

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, it has been my aim to draw attention to the different ways the traditional Swazi grass mat has transformed in recent years. The grass mat continues to hold a prominent position in Swaziland. The primary focus of this study has been the Swazi grass mat; due to time constraints the possibilities of making common links with other groups in the region has been virtually impossible. The comparisons with the Zulu techniques of mat-making have been largely dependent on the early writings of Bryant (1929, 1949); some significant connections were made with Zulu contemporary production of grass mats. Samples from Kwa-Zulu Natal were collected from traders at the Manzini Market displaying the pierced technique of mat making described by Bryant (1949); this confirmed the continuity of this technique. Furthermore, this technique is also applied by mat-makers in the south-western part of Mozambique.

The influence on the Swazi of the Tsonga in the northern parts of Swaziland remains a neglected area. It may be possible to link the Tsonga influence in relation to the historical amalgamation of the Tsonga people in the third stage of the expansion of the Swazi state in the mid-nineteenth century. A fraction of the Tsonga influence has been covered in relation to the *Imbongolo* mat-making frame which is attributable to a Mozambique origin; however, further investigation needs to be carried out to seek further clarification, confirm, and establish this.

Information is scant concerning the *Sotho*, the early inhabitants of Swaziland, and increases the possibilities of further investigations. Archaeological researches carried out in Swaziland have confirmed the presence of the *Sotho* but none has yet identified their material culture. In terms of linguistic connections with the *Sotho*, the word for a grain basket, '*Sesiu*,' sounds similar to the *SiSwati* '*Silulu*.' Even though this was a minute connection established, the prospects for future analysis are much greater.

An area of interest that emerged from this study is the potential for mathematical analysis in relation to the studies carried out by Gerdes in Mozambique and Washburn and Crowe in the States. It has been motivating to note that the field of Ethnomathematics has gained popularity within both the Art and Mathematics Departments at the University of the Witwatersrand. The section on the analysis of symmetry in the Msithini Group has been stimulating. The impetus for this section was prompted by an invitation to present a paper at the Southern African Association for Research in Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education (SAARMSTE) in 2003 and the International Symmetry Festival organised by the International Symmetry Association in Hungary, Budapest, in August 2003. Both papers dealt with the issue of symmetry in patterns on Swazi grass mats. In addition, as a newly appointed member of the Executive Board of the International Symmetry Association, the opportunity to represent Africa and to promote and investigate possibilities of Africanising Mathematics teaching to stimulate teachers on the African continent presented a further incentive. There remains within Swazi material culture an untapped resource in the form of beaded necklaces, beer pots and sisal and grass baskets where ethnomathematical theories may find valuable application in the future.

The information contained in the three groups of spreadsheets and the photographic records compiled for this study offers further engagement in continuing the documentation process set in motion. I believe the composite mat will continue to challenge the skills of the Swazi mat-makers in the future in attempting to attract new patronage. However, parallel to this development the traditional grass sleeping and sitting mats will continue to be made. There exists numerous possibilities of integrating new words and sentiments; perhaps this will take the form of messages pertaining to living a safe lifestyle as a response to the current HIV and AIDS pandemic in Swaziland. The new wall hangings might include for example, ‘Stop

HIV' or 'Love Life.' Recent examples have been seen in a new Paediatric Clinic in Mbabane with the words LITSEMBA LIKUPHILA (Hope is Life) (Fig 58) ¹ and LILANGA LELIMNADSI (Have a Sweet Day or Have a Good Day) (Fig 59). ² These are definitive examples of how the wall hangings are being used to portray messages of hope.

¹ Made by Hlobisile Mbuyisa, Emoti.

² Made by Hlobisile Mbuyisa, Emoti. Mats commissioned by Marquis and Company International and Working Walls of Africa Specializing in Healing Environments for Healthcare, Houston, USA, coordinated by Justin Thorne (Sept. 2005).