

Nurturing Sanity Through RajutKejut Craftivism

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced people to minimize their activities and choose essential things to do. Apart from maintaining personal and environmental hygiene, mental health is also a priority. The RajutKejut Community is a group of female crocheters who yarn bombs in public spaces with crochet works. Within the pandemic conditions where activities are limited, they remain connected to each other by utilizing technological and digital advances, to share news and stories also support each other to ease anxiety and feelings of loneliness in facing pandemic. Through crocheting –which is an activity with meditative nuances– in a quarantine atmosphere, a space for reflection and contemplation is formed. This is essential to be considered that beside preserving quality intake, the body's immunity can also be increased by maintaining mental health and happy feeling. The community held an activity to carry out yarn bombing in their respective neighborhoods and share stories about them. As a research question, how can bodily activities through craft raise awareness which then gives an understanding of one's existence in the midst of a pandemic situation. This study uses the phenomenological of perception by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as analysis method which is bodily experiences could help people to comprehend their world, particularly in the current pandemic situation. At the end of the discussion, this research shows that the pandemic conditions encouraging people more to look back at the past, realize their existence in present, and project themselves to plan their next steps. This can be realized by carrying out bodily activities consciously, which bringing humans back to retrace their existence in the world as humans who have bodies that are able to 'make' in order to fulfill their needs, using their bodies, therefore that awareness of self and self-existence is awakened.

Keywords: *covid-19, sanity, craftivism, rajutkejut*

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic stroke Indonesia in March since the discovery of the first case in Depok on 28 February 2020. Kompas.com media reported that the first case of Covid-19 found in Indonesia infected two residents of Depok, West Java. The suspects were examined on 1 March 2020 and they were confirmed positive for the Coronavirus on 2 March 2020. President Jokowi officially confirmed that the Covid-19 cases were discovered in Indonesia. The first case was followed by other cases and a significant increase was shown in the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19. Hukumonline.com reported the Jakarta provincial government took the initiative to apply closure of schools, workplaces, and restrict public events and was proceeded by the stipulation of the central government regulation at the end of March through Government Regulation number 21 of 2020 on Large-Scale Social Restrictions (known as *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*, PSBB) by limiting activities for residents in the area under the suspicion of being infected by Covid-19 to prevent the possible spread of Covid-19, in the context of Accelerating the Handling of Covid-19. The government stipulates restrictions on mass gatherings/crowds, public transportation closures, domestic travel bans, and border closures, in addition to implementing health-related regulations such as the use of masks, social distance, and personal hygiene. Given PSBB, people must limit their activities and do activities from home, prioritize essential aspects – needs over wants. PSBB brings people into a new way of life which is termed the 'new normal'. This covers work, study, socialization done within limitations given the nature of the spread of the coronavirus. According to a social welfare science specialist Aryan Torrido, there are changes in economic and health situations globally and conditions which continue to be driven by changes in consumption behavior. This forces people to adjust their behavior healthily, do most of their consumption activities in their home (domestic area), and shift their daily consumption pattern that was previously driven only by wants to fulfill self-actualization (as characteristic of modern humans) into need-based consumption pattern. The ability to manage stress becomes an exigency during the pandemic amid a limited social environment full of uncertainty for a long time (Torrido, 2021).

The impact of economic hardship is ensued by a decline in the quality of mental health. According a paper written by Yuli Asmi Rozali, Novendawati Wahyu Sitasari, Amanda Lenggogeni, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced many people in various age groups and countries to adopt new habits; students cannot study in school, workers are at risk of being exposed to Covid-19, termination of employment, poverty as the results of the economic deterioration, those who must be isolated during PSBB, and the families of Covid-19 victims who should lose

their loved one for not having the chance to say final goodbye. These cases entail great potential to weaken mental health (Rozali et al, 2021). Situations amid the Covid-19 pandemic triggering stress may exacerbate depression when excessive worry, fear, and anxiety are experienced by individuals. These challenges may happen to everyone with no age limit. This opinion is reinforced by Rifa Fauziyyah, Rinka Citra Awinda, Besral that the Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialist Association (PDSKJI) conducted an online survey on mental health from April to August 2020 on 1,552 respondents related to three psychological problems; anxiety, depression, and trauma. Most respondents were women (76.1%) with a minimum age of 14 years old and a maximum of 71 years old. A total of 64.3% of respondents experienced psychological disorders with a distribution of 63% suffering from anxiety and 66% experiencing depression (71% women and 29% men) (Fauziyyah et al, 2021).

Individual's immunity can be improved with a healthy mind and a pleasant mood. The content feeling will improve hormones to work more effectively in maintaining immunity. According to Fransiska Kaligis, Madhyra Tri Indraswari, Raden Irawati Ismail, World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines stresses four main points in fighting stress and mass anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The guidelines include the following:

- 1) Limit exposure to excessive information and cut down time spent on watching, reading, or listening to news about Covid-19. Checking the news only once or twice during the day;
- 2) Perform relaxation by engaging in meditation and exercise, such as physical workout, yoga, or Pilates. Getting enough rest and eating food with balanced nutrition are also important;
- 3) Do various activities that are relaxing and fun to vent the stress away. Looking after oneself mentally and physically during the pandemic, as well as providing a safe environment for children and the elderly, are of utmost importance;
- 4) The community can serve as a valuable source of support in helping manage difficulties faced by individuals and families (Kaligis et al, 2021).

In support of the WHO guidelines to maintain mental health, according to clinical psychologist Sustriana Saragih in *Koran Tempo*, therapy through hobbies is proven to be able to treat mild depression, such as feeling weak and lack of energy due to struggling minds. When people start doing activities, the body will move and the mind is stimulated to be more active. Hobbies are activities that can bring pleasure according to the talents and interests of each individual. Pursuing a hobby is considered to be able to reduce symptoms of mild depression. This study suggests that hobbies may reduce depressive symptoms by 30%, especially among adults and older adults. Doing hobbies is an effective way to restore mental health.

The activities comprise making music, creating handicrafts, collecting objects, or assembling miniatures. Crocheting is an option to treat mental health, both individually and collectively. A craft teacher Kiki Puspita in Koran Tempo said that she opens online crochet classes, affirmed that many of her students took crocheting classes for therapeutic purposes, to help them feel more mentally stable in the pandemic. Furthermore, participants enrolled in classes to fill their spare time to avoid negative thoughts and behaviors. Crocheting serves as a source of motivation and happiness especially when they successfully complete their work. In this uncertain time, the number of class participants increased significantly and most of them were beginners (Koran Tempo, 2021). Crafters who are also activists Kate Just and Tal Fitzpatrick made @covid19quilt project in Australia. They gather, narrate, and share experiences of Covid-19 with craft on Instagram, to shared history of creating socially engaged textile projects that engage communities in thinking through, and making art about complex social and political issues (katejust.com). As facilitators, creators, and curators, they started the @covid19quilt on Instagram as ‘a way of responding to the distress, illness and loss arising globally due to the pandemic’ (Just in Fitzpatrick, 2021).

In Jakarta, there is a crocheting community called *RajutKejut*, one of its activities is yarn bombing. The community, started in 2014 by five initiators, Harjuni Rochajati, Yulina Achrini, Wahyu Hardjanti, Vidhyasuri Utami, and Elisabeth Tata. They are mothers from the middle class in Jakarta who are aware of social issues which develop in society. Coincidentally, they do and love crocheting and then initiated the yarn bombing project. In the beginning, this activity entailed as political statements during the presidential election in 2014 among the initiators, then it expanded, in which the projects they worked on were involving many crocheters throughout Indonesia but using issues that are more universal and closer to humanitarian aspects. They do yarn bombing using knitted threads with crochet technique, responding to various objects in the public spaces. Over time, this community whose membership is fluid and open has been followed by hundreds of crocheters throughout Indonesia, who participate in succeeding *RajutKejut* projects. Even though they cannot do activities in public spaces during pandemic, they do not belittle their enthusiasm to continue carrying out the yarn bombing. Information and communication technology advancement are utilized as a device not only to share news and tell stories about people’s circumstances, but also to organize online crocheting events, such as making masks from crocheting and *bombing* their neighborhoods with their crocheting works and share stories about them. This study highlights the research question: How *RajutKejut* community through activity body by making communal crafts can create an

understanding of themselves and their environment, which is understanding that leads to the formation of mental health amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The subject of this research is *RajutKejut* community with the object of research of craftivism contained in *RajutKejut* so it has a psychological impact on its members. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a perceptual phenomenological approach by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as an analytical method, where bodily experiences help people to understand their world, especially in this difficult time. In his thought, he reveals the original relationship between man and the world he or she lives in, which is through understanding the body, the world as perceived, and being-for-itself and being-in-the-world. As stated by Thomas Hidya Tjaya that in Merleau-Ponty's view, the body is the anchor of humans in the world because, in the absence of a body, human existence cannot be understood. Merleau-Ponty views that the body makes human consciousness and self always focus on the world and its objects, including other people, and move to access the past, realize their present existence, and project themselves into the future. The concept of the body and the existence of consciousness affect the way to understand self and others, including the shared world (Tjaya, 2020:11-13,143). Data were obtained through interviews with crocheters, observations in the work process, the work they produced, and literature related to this research.

FINDINGS

In the pandemic, craftivism can help people maintain their mental health by creating crafts for personal pleasure and serenity, individually and collectively, so that there is a relationship among crocheters. They can share grouch, encourage each other, think positively, and feel enjoy together. These will amplify positive spirits. Through the qualities possessed by craftivism as an agent of change within the family and relatives, this can help people live their lives, understand themselves, and their world to maintain the sanity.

DISCUSSION

Indonesia has entered the second year of the pandemic period which began in March 2020 and had experienced a spike in cases of the Delta variant in July 2021 (corona.jakarta.go.id). Meanwhile, the vaccine has been distributed in Indonesia since January 2021 (setkab.go.id) but has not yet been evenly disseminated. The pandemic gives difficult conditions for the society has an impact on the mental

health of the community. The body felt 'imprisoned' at home, causing a feeling of torment and depression due to the limited interaction with the outside world such as meeting other people and seeing natural and cultural objects, which can be a means of recreation. This stress feeling and depression may appear in the mind as human beings have interacted with the world outside themselves and experienced pleasant events. As a result, there is an inside drive to be able to experience it again. With all these limitations, human beings must choose the essential first and prioritize needs over wants where desire is a mere human ego. To detain the ego, one needs to reflect and contemplate. According to Novita Siswayanti, In Javanese culture, it is known with the saying of *eling lan waspodo*, which means that we always need to be aware and careful in every move, step, word, action, and deed. Human beings are aware of their situation and are always willing to surrender and be sincere by leaving everything to God and believing in God (Siswayanti, 2013).

During quarantine, various activities can stimulate the production of hormones that are useful for body relaxation and create a better mood. Doing exercise will increase the production of endorphins that makes the body and mind relax. Creative activities such as music and crafts will stimulate the dopamine to make ones happier. Activities that involve other people, such as doing collective activities or entertaining others, will encourage the hormone oxytocin which makes feel useful for others and the environment as self-actualization and a sense of accomplishment (Koran Tempo, 2021).

The works of *RajutKejut* project as a yarn bombing community are the results of the crocheters who produce relatively small crocheted modules which are then spliced and combined into one large collaborative work. The modules usually are knitted together at the place of an initiator (they call it '*kopi darat*' or meeting up), then the huge artwork is installed in an open public space. During the pandemic with all the restrictions, they could not carry out yarn bombing as usual. Therefore, they invited fellow crocheters to knit together through Google Meet. They discussed current issues during the Covid-19 such as health tips, nutritious intake, news from sick family or friends, symptoms experienced, vaccines, in addition to issues that are generally discussed during '*kopi darat*' such as sharing crochet patterns and telling stories about individual projects and domestic matters. They also discussed several yarn bombing projects of *RajutKejut* during the pandemic, yet conducted yarn bombings in their respective areas with the World Yarn Bombing Day project at June 11th 2020, Valentine's Day 2021, and the celebration of the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia 2021 called "*Tujuh belasan*".

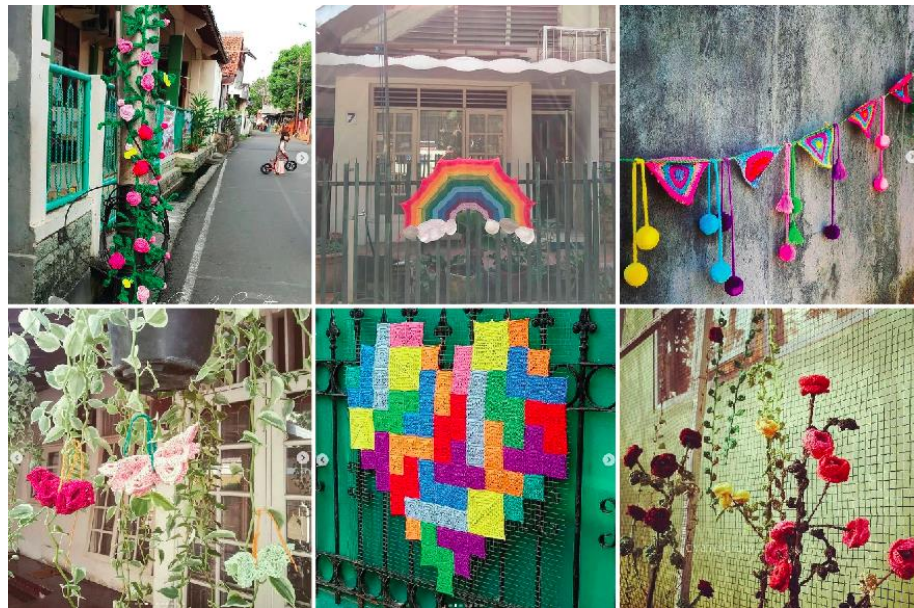


Figure 1. World Yarn Bombing Day with RajutKejut
Source: Doc. RajutKejut



Figure 2. Celebration of the Independence Day with RajutKejut
Source: Doc. RajutKejut



Figure 3. Valentine's Day with RajutKejut
Source: Doc. RajutKejut

RajutKejut with its yarn bombing has advocated the spirit of craftivism. The term craftivism was coined by Betsy Greer in 2007 and defined by Tal Fitzpatrick in her book *Craftivism: A Manifesto/Methodology* (Fitzpatrick, 2018). It considers the process and work and it raises consciousness about current issues in the community. Some projects in *RajutKejut* shown this, as strengthening social connection, protests, notifications, and enhancing community resilience, as well as community participation in the therapeutic, as in *RajutKejut* projects such as World Yarn Bombing Day in 2020, Valentine's Day and Independence Day of Indonesia in 2021. In this study, several characters of craftivism in *RajutKejut* will be discussed which are then analyzed through a perceptual phenomenology approach from Merleau-Ponty.

Collaborate/Co-create. *RajutKejut* relies heavily on collaborative work with volunteering crocheters. It is not only to support the realization of the work but also to spread ideas through cooperation. For this reason, *RajutKejut* carefully manages project management. There is a body that coordinates this section, patrols project management, especially in terms of the involvement of volunteering crocheters who are expanded throughout Indonesia, such as information management and yarn distribution as well as module writing compiled by volunteers. With the active involvement of volunteer crocheters with diverse profiles, obviously, they produce various quality works. Qualified works will be used immediately. For works that are not selected will be repaired by crocheters and then included. Regardless of the conditions, *RajutKejut* accepts

that the involvement of the crocheters (public) in supporting the issue is a priority compared to perfect work. Thus, the project can be held inclusively. Anyone who crocheting can join, even those who are completely new to learning. This is achievable because it uses the system module for the work. The module can be completed easily for a beginner. For those who are skillful, this can serve as a challenge to create works that are different from their daily lives. For those who want to get involved but have no crocheting skills, *RajutKejut* invites them to get engaged during the installation (the more help, the better and the faster the project finishes). In addition to open donations, *RajutKejut* also provides free training in some projects for those interested in crocheting to extend new networks and human resources in supporting its activities and future projects. For operational costs (such as transportation and material purchases), it is supported by donors as well as *RajutKejut*'s funds collected from the commission project. *RajutKejut* also often collaborates with other artists. Apart from the need for other skills, it also considers the potential for wider dissemination of the narrative with the followers of collaborating artists, which brings mutual benefits. This is explained by Fitzpatrick:

Do-it-together create unique opportunities to engage and collaborate with others. it is possible to maximise the impact and scope of craftivism projects, as well as develop more ambitious projects. a few things you need to consider include how your collaborative projects will be managed, what is expected of each collaborator, and how you are going to manage questions of authorship and ownership in an ethical way. Transparency and up-front disclosure about these sorts of issues are critical for establishing and maintaining healthy, reciprocal working relationships... minimise barriers to entry (whether real or perceived) in order to ensure your projects are inclusive. Consider: can you offer basic skills training for people who are new to craft, provide resources/materials to participants in order to ensure those who do not have/can't afford their own materials, accessible by public transport and is accessible for people with disabilities (Fitzpatrick, 2018:17).

The world outside *RajutKejut* appreciates *RajutKejut*'s existence. *RajutKejut* exists because of its members. The world outside *RajutKejut* indirectly respects *RajutKejut*'s crocheters. Appreciation is important to positively raise self-awareness, self-existence, others' existence, and the world's existence. Regarding this according to Merleau-Ponty:

I understand the other person through my body, just as I perceive "things" through my body. The sense of the gesture thus "understood" is not behind the gesture. It merges with the structure of the world that the gesture sketches out and that I take up for myself. The sense of the gesture spreads across the gesture itself – just as the signification of

the fireplace in perceptual experience is not beyond the sensible spectacle nor beyond the fireplace itself such as my gaze and my movements find it in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012:191-192).

People who live from and support *RajutKejut* also have their own world other than *RajutKejut* that will enrich *RajutKejut*'s references. In addition, the references are much more varied due to the various historical experience of each crocheter. Moreover, the crocheting concept has become wider. *RajutKejut* perceives the crocheters' differences and diverse backgrounds as a power. This is in line with Merleau-Ponty said that:

There are neither any natural signs nor any purely conventional signs... gesticulation is not merely the gesture that is contingent with regard to bodily organization, it is the very manner of meeting the situation and of living it. When angry, the Japanese person smiles, whereas the Westerner turns red and stamps his foot, or even turns pale and speaks with a shrill voice. Having the same organs and the same nervous system is not sufficient for the same emotions to take on the same signs in two different conscious subjects. What matters is the manner in which they make use of their body, the simultaneous articulation of their body and their world in the emotion... Just like words, passionate feelings and behaviors are invented. Even the ones that seem inscribed in the human body, such as paternity, are in fact institutions. It is impossible to superimpose upon man both a primary layer of behaviors that could be called "natural" and a constructed cultural or spiritual world. For man, everything is constructed and everything is natural, in the sense that there is no single word or behavior that does not owe something to mere biological being (Merleau-Ponty, 2012:193,195).

The crocheters can understand themselves (self-knowledge) when they act to interact with the crocheting setting - *RajutKejut*'s world, any world around them, including interacting with crocheting objects and people in *RajutKejut*'s environment. Regarding this, according to Merleau-Ponty the word (self) is a way to express relationships with objects (there are intentional relations). Therefore, self-knowledge can only be achieved through action, which is interaction with any objects in the world, including with other subjects (Tjaya, 2020: 135).

Take Your Time. The activity of 'making' manually gives awareness and builds confidence that they are capable of making change in a creative, different, and acceptable way. Through works that are formed slowly, it gives awareness to the *RajutKejut* community that change may occur through a slow yet consistent process. This is in line with what Fitzpatrick said that change takes time, which is why craftivism is all about taking things slowly. The process of making

something by hand provides us with the time and space necessary to think deeply about the issues we are concerned about (Fitzpatrick, 2018:13). For this reason, *RajutKejut* realizes the need to carry out routine activities as a continuous effort to activate the community, narrate the aspirations of the initiators through their projects while providing space for expression for its members. *RajutKejut* also believes that the small, passionate, massive, and sustained contribution made by crocheters will produce tangible results. Therefore, *RajutKejut*'s work often surprises the public, not only because the work suddenly appears in the public space, but also because of the quality of the patience in working the project. This surprising effect steals the public's attention so that it has the potential to become a medium for conveying messages. According to Fitzpatrick, audiences are able to recognise the time and care you invest in your craftivism projects, meaning that the time and care you take in making your craftivist objects becomes embedded in the finished piece (Fitzpatrick, 2018:13). Making works in the form of objects will gradually create a sense of 'making' as an activity that builds awareness where people become acquainted with their world, interact with their world, and understand their world. By patiently making works step by step, people realize that every work is formed through a journey, some stages are passed, and each stage is part of a process that should be appreciated.

Play. The *RajutKejut* community is made for fun yet improving social sensitivity together. Works are done in a group in an enjoyable situation experienced together. This joy attracts crocheters to join in and be involved in *RajutKejut* projects. During a pandemic, when everything is not possible for *RajutKejut* to make works in a communal public space, participants happily responded to *RajutKejut*'s invitation to make yarn bombings in their respective neighborhoods. There is a sense of joy in the creation of a fun childhood playroom that can be done individually or collectively. They can choose the shape, pattern or color that they like and that looks challenging to try. There is also space to experiment, to apply new techniques or new patterns, to share on social media, and to talk about. This is explained by Fitzpatrick that:

Play is a type of exploration, a methodology for learning, that people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities can engage in. You can make changing the world seem like fun both for yourself and for others, then more people are likely to engage with your work. Craftivism enabling us to physically play with materials, and by providing us with endless opportunities. Making use of craft's inherent playful logic is an effective way to disarm audiences and to spark their curiosity (Fitzpatrick, 2018:14).

RajutKejut's work began because it was driven by the intention to make at the beginning. Therefore, the work is the result of the aesthetics expression, which is the expression that manifests in the work when the crocheter responds to external conditions. Meaning can be depicted in the work and the work is the external existence of meaning. This condition can be explained through Merleau-Ponty's opinion that the crocheters have a body as a way of engaging in the world, perceiving the world, and expressing themselves in various gestures. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is not a tool attached to oneself so that one can use it for any purpose, so he can be involved in the world. The body is a way of expressing thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires (Tjaya, 2020:137). The body is the origin of all expressive space. It also gives birth to objects that are the result of the body's work. Thus, it can be considered that the work is an extension of existence that has its journey, as Merleau-Ponty said that our body is not merely one expressive space among all others, for that would be merely the constituted body. Our body, rather, is the origin of all the others, it is the very movement of expression, it projects significations on the outside by giving them a place and sees to it that they begin to exist as things, beneath our hands and before our eyes (Merleau-Ponty, 2012:147). Since work activities (as a result of expressive activities) are successfully carried out, the impression on the crocheter (as well as the crowd) is not only in the form of memory, the expression (work) makes the signification exists as an object (becomes concrete) at the core of the work and opens a new dimension of experience for the crocheter's (and crowds). It creates a new meaning to the works. Crocheters are given the freedom to determine their work. This is in line with what Merleau-Ponty said that it shapes the sense of existence to be concrete and realizing themselves as free human beings to choose, to decide to act, and to determine their history (Tjaya, 2020:141). Within the crocheter lies a free spirit that eagers to play without judgment and without prejudice, like a peaceful childhood (Tjaya, 2020:152).

Social Media. *RajutKejut* uses social media in the majority of their activities. Regardless of their mature age, the imitators are quite reliable in utilizing social media, not only for posting images with captions and replying to comments but also for utilizing simple instant research tools. *RajutKejut* always mentions those who involve in the project, be it on social media and in the exhibition catalog. Likewise, in the projects during the pandemic, social media has an important part because invitations are informed through social media and work exhibitions are held on social media as well. The crocheters uploaded their works on their personal Instagram accounts, along with tags, mentions, and hashtags under *RajutKejut's* direction. Afterward, these works were reposted on *RajutKejut's*

Instagram account embedded with acknowledgment to people who participated in the project, as explained by Fitzpatrick that:

We should be thanks to online digital spaces. Using new technologies and social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest, craftivists across the globe are able to communicate with one another, learn new skills, connect with potential collaborators, coordinate projects, invite social engagement, share patterns and projects and reach wider audiences. Social media also enables craftivists to take part in critical conversations that help enrich the practice of craftivism. consider how you can most effectively use online tools and social media platforms in order to engage, connect, document and share your craftivism practice (Fitzpatrick, 2018:20).

CONCLUSION

Going through pandemic with crocheting activities in a quarantine atmosphere creates a space for reflection and contemplation which makes people look back to the past realizing their presence today and project themselves to step into the future. Through works that are made consciously in body activities, people realize that they have the ability to 'create' both to fulfill their own needs and their desires so that self-awareness and self-existence are awakened to find out that they are valuable. It shows confidence that they can live in their world. By doing it together with the community, it will strengthen the confidence that one is not alone. Many people value their existence and care about themselves. A feeling of security is awakened that they are accepted by their existence in the world making them feel comfortable to continue working. In line with what, Merleau-Ponty states that feeling is able to bring out self-existence.

The attitude to appreciate that the condition of self and others is different. It is important to foster it to continue to develop in the wider community that they are aware of the existence of individuals with their respective conditions as subjects communicating with each other to build their world. Crocheters find comfortableness being with *RajutKejut* because they can feel themselves and their world as an inseparable unity. As expressed by Merleau-Ponty crocheters feel comfortable because they understand the world where they live in. They know their existence in the world by interacting with the world and they realize that the world understands them (Tjaya, 2020:107).

Craftivism in the pandemic can help people maintain mental health by making creative works for personal pleasure and peace individually or collectively.

Therefore, there is a connection among crocheters by sharing feelings, encouraging each other, thinking positively, feeling joy together, and amplifying positive spirits. Togetherness in the *RajutKejut* community is formed in a process through cooperation that always has the spirit of supporting and encouraging each other. Through the qualities possessed by craftivism, it can help individuals live their days, understand themselves and their world to help them feel stable emotionally.

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