heavy rain. Soon after the birth, the buffalo needed to be cleaned and warmed as its body temperature dropped dramatically. The buffalo vibrated in the cold rain; the newly born calf was carried inside the house. Aashbai took one of her favourite quilts and put it on the buffalo. The wet quilt insulated the buffalo for a couple of days while she regained her strength. Aashbai later took the quilt back, washed it, and used it as it had been used by her before the buffalo's use. I wanted to share this story as it shows how the users of quilts are not always humans. Also, mice like to make nests in stored quilts, whether we like it or not.

Also, when old quilts are reworked, like we did at the workshop, they are recognisable as specific quilts. For example, there is an old Muslim shrine in our village. It is maybe 100–150 years old, but it still has the

bed with the quilt. Age and ageing of quilts is also connected to how we humans change and transform—I am still Shyam, but I am no longer the same Shyam as I was as a child, using a certain quilt.

*Marjaana:* When I was sharing our quilting experiences on Facebook, an Egyptian colleague shared a story that in her family there was a tradition every summer to undo and wash the patches of quilt and then reconstruct the quilts for new use. This tradition is a reminder that quilts are never really finished or final, yet they have recognisable features that have strong affective connections to those who have used them.

*Vishnu:* I wish you rest. So you can—  
Fight!  
Fight! Fight! Fight!  
Fight with your two pollices!  
Fight the police!  
Fight the policies!  
Fight until all have the right to sit!  
Fight for the toilets!  
Fight!  
Fight! Fight! Fight!  
Fight with your two pollices!  
Fight with a song!  
Fight with a dance!  
Fight against the norms!  
Fight the neuro typicalities!  
Fight with your pen!  
Fight with your needle!  
Fight!  
Fight! Fight! Fight!  
Fight with your two pollices!

As a form of anarchiving, repertory of traces of collaborative research-creation, this piece has aimed at carrying potential: trigger new events and processes forward-feeding mechanism for creativity (SenseLab 3e, 2020).

These conversations, videos and texts on quilts and quilting, have been (re)constructed for this book as a chapter based on our conversations as a part of an edited (or we suggested, quilted) book that focuses on decolonising or reversing power hierarchies of arts-based methodologies. On these pages, we have connected our life histories with those of the traditions of quilting, and we have unravelled some unspoken histories and their connections to pain, grief and the need to be touched and belong across the boundaries of coloniality, state borders, social hierarchies and discrimination.

## Notes

1. Throughout this text, there will be a number of languages used. At times translated into English, at times not. Sometimes, the original language is written in Roman script, other times in their current standardised written form. When translating the texts into English, we follow Richa Nagar's notion of hungry translation which insists 'on a collective and relational ethic of radical vulnerability that refuses to assume that it can arrive at a perfect translation (Nagar, 2019, p. 36).

2. Saba, one of the participants, emailed the lyrics to us in June 2020: it is a short lullaby that mothers and grandmothers sing to their children while rocking the cradle. It is sung widely in most of the former Yugoslavian countries, with small variations, of course. This is how my mom and grandma used to sing it to us—their seven (grand)children.
3. Rutazibwa (2020, p. 225) quoting Shillam, 2015; see also [www.youtube.com/watch?v=e83LOt4Zc1k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e83LOt4Zc1k)
4. *Stay woke* became a watch word in parts of the black community for those who were self-aware, questioning the dominant paradigm and striving for something better. But *stay woke* and *woke* became part of a wider discussion in 2014, immediately following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The word *woke* became entwined with the Black Lives Matter movement; instead of just being a word that signalled awareness of injustice or racial tension, it became a word of action. Activists were *woke* and called on others to *stay woke* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
5. Namaste (pronounced as namah sthe).

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