

**The meaning of the food practices of the peoples of Mmotla, near
Pretoria, South Africa: A socio-cultural and socio-psychological
approach**

ANNEMARIE THERESE VILJOEN (née Kuschke)

Thesis

PhD Cons Sc (Food Management)

Supervisor: Prof Dr P Botha

Co-supervisor: Prof Dr CC Boonzaaier

October 2009

**The meaning of the food practices of the peoples of Mmotla, near
Pretoria, South Africa: A socio-cultural and socio-psychological
approach**

by

ANNEMARIE THERESE VILJOEN (née Kuschke)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

PhD in Consumer Science (Food Management)

in the

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Science

Department of Consumer Science

University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof Dr P Botha

Co-supervisor: Prof Dr CC Boonzaaier

October 2009

DECLARATION

I, **Annemarie Therese Viljoen**, hereby declare that the thesis for the **PhD in Consumer Science** degree at the University of Pretoria, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

ANNEMARIE THERESE VILJOEN

19 October 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to the following persons who had a share in the completion of this study.

- Professor Priscilla Botha, supervisor, for her professional guidance, counsel, support and encouragement
- Professor Chris Boonzaier, co-supervisor, for his willingness to be involved in this study, his valuable input, perceptiveness, knowledgeable advice and support
- Professor Anna Marie Trollip, for her contribution to the planning of the study and her concerned interest throughout
- Hendrica Lebelo and Justice Mahlangu for their involvement in the focus group sessions and the interviews: thank you for all the work you took upon yourselves to assist in organising the participants and venues. Your enthusiastic support during the data collection process and afterwards is appreciated
- The focus group participants and interviewees who freely shared their knowledge, views and experiences: thank you, very sincerely, for your hospitality, time and enthusiastic participation in this study
- Professor Joan Fairhurst for language editing the thesis and for her friendly support and encouragement
- Refilwe Ramagoshi and Buti Skhosana for editing the African language terminology
- Ingrid Booysen and Trudie Erasmus for attending to the graphics and assisting with the technical editing of the thesis
- Hannetjie Boshoff and Elsie Verheem from the University of Pretoria Library Services for obtaining some of the references so willingly and efficiently
- Rinkie Dube, Frans Nkwana and Maria Monchusi for their advice and assistance in the preparation of some of the recipes provided by the participants
- My colleagues at the Department Consumer Science for their understanding, assistance and collegial support
- My husband Piet, family and friends for their patience in accompanying and affirming me throughout this long journey

SUMMARY

The meaning of the food practices of the peoples of Mmotla, near Pretoria, South Africa: A socio-cultural and socio-psychological approach

by

ANNEMARIE THERESE VILJOEN (neé KUSCHKE)

Supervisor: Prof Dr P Botha
Co-supervisor: Prof Dr CC Boonzaaier
Department: Consumer Science
Degree: PhD in Consumer Science: Food Management

In this study the aim was to describe and understand how meanings emerge from the context in which the food practices of the peoples of Mmotla were construed. South African society is multi-cultural and black South Africans, upon contact with Western-oriented societies, seem to have gradually or partially adopted the Western lifestyle including eating patterns, leading to changing traditional food practices that can be mostly attributed to the effect of acculturation, urbanisation and modernisation processes.

The current knowledge base of food practices of the South African population as a whole is fragmentary, with limited information on what some sectors of certain population groups eat. Inadequate attention is paid to the reasons why specific food items are chosen or excluded. To facilitate meaningful consumer education and to recommend sound nutrition interventions, a thorough understanding of *why* as well as *what* South Africans eat is urgently needed. Moreover, cognisance should be taken of the factors that contribute to the development of typical food practices within specific communities.

As confirmed in various studies in other countries, the reasons for human food choices require an appreciation of the fact that food practices are embedded in the food choice processes which, in turn are guided by numerous interrelated and interdependent factors that are context-specific. A holistic and contextual approach with knowledge of the socio-cultural, psychological, historical and demographic factors that contribute to food practices should be

uncovered when attempting to understand and describe these practices and their underlying meanings.

The human ecological perspective, as overarching theoretical perspective, is supported by cultural and symbolic interactionism perspectives and other theoretical models, and combined with a qualitative research design to uncover, describe and interpret all the environmental levels, the physical, politico-economic, socio-cultural and the micro-world of the individual, and their embedded factors. Data was obtained from focus group discussions and interviews, supported by participant observation and unobtrusive measures. Purposive sampling was used to select female participants for the focus groups and theoretical sampling for the individual interviews. Gathered data was systematically analysed according to the grounded theory approach throughout the data collection phase.

From the findings it became apparent that the food practices of the peoples in Mmotla continue to develop and change. A distinct move towards the modern Western-oriented food practices emerged. Although acculturation of food practices was evident, traditional food practices were not discarded, and both traditional and modern food practices were embraced and regarded as important. Meanings linked to the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments were used to define the context in which food items were used as symbols, signs or codes to define a specific situation and/or communicate the associated meanings. This resulted in dynamic movement between the two poles, the modern and the traditional, depending on the context. Thus the acculturation response is consequently seen to be fluid, context-specific and driven by various interacting factors from the different environmental levels.

This valuable and noteworthy contribution augments existing theories and models on food choice within the South African context.

Keywords: food choice, food practices, food context, traditional food, meanings, acculturation, human ecological perspective, symbolic interactionism, cultural perspective

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION		i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		ii
SUMMARY		iii
LIST OF TABLES		xii
LIST OF FIGURES		xiii
LIST OF ADDENDA		xv
CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE		1
1.1	BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY	1
1.2	PROBLEM STATEMENT	6
1.3	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	7
1.4	RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES	8
1.5	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	9
1.6	PRESENTATION AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY	11
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		14
2.1	INTRODUCTION	14
2.2	CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE MAIN CONCEPTS	15
2.2.1	Food practices as concept	15
2.2.2	Meanings attached to food and food practices	18
2.3	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND MODELS	20
2.3.1	Human ecological perspective	22
2.3.1.1	Physical environment	23
2.3.1.2	Economic and political environment	24
2.3.1.3	Socio-cultural environment	24
2.3.1.4	Socio-psychological environment	26
2.3.1.5	Assumptions of the human ecological perspective	27
2.3.2	Cultural perspective and assumptions	30
2.3.3	Symbolic interactionism perspective and assumptions	33
2.3.4	Theoretical models	37
2.3.4.1	The developmental model of food culture	37
2.3.4.2	Dietary acculturation	41

2.4	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	43
2.5	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	46
CHAPTER 3:	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	47
3.1	INTRODUCTION	47
3.2	RESEARCH DESIGN	47
3.3	THE RESEARCHER AS A RESEARCH INSTRUMENT	50
3.4	THE RESEARCH PROCESS	52
3.4.1	Choosing the research site and gaining access	52
3.4.1.1	Suitability of Mmotla as research setting	53
3.4.1.2	Access and establishing trust	54
3.4.2	Data collection phases	56
3.4.2.1	Phase one of sampling and data collection	58
(i)	Sampling and criteria for inclusion	58
(ii)	Focus groups as data collection technique	59
(iii)	Participant observation	64
(iv)	Unobtrusive measures	66
3.4.2.2	Phase two of sampling and data collection	67
(i)	Sampling technique and criterion for inclusion	67
(ii)	Individual interviewing as data collection technique	68
3.4.3	Transcriptions	70
3.4.4	Data analysis	71
3.4.4.1	The grounded theory approach to data analysis	72
3.4.4.2	Manual data analysis procedures	73
3.4.4.3	Data analysis with the Atlas.ti software package	76
3.5	ETHICS	78
3.6	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	78
CHAPTER 4:	EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS	79
4.1	INTRODUCTION	79
4.2	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	79
4.3	PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	81
4.3.1	Natural environment	81
4.3.2	Infrastructure of the village	82
4.4	SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT	84
4.4.1	Cultural profile of the Mmotla community	84
4.4.2	Ideology	85
4.4.2.1	Christianity	86



4.4.2.2	Ancestral veneration	88
4.4.3	Social organisation	89
4.4.3.1	Support groups	89
4.4.3.2	Burial societies	91
4.5	ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT	92
4.6	ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES AND FOOD PRACTICES	92
4.7	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	95
CHAPTER 5:	EVERYDAY FOOD PRACTICES	97
5.1	INTRODUCTION	97
5.2	FOOD CATEGORIES	97
5.2.1	Traditional foods	97
5.2.2	Modern foods	101
5.3	EATING PATTERNS	105
5.3.1	Traditional eating patterns	105
5.3.2	Contemporary eating patterns	109
5.3.2.1	Weekday meal pattern and composition	109
5.3.2.2	Weekend meal pattern and composition	110
5.4	ENVIRONMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTEMPORARY FOOD PRACTICES	113
5.4.1	Physical environment	113
5.4.2	Economic environment	115
5.4.3	Socio-cultural environment	117
5.4.3.1	Interaction with white people	117
5.4.3.2	Convenience	118
5.4.3.3	Role of the church	119
5.4.3.4	Health-related aspects	120
5.4.3.5	Education	120
5.4.3.6	Social interaction	121
5.5	VALUES ATTACHED TO FOOD PRACTICES ON WEEKDAYS AND OVER WEEKENDS	122
5.5.1	Food practices on weekdays	122
5.5.2	Food practices over weekends	123
5.6	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	125
	TERMINOLOGY LIST	128

CHAPTER 6:	FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS DURING INITIATION RITES AND ASSOCIATED CELEBRATIONS	129
6.1	INTRODUCTION	129
6.2	COURSE OF THE NDEBELE MALE INITIATION (<i>INGOMA</i>)	130
6.2.1	Preparation phase	131
6.2.2	Departure and seclusion	131
6.2.3	Home-coming	131
6.3	THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES DURING THE <i>INGOMA</i>	133
6.3.1	Preparation phase	133
6.3.2	Seclusion phase	136
6.3.4	<i>Isithwalela</i> celebration	140
6.3.5	Home-coming celebrations	141
6.3.6	Individual celebrations at the homes of the <i>amasokana</i>	141
6.3.7	Second visit to the traditional leader	143
6.3.8	Celebration at the maternal grandparents	144
6.4	INITIATION AMONG THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS	144
6.5	COURSE OF THE NDEBELE FEMALE INITIATION (<i>IQUDE</i>)	148
6.5.1	Preparation phase	150
6.5.2	Celebrations during <i>iqude</i>	151
6.6	THE MEANING OF THE FOOD PRACTICES DURING THE <i>IQUDE</i>	151
6.6.1	The preparation phase	151
6.6.2	The seclusion of the <i>isigoyi</i>	153
6.6.3	The first <i>iqude</i> celebration	154
6.6.4	Celebrations at the end of <i>iqude</i>	160
6.7	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	163
	TERMINOLOGY LIST	166
CHAPTER 7:	FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS AT WEDDINGS AND OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS	167
7.1	INTRODUCTION	167
7.2	THE TRADITIONAL NDEBELE WEDDING AND THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES	168
7.2.1	The <i>isimanje</i>	169
7.2.2	The <i>isikiri</i> celebration	172
7.2.3	First wedding celebration	176
7.2.4	The <i>idwende</i>	178



7.2.5	The second wedding celebration	184
7.2.6	The first years of marriage	185
7.2.7	Ukungenisa ubaba	187
7.3	THE MODERN WEDDING	188
7.4	MAIN EVENTS AND MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES AT THE MODERN WEDDING	191
7.4.1	The first wedding celebration	191
7.4.2	The second wedding celebration	192
7.4.3	Food practices and their meanings	192
7.4.4	The wedding cake(s)	193
7.5	OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS	197
7.5.1	Birthdays	197
7.5.1.1	Birthday celebrations for children	198
7.5.1.2	Birthday celebrations for adults	199
7.5.1.3	The 21st birthday celebration	199
7.5.2	New Year's Day celebration	200
7.5.3	Graduation celebrations	201
7.5.4	Family reunions	201
7.5.5	Celebration to honour or thank parents / grandparents	202
7.5.6	Meanings of the food practices at other special occasions	202
7.6	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	202
	TERMINOLOGY LIST	205
CHAPTER 8:	FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS ON RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS	206
8.1	INTRODUCTION	206
8.2	ANCESTRAL RITUAL OCCASIONS AND THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES	207
8.3	FUNERAL PROCEDURES	211
8.3.1	Traditional funerals	211
8.3.2	Modern funerals and meanings attached to the food practices	213
8.3.2.1	Food preparation	216
8.3.2.2	Food serving procedures	219
8.3.2.3	The funeral feast	220
8.3.3	Other funeral related procedures their associated food practices and meanings	223
8.3.3.1	The "washing of the spades"	223
8.3.3.2	Preparation and serving of the widow's food	223

8.3.3.3	Celebration to mark the end of mourning	225
8.3.3.4	The unveiling of the tombstone	226
8.4	CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS	230
8.4.1	Christmas	230
8.4.2	Easter	231
8.4.3	Baptism and confirmation	232
8.5	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	233
	TERMINOLOGY LIST	236
CHAPTER 9:	THE MEANINGS OF FOOD AND FOOD PRACTICES	237
9.1	INTRODUCTION	237
9.2	FOOD CONTENT	238
9.2.1	The use and meanings of traditional food	238
9.2.1.1	Maize	240
9.2.1.2	Sorghum	243
9.2.1.3	Indigenous leafy vegetables and legumes	248
9.2.2	The use and meanings of modern food	249
9.3	FOOD CONTEXT	255
9.3.1	Weekday food context	256
9.3.2	Weekend food context	257
9.3.3	Food context on special occasions	258
9.4	ACCULTURATION RESPONSE	259
9.4.1	Affordability	260
9.4.2	Religious beliefs	261
9.4.3	Cultural identity	261
9.4.4	Prestige and social status	262
9.4.5	Norms and standards	262
9.5	DISCUSSION ON THE PLIANCY OF FOOD USE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	262
9.6	POLYSEMIC FOOD	266
9.6.1	“The polysemic goat”	266
9.6.1.1	Ancestral veneration	267
9.6.1.2	<i>Iqude</i>	269
9.6.1.3	Traditional Ndebele wedding	270
9.6.2	Bread and red jam as symbol of the <i>iqude</i>	272
9.7	CONCLUDING SUMMARY	274
	TERMINOLOGY LIST	275

CHAPTER 10:	CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	276
10.1	INTRODUCTION	276
10.2	CONCLUSIONS DERIVED FROM THE MAIN FINDINGS	277
10.2.1	Development of contemporary food practices	278
10.2.2	Contemporary food practices and their meanings	283
10.2.2.1	Food practices in everyday contexts	285
(i)	Weekday food practices	285
(ii)	Weekend food practices	285
10.2.2.2	Food practices in the context of special occasions	285
(i)	Food practices at traditional special occasions	286
(ii)	Food practices at modern special occasions	287
10.3	FINAL CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	288
10.4	FINAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	292
10.5	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	294
10.6	METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS	298
10.6.1	Research strategy and design	298
10.6.2	Sampling	299
10.6.3	Data collection	300
(i)	Focus group discussions	300
(ii)	Individual interviews	301
(iii)	Participant observation and unobtrusive measures	301
10.6.4	Data capturing and editing	302
10.6.5	Data analysis	303
10.6.6	Trustworthiness of the findings	304
(i)	Credibility	304
(ii)	Transferability	305
(iii)	Dependability	305
(iv)	Confirmability	305
10.7	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE	306
10.8	IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	306
	REFERENCES	309

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 5.1:	TRADITIONAL FOODS AND DISHES	99
TABLE 5.2:	MODERN FOODS AND ASSOCIATED DISHES	102
TABLE 6.1:	PHASES OF THE MALE NDEBELE INITIATION AND ASSOCIATED FOOD PRACTICES	132
TABLE 6.2:	COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA	145
TABLE 6.3:	PHASES OF THE NDEBELE FEMALE INITIATION AND ASSOCIATED FOOD PRACTICES	150
TABLE 6.4:	COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT FEMALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA	162

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1:	ENVIRONMENTAL LEVELS CONTRIBUTING TO THE FOOD CHOICE PROCESS (ADAPTED FROM FIELDHOUSE (1995:27) AND SIMS-SMICIKLAS-WRIGHT (1978))	23
FIGURE 2.2:	DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF FOOD CULTURE (ADAPTED FROM KITTLER & SUCHER, 2008:11; SOBAL, 2000:7)	39
FIGURE 2.3:	DIETARY ACCULTURATION MODEL (ADAPTED FROM SATIA-ABOUTA ET AL., 2002)	42
FIGURE 2.4:	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	44
FIGURE 4.1:	LOCATION OF MMOTLA VILLAGE	80
FIGURE 4.2:	SPAZA SHOP	83
FIGURE 4.3:	TYPICAL STREET SCENE	84
FIGURE 6.1:	<i>ISIFUNZI</i> PART OF THE SLAUGHTERED BEAST	143
FIGURE 7.1:	FLOW DIAGRAM OF THE MAIN EVENTS IN THE TRADITIONAL NDEBELE WEDDING	169
FIGURE 7.2:	BREAST SECTION OF THE <i>ISIKIRI</i> GOAT	173
FIGURE 7.3:	PARTS OF GOAT TO BE TAKEN TO BRIDE'S FAMILY	177
FIGURE 7.4:	ALLOCATED PARTS OF SLAUGHTERED BEASTS	179
FIGURE 7.5:	THE RUMP SECTION - <i>SETLHANA</i>	181
FIGURE 8.1:	THE COURSE OF THE MODERN FUNERAL	214
FIGURE 9.1:	SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF TRADITIONAL BEER	246

FIGURE 9.2:	SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF MODERN FOOD	250
FIGURE 9.3:	TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FOOD AS TWO OPPOSING CULINARY POLES ON THE FOOD USE CONTINUUM	255
FIGURE 9.4:	FOOD CONTENT DURING WEEKDAYS	256
FIGURE 9.5:	FOOD CONTENT DURING WEEKENDS	257
FIGURE 9.6:	FOOD CONTENT ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS	259
FIGURE 9.7:	PLIANCY OF FOOD USE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	260
FIGURE 9.8:	SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE SACRIFICIAL GOAT	267
FIGURE 9.9:	SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE BREAD AND RED JAM AT THE <i>IQUDE</i>	273
FIGURE 10.1:	FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTEMPORARY FOOD PRACTICES	279
FIGURE 10.2:	FOOD CONTEXTS AND ASSOCIATED FOOD CATEGORIES	284
FIGURE 10.3:	FINAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	293

LIST OF ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A: THEMES – EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS	324
ADDENDUM B: THEMES – SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT	325
ADDENDUM C: TRADITIONAL RECIPES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
ADDENDUM D: MODERN RECIPES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
ADDENDUM E: PHOTOGRAPHS	354