



Women Art and Geometry in Southern Africa

Paulus Gerdes

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Africa needs to awaken and nurture its magnificent creative potential. African Women, constituting half of the population, are still strongly underrepresented in scientific and technological careers where mathematics plays an important role. Women themselves appear to lack the confidence to take up studies in the science fields that have been considered male domains in Europe and throughout colonial Africa. Ironically, however, outside this context, South African women have traditionally been involved in cultural activities ;V such as ceramics, beading, mural decoration, mat and basket weaving, hair braiding, tattooing, string figures ;V which bear a striking artistic and mathematical character.

The main objective of this book is to call attention to some mathematical ideas incorporated in the patterns invented by women in Southern Africa. An appreciation of these mathematical traditions may lead to their preservation, revival and development. Use of female art traditional forms has implications in the field of mathematics education.

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