SECTION 4

CENTRAL THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this last section the penultimate and final chapters respectively present the central themes that emerged during the selective coding and the conclusions derived from the main findings.

A number of themes relating to the use, meaning and symbolism of food came to the fore from the findings. This crystalised out into two categories that were respectively named the "pliancy of food use" and "polysemic food". The themes associated with the "pliancy of food use" category portray how the participants adjusted their food practices in specific contexts. The numerous symbolic meanings that could be attached to a food item in a specific context, is represented in the"polysemic food" category. These are presented in Chapter 9 by means of developed conceptual models to illustrate the relation between the identified themes.

Chapter 10 as the final chapter of the thesis presents the main findings, conclusions, advances and contributions of this study on the food practices and their meanings within the South African context.

The following chapters are included:

Chapter 9:   The meaning of food and food practices
Chapter 10:   Conclusions, reflections and recommendations

CHAPTER 9

THE MEANINGS OF FOOD AND FOOD PRACTICES

9.1   INTRODUCTION

A grounded theory approach to data analysis was followed to understand and describe the food practices of the Mmotla community and the meanings attached to them through the narratives, descriptions and opinions of the participants in this study. Grounded theory methods are systematic, inductive guidelines for analysing data to build theoretical frameworks and models that explain the data by focusing the analysis on emergent categories (Charmanz, 2000: 509). This in itself requires a holistic approach where the context of all aspects that have bearing on the topic of food practices had to be understood as well. Therefore, a detailed description and interpretation of everyday food practices, and those applicable to special occasions, together with their historical backgrounds were given in previous chapters to contextualise these practices.

A large number of themes relating to the use, meaning and symbolism attached to food emerged from the findings. Each was placed in one of the two main core categories, "pliancy of food use" and "polysemic food". The "pliancy of food use" category exposed meanings the participants attached to food in different contexts. The symbolic meanings attached to food in a specific context, fell into the "polysemic food" category. In this penultimate chapter, the steps of the analytical process leading to the development, refinement and interrelation of concepts are given, together with discussion on the explanatory frameworks that were compiled to illustrate the relationships between the categories of concepts.

The first core category of themes entitled "pliancy of food use" portrays how the study group adjusted their food practices in different contexts. Other conceptual themes closely related to the core category "pliancy of food use" are food content, food context and the acculturation response. The second core category, labelled "polysemic food", reflects the numerous symbolic meanings that a food item can convey in a specific context. How these conceptual themes and the core category relate to one another is illustrated as conceptual models that show the relationship between the identified categories. Food content, a conceptual theme

under the "pliancy of food use" core category, is discussed first, followed by the other two themes, food context and acculturation response.

9.2   FOOD CONTENT

Participants' spontaneous conceptualisation and categorisation of food into the dichotomised grouping of traditional and modern food, as described in Chapter 5 (see 5.2) again come to the fore. Although these two food categories are two diametrically opposed culinary poles, there seems to be an ease or fluidity of movement between them, and food items from each are often used side-by-side. How, and when, food from each category is used varies, largely depending on the context in which it is used and the meaning attached to it. First, the use and meanings of traditional and modern food categories is described followed by a discussion of the different contexts in which they are used in order to explicate the different associations and meanings of each of them.

9.2.1   The use and meanings of traditional food

Most traditional dishes (see 5.2.1) are not served on a daily basis anymore, although some seemed to be prepared fairly often in the majority of households. The decline in the consumption of traditional dishes by the people of Mmotla could be attributed to changes in the physical (natural and technological) and socio-cultural environments as explained in Chapters 4 and 5 (see 4.3, 4.4 and 5.5). This has resulted not only in a reduction in availability, accessibility and the affordability of traditional food in general, but also contributed to its decreased familiarity and acceptability by the younger generation. However, in spite of this tendency the consumption of certain traditional food items and dishes continues.

In this study, specific traditional dishes eaten regularly are *bogobe, ting mabele* and traditional sorghum beer with maize-meal porridges (both soft and stiff) still included in the diet of most of the participants on a daily basis. Stiff maize-meal porridge, *bogobe,* as well as other traditional dishes prepared from sorghum (*ting mabele* and traditional beer) are frequently added as favourites to the menu on special occasions. When communication with the ancestors takes place, the preparation and consumption of traditional food continues to be strictly enforced by those who participate in these rituals. Various reasons for the continuation of the use of traditional foods emerged and these vary according to the context in which it is used, as described below.

Maize-meal continues to be the most important staple food as reflected in the daily meal patterns on weekdays. Soft maize-meal porridge is prepared for breakfast by some, and *bogobe* (stiff maize-meal porridge) is eaten with a relish for lunch and/or supper. The frequency of preparation of certain dishes depends, in the first place, on the amount of money available for food and, and secondly, on the size of the household. Most households are often on a tight food budget during the week, and then frequently resort to the inclusion of more "traditionally-oriented" dishes. The participants indicated that in these instances the *bogobe* would be served with low-cost protein- and vegetable-based relishes. Examples of low-cost protein-based relishes are *maotwana* (chicken legs), chicken *mala* (intestines), *mogodu* (ox tripe) and *morogo,* spinach or cabbage are examples of low-cost vegetable-based relishes. Those who have more money available are inclined to prepare modern food such as rice, meat or chicken and Western-style vegetable dishes for supper more frequently than those with a limited food budget. The degree to which traditional food is included on a daily basis on weekdays, therefore depends primarily on the affordability of modern food. In general, the tendency is to only include more food that is modern if money is available to do so.

For special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas and New Year's celebrations, favourite traditional dishes are, however, often prepared, and in most cases these are served side-by-side with the modern dishes as revealed in explanations such as:

 "The food will be rice, vegetables, salads, gemere, dikuku, traditional and modern [commercial] *beer, ting mabele, pap* [*bogobe*] *and beef, chicken, mutton – there will be more than one kind of meat. Dessert will be custard and jelly."*

Bogobe, ting mabele, and traditional beer were always mentioned as part of the menu on special occasions. The inclusion of these traditional dishes together with modern dishes indicates that they have become special dishes for celebrations. In the case of *ting mabele,* traditional beer and some of the legume-based dishes, the ingredients required for their preparation have become scarce and/or too expensive to include on a daily or more regular basis. Another reason is that some of these traditional dishes require involved and/or long preparation methods as, for example, *ting mabele* and traditional beer.

On special occasions where it is regarded as essential to communicate with the ancestors, traditional food is prepared exclusively as described in Chapter 8 (see 8.2). This happens on those days when the ritual slaughter and communication take place during the rite of passage celebrations such as initiation, weddings and funerals. According to the ancestors' prescriptions, only traditional food is to be served, as confirmed by the following quotations:

"With the ancestral worshipping they say they don't prepare modern food, only traditional food."

"They say the ancestors don't want to eat modern food. It is tradition they must have their food."

"Ja, they want traditional food. They are not fond of modern food."

From the study findings it became apparent that the traditional dishes prepared from maize and sorghum were frequently included. The reasons for their continued use reflect the importance that is attached to these two staple grains. They are still regarded as core or staple food in the daily diet and at special celebrations. The cultural importance of dishes prepared from these two grains is underscored in the discussion of each that follows.

9.2.1.1 Maize

For most of South Africa's ethnic groups maize seemed to have gained widespread popularity and replaced sorghum as staple grain since the late 1800s (Quin,1959:34). Various studies done in the latter decades of the twentieth century confirm the popularity of maize as a staple grain reporting that was being eaten on a daily basis mainly as stiff and/or soft maize meal porridges (Mbhenyane *et al.*, 2005; Viljoen & Gericke, 2001; Van Eeden & Gericke, 1996; Steyn, *et al.*,1990 & 1993; Manning, *et al.,* 1974).

Bogobe (stiff maize-meal porridge) continues to be regarded as the staple or core food by the majority of the participants. This staple starch is eaten at least once a day and at all special occasions as part of the menu. The inclusion of maize in the daily diet as well as at special events, demonstrates the central role and importance still attached to *bogobe* as a staple food. This is due, not only to its availability and affordability but also to the values, beliefs, emotional and symbolic meanings it represents.

Maize-meal was one of the most affordable and accessible traditional foods available to the participants and, in the first place, this has contributed to the continuation of *bogobe* as a staple or core food. Furthermore, it is widely regarded as an essential and nourishing food. Some participants view it as the food vital for sustaining life as it provides energy and therefore has to be included on a daily basis. Participants explained this as follows:

"Pap [*bogobe*] *is energy – krag* [strength]. *When she thinks about pap it is the food that gives someone energy."*

"… some people will say, mabele is the food that I must eat, it gives me strength, but other people will also say, mealie meal or bogobe."

Another participant similarly stated that, in her opinion, modern food does not provide the same degree of nourishment to sustain life, when compared to traditional food such as maize. Her statement in Afrikaans is:

"…ons eet nie meer daardie kos wat ons lang tyd gehad het. Ons eet net die gemors; die kos van hierdie tyd, dit word nie strength nie."

[37] *"… we do not eat the food that we had long ago. We only eat junk; the current food* [modern food] *does not provide strength."*

Familiarity and taste preferences are other reasons why stiff maize-meal porridge is popular. The taste preference for maize-meal dishes is closely associated with its familiarity, an idea that is illustrated in the following phrases:

" … there are older people who still like the traditional food, like her husband when it is Sunday, then she will have to cook pap [bogobe] *for him. He doesn't enjoy rice."*

"She likes bogobe"

Another reason given relates to its satiety value. It was explained that in comparison with modern food, it has a higher satiety value and therefore it has to be included on the menu on special occasions. This was explained by statements such as:

"this modern food they don't stay long [have a low satiety value]*"*

It was explained that the reason why stiff maize-meal porridge is preferred by males is because it is more filling and therefore satisfying.

"The other thing is most men like traditional food, they don't like rice, they like pap.

In this regard, Jones (1963:85) confirms that food is appreciated for its satiety value and this is particularly important for those people who often only have two meals a day. What is more, when entertaining on special occasions, feeling satisfied pleases the guests and this is an indication that the host has extended an appropriate degree of hospitality. In response to the

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[37] Quotation directly translated from Afrikaans

question why *bogobe* has to be included on the menu of special occasions it was emphatically stated that:

 "… but pap [stiff maize-meal porridge] *and meat **must** be there, because it is tradition."*

"It is the staple food that is the whole thing."

The emotional importance and cultural value attached to *bogobe* is reflected here. It was often mentioned that the older generation often requested traditional food items at celebrations and therefore it is included on the menu together with modern food.

Illustrated by these examples of people who insist on the inclusion of *bogobe* in their daily diets and even on special occasions, is what Passin and Bennett (1943:113) explain as a reaction of emotional resistance that is attached to a change of a core or staple food. In a certain sense, these reactions also portray that *bogobe* is regarded as a comfort food as it is experienced as a familiar and satisfying food, yet it simultaneously serves as marker for personal and social identity, following the description of comfort food by Kittler & Sucher (2008:4) and by Lochner, Yoels, Maurer and Van Ells (2005). The insistence on the inclusion of *bogobe* at special celebrations also ties in with the explanation by Long (2000:154), that, when a staple food is used on special occasions, it serves as an "intensification of the everyday menu" and thus indirectly emphasises its importance. She gives the example of meat and potatoes that are regarded as staples in the American diet, and illustrates their focal position in the Thanksgiving meal.

The degree of importance attached to maize-meal is further indicated in its use as a substitute or emergency medium to communicate with the ancestors in those cases when traditional beer is not available. Such a situation could arise in the case of an unexpected death of someone and/or when communication with the ancestors becomes a matter of urgency and there is neither time nor the means to brew traditional beer. Maize-meal, water and ash are then used as substitute for traditional beer. The water and maize-meal mixture serves as a symbolic replacement of the traditional beer and becomes a sacrificial food. McAllister (1993:74) confirms that an unfermented mixture of grain and water can be used as symbolic beer in an emergency. Following Jellife's (1967) classification, maize-meal is a cultural super-food. In his well-known classification system, he defines a cultural super-food as a dominant staple food that is the main source of energy in the diet. This food often has "semi-divine status and is interwoven into local religion, mythology, and history".

Although maize has replaced sorghum as the staple food, sorghum is still used extensively in dishes reserved for special occasions and as a special treat in the everyday diet of those who can afford it.

9.2.1.2 Sorghum

Sorghum is one of the oldest cultivated crop plants in Africa (Raschke & Cheema, 2007; Bryant, 1967:271; Quin, 1959: 24-26). This drought resistant crop was widely cultivated throughout Africa, and large parts of the continent, including South Africa, relied on it as staple food. The large variety of dishes prepared by the different indigenous groups is testimony to the importance of this crop in the diet of previous generations as suggested by Bryant (1967:271-272), Quin (1959:24), and Junod (1927II:11). Quin (1959:29) gives examples of more than 25 dishes that contained sorghum as part of the traditional Pedi diet. It is therefore understandable that such an important crop was also used in rituals and for ceremonial purposes by the peoples of Africa. Maize has replaced sorghum as staple food (Shaw, 1974:99; Schapera & Goodwin, 1962:131; Quin, 1959:37) and consequently sorghum is not used as extensively as before and, when it is used, it is mainly for brewing traditional beer[38]. The decline in use is because sorghum is not cultivated to the same extent as previously and has become a relatively expensive commodity to purchase. This was frequently emphasised by the participants.

Evidence from the data gathered in this survey supports this documented trend of decreasing consumption of sorghum within black South African communities. The study group still uses sorghum dishes on a limited scale. Even though a small number were aware that this former staple grain is used frequently in the form of *mabele* porridge for breakfast, the majority felt that it was generally infrequent practice and that sorghum is mainly reserved for special occasions in the form of *ting mabele* and traditional sorghum beer. It is therefore still regarded as a special and important grain, although as a direct result of its price, it was now mostly only prepared for special occasions.

Although sorghum changed from a dominant staple food to a secondary core food in terms of the classic classification system of Passin and Bennett (1943:113), it is still extensively used in rituals and ceremonies in this community. It is specifically prepared for those special occasions where communication with the ancestors forms part of the ritual procedures. On these occasions it is an imperative to do this because; *"… mabele* [sorghum] *is ancestral food".* This reaction is similar to that associated with sacrificial or staple food, and is a clear

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[38] Since sorghum grains are not readily available anymore, nowadays a malted commercial meal is often used as substitute. See Addendum C for recipes.

indication that sorghum continues to fulfil the role of a "cultural super-food" in the religious rituals of some of the participants.

Testimony of the emotional value and importance attached to this grain is reflected in how and when it is used. Sorghum is mainly served at special and ritual events in the brewing of traditional beer and preparation of speciality dishes such as *ting mabele*. The role and symbolic meaning attached to sorghum porridge, traditional sorghum beer and *ting mabele*, is briefly described to illustrate why it continues to be regarded as an important grain by the participants.

- **Sorghum porridge**

Some participants regard the consumption of sorghum as a prescription from their ancestors and its consumption serves as a symbolic link between them and their ancestors. One of the participants explained this as follows:

"*In my case I won't eat mealie* [maize] *porridge, only mabele* [sorghum]. *Then the reason is, it is* [a] *spiritual prescription, because my ancestors have eaten mabele* [sorghum]*, so I must follow the same path. Then there is no way that I can eat white pap* [maize meal porridge]*, it doesn't cover my tradition, so I still eat mabele pap* [sorghum porridge].*"*

The continuous influence of the ancestors and the importance of obeying their directives were symbolised through the consumption of sorghum porridge. The importance of obeying and thereby honouring the ancestors was often emphasised, as indicated in statements such as:

"*… some ancestors will not get very happy when you eat white pap* [maize meal porridge]. "

In the same vein, others regarded the consumption of sorghum as a symbol of cultural identity or guaranteeing its preservation as required by the ancestors. When adhering to these prescriptions, the approval and pleasure of the ancestors is ensured as explained in the following quotations:

"*… then they* [the ancestors] *can see that you are still following the traditional way.*"

"*… and also from the ancestors that they won't be happy if you don't eat mabele* [sorghum]*, because that was the traditional staple food. That was the food.*"

Some participants attached the same value to sorghum as would apply to any important staple grain, where it is believed that the consumption of the staple grain would impart special attributes to those who consume it, such as strength. It was explained that: *"… people will say mabele* [sorghum] *is the food that I must eat, it gives me strength."*

- **Traditional sorghum beer**

Important ideological connotations of sorghum underscore the values and belief systems of the participants through the brewing and use of traditional sorghum beer. McAllister (2003; 1993:72-75) gives an overview of the different traditional roles and uses that sorghum beer fulfilled in the lives of the different ethnic groups in Southern Africa. In his description of the various types of beer-drinking occasions of the Xhosa, he (McAllister, 2003) gives a full account of these events and includes the lexicon associated with traditional beer offered on each of these occasions. The Xhosas brew beer for hospitality, for religious motives, to mark a change in status of a person, to recognise services rendered or work performed and to sell it.

Apart from being a popular everyday beverage, the Mmotla participants also referred to the multiple functions and roles associated with traditional sorghum beer. According to them it is not only prepared as a sought-after drink for special occasions, but it is an important communication medium with the ancestors where it serves as link between the ancestors and their descendants and is food for them. One of the participants explained that *"… traditional beer was not only used for ancestral purposes, it was used for quenching the thirst, for family members and friends of the family and it was also sold."* It emerged that traditional beer continues to be regarded as the most important beverage at celebrations and on special occasions and has numerous symbolic meanings and roles attached to it. For example, it can, symbolise hospitality, cultural identity and ancestral veneration and, in some situations, all three categories of meanings can apply simultaneously. Figure 9.1 represents the various categories of meanings that are represented by serving traditional sorghum beer on special occasions.
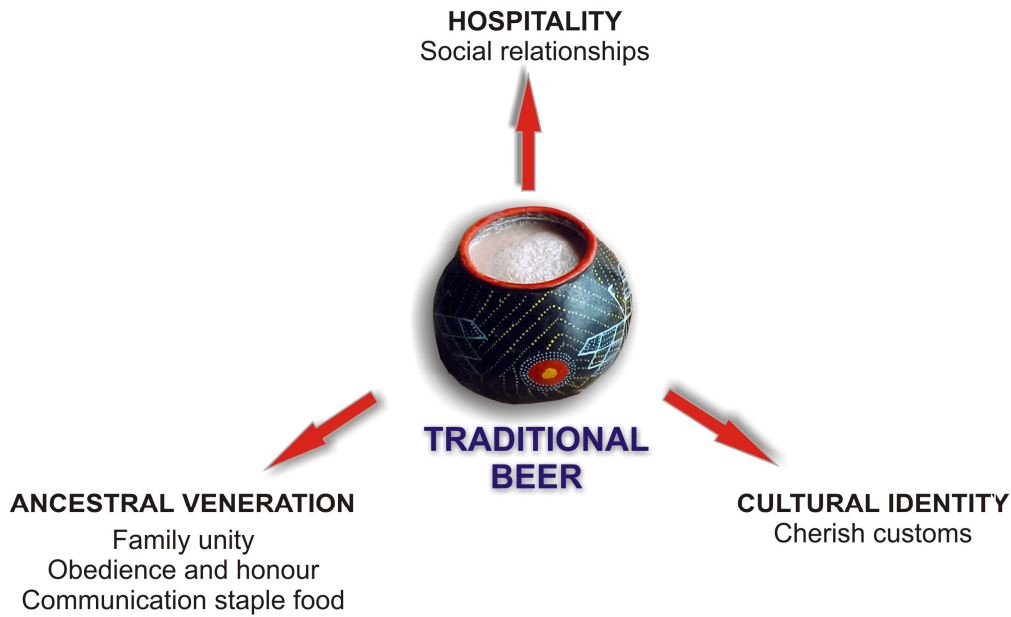
HOSPITALITY
Social relationships

TRADITIONAL BEER

ANCESTRAL VENERATION
Family unity
Obedience and honour
Communication staple food

CULTURAL IDENTITY
Cherish customs

FIGURE 9.1: SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF TRADITIONAL BEER

Traditionally sorghum beer was offered to visitors as a sign of hospitality and this practice continues even today. It is an essential and important item at all special events. In offering traditional beer to visitors, not only hospitality, but friendship and social relationships too are often also implied. This, for example, is illustrated in the procedures when the groom's family and friends arrive at the home of the bride's parents for the wedding celebration (see 7.2.3). According to the rules of etiquette, they were not allowed to enter before they have accepted and drunk the traditional beer offered them. It was explained that *"…they wait outside, they must first get beer, … they want to feel welcomed and they will feel welcome by the fact that the household will offer them beer".* This ties in with the account given by McAllister (1993:75) that traditional beer is seen as a communal food that promotes communal harmony, sociability and neighbourliness. It also symbolises the establishment or re-establishment of friendly relationships.

Traditional beer is further closely associated with cultural identity and the continuation and cherishing of certain traditional customs. It was explained that traditional beer has to be prepared at all these celebrations, because *"… when they grew up there was traditional beer, so they are still following their parents' tradition."* The importance of continuing with this custom is, for example, emphasised in the traditional Ndebele wedding procedures where the bride is given traditional beer to sip during the night of the *isikiri* celebrations. It was explained that this beer is given as a sign to remind the young bride of her future duties to prepare traditional beer for her husband. The preparation and serving of traditional beer on these occasions is essential and symbolises cultural identity and unity with the ancestors.

Apart from the unity with the ancestors that is represented through the offering and sharing of the traditional beer with the ancestors, this act is also a sign of obedience and honouring them.

An important characteristic of the beer used for ancestral veneration is that it is unstrained. Therefore *thabalala,* which is traditionally not strained, is the beer prepared for ancestral veneration. It was explained that the solid part of this beer (the malted sorghum), *"… represents the food of the ancestors."* Because *thabalala* has these *"remnants"* (solid parts), and it represents the staple food. The following quotation summarises this aspect:

"*This part is the most important part of the beer, it has strength. The solid part is seen as food, as nourishment. The liquid is not important."*

The malted sorghum solids symbolises the staple food and, in ensuring that these parts are available to the ancestors, the bond with the ancestors is maintained through the social unity of sharing the staple food. McAllister (1993:74) confirms this view in his account of the important part that beer plays in Nguni rituals. He uses the example of the Zulu who also refer to beer as "the food for men" where men include both the living and dead. Although Sekhukhune (1993) also mentions that unstrained beer is used as sacrificial medium for the ancestors, the reason for using unstrained beer given by him differed. His reason relates to the fear that might exist, that strained beer "has already been interfered with and might, therefore, be without lush."

The importance of keeping the ancestors informed of what happens to those they have left behind was repeatedly emphasised. Therefore traditional beer needs to be prepared for the various rites of passage celebrations where this communication is compulsory as described during initiation, wedding celebrations (see 6.3.6, 6.6.3, 6.6.4 and 7.2.2) and at funerals (see 8.3.2).

To remember and honour the ancestors, traditional beer needs to be poured on the ground at the special place, allocated as ancestral shrine in the yard. Communication with the ancestors is demonstrated by means of the traditional beer as explained in the following quotation:

"You can show the ancestors that you remember them by just taking the traditional beer to pour at that special place."

This act is also symbolic of the social and family unity with the ancestors, as the traditional beer becomes the binding factor between the living and the deceased ancestors. The ancestors are, for example, informed when the family is together for a special occasion such as an initiation, wedding, funeral or family reunion. This was illustrated in the following phrase:

"Traditional beer will be prepared and the ancestors will be informed that the family is together."

Landgraf (1974:22) mentions that a married Manala Ndebele woman only participated in beer drinking when her relatives came to visit and traditional beer was offered to the ancestors.

- **Ting mabele**

Another traditional sorghum dish that features prominently at all special occasions is *ting mabele*. *Ting mabele* is associated only with important events, and has been elevated to the status of a speciality and dish mainly reserved for special occasions due to the price of sorghum meal. This is in contrast to *ting* prepared from maize-meal that is looked upon as an ordinary dish suitable for daily consumption. *Ting mabele* is a speciality because it is tastier than *ting* prepared from maize-meal. One of the other reasons why it is a special dish relates to its long and involved preparation method. To make it is regarded an art and only skilled people can prepare *ting mabele* properly, specifically when large quantities are required such as for initiation and wedding celebrations and for funerals. *Ting mabele* must have a specific consistency to hold its form when served and therefore not be runny (see Addendum C). Another reason for the popularity of this dish at special celebratory events is its good keeping quality. It can be kept for a few days and needs no refrigeration.

9.2.1.3 Indigenous leafy vegetables and legumes

Apart from maize and sorghum dishes, other traditional foods that were used occasionally were those prepared from indigenous leafy vegetables and legumes. The participants revealed that they only resorted to indigenous leafy vegetables when they are in abundance during spring and early summer. This was the case during weekdays when they had limited or no money available to purchase other vegetables to be used for the vegetable relish. Kepe (2008) and Jansen van Rensburg *et al.* (2007) confirm that the consumption patterns of indigenous leafy vegetables are variable and suggest that poverty status, the degree of urbanisation, and time of the year are factors that determine consumption. The practice of

having these on the weekday menu of the household when the male members are often not at home due to work commitments, implies that leafy vegetables is food for women and children. Associating leafy vegetables with female food and poverty unfortunately continues to exist in South Africa (Kepe, 2008; Jansen van Rensburg *et al.,* 2007; Maunder & Meaker, 2007) as well as in other African countries (Flyman & Afolayan, 2006; Weinberger & Swai, 2006; Prasad, 1998) and contributes to the low status attached to these nutrient-rich vegetables.

Certain legume-based dishes such as *irhayi* and *umkhupha* were often mentioned as popular menu items for special occasions (see Addendum C for recipes and descriptions). These are currently, however, mostly prepared from dried sugar, kidney or butter beans due to the unavailability or cost of the indigenous legumes traditionally used in their preparation.

From the analysis of the findings related to traditional foods, a number of reasons emerged for their continued use. The meanings attached to the use of traditional food varied according to the context in which it was used, once again confirming that various meanings can be attached to a specific food. The constant inclusion of the familiar staple food *bogobe* in the diet of the majority on a daily basis, and the request for it on special occasions by the elderly and males, reflects the security and comfort that *bogobe* as staple food provides. In the case of traditional beer, for example, it is a beverage served as a sign of hospitality, friendship and family unity, as communication medium with the ancestors and honouring them, and at the same time cultural identity is mirrored. Some traditional dishes such as traditional beer, *ting mabele* and certain traditional legume dishes, for example, *irhayi* and *umkhupha* have acquired prestige value because they are prepared from ingredients such as sorghum and indigenous legumes that have become scarce and/or expensive, and have involved preparation procedures.

9.2.2 The use and meanings of modern food

As explained in Chapter 5 (see 5.5) various factors contributed to the change from a traditional to a more Western-oriented food practice. Modern food is regarded as special and it has become closely associated with weekends and special occasions. It emerged that the consumption of modern food has a number of underlying meanings attached to it. A number of meanings are also associated with the person who uses and consumes modern food. Figure 9.2 represents the various symbolic meanings that the participants associated with modern food.
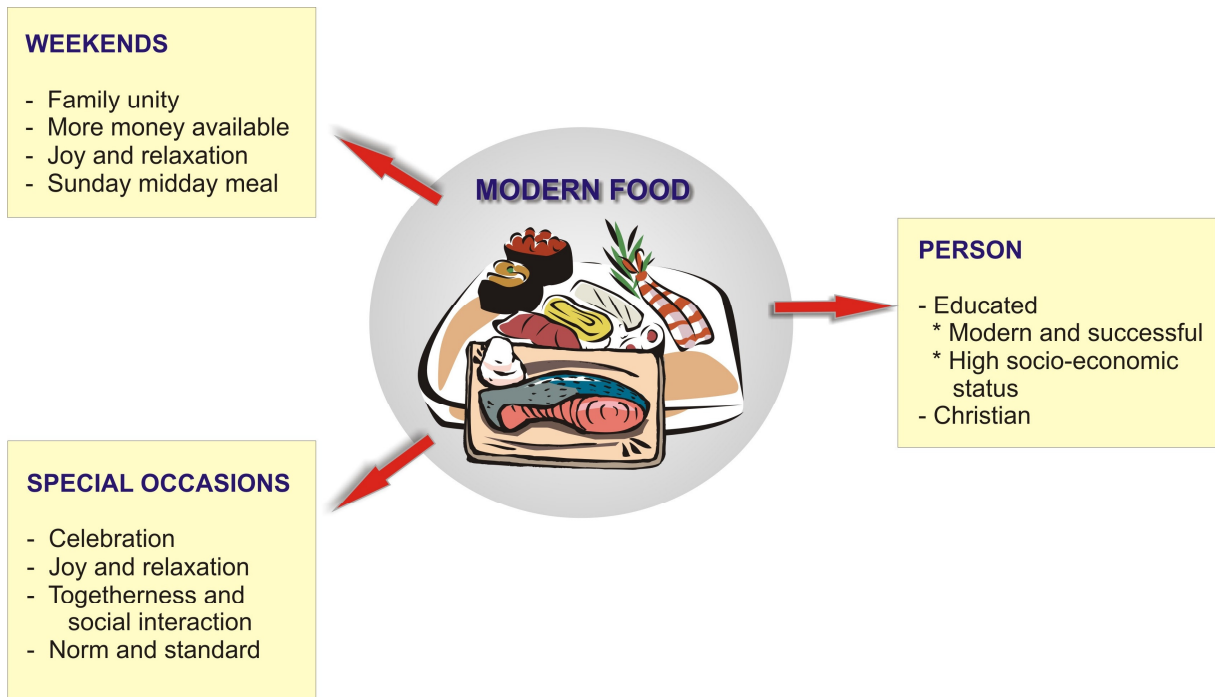
WEEKENDS

- Family unity
- More money available
- Joy and relaxation
- Sunday midday meal

MODERN FOOD

PERSON

- Educated
  * Modern and successful
  * High socio-economic status
- Christian

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

- Celebration
- Joy and relaxation
- Togetherness and social interaction
- Norm and standard

FIGURE 9.2: SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF MODERN FOOD

Modern food is regarded as special, because it is associated with weekends and more specifically the Sunday midday meal. In this context, it represents family unity as family members are often not together during the week due to work commitments. Comments such as "… *on Sundays it is special because everybody is at home, that is why they cook this special food"* illustrate how food is used here to celebrate and symbolise family unity. Modern food has not only become associated with weekends but also become a sign to distinguish between a tight food budget with meals prepared on weekdays and more money being available, or even set aside, for food purchases over weekends. This is illustrated by explanations such as:

"The reason why food eaten on Sundays is different, is that during the course of the week there is not enough money, and the other thing is that most people who are working get paid on Fridays. And those who get paid monthly don't want to waste it on food during the week."

Over the past few decades, new meaning has thus become attached to the Sunday midday meal. It is now viewed as a high status meal with an underlying inference to the socio-economic status of those who consume it. As indicated in the above quotation the participants were willing to sacrifice certain foods during the week to enable them to have money available to purchase special food for the Sunday midday meal. A trade-off between the food eaten during the week and weekends has taken place. This further reflects the value attached to the Sunday midday meal in comparison to the weekday meals, as well as the

strategies and priorities of the participants to meet these salient values associated with the Sunday midday meal. People often use strategies such as prioritising and balancing in their food choice process (Connors, Bisogni, Sobal & Devine, 2001; Furst *et al.,* 1996). The food prepared for the Sunday midday meal has thus become the ideal and it has such a high prestige value attached to it that it has become the norm for the type of food that should be served at all special events. The participants always mentioned that food *"like on a Sunday"* has to be prepared for special occasions.

Modern food has therefore become synonymous with food suitable for a special occasion. It is closely associated with celebrations, joy, relaxation and being together with family and friends. Social occasions and all big celebrations are scheduled for weekends when most people would be able to attend the festivities. The importance and prestige attached to modern food for social occasions was often emphasised, and it was emphatically stated that *"…there **must** be modern food."* It is also regarded as a social disgrace if it was not available and people would gossip if it was not served. *" … if it* [modern food] *is not there, it will be talked around."* It emerged that a great deal of attention and social recognition is given to the use of modern food, similar to the viewpoint of Fieldhouse (1995:83) who states that the "importance of prestige food lies in how much social recognition it confers", a comment that also seems to be applicable here.

The high status attached to modern food portrays various meanings of which the most important are being educated, successful, and "*from today*". It has become important to be regarded as an educated person and someone with enough money who can afford to purchase certain food items. A person who is well informed in these changing times and adheres to modern lifestyle trends usually consumes modern food. Modern food, as is the case with clothing, conveys conspicuous consumption[39] that displays financial success or earning power, often motivated by possibly wanting to create the envy of others. This tendency is referred to in a study on retailing in South Africa, where Cant and Brink (1999) reveal that black consumers are very conscious of their choice of products. They explain that consumer goods are used to reflect the "right" social class that black consumers wish to be categorised by their friends and peers. Odhiambo (2008) endorses that conspicuous and public display of material goods have become important indicators of social class in the post-*apartheid* South African context.

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[39] The term conspicuous consumption was coined by Veblen to refer to people's desire to provide prominent visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods (Solomon, 2007:474).

The importance and prestige attached to modern food was clearly illustrated in the reaction to a question about the food to be prepared at a funeral, and in attaining such a goal. It was stated:

"If you cook rice and this modern food, they say ooee, I see you are from today …"

This is typical of invidious consumption practices (Solomon, 2007:474) where products are used intentionally to display wealth and/or to generate envy by signifying that they have improved their situation. Social status was associated with following the modern Western-oriented food practices as the following quotation suggests:

"Then the other thing we, … new [younger] *generation, we are educated enough that is why we want to eat more food* [larger variety] *and fancy ones".*

On the other hand, the younger generation associated traditional food as food consumed by old-fashioned, uneducated people or those who have low social status. Traditional food was often referred to as *"olden days foods".* It therefore seems important for the younger generation to follow the example of educated people such as teachers, lawyers and health-care workers. Clearly, contact with these groups has contributed to some of the changes that have taken place in food practice. One of the younger participants stated that:

"The changes are because we are now mixed together [rich and poor, educated and less educated], *so when the rich start to buy rice, vegetables, and the poor then come around* [will follow]*, they will start to buy the same stuff - even if they don't have money".*

It was explained that the rich people were regarded as people who were employed as teachers, nurses, lawyers and business people *"… because they earn more money they buy everything, so they copy from them".* Educated people and those who earn money were seen as role models or a reference group and their example was followed with regard to what they bought and how they prepared their food. According to the description by Schiffman and Kanuk (2007:312), such a reference group is a comparative reference group. People use the behaviour of others to serve as a benchmark for specific or narrowly defined behaviour, and strive to follow suit. In the given example, the context is the specific food choice of the reference group. This usually occurs when people have direct face-to-face contact with the reference group (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:313).

A driving force behind the importance of serving modern food at social functions relates to the fear of the consequent shame that is associated with gossip that takes place afterwards if

these social standards are not met. Reflected here is the normative influence[40] of the reference group. Modern food is thus a status symbol to communicate a desired social class and can be described as pecuniary emulation. Bagwell and Bernheim (1996:350) explain that pecuniary emulation occurs when people consume conspicuously to create the impression of being a member of a higher class to increase their social standing.

The Mmotla participants can be compared to the strivers in the VALS™ system[41]. Strivers are people for whom money defines success, but they themselves do not necessarily have enough of it and emulate people who have greater material wealth. The reference group of the participants (those employed as teachers, nurses, lawyers and business people) can be compared to the achievers in the VALS™ system (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:439-442). Achievement motivates both the strivers and achievers in that they both aim for a clear social position and are strongly influenced by the actions, approval, and opinions of others, being inclined to purchase status symbols. In fact, the Mmotla people often incur enormous debt to provide the appropriate food for a funeral or wedding, as large numbers of guests are customarily present on these occasions. Solomon (2007:466) ascribes spending behaviour to people's appreciation of social class differences in their world view. The environments and world view of the working or lower-middle class are, for example more closed and restricted which results in their immediate needs tending to dictate their buying behaviour. This is contrary to people of a higher class who are inclined to focus more on long-term financial goals such as to own a house and secure their children's education, for example. It is thus understandable that the immediate needs as incurred by a special occasion, such as a wedding, funeral or other celebration, is so important to the participants that they would direct their spending behaviour to this end. This assumption is demonstrated by the fact that wedding celebrations are often postponed to enable the hosts to save or collect enough money. Not only is social importance attached to providing sufficient quantities of the appropriate kind of food, but so too are the psychosocial consequences to provide food that is socially accepted, important as these define a person's social position or aspired social position in society (Solomon, 2007:474, 477; Peter, Olson & Grunert, 1999:66). To a certain extent, the support group provides "financial security and social security" to enable its members to be in the position to gracefully host big celebrations such as initiations, weddings and funerals or any big social event. The support group not only assists financially, but also

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[40] Normative influence occurs when an individual fulfils group expectations to gain a direct reward or to avoid a sanction. This is usually the strongest when individuals have close ties with the group, and when the product involved is socially conspicuous (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:234).

[41] The VALS™ provides a systematic classification of American adults into eight distinct consumer segments based on enduring psychosocial characteristics that correlate with purchase patterns (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:439).

offers their labour and skills to make it possible for the appropriate food to be provided on these social occasions.

Practical reasons were also given for the increased popularity and consumption of modern Western-oriented food. Increased availability and access, together with the relative ease and convenience in the preparation of modern food, especially for large numbers of people, contributes to making things easier. Most traditional dishes, apart from the ingredients that were often scarce and expensive, have long, involved and tedious preparation methods. It is therefore impractical to cater adequately for the large number of guests who normally attend initiation, wedding celebrations and funerals. Therefore, modern food tends to be prepared because it is not so complicated to prepare, as is explained in the following quotation:

"… it would be much easier if everything was modern food, it would be less trouble".

Another contributing factor is that the younger generation have neither the knowledge nor the skills to prepare these traditional dishes, which also explains the decline in the preparation of traditional dishes at large celebrations.

The serving of modern food was also not purely by choice. Certain churches and religious groups condemn some of the traditional rituals and ceremonial procedures and consequently the food practices associated with these have declined or fallen into disuse. Some of the participants frequently indicated that their church prohibited them, for example, from brewing or consuming traditional beer, because it is associated with ancestral veneration. Similarly, the consumption of the meat of a ritually slaughtered beast is prohibited at funerals. The explanation given was that the meat was slaughtered for the deceased person. Consuming this meat is associated with the eating of the person for whom the beast was slaughtered. The serving of modern food has largely become associated with being a Christian or, put in another way, devoted Christians abstain from certain traditional food.

Food content can thus be viewed as two opposite poles where the two food categories (i.e. traditional food and modern food), each represents a "culinary pole". A dynamic movement on the food use continuum between these two poles emerged from the findings as represented in Figure 9.3.

Traditional ⟵⟶ **Food** ⟵⟶ Modern

FIGURE 9.3: TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FOOD AS TWO OPPOSING CULINARY POLES ON THE FOOD USE CONTINUUM

The ease of movement or switch between these two "culinary poles" is determined by the context or situation in which the food is used. In turn, this is closely guided by the response to acculturation. These two factors account for the position of a food on the food content continuum between the traditional or modern poles. How and when each of the above food categories is used, thus depends both on the food context and the level of the acculturation response.

9.3   FOOD CONTEXT

Food context refers to the situation in which food consumption takes place. Three food contexts namely, those of weekdays, weekends and special occasions were identified, and it emerged that these food contexts dictate how the two food categories of traditional and modern are used. The fluidity or movement between these two opposite culinary poles contributes to the importance attached to the different environmental determinants that are in interplay in a given food context. These determinants from the economic, social-cultural and socio-psychological environments become the driving forces that are instrumental in guiding and, in some instances, even dictating the extent to which each of the two food categories is used in a situation. In some instances the determinants from the various environments are viewed as competing forces that guide or dictate the degree to which each food category is used. These competing forces shift and, in some cases, even move or draw the food content in the direction of a specific culinary pole. The various food contexts of weekdays, weekends and special occasions, and their food content as found in this study, are illustrated and interpreted.

9.3.1 Weekday food context

The food content of meals on weekdays as determined by the food context is given in Figure 9.4.
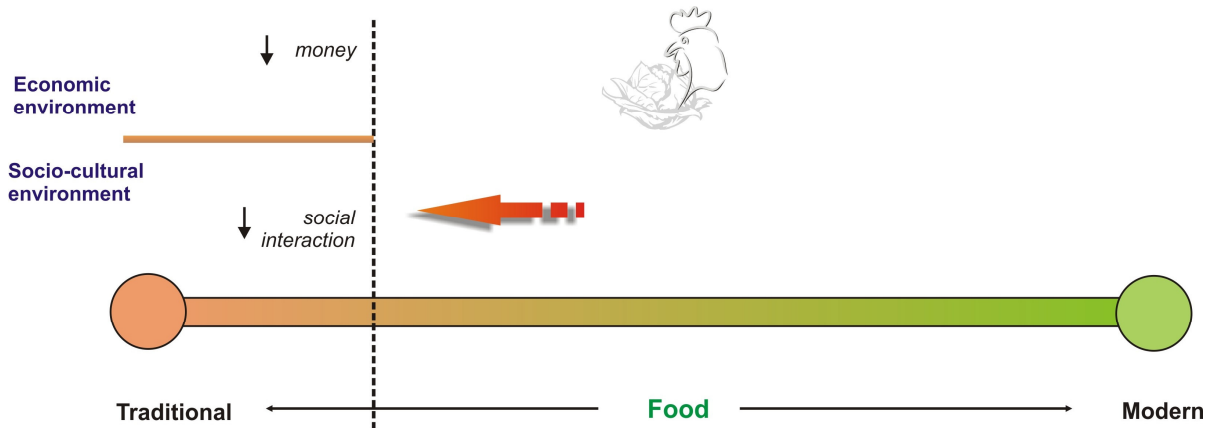

FIGURE 9.4: FOOD CONTENT DURING WEEKDAYS

In the majority of the households, the food content on weekdays shifts more toward the traditional-type of food category as illustrated in Figure 9.4. Traditional-type dishes such as chicken offal, *mogodu* (ox tripe), *morogo* or cabbage are served as relishes with *bogobe,* and meat was seldom or infrequently on offer. A large portion of the money available for food purchases in households was used over weekends. This, and similar statements, confirm this finding:

"… during the course of the week there is not enough money …"

The limited money available during the week can be attributed to the fact that larger quantities of special and expensive foods were served (see 5.3.2.2) to enhance the enjoyable, social nature of food consumption over weekends. The tight or restricted food allowance left for the rest of the week (or month) then forces people to include more affordable traditional-type of dishes, and this could even be the case over weekends for some. It was explained by one of the participants that:

"On Sundays when they don't have money they will have bogobe and morogo for lunch."

Affordability and the consequent accessibility to food are strong forces that determine what is consumed. It seemed as if people easily fall back on less expensive relishes that can be served with the stiff maize-meal porridge, specifically for weekday supper.

Another force relates to the level of social interaction and who participates in the interaction, as this also determines the kind of food that is prepared. Often the breadwinners in a household are away from home and only return to their families over weekends. Over weekends, the togetherness of the family is celebrated in the preparation and consumption of a larger variety, and often more expensive and/or special food (as described in Chapter 5 (see 5.3.2.2), in comparison to weekdays. Information given by the participants endorses the finding that, due to work and school commitments of some members in their households, the same attention to food preparation and specifically the kind of food that is prepared, is different from that prepared and consumed over weekends. .

9.3.2 Weekend food context

It emerged that the food content over weekends differs from that eaten during the week. In the majority of households it shifts towards the modern category and is depicted in Figure 9.5.
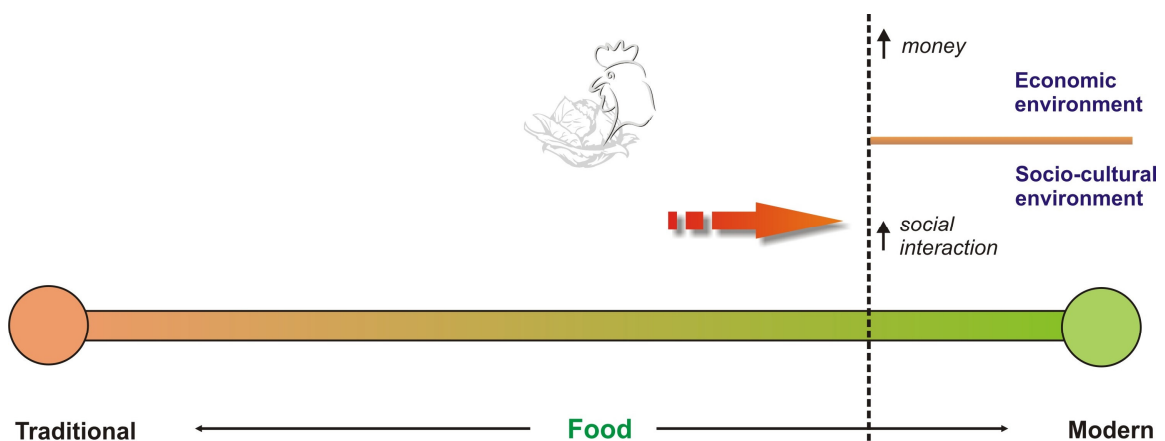

FIGURE 9.5: FOOD CONTENT DURING WEEKENDS

The shift towards modern food content is because more money is available or even set aside for more expensive and special food purchases in most households. An elderly pensioner explained that she often saved money for weekends to purchase more vegetables.

"*Then for Sundays if I have money* [set money aside]. *I buy all* [a larger variety of] *the vegetables.*"

Most of the men employed as labourers are home over weekends and receive their weekly wages on Fridays. This was explained as follows:

"… over weekends people come from work and then they have pay. So that is why they buy more food."

"Ja, they eat more meat over weekends."

The Sunday midday meal has become the culinary highlight of the week for the participants. The kind of food prepared for the Sunday midday meal has become the norm for the kind of food associated with celebrations and special occasions (see 5.5.2). The food content on special occasions is therefore similar to that of weekends (see 9.2.2).

9.3.3   Food context on special occasions

At most special occasion events the general practice followed is to serve food similar to that prepared for the Sunday midday meal. It emerged as the norm or expected standard for the type of food that should be offered for a special occasion function. Participants always used the description *"food, like on a Sunday"* when talking about food for special occasions. Although both traditional and modern food categories are represented at these celebrations, the emphasis is on the inclusion of modern food.   However, when ancestral veneration requires the ritual slaughter and communication with the ancestors, there was consensus that traditional food had to be served. Those who still engage in traditional rituals associated with the rites of passage, strictly follow these prescriptions. Food content then moves over to the traditional pole during those stages of the celebrations where communication with the ancestors is compulsory. It should be noted that at other stages of these traditional celebrations (before and after the communication with the ancestors), modern food is enjoyed by those present. Those who continue in the practice of celebrating these traditional rites thus move with ease between the modern and traditional food categories and accept food from both. At modern celebrations such as modern weddings and birthdays, the food content leans over to the modern food category, although favourite traditional dishes are part of the menu.

As described in Chapter 4 (see 4.4.2) some Christian churches on the other hand, force and continue to influence their members to move away from the traditional fare towards the modern, and even forbid them from consuming certain traditional dishes. Christian churches were also instrumental in enforcing the process of acculturation on their members and this has not only contributed to the adjustment in the format of programmes for occasions such as wedding celebrations and funerals, but also affected the kind of food that may be eaten on these occasions. A clear indication has emerged that the food category used on special occasions is context-dependent as illustrated in Figure 9.6.
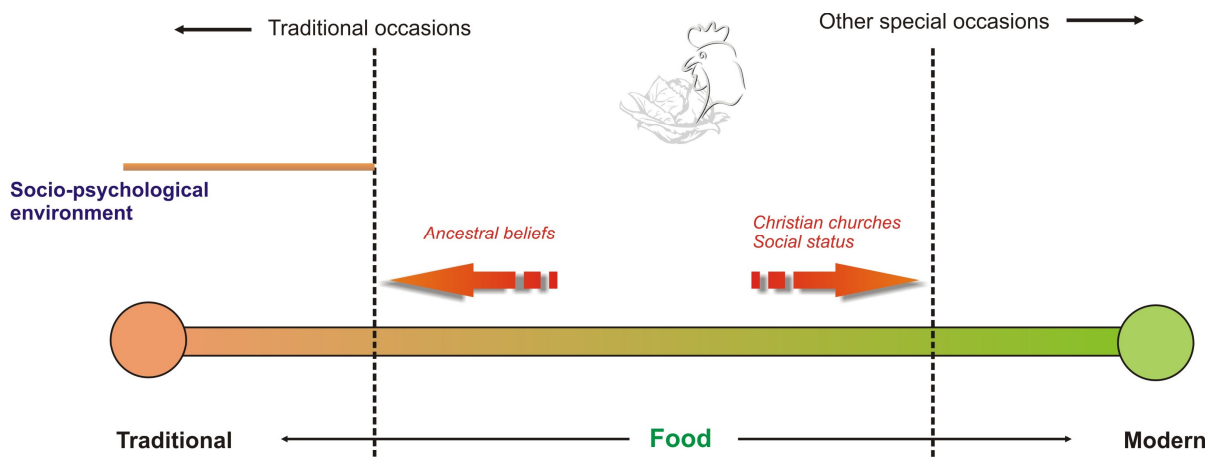
FIGURE 9.6: FOOD CONTENT ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS

In conclusion, a number of interrelated factors, from different environments, are closely associated with the above three food contexts. These factors or determinants act as driving forces that are often simultaneously responsible for steering or guiding the movement between the two food categories. The same food type can occupy different positions on the continuum between the traditional and modern food categories. The position on this continuum is largely dependent on the food context, and on the strength of the driving forces from the particular external or internal environments of a specific community, in this case, Mmotla

9.4 ACCULTURATION RESPONSE

The conceptual category described as the acculturation response refers to the position on the food content continuum that extends from the traditional to the modern food categories. Affordability, religious beliefs, cultural identity, prestige and social status, including the norms and standards associated with the specific food context, emerged as the most prominent driving forces that steers the acculturation response. The conceptual framework of the acculturation response that emerged from the analysis portrays these driving forces. It is presented in Figure 9.7.
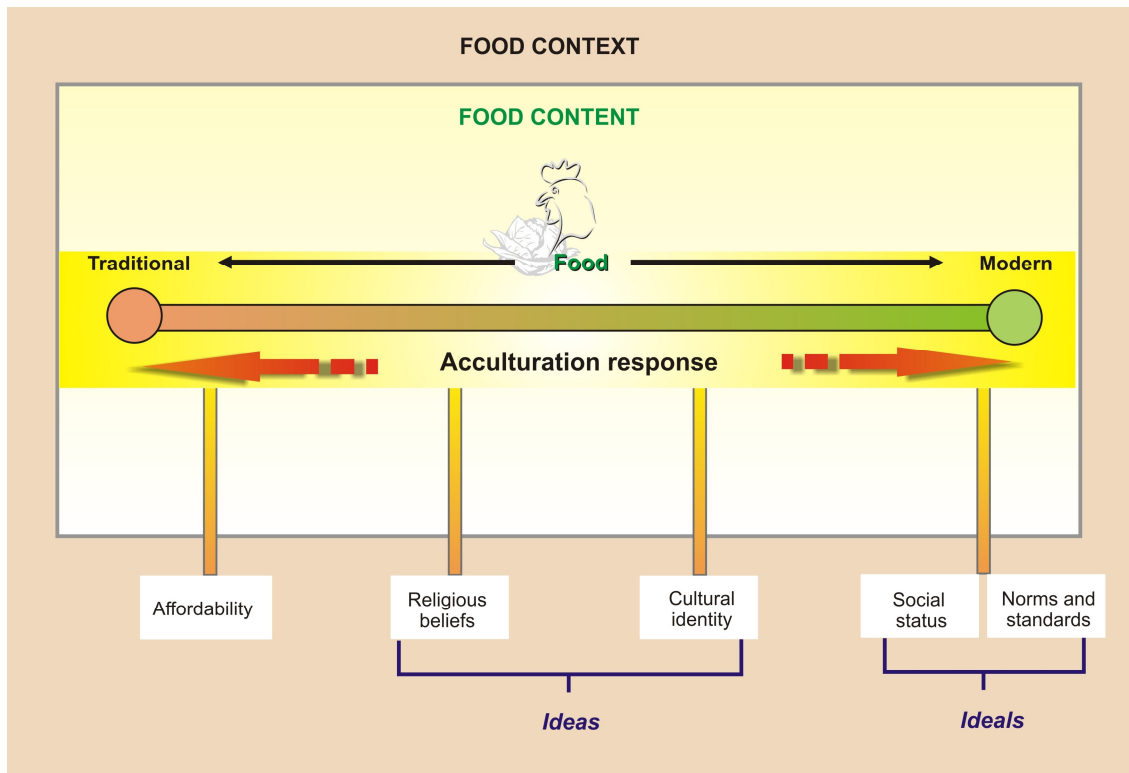
FIGURE 9.7: PLIANCY OF FOOD USE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework depicts the notion that food content is not only embedded in or interdependent on the specific food context but also shows that a number of interacting driving forces are steering the acculturation response either towards the traditional or the modern food category poles. The dominant driving forces are briefly discussed.

9.4.1 Affordability

Although the general tendency is to include more food from the modern food category, this depends on the money available for food purchases. Hence affordability becomes the determining force of where on the continuum, between traditional and modern food, the food content will be on weekdays. The majority of the participants resorted to low-cost food items as relishes to accompany the staple food of either maize-meal porridge or bread, due to a very limited food budget. Those who have more money have meat with one or two meals during the week and/or separate vegetable dishes prepared from cultivated vegetables.

Over weekends, the shift inclines towards the modern food category as a large number of convenient and/or fast food items are consumed in the majority of households, specifically on Saturdays (see 5.3.2.2). Expensive special treats such as cheese, French polony, baked products, sweets and soft drinks are often part of the eating pattern for Saturdays and

Sundays. Affordability is thus instrumental that eases the movement between these two culinary poles on weekdays and over weekends.

As special occasions are celebrated over weekends, money is more likely to be available. The caring and supportive role rendered by the social network and support group as described in Chapter 4 (see 4.4.3) and explained under paragraph 9.2.2 above, however, contributes significantly to the affordability of hosting such a special occasion according to the ideals set by the participants.

9.4.2   Religious beliefs

Another strong force that determined the acculturation response is that of the religious beliefs of the participants. The two opposing forces of Christianity and belief in ancestors are at work here and, in some instances, such as on special occasions, these two forces compete to drive the acculturation response toward one or the other of the two culinary poles. Again, a dualism is noted. There is a strong tendency to lean more toward the modern pole for special occasions. However, those who still participate in ancestral veneration, strictly follow traditional prescriptions and continue to prepare and consume traditional food on those occasions or at appropriate stages of ritual ceremonies when ancestral veneration takes place. Adhering to the traditional customs, as prescribed for ancestral veneration, means that the food content is forced toward the traditional food end of the continuum. Opposed to this, some Christian churches dictate and/or influence their members to abstain from traditional food (see 4.4.2), and thereby force the food content to the opposite modern food pole.

9.4.3   Cultural identity

Closely associated with the acculturation force of religious beliefs is the conceptual category of cultural identity. Food is a powerful marker of cultural identity (Bryant *et al.,* 2003:235; Crouch & O'Neill, 2000; Fischler, 1988) and this also emerged from the analysis of the findings of this research. It is reflected in the emphasis placed on adhering to traditional customs such as the regular communication with the ancestors and obeying their prescriptions with regard to honouring traditions, such as the serving of traditional food that is required during certain ritual procedures as described previously (see 9.4.2). Food is further used as a symbol of cultural identity by the inclusion of traditional dishes such as traditional beer, *ting mabele,* favourite legume dishes and *bogobe* on the menu of all special occasions.

9.4.4 Prestige and social status

The use and meaning of modern food is closely linked to prestige and social status and this has become associated with the ability to serve a large variety of foods from the modern food category on special occasions as previously explained (see 9.3). Food is often used as a symbol of prestige to indicate the social status and economic standing of the person using, sharing or giving food (Kittler & Sucher, 2008: 4; Bryant *et al.,* 2003:202; Fieldhouse, 1995:85). It has become important to impress others by preparing and serving large varieties of modern food for special celebrations. This was not only regarded as a hallmark of being modern and educated but also a subtle way to reveal the financial means and social standing or aspired social class of the host. This was conveyed in phrases such as *"we are from today"* to emphasise the importance attached to being regarded as someone who has kept abreast of changes in the social environment.

9.4.5 Norms and standards

Closely interrelated with prestige and social status are the norms and standards set for a specific food context. Norms and standards are culturally learned through socialisation and acculturation and are "normative gauges" or guidelines and rules that humans use when making food choices (Sobal *et al.,* 2006:5; Devine *et al.,* 1999; Furst *et al.,* 1996). It emerged that certain norms and standards were set for special occasions. As explained (see 9.3), the format and content of the Sunday midday meal has become the ultimate standard for the type of food associated with special occasions together with the emphasis on a larger variety and quantities of modern food.

The core category of "pliancy of food use" reveals that the acculturation response varies according to the food context and that the food content is adapted with ease as required by the specific situation in which the food is used. Apart from affordability, the food ideology of the participants, as represented by their ideas and ideals, is portrayed by how these two food categories of traditional and modern food fuse.

9.5 DISCUSSION ON THE PLIANCY OF FOOD USE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis sought to advance understanding of the situational or contextual nature of the food practices including the choice and use of food and meanings attached to food in general. The inductively developed pliancy of food use conceptual framework reflects how the people of Mmotla engage in food choice and use. It can be used to examine the flexibility

of food choice and use, as experienced during the week, over weekends and on special occasions.

The strength of the proposed framework is that it is grounded in the participants' own descriptions of their personal food choices and use in the different contexts in which they are engaged. The findings are important for understanding the needs of the black South African food consumer and to contribute to the theory related to the eating patterns of this group. To date, these issues have not been well addressed from a theoretical point of view. However, they are central to studies on the nutrition transition in South Africa and other food and nutrition studies focusing on nutrition intervention and food security (MacKeown *et al.,* 2007; Labadarios, Steyn, Maunder, MacIntyre, Gericke, Swart, Huskisson, Dannhauser, Vorster, Nesamvuni & Nel, 2005; Vorster *et al.,* 2005b; Bourne *et al.,* 2002; MacIntyre *et al.,* 2002; Labadarios *et al.*, 1996). This study, in the first instance, presents insights into the meanings that the people of Mmotla themselves attach to a specific food context in a holistic and contextual manner. In the second instance, its approach enhances in-depth understanding of all the interrelated and interdependent factors that contribute to the food practices of a specific food context. A holistic presentation of all the facets of their food practices as explicated, leads to an enriched appreciation and better understanding of the meanings attached to these practices and thus contributes to the theoretical underpinnings of food practices in a South African context.

Food practices are dynamic and constantly evolving. The pliancy of food use framework illustrates the adjustable nature of food practices described by the study group and confirms that the process of change with regard to food practices is an ongoing and evolving process. This view is consistent with other descriptions of food choice concepts and processes as portrayed in the food choice process model designed by Sobal *et al.* (2006) and Furst *et al.* (1996).

Acculturation, according to the developmental model of food culture (see 2.3.4.1), is one of the food culture changes that contributes to changing food practices that result from socio-cultural processes such as migration, urbanisation and modernisation. These in turn lead to changes not only in the physical environment of those participating in these societal changes, but also their impact on their socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments as well. These are then manifested in the altered beliefs, values, norms and standards concerning food practices. This framework is supported by the acculturation model of Segall (1979:186-188) and the dietary acculturation model of Saita-Abouta *et al.* (2002).

Due to developments such as modernisation, urbanisation and migration, changes in both the external and internal environments of the Mmotla participants took place. As proposed in the developmental model of food culture (see 2.3.4.1) these changes in society are analogous to changed trends in food usage and behaviour that are the direct result of the type of food that becomes available and accessible (Raschke & Cheema, 2007; D'Haese & Van Huylenbroek, 2005; Weatherspoon & Reardon, 2003; Walker, 1992; Walker *et al.,* 1992). It emerged from the findings that, over the past four decades, more Western-oriented and other newly developed foods were introduced to and have become available and accessible to the people of Mmotla, and gradually became part of their culinary repertoire and eating patterns. Simultaneously new uses and meanings are now associated with these food items.

The overriding themes in the proposed pliancy of food use framework are **acculturation response** and **context.** The framework portrays that the acculturation response drives the extent of acculturation, including the degree of acceptance of certain foods in a particular food context. It emerged that three separate sets of interrelated thematic dimensions (affordability, ideas and ideals) are instrumental in guiding or driving the acculturation response of a specific food context towards either one of the culinary poles or any position between them. These dimensions are not only consistent with the contextual or situational factors reported on by other researchers (Marshall & Bell, 2003; Connors *et al.,* 2001; Devine *et al.*, 1999; Furst *et al.,* 1996), but also provide valuable insights into the food choice and use of the participants.

Affordability is defined as having the financial resources available for the needed or desired food purchases. Sobal *et al.* (2006:6) point out that individuals construct their food choices by being aware of their available or accessible resources and in the process exclude those foods that are not within their financial means. As the participants are forced to purchase most of their food, the price of food and their financial ability largely determine what category of food can be purchased and consumed during the week and over weekends.

Ideas represent the ideation component of culture. Culture guides societal members about the way they should think, feel and act, and this means that "culture designates the socially standardized activities of people" (Axelson, 1986:345). Through their customs, which includes all food-related activities, people depict the learned and shared meanings of their culture.

In the food choice process model of Furst *et al.* (1996) and the extended model by Sobal *et al.* (2006), ideals include the standards or normative measures that individuals use to guide

their food choices. These are learnt through socialisation and acculturation, which indicate their cultural grounding (Sobal *et al.,* 2006:5). What is acceptable and preferable for consumption is determined by cultural and sub-cultural norms and individuals then see these as ideals in food selection. A number of studies confirm that the ideals that individuals have about proper meals, appropriate manners and what is suitable for a specific food event, direct their food choice (Bisogni *et al.*, 2005; Bisogni *et al.*, 2002; Furst *et al.,* 1996; Charles & Kerr, 1988).

Apart from these three dimensions, the food context (i.e. on weekdays, during weekends and on special occasions), and who participates in the social interaction, also steers the acculturation response towards a specific pole and contributes to the underlying meanings attached to the food. In the proposed framework, the fluidity or movement between the two "culinary poles" confirms that **context** is an important determinant of food choice and use. This is consistent with other research findings (Marshall & Bell, 2003; Connors *et al.,* 2001; Devine *et al.*, 1999; Furst *et al.,* 1996) and, in a recent study, Blake *et al.* (2007) confirm that people's conceptualisation and categorisation of food depends on the food context. This again underscores the importance of food context to understand human food choice and use.

The findings on food choice and use of the participants in the various contexts, further contribute to the theory of the eating patterns of the black South African food consumer. Apart from the meal patterns and meal cycles that serve as an indication of the number of eating events, eating patterns in addition, give an account of the meal composition and the social organisation associated with the meal (Kittler & Sucher, 2008:9; Connors *et al.,* 2001; Mäkelä, 2000:10; Oltersdorf *et al.*, 1999). Valuable information emerged on how the food context and the social organisation associated with it, guide, and in some instances even dictate, the food content or meal composition of a food event in this South African community.

The underlying meanings and messages that the participants attach to food can also be inferred from how food is used as symbol, sign or code and is part of an intricate symbol system that conveys cultural meanings (Roth, 2001; Counihan, 2000:1516-1517). This is not only illustrated in the "pliancy of food use" core category, but also in the other core category, "polysemic food" that specifies that several symbolic meanings can be attached to a specific food or category of foods.

9.6   POLYSEMIC FOOD

Polysemic means that many symbolic meanings can be simultaneously attached to an item (Bryant *et al.,* 2003:223) which, in this case, is food. Included under the collective category "polysemic food", are two examples that emerged from the findings. The meanings attached to the sacrificial goat by the Ndebele and the bread and red jam served at the *iqude* celebration are given to illustrate their polysemic meanings.

9.6.1   "The polysemic goat"

From the data collated, it came to light that the Ndebele participants attach a number of symbolic meanings to the sacrificial goat, or specific parts of it, that are context related. The sacrificial goat, or certain parts of it, mainly symbolised either ideological meanings or meanings related to the social organisation of the group. In certain instances, both groups of meanings are simultaneously represented in a specific context. Three contexts emerged where the sacrificial goat or parts of it, symbolised various meanings. Because ancestral veneration is central to the world view of these participants it is dealt with as the first context in the discussion on the symbolic meanings attached to the sacrificial goat. The meanings symbolised by the sacrificial goat at the *iqude* and during the traditional Ndebele wedding procedures are presented as the second and third contexts respectively. To support the discussion, Figure 9.8 depicts these three contexts and the symbolic meanings attached to the sacrificial goat in each.
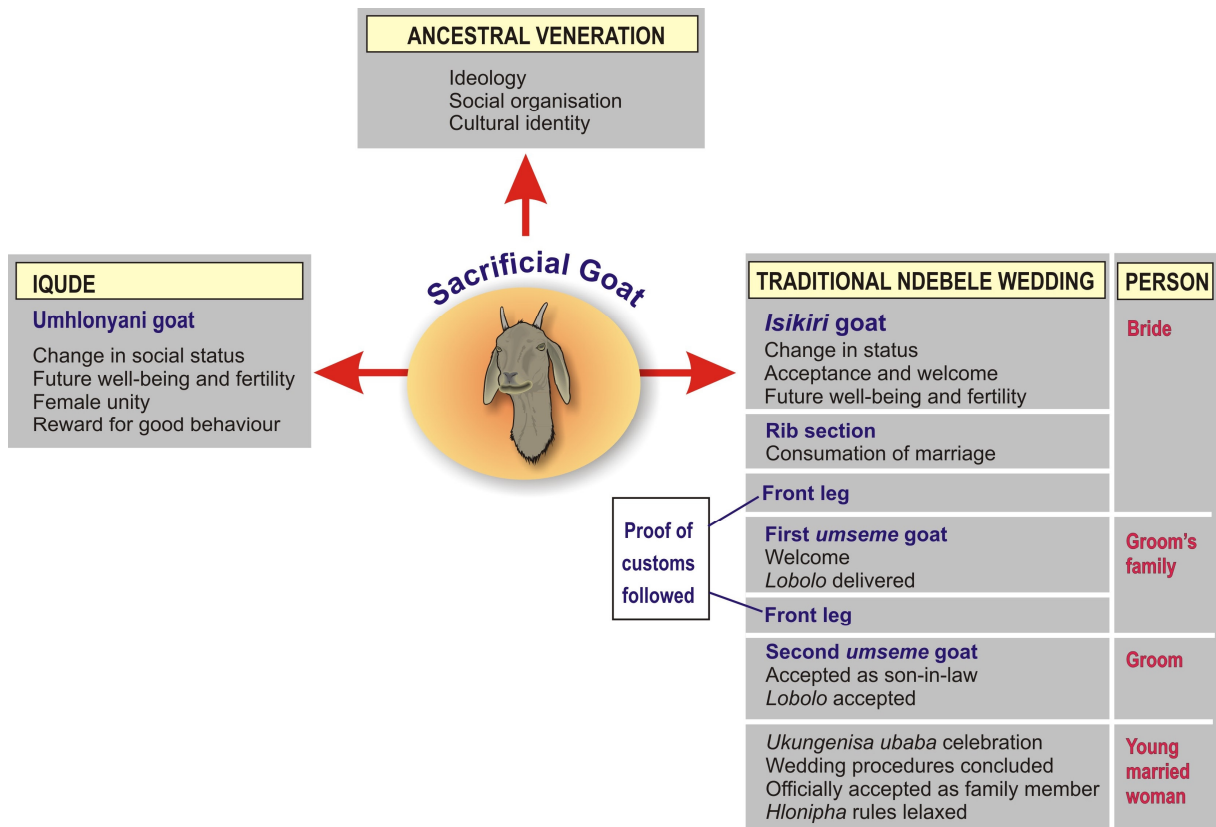
FIGURE 9.8: SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE SACRIFICIAL GOAT

9.6.1.1 Ancestral veneration

The ritually slaughtered goat represents important underlying facets of the **ideology** of the participants and specifically their beliefs, values and world view. The sacrificial slaughter of a goat symbolises, in the first instance, belief in the ancestors, and simultaneously obedience is symbolised through the act of veneration and informing them of the major events and milestones in the lives of those they left behind (see 8.2.). This signifies that the deceased are remembered, honoured and respected members of the kinship group. In paying tribute to the ancestors, they are not only openly honoured and acknowledged but the consequences of obeying the prescribed customs they demand, is emphasised. At the same time, this is a sign of aspects of the participants' world view. Through veneration, important information is passed on to the ancestors. It was explained that the ancestors expect to be informed of what has become of their descendants in order to be able to ensure and guard their well-being.

Important meanings regarding the **social organisation** of the group are also portrayed through such an act. The ancestors are acknowledged and honoured as elders and as such, they continue to be treated and respected as part of the kinship group that needs to be informed and consulted on grounds of their seniority (Theron, 1996:29-33; Hammond-Tooke,

1974:325; Eiselen & Schapera, 1962:254). The reward for adhering to the traditions and customs ancestors prescribe is well-being in the form of future prosperity and fertility. The deep-seated belief that the ancestors are directly instrumental in the welfare and procreation of descendants is emphasised in the importance and even anxiousness associated with the ritual to slaughter a goat at both the male and female initiation ceremonies and at traditional weddings. The sacrificial goat, for example, becomes a symbolic guarantee for future prosperity and fertility of a female as effected in the slaughter of the goat at the *iqude,* and *isikiri* celebrations (see 6.6.3 and 7.2.2). It is believed that adherence to and strictly following the prescriptions of the ancestors, namely to keep them informed, ensures the future success and continuation of the family lineage.

Apart from recognising their seniority in the kinship group, performing these rituals inculcates values of obedience and respect for the ancestors through honouring traditions and customs. At the same time, **cultural identity** is reflected through adhering to the prescribed initiation and traditional wedding customs. On these occasions the sacrificial goat also signifies other aspects of **social organisation** related to social and kinship relationships as well as to social status, cultural identity and the religious beliefs of those who participate in the event.

During the rite of passage celebrations such as those for initiation and marriage, for example, the slaughtered goat symbolises a change in status within the family and society of the females undergoing the process. The goat slaughtered at the *iqude,* for example, serves as symbol that the girl is now fully grown and ready (physically and emotionally) to undergo the process of *iqude*. The goat becomes a symbol of the mutual agreement among family members on the status of the girl in society who is about to change from a girl to that of a nubile young woman, as illustrated in the following quotations:

"It is to show that she is no longer a child, but is a teenager."

"She goes to the grandparents [maternal grandparents] *so that they can say thank you that she has grown up and to inform the ancestors. The grandmother will slaughter a goat just to inform the ancestors that the girl has now grown up."*

Similarly, the *isikiri* goat represents the young woman's transition to the married state. This goat symbolises that the bride is henceforth regarded as a married woman as explained in the following quotation:

 "… when you go to your in-laws [for the *isimanje* process]*, then they must slaughter a goat to show that now you are a woman. You are no longer a girl…"*

The second context where the sacrificial goat signifies several symbolic meanings is at the *iqude*.

9.6.1.2 *Iqude*

The *umhlonyani* goat slaughtered on the Friday at the beginning of the *iqude* of a girl, has various symbolic meanings attached to it. By informing the ancestors of the process the girl is about to undergo, her **future well-being** is ensured because the ancestors have knowledge of what is happening to her. This is important, as explained before, because it serves as a precaution to ensure that the future fertility of the girl is not negatively influenced by disgruntled ancestors. It is strongly believed that the goat has to be slaughtered to ensure the girl's ability to bear children. This is illustrated by the emphasis placed on this goat as indicated in the following statements:

"The goat must be slaughtered. It is also for the ancestors, even if they don't speak with the ancestors. But the ancestors will see and agree with you that the girl has grown up. If the goat is not slaughtered the ancestors will be unhappy."

"… but there must be a goat, if there is not a goat, something terrible can happen to the girl, maybe she cannot have children, and then you find that there was a mistake, they didn't slaughter a goat."

The *umhlonyani* goat is specifically for the females attending this celebration and only females are allowed to eat the meat from this goat. The sharing of the meat from this goat is a symbol of **female unity** and it was emphasised that the entire goat has to be consumed by the females at this celebration. It was explained the elderly women and the young girls often have to finish the rest of the meat, if any was left, before the beast could be slaughtered for the *iqude* celebrations on Saturday.

The slaughter of the goat was also viewed by some as a symbol of the girl's good behaviour of not being sexually active and falling pregnant before the *iqude*. The goat thus epitmises her good behaviour and its slaughter confirms that the norms of society were followed. Thus the goat is also regarded as a **reward** for her good behaviour, simultaneously indicating that the goat acknowledges her new status in society, namely that of a nubile female. The following quotation endorses this interpretation:

"It is to show now she can be married to say thank you that she didn't sleep around with boys. … then it is now the time if you want to be [get] *married."*

The traditional Ndebele wedding is the third context where the sacrificial goat and certain parts of it, signify a number of symbolic meanings.

9.6.1.3 Traditional Ndebele wedding

The first goat slaughtered during the wedding procedures is at the *isikiri* celebration, and similarly the *isikiri* goat has various symbolic meanings attached to it. It was explained that when the goat is slaughtered the ancestors of the groom's family are again informed of the important event in the life of one of their male descendants.

The importance attached to the slaughtering of this goat was illustrated by one of the elderly participants who gave an account of a personal experience referring to the example of her sister's wedding. At the time of the wedding the in-laws of her sister failed to slaughter the *isikiri* goat for her and the ancestors of her brother-in-law were thus not informed that the marriage was going to take place. The participant's sister then had a child who was paralysed and this condition of the child was believed to be a direct result of the fact that the paternal ancestors of the child were not informed of the marriage through the sacrificial goat. The child was only healed after the prescribed goat was slaughtered.

Apart from symbolising that her status in society changes from that of an unmarried young woman to that of a married woman, the goat denotes that the bride is **accepted** in the groom's family through the slaughter of the goat and informing the ancestors that a marriage is going to take place. Some participants regarded the slaughtered goat as sign of being **welcomed** into the family of the groom. This was revealed by statements such as the following:

"*The goat that they slaughter for the makoti* [bride] *is to show her that they welcome her in the new family.*"

"*It is just a symbol that she is welcome at the in-laws.*"

A similar reason was offered to explain why the goats were slaughtered at the wedding celebration at the bride's family. Here the goats represent that the groom and his family and friends are **welcome** at the bride's family. During these celebrations at the bride's family, apart from the two beasts that are slaughtered, two goats are slaughtered as well (see 7.2.4). These goats symbolise not only hospitality and acceptance of the male members of the groom's family, but also serve as a sign of agreement that the *lobolo* transaction was completed to the satisfaction of both parties concerned. The first goat is slaughtered in

honour of the father of the groom (who is not present at the celebrations at the home of the bride's parents) and for the men who accompanied the *lobolo* cattle or handed over the *lobolo* as the representatives of the father of the groom. The second goat is slaughtered in honour of the groom. The first goat is a sign of the acceptance on the part of the bride's family that they agree with the *lobolo* delivered and are **satisfied** with it. The family of the bride slaughters the *umseme* goat as sign of the **acceptance** of the *lobolo* and that the groom's wedding party is welcome at the family of the bride. This was explained as follows:

"The goat is for the umseme. Before they can sit down the makoti's family must slaughter these. Before they can say you are welcome, sit down."

"… it is before they can sit down, before they can allow them to sit they will slaughter them a goat."

The front leg of a slaughtered goat is used to communicate proof to the other family that a procedure was performed according to the prescribed custom. As described above, a number of goats are slaughtered at the different stages of the traditional Ndebele wedding at the family homes of either the groom or the bride. At certain stages it is required that the ancestors be duly informed. The family members who are not present require proof that the in-laws of their child have performed the prescribed rituals. Part of the slaughtered goat is then taken back to the other family as evidence that a goat was slaughtered as part of the ritual and/or that ancestral veneration took place if it was required. Evidence of this is required in the following cases, namely, when the bride returns from the groom's family after the *isimanje* for the wedding celebrations at her parents' home, when the representatives from the groom's father return to him (the father of the groom) after delivering the *lobolo* cattle, and after the birth of a child.

The bride will take one of the forelegs of the *isikiri* goat that was slaughtered for her, back to her family when she returns the next day for the wedding procedures at her parents' home. This "*arm of the goat*" serves as sign to the bride's family that the prescribed ritual procedures were followed and that the ancestors of the groom's family have been notified of the marriage and that she is accepted as a daughter-in-law in the family. This evidence reassures the bride's family that the groom's family have followed the customary rituals and thereby ensures that the ancestors of the groom would not be offended and punish their daughter by causing her to be infertile or to bear disabled children.

The other instance where the *"arm of the goat"* is used as proof of the performance of a customary procedure is where it is used as sign to the father of the groom that the *lobolo*

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transaction took place to the satisfaction of all concerned. In this case, the foreleg of the goat, slaughtered in honour of the groom's father and as sign that the men who represented him were welcome at the bride's family, is taken to him as proof that the *lobolo* cattle were delivered and that both parties agreed and that the transaction took place. The foreleg of the goat becomes a symbol of the transaction that was settled.

The last goat slaughtered as part of the traditional Ndebele wedding procedures honours the young married woman some time after the wedding (it could be after two or more years) when the in-laws slaughter a goat. This not only signifies that the long and involved traditional Ndebele wedding process has reached its concluding stage, but also that the young woman is now fully accepted and acknowledged as part of her husband's family. Once the young married woman has been fully accepted into the grooms' family, she is traditionally allowed to drink milk at the home of her in-laws and to talk to her father-in-law as described in Chapter 7 (see 7.2.7). At the time of the study, this part of the procedure was still regarded as essential although emphasis on the milk consumption has fallen away as people do not own herds anymore. Some families, however, continue to enforce this restriction together with restricting the consumption of eggs. The symbolic meanings attached to this procedure still apply as it is closely related to the *hlonipha.* Here the slaughtered goats have, once again, a number of meanings.

The goat slaughtered by the father-in-law symbolises that his daughter-in-law is now officially accepted and regarded as part of the family. By being accepted, some of the strict *hlonipha* rules to which a married woman is bound, are relaxed. For example, she is now allowed to drink milk at the home of her in-laws, and to talk to her father-in-law and receive him and his brothers as guests at her house, which was not permissible before.

"They only slaughter a goat and then they say now we release [lift the restriction on milk consumption] *you, you can eat milk."*

The bread and red jam served at the *iqude* celebration, similar to the sacrificial goat, also symbolises a number of meanings that are context-dependent, and serves as another example of a polysemic food.

9.6.2   Bread and red jam as symbol of the *iqude*

In Chapter 6 (see 6.6.3) the procedures and food practices associated with the first *iqude* celebration were described. The importance and meanings of serving bread and red jam on Sunday afternoon after lunch was highlighted. The bread and red jam has become symbolic

of the *iqude* celebrations in recent times. Figure 9.9 gives a diagrammatic representation of these symbolic meanings attached to the bread and red jam.
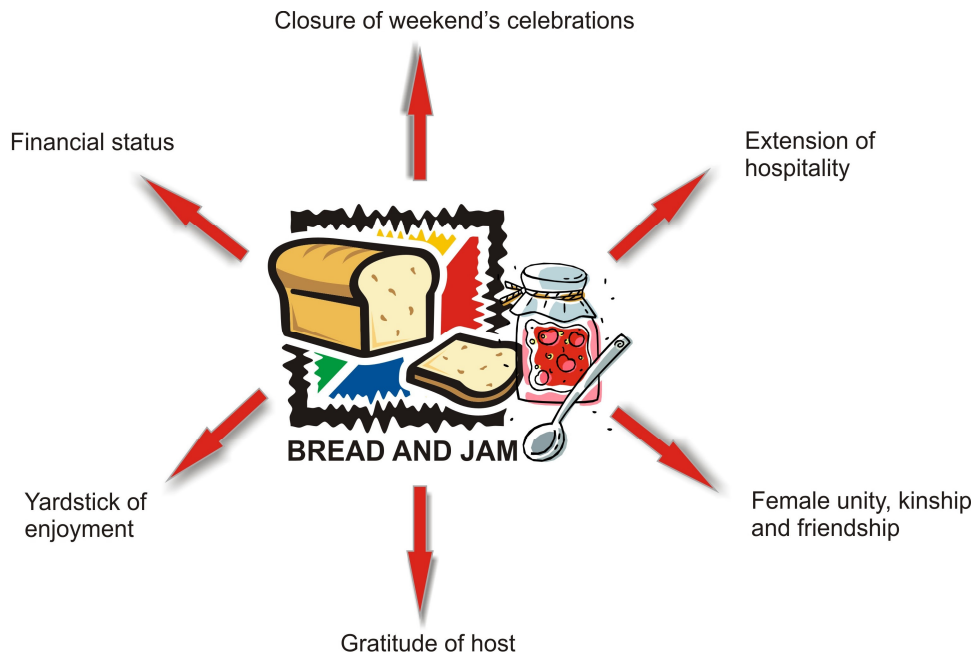
Closure of weekend's celebrations

Financial status

Extension of hospitality

BREAD AND JAM

Yardstick of enjoyment

Female unity, kinship and friendship

Gratitude of host

FIGURE 9.9: SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE BREAD AND RED JAM AT THE IQUDE

When bread and red jam is served, it signals that the weekend's celebrations are drawing to a close. As a symbol of the extension of the hospitality of the hosts, this special treat at the *iqude* is given to each female with a daughter who has already undergone the *iqude*. Here it serves as symbol of female unity and simultaneously of kinship and friendship ties that are strengthened through this celebration. According to Jansen van Vuuren's (1992:386) observations, this is given in reciprocity for the gifts received from the guests on their departure on Sunday afternoon and thus symbolises the gratitude of the host as well. To be in the position to hand a loaf of bread and tin of red jam to each female guest symbolises the financial status of the host and the gesture has prestige value attached to it as well. Some participants even regarded it as a yardstick to measure enjoyment and the success of the celebrations according to the extent to which the bread and red jam was given.

The symbolism attached to the bread and red jam at the *iqude* mainly represents the prestige and status of the family who hosts the celebration.

9.7 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

In following the grounded theory approach to data analysis two core categories emerged from the findings. The first core category was "the pliancy of food use" and three aspects closely related to it, namely food content, food context and acculturation response were identified. This core category illustrated the use and meanings that the participants attached to traditional and modern food as well as the fluidity and ease with which the participants used food from each of these two extreme culinary poles depending on the context in which the food is used. Through discussion on the use of both the traditional and modern food categories, the food ideology of the participants was portrayed as a reflection of their beliefs, values, attitudes, world view and cultural identity with evidence that related to how each food category was used.

The second core category concerned "polysemic food" that revealed the numerous symbolic meanings that were attached to specific foods or a food category in a specific context. The symbolic meanings attached to traditional beer, modern food, the sacrificial goat, and the bread and red jam at the first *iqude* celebration by the Ndebele group, were identified as themes under this core category. Aspects of the food ideology of the participants were reflected through the multiple symbolic meanings attached to the sacrificial goat and traditional beer, whereas the symbolism attached to modern food and the bread and red jam at the *iqude* mostly related to prestige and status.

TERMINOLOGY LIST

bogobe	Stiff maize-meal porridge
chicken mala	Chicken intestines
gemere	Ginger beer. See Addendum D
hlonipha	Showing respect or treating someone respectfully
iqude	Ndebele female initiation
irhayi	Dish prepared from dried maize and cowpeas. See Addendum C
isikiri	Last phase of the *isimanje* and first wedding celebration at the groom's parents' home
isimanje	The couple of days that the bride spends at the home of the groom's parents in preparation for her marriage into the family
mabele	Sorghum
makoti	Pedi for bride
maotwana	Chicken feet
mogodu	Ox tripe
morogo	Collective name for indigenous green leafy vegetables
ting ya mabele	Fermented sorghum meal porridge
thabalala	Alcoholic beverage prepared from malted sorghum
umhlonyani goat	Goat slaughtered for the girl undergoing the *iqude*
umkhupha	Maize-meal and legume dish. See Addendum C
umseme	Woven grass sleeping mat

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Why people eat as they do is indeed an intricate phenomenon to unravel. Many influences from different environments shape human food practices and the embedded food choice process (Bryant *et al.*, 2003:2; Story *et al.*, 2002; Schifferstein *et al.,* 2001:5-6; Pelto *et al.,* 2000:1; Sobal *et al.,* 1998). Any food consumption event, be it an ordinary weekday meal, a snack or a meal prepared for a special occasion, is guided by a number of interrelated issues emanating from a variety of sources. These result in a composite matrix of factors and environments that are involved in the food practice process (see Chapter 2).

Not only do multiple factors contribute to the creation of food practices in a complex manner but, as part of culture, the development of food practices too is an ongoing and dynamic process that continues to evolve as a result of active large-scale socio-cultural processes as spelt out in the developmental model of food culture (see 2.3.4.1). Some of the mentioned socio-cultural processes explicated in this model have been identified as accounting for the changes noted in the lifestyle and food practices of black South African population groups (Vorster *et al.,* 2005b; Bourne, *et al.*, 2002; MacIntyre, *et al.,* 2002; Walker & Charlton, 2001; Labadarios, *et al.,* 1996; Walker, 1995; Bourne *et al.*, 1993). Existing literature reports on these changes, and acknowledges South Africa's nutritional transition. However, describing the food practices in place at the turn of the twenty-first century, explaining the meanings attached to them and accounting for the changes that took place, were not addressed at all. This research accommodates these issues and some of its findings do confirm changes reported in the literature on the nutrition transition in South Africa (Mackeown *et al.,* 2007; Vorster *et al.,* 2005b; MacIntyre *et al.,* 2002; Vorster, Bourne, Venter & Oosthuizen, 1999; Labadarios *et al.,* 1996). However, it seems to be the first time that a holistic and contextual approach to studying the food practices of a South African black community has been undertaken.

The aim of this study was thus not only to give a comprehensive description of the food practices of a black South African community at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but

also to gain an understanding of **why** these practices are followed and **what** meanings are attached to them including **how** and **why** the changes took place. This in itself necessitated that the underlying factors that contributed to the observed development and change be included in such an investigation.

Against this background the overarching goal of the research was to describe and understand how meanings emerged from the context and how these could be used to construe the food practices of the peoples living in Mmotla. This goal was realised through the following objectives:

- To describe and interpret the food practices in this community and **how** the food practices developed over time.
- To describe and interpret how the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environmental forces manifest in their food practices during social interaction and **what meanings** are associated with these food practices during social interaction.
- To identify the **salient codes** (both modern and traditional) and the meanings that are in interplay when food practices are negotiated to define situations, interpret meanings or assign new meanings to facilitate effective communication.

With the three theoretical perspectives and the theoretical framework presented in Figure 2.1 as point of departure, the main findings, conclusions, advances and contributions of this research on the food practices and their meanings, are drawn together. This is to illustrate how the findings augment the theory on the development of food practices and their associated meanings in a South African context. Some of this research's findings do confirm changes in eating patterns and reasons why changes occurred as reported in the extant literature. These results advance and enhance existing work as they add a new depth of understanding of the food practices of this South African community. Furthermore, this research contributes additional knowledge that arises from these findings derived from investigating the everyday food practices and those applicable to special occasions, including the meanings attached to them in each context.

10.2   CONCLUSIONS DERIVED FROM THE MAIN FINDINGS

A holistic and contextual understanding of human food practices necessitated that all the environmental levels and their embedded factors be taken into account (Rozin, 2007:8; Bryant *et al.,* 2003:3; Story *et al.,* 2002; Pelto *et al.,* 2000:2; Sims & Smiciklas-Wright, 1978). How the food practices of the Mmotla people were shaped by factors from their socio-cultural

and socio-psychological environments during social interaction was of significance for an in-depth understanding of their food practices and their associated meanings. Although the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments were particularly important, contributions from the other environmental levels are also acknowledged. Contemporary food practices and their meanings were thus interpreted against the multifaceted matrix that developed through the interrelationships and interdependency of the various environments in which these people lived and were in contact with on a daily basis. The human ecological perspective, used as principle theoretical framework for this study, and supported by the cultural perspective and the tenets of symbolic interactionism, afforded the opportunity to secure a holistic and contextual understanding as justified in Chapter 2 (see 2.3).

Figure 2.1 (see Chapter 2) illustrated not only the contribution of the various environmental levels to the food choice process as part of food practices, but also sought to portray the interrelatedness and interdependency between these environmental levels including the reciprocal interaction between humans and their environments.

10.2.1 Development of contemporary food practices

An expansion of the model given in Figure 2.1 is now used to show how factors at the various environmental levels interplay in the formation of the contemporary food practices of the Mmotla people. The contribution of the three theoretical perspectives to achieve a contextual approach added new depth to the understanding of the food practices of this South African community and contributed to refining the theory related to issues of significance in the South African context. This was specifically achieved through the insights obtained when interrogating **how** and **why** changes had taken place, thereby enhancing the understanding of the meanings they attached to them.

The basic premise of the human ecological perspective deals with the way in which humans interact with their surrounding environments and emphasises a reciprocity and interrelatedness between humans and their environments, noting that they co-exist as a unity (Sobal *et al.,* 2006:2; Story *et al.,* 2002; Sobal *et al.,* 1998; Bubolz & Sontag, 1993: 425; Sims & Smiciklas-Wright, 1978). Food practices, and the underlying food choice process, form part of human behaviour and are steered by the various environments with which they interact. **What** people eat is in the first place, determined by **where** people live, this implies that not only the physical environment but all the other environments such as the economic and political as well as the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are involved and contribute to the food choice process (Rozin, 2007: 10-15; Bryant *et al.,* 2003:10; Sobal *et al.,* 1998).

The human ecological perspective was a suitable avenue through which to explore, interpret and understand the development of the food practices of the Mmotla people and the various contexts in which food is used. The dynamic nature of this perspective acknowledges that adaptations and changes in any one of the environments impinge on the other interlinked environments, and this contributed to a successful holistic understanding of their food practices. Contemporary food practices of the peoples in Mmotla were shaped, and continue to be shaped, by a series of adaptations and changes to the physical and social environments in that each has a reciprocal causation effect on all the other interrelated environments and factors embedded in them as depicted in Figure 10.1.
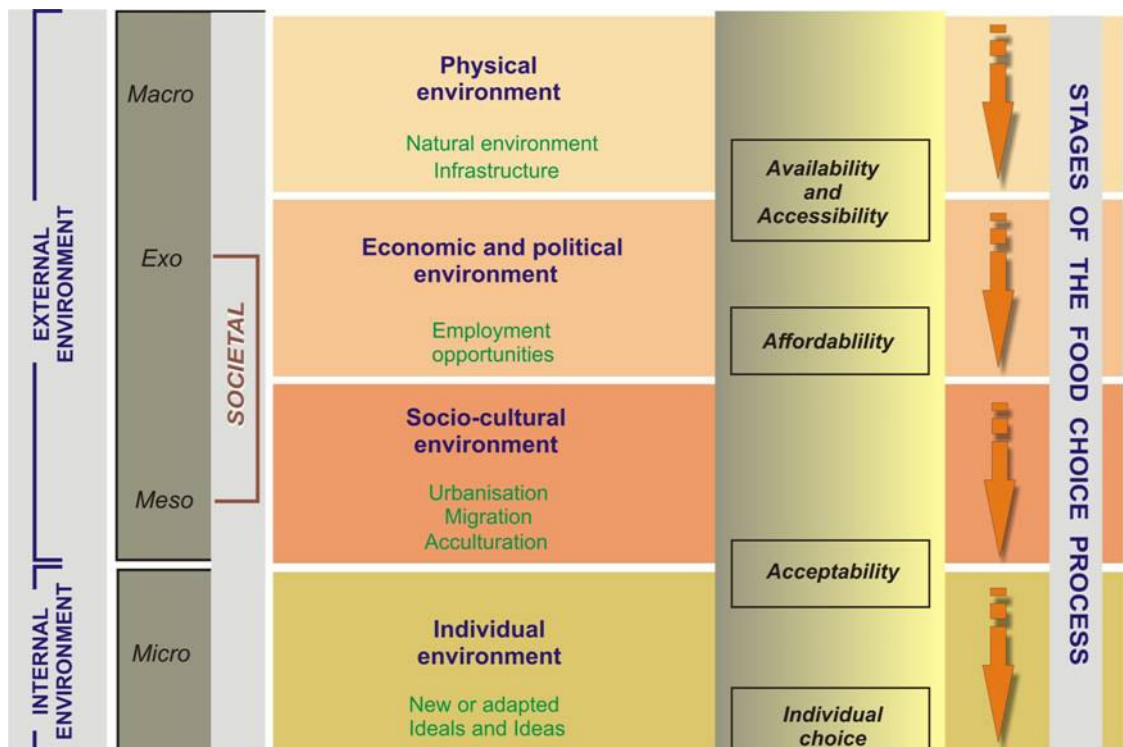

FIGURE 10.1: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTEMPORARY FOOD PRACTICES

Figure 10.1[42] portrays the most salient factors from each ecological environmental level that contributed to the contemporary food practices of the Mmotla community. This includes the stages in the food choice process where they are significant. These are indicated in black. How the contemporary food practices developed over the past four decades is linked to these factors, as they had a direct bearing on food availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability. The **availability** of food was, in the first instance, determined by the physical

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[42] The conceptual framework of the study was based on Figure 2.1 and presented in the traditional circle format characteristic of human ecological models. In order to obtain a more legible model the rectangular format of Figure 2.1 is used in this chapter to illustrate the development of the final conceptual framework of the study.

environment of Mmotla. A detailed description of this environment is given in Chapter 4 (see 4.2 and 4.3). The restrictions of the natural environment curtailed the opportunity to cultivate food for household consumption and forced them to resort to commercially available food products. They not only became dependent on the retail sector to provide for their basic food needs, but they also needed money to obtain these food commodities. The location and infrastructure of the village was another factor associated with the physical environment that contributed to how readily food products were **available** and **accessible**. Typical of such small villages, the few stores located there often supplied only basic food items and other bare necessities, usually at a higher price compared to what was charged in larger stores and supermarkets. Similar to other black South African communities the **affordability** of food became a major hurdle in the **accessibility** of food (D'Haese & Van Huylenbroeck, 2005; Labadarios *et al.*, 2005; Rose & Charlton, 2002; Walker & Charlton, 2001). This situation further entrenched the need to have a disposable income and cash available to purchase even the most basic of food items. Limited **employment opportunities** in Mmotla led to an increased urge to seek employment in the nearby border industrial areas and urban areas of Pretoria and Johannesburg. This meant that those who had employment in these cities had to commute between their place of residence and where they worked. Considerable cost and time is involved in commuting between 50 and 100 km, and in some instances even more than 100 km.

Humans respond to and change, develop or modify their environments that often pose constraints, yet they also offer opportunities (Bryant *et al.*, 2003:10; Bubolz & Sontag, 1993: 433). The limited availability of and accessibility to traditional food and the inability to cultivate any crops for household consumption, forced the people of Mmotla to adapt and make changes in their food choices. They did this through the inclusion of the available commercial Western-oriented foods in their food patterns. In order to make these adjustments in response to the constraints of the physical and economic environments, necessitated employment in the nearby urban and industrial areas to earn an income. Inevitably, this led to a continuous movement between place of employment and residence. **Migration** and **urbanisation** were thus accelerated through this need to have a disposable income. Through migration and urbanisation increased contact and interaction with people from other cultures and ethnic groups were established. This created and contributed to a chain of reciprocal responses in the various environments of the study group. The most common and rapid way of responding to environmental changes that humans make, is by means of socio-cultural adaptations (Bryant *et al.,* 2003:12; Pelto *et al.*, 2000:3).

Employment in white households and in industry brought them not only in closer contact with the white culture and the Western-oriented urban lifestyle, but also with other black cultural

groups in the workplace and larger society. Apart from the close contact that was established with other cultural groups in the workplace, the immediate residential environment of the participants simultaneously enhanced cross-cultural interaction. As a direct result of the political agenda of the past, the forced eviction of groups of people from nearby urban areas and farms, and the relocation to this village and the neighbouring township of Soshanguve, contributed to the creation of this village and its multi-cultural character. The increased exposure and interaction with the Western-oriented culture and money economy, the contact and interaction with people from other cultural groups in the workplace and community, all led to **acculturation** and **modernisation**. This, together with the emphasis on education and training in order to secure better employment to improve earning power, as well as the conversion to the Christian religion, further contributed to the increased and continuous exposure to other cultures including their world views, beliefs, values and attitudes. In response to this exposure, adaptations and change in the social and cultural environments followed. This resulted in changes in each of the three components of culture where it became visible in their food usage and food-related behaviour. In his model of social dynamics and food culture, Sobal (2000) posits that, when major structural changes such as modernisation, urbanisation and migration occur, changes in food culture are part of the complex process. This was also the case in Mmotla and became visible in the material culture and behaviour of the people of Mmotla as manifest in their food practices.

Change was visible in the food (material culture) and the associated food behaviour (menti-facts and socio-facts) that portrayed the concurrent changes in the beliefs, values and attitudes of individuals and groups of individuals in this community. The impact of technological developments, mainly as a result of modernisation and urbanisation as well as changes in the physical environment, contributed to an increased availability and exposure to new and other food products. The availability and access to basic services such as piped water, sanitation and electricity, which are closely associated with the physical environment and indirectly affect food practices, have only become available to the majority of the residents in recent years, after the dismantling of *apartheid.* This, together with the continuous interaction with people from other cultures and social groups in the community, the workplace, church and school, simultaneously increased the exposure and introduction to foods others use. Exposure to other kinds of food not only included how and when it was used and prepared, but also the underlying meanings attached to it. Aspects of the food ideology and food behaviour of other people were also integrated, and implied transformed beliefs, values and attitudes toward food in general. These were ultimately noticed as either **adapted** or **new ideas** and **ideals** at the individual and socio-psychological environmental level, and were eventually reflected in the food practices and the meanings individuals and the group attached to them.

To understand the dynamic nature of the changes that took place in the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments of the participants, the cultural perspective and symbolic interactionism complemented the human ecological perspective. Both these theoretical frameworks deal with meaning and facilitate the uncovering of the meanings attached to food in various contexts and situations. The major focus of this study dealt with how the meanings attached to food and food practices, developed and changed over time, as well as why these became obvious in a certain way. Moreover, it included finding out how the situation or context guided the choice of specific foods to give them meaning, and how these meanings were interpreted, negotiated and communicated by those who participated.

The human ecological perspective allows for the deliberation of change and how change impacts on the interrelated environments in which humans interact (Story *et al.*, 2002; Bubolz & Sontag, 1993:421). The cultural perspective complemented the human ecological perspective in this regard, as this perspective guided the consideration of the meanings attached to food and food practices as they developed and evolved over time and in different contexts. As explained in Chapter 2 (see 2.3), the cultural perspective focuses on the socio-cultural environment and addresses the symbolic realm of social life, where cultural forms and social relations are studied in relation to the ideologies of a cultural group and includes how these characterise a cultural group. A strong focus of this perspective is on the expressive culture or material artefacts (food and food practices in this case) and includes the signification or development of meanings associated with cultural objects. It was not only food as cultural products that resulted in signification, but also the way people related to these products and what they did to, or with it. The assumptions of the cultural perspective guided the interpretation of the meanings attached to the food practices as part of the expressive culture in the various contexts described by the participants. In Chapter 9, a summarised interpretation of the meanings and symbolism attached to food as material culture of the study group was given (see 9.2). Theories on acculturation and the developmental model of food culture also contributed to and guided the understanding of the food practices and the interpretation of the meanings attached to food in the various contexts it was used.

Symbolic interactionism provided the other theoretical framework to research the different meanings (symbols) that were used in different contexts. Symbolic interactionism was useful at the micro-environmental or individual level to understand the meanings attached to food and food practices that resulted from human interaction. Humans react to things on the basis of the meanings that they have for them, thus the meanings of things are derived from or out of social interaction with others (Sandstrom *et al.,* 2006:1; Blumer, 1969:2). The way people react to an object is usually a result of their interpretation of the meaning(s) the object has for

them (Charon, 1998:48). Here symbolic interactionism was useful to uncover the dynamics through which meanings with regard to food practices were socially constructed, in different contexts by the study group. The premises of symbolic interactionism were applied to interpret and describe the meanings attached to food, the role of food as a symbol and how food obtained symbolic meaning, what meanings were attached to food in different contexts and how food obtained new meanings. In Chapter 9 the meanings of the food practices of the Mmotla participants were interpreted (see 9.2).

The most salient factors that contributed to contemporary food practices and how these had evolved over the past four decades are the result of the dynamic and ongoing changes and developments in the environments of the participants are described and explained. These factors had a direct bearing on the availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability of food and, in turn, on the participants' food practices and the meanings attached to them. All these contributed to and enhanced the shift towards Western-oriented food practices. The main findings follow and relate to the participants' contemporary food practices incorporating reference to how meanings attached to food are based on how food is perceived and used in various contexts

10.2.2 Contemporary food practices and their meanings

The present study aimed to understand how meanings emerged from the context and how these were used to construe the food practices of the Mmotla people**.** Meaning is a social product and arises through the process of interaction between people, in other words it is created. Humans act toward things, including food, on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them (Sandstrom *et al.,* 2006:1; Blumer, 1969:2-3). People are inclined to categorise food to help them make sense of their world and this simultaneously gives an indication of the cultural usage thereof, including the values attached to it (Blake *et al.,* 2007; Anderson, 2005:113; Furst *et al.,* 2000; Fieldhouse, 1995:37). To make sense of the world they live in, the participants likewise categorised food and special occasions into dichotomised groups of traditional and modern. This provided valuable insight into how food was perceived and used and contributed to understanding the meanings attached to food, especially how these developed and were used in various contexts, to communicate and define the situation.

People not only categorise food to make sense of their world, but also to simplify their world (Blake *et al.,* 2007; Sobal *et al.,* 2006:9-11; Anderson, 2005:113; Furst *et al.,* 2000). Through this categorisation the participants gave an indication of the presence of two opposite poles in their lives, namely, the traditional and the modern that was ever present and even

reflected in the way they perceived and used food. Of particular significance was the fact that traditional food has not been discarded, and was still used and regarded as important. The categorisation also portrayed how food was valued and used in various contexts. This in itself reflected a great deal about the values and beliefs and how food, as a symbol, conveyed certain messages. Food as material artefact conveys messages (Sobal *et al.,* 2006:11; Anderson, 2005:112; Fieldhouse, 1995:37) and the participants likewise attached and communicated various messages in each context where the two food categories were used. The categorisation further provided a norm of what should be prepared and served in a specific context (see 9.3).

Various authors indicate that the food practices in which people engage depend on the situation or context in which a food event takes place (Blake *et al.*, 2007; Meiselman, 2007:67-69; Devine *et al.*, 1999, Meiselman, 1996:247-252). The findings of this study were similar, and the various contexts in which food practices took place, portrayed not only what and how food was used, but also the meanings attached to the food. Even the food-related behaviour of those who participated in its consumption was context or situation dependent. These situations or contexts fell into two broad groups, those that dealt with everyday situations as demonstrated at household level on weekdays and over weekends, and those that related to special occasions or celebrations. Within the special occasion contexts a distinction was made between traditional and modern occasions. The food practices within each of these groups of occasions differed and therefore the meanings also varied. This was due to the degree of interaction between individuals or groups of individuals in each of the contexts. The degree of interaction and who participated determined the status or prestige of the occasion and this guided or defined the food content and the meanings attributed to the food. Figure 10.2 illustrates the various food contexts with an indication of the food category most likely to be used in each.

Household level		
Everyday contexts	**Weekday food practices**	**Weekend food practices**
	Combination of modern/ Western-oriented and traditional food	Mainly modern / Western-oriented food
Public arena		
Special occasion contexts	**Traditional occasions**	**Modern occasions**
	Traditional and modern food	Modern food

FIGURE 10.2: FOOD CONTEXTS AND ASSOCIATED FOOD CATEGORIES

10.2.2.1 Food practices in everyday contexts

The everyday food contexts were those experienced at household level and it emerged that distinctive practices were followed during weekdays and on weekend days.

(i) Weekday food practices

On weekdays the food pattern seemed to be primarily directed by what the food budget allowed and the participants seemed to resort to the less expensive and more traditional type of food items. In contrast, the weekend pattern included more expensive and special treats as more money was available.

(ii) Weekend food practices

Valuable insights into the current food consumption patterns over weekends were obtained in the present study, which contributed to the understanding of the way food was perceived and used by the participants on special occasions. The meal pattern and composition over weekends differed in a number of ways from those of weekdays and appeared to have a more modern and contemporary slant.

How the two categories of traditional and modern food were viewed and used by the participants seemed to be rooted in the contrast between the food used on weekdays and weekends. Traditional food appears to be associated with limited finance and hardship, as well as the routine and drudgery experienced during the working week. Modern food, on the other hand, is associated with having money, pleasant social interaction, relaxation, joy and strengthening of family and friendship ties. Modern food has therefore become a symbol of social coherence and the Sunday midday meal, the "gold standard" or norm for food suitable for all special occasions and celebrations. A higher prestige value is attached to modern food and it has become a yardstick of economic well-being, success and good times.

10.2.2.2 Food practices in the context of special occasions

The other two food contexts, as depicted in Figure 10.2, are those associated with special occasions. In the academic literature of recent times, apart from some authors (McAllister, 2003; Fieldhouse, 1995:93; Jones, 1963:60-61; Quin, 1959:96-102) who merely refer to the prominence of traditional beer and the abundance of meat from a slaughtered animal at special events, no detailed descriptions of the types of celebrations, their format and/or the food served at gatherings of particular significance for the black South African population are

on record. The findings of this study serve to fill this lacuna as a comprehensive account of the food practices associated with special occasions, as celebrated by the Mmotla participants, is given.

In contrast to everyday food practices that were confined to the private sphere of the household, celebrations or special occasions were public occasions and therefore more open to public scrutiny and critique. As in the case of food, special occasions were also classified as being either traditional or modern.

(i)   Food practices at traditional special occasions

Traditional occasions were regarded as those that had been celebrated by past generations. An important feature of traditional celebrations was the pivotal role that ancestral veneration played in the food practices associated with certain rituals performed at specific stages during these traditional celebrations. The continued belief in the ancestors thus contributed to the maintenance of certain traditional procedures especially specific food practices. Ancestors were perceived and treated as important special guests at these events, and it was regarded as important to express respect and obedience towards them by serving their preferred traditional food.

This created a predicament when hosting a traditional celebration as nowadays modern food is the preferred food served at most of celebrations. As explained, the most appropriate food for a special occasion was modern food "*like on a Sunday*". To overcome the dilemma of having to obey and respect the ancestors by honouring traditional customs and providing traditional food on the one hand, while guests needed to be pleased on the other, the general practice followed was to prepare both traditional and modern food for these occasions. Traditional food was then used when ancestral veneration took place or when custom required that it be served.

Apart from the prestige attached to modern food, other reasons why it was included side by side with the traditional, related to the religious beliefs and food preferences of the guests. Certain Christian churches required that their members not only abstain from participation in ancestral rituals, but also prohibited the consumption of food used by others in ancestral communication. This included the meat from a sacrificial animal, traditional beer and other fermented traditional dishes. To some, the consumption of modern food even became a symbol of Christianity. The other reason was a direct result of how familiar the guests were with traditional foods and what meanings they attached to traditional dishes. The younger generation, for example, were not used to some of the more traditional dishes and/or had

limited exposure to it, and consequently they disliked the taste and texture of these dishes. Furthermore, traditional foods are now associated with the poor, the old-fashioned or uneducated people and are therefore not regarded as being suitable for serving to guests. In similar vein, others too, have likewise reported on the low status attached to traditional food (Kepe, 2008; Jansen van Rensburg *et al.,* 2007; Weinberger & Swai, 2006; Ogoye-Ndegwa & Aagaard-Hansen, 2003).

Forces from the socio-cultural environment, specifically the ideological and social organisational components of culture were more influential in creating the meanings attached to the various food practices related to traditional contexts, although ideas and ideals, as forces from the socio-psychological environment also came to the fore in some instances. This is particularly evident in the meanings of the food practices associated with the traditional rites of passage of the Ndebele during the male initiation process and *isikiri* at the traditional wedding procedures (see 6.3 and 7.2.2) where cultural identity and the belief system are emphasised. Although the majority of the other cultural groups still engaged in these rites, the Ndebele, as one of the more conservative groups, adhered very strictly to their traditional customs. The other cultural groups did not have such involved rites and it seemed as if food did not feature as prominently as in the case of the Ndebele.

Food practices during traditional celebrations clearly reflected the ease and fluidity with which the participants switched between the traditional and modern food categories and how each was applied to negotiate and saliently define the specific situation or context in which it was being used, thereby accommodating both their own personal beliefs and values whilst at the same time ensuring that important messages were being conveyed through the accepted traditional and modern codes that their food practices signified (see for example 6.3 and 7.2 regarding initiation and traditional wedding celebrations).

(ii)   Food practices at modern special occasions

The participants regarded birthdays, weddings, funerals, Christmas and Easter as the major modern celebrations. Although weddings and funerals were part of the traditional special occasions, these have undergone significant changes from the traditional way of doing things, and are therefore regarded as being "modern" and thus identified by the participants as modern special occasions. The food served at modern weddings, funerals, birthdays, Christmas and Easter is similar to that of the Sunday midday meal and communicates the same meanings.

The outcomes of urbanisation, acculturation and conversion to the Christian faith, modernisation and education are evident in the food practices associated with these special occasions that are characterised by mainly serving modern food. Moreover they have considerable prestige value as modern special occasions are often used as an opportunity for conspicuous consumption (i.e. a display of the host's economic status) and to exhibit to others that the host is a modern and educated person and clearly in a favourable financial position and able to afford hosting such an occasion. A large variety of modern dishes are prepared and particular attention is given to the presentation of the food. Although the emphasis is on modern food, certain favourite traditional dishes such as *bogobe, ting mabele*, the meat from a slaughtered animal and traditional beer are often included in the menu. The inclusion of these dishes underscores not only the popularity of traditional dishes, but they are also a subtle signifier of the cultural identity and traditions of the host. As explained by Long (2000:143) the inclusion of traditional dishes in celebratory meals is often deeply personal and emotive and can embrace intense symbolic meanings and values for individuals.

It emerged that the church plays a major role in the food practices of certain groups in this community and this, to a large extent, determines what is permissible at special occasion events. Some participants and their families have been followers of the Christian faith for a number of generations, and it was clear that they had discarded ancestral veneration completely, whilst others continued to adhere to its practices, even though they are members of a Christian church. Some church groups strictly forbid their members to participate in ancestral veneration and, in some instances, this even includes the consumption of food used by others in the ritual communication with the ancestors. Other church groups approve of ancestral veneration and their members are allowed to enjoy the traditional beer and meat others have used in ritual communication with the ancestors.

10.3 FINAL CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The food practices of the people of Mmotla continue to develop and change and, although there is a distinct move towards the Western-oriented food practices, it was clear from the findings of this study that traditional food practices were not discarded. Both the traditional and the more Western-oriented, modern food practices were regarded as important and could thus be viewed as two opposite poles on a continuum with a noticeable dynamic, easy flow of movement between them. Not every participant held the same position on this continuum as, in most cases, they adapted their food practices as required by the context or situation. The fluidity of movement between these opposite poles clearly emerged as context

specific, as explicated in Chapter 9 (see 9.3). Each food situation was negotiated and often included food from both these opposite poles of the continuum.

The level of social interaction, as well as the people concerned, determined the food context. Meanings associated with both the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments were used to define the context. Food from either the traditional or the modern categories became the symbol, sign or code that represented a specific situation and/or communicated the meaning attached to it. The serving of modern or more Western-oriented food at a special occasion function could, for example, mean that the host was educated, successful and had or pretended to have the financial means to host the celebration. In a certain sense the socio-economic standing of, or that which the host aspired to, was signalled through the kind, quantity and variety of food served. Modern food became a symbol of success and advancement and keeping apace with change.

There were contexts in which the use of modern food and the exclusion of traditional food symbolised that the host belonged to the Christian faith. It emerged that some churches and religious groups condemned ancestral veneration and the accompanying traditional rituals and ceremonial procedures including the associated food practices of preparing traditional beer and sacrificing an animal in honour of the ancestors. The authority and power of some religious groups in prohibiting certain traditional food practices contributed to the practice of abstaining from the consumption of certain traditional foods by members of these churches. In some instances the serving of modern food had a hedonistic connotation and the emphasis and associated meanings revolved around the host as an individual and the identity (s)he wished to portray. On the other hand, the serving of traditional food on special occasions or during traditional ceremonies signified that the beliefs in the ancestors continued. Adhering to traditional food practices so strictly on these occasions, bore testimony as to how deep-rooted these were in the belief system of those who continued with ancestral veneration.

Although traditional dishes were no longer frequently prepared in the majority of households and a general decrease in the consumption of traditional dishes was evident, the consumption of certain traditional food items and dishes continued on a regular basis in Mmotla depending on the situation or food context. For instance, when financial resources were limited, some participants often resorted to low-cost traditional-type menu items especially during the week. This situation meant that certain traditional foods became stereotyped as food of low prestige value and as food consumed by poor and uneducated people. This was specifically the case with dishes prepared from indigenous green leafy vegetables. Due to the low status ascribed to these vegetables a negative nutritional

outcome resulted as documented in a number of studies conducted in South Africa and the rest of the continent (Faber, Van Jaarsveld & Laubscher, 2007; Faber & Wenhold, 2007; Jansen van Rensburg *et al.,* 2007; Weinberger & Swai, 2006; Ogoye-Ndegwa & Aagaard-Hansen, 2003). Indigenous green leafy vegetables are excellent sources of micronutrients that could significantly contribute to the micronutrient intake of vulnerable groups such as young children and women to combat micronutrient deficiencies (Faber *et al.,* 2007; Faber & Wenhold, 2007; Maunder & Meaker, 2007). On the other hand, some traditional dishes, such as those prepared with sorghum and certain legumes, have been elevated to high status foods due to the scarcity and cost of sorghum and legumes such as jugo beans and cowpeas. The nutritional benefits of consuming legumes and sorghum dishes should therefore be promoted and the consumption advocated. The importance of sorghum and maize as a sacrificial and staple food was often emphasised. Their use not only symbolised deep-rooted cultural values and beliefs, but also reflected the emotional value attached to these staple foods.

The inclusion of traditional dishes on the menu for special occasions also symbolised cultural identity. In post-*apartheid* South Africa, where cultural and ethnic revival is being promoted it has become permissible to participate openly and even to show-case traditional practices. This was specifically the case with the Ndebele participants who regarded it as important to cherish and maintain their cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, although the modern Western-oriented food practices were embraced in other contexts. Examples of how the traditional and modern food were used side by side or separate depending on the context, was illustrated in the traditional Ndebele *ingoma*, *iqude* and wedding procedures as described in Chapters 6 and 7 (see 6.3, 6.6 and 7.2.1). Devine *et al.* (1999) similarly found in their study that people sometimes enacted their cultural identity through their food choices and at other times they did not.

Apart from the context or situation that determined the degree of inclusion of either traditional or modern food, the age, life-course and lifestyle of the participants were also contributing factors. In reviewing the changes in the food practices from the participants' perspective on how it changed and developed over the past 40 years, it is concluded that, although they basically followed the same eating patterns (see 5.3.2), the familiarity and exposure to certain types of food created subtle differences noted in the food practices of the younger and older generations reflecting their attitudes, values and preferences for certain foods. The younger generation (40 years and younger) who did not have the same exposure to traditional food when compared to some of the older participants, did not portray the same values and attitudes. The younger generation, who had more exposure to the Western-oriented culture, modern technological developments such as television, electrical appliances

and commercial food products did not attach the same value to traditional food. This is ascribed to the effect of secondary socialisation[43] and acculturation on the one hand. On the other hand, the younger generation did not have the same exposure to traditional food in comparison to the older generation, due to the limitations posed by the physical environment of Mmotla. In practice, the consequence was that the younger generation was not as enculturated in the use and preparation of certain traditional dishes as a result of the limited exposure. Apart from the lack of knowledge and skills in the preparation of certain traditional dishes, these were often very time-consuming to prepare in comparison to the modern food. To prepare modern food was easier and less complicated especially for those who used electric appliances. It is understandable that the younger generation, due to their modern life-style with its accompanying time constraints, would resort to Western-oriented food practices. The older generation were more conservative and set in their ways, and inclined to be more attached to traditional-oriented food practices.

On reviewing the change and development of the food practices of the various generation groups, it was evident that the food practices of each generation differed slightly from the previous generations. In the case of the Mmotla people, this is similarly ascribed to the challenges and developments in the physical, economic and social environments in which each generation grew up, as explained in literature (Kittler & Sucher, 2008:6; Bryant *et al.,* 2003:99; Ferraro, 2001:29-31; Devine *et al.,* 1999). It became clear that the food practices of each generation originated from those of previous generations, and that intra-cultural variation exists. This finding underscores the paradox of food habits as put forward by Fieldhouse (1995:2) who states that although food habits are "stable and predictable, they are at the same time undergoing constant and continuous change". The findings of this research confirm that food practices, as part of culture, involve a complex, dynamic, and on-going process. The process not only illustrates the cultural universal that culture is adaptive and that collective adjustments are made over time (Ferraro, 2001:31; Els, 1993:11-12), but it is also in accordance with the premise of the ecological perspective that adaptation is a continuous process and that humans respond, to and act on changes (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993:425).

Of particular importance to the South African setting is that, although acculturation regarding food practices was evident, the acculturation response or "degree of acculturation" was very fluid and context-specific, driven by various interacting factors from different environmental levels as explained in Chapter 9 (see 9.4) of which influences emanating from the socio-cultural environment were the most pervasive. Certain traditional food practices continue,

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[43] Secondary socialisation occurs as children grow older and become exposed to diverse experiences, viewpoints and the influences of others such as peers and the school environment (Fieldhouse, 1995:5).

since they are an integral part of the belief and value systems of those who still participate in ancestral veneration. However, on the other hand, the acceptable and often preferred taste of Western-type of foods as well as its associated prestige value, accessibility and convenience led them to becoming the more acceptable and sought after food items.

The dualisms that exist in the lives of the participants were reflected in their food practices as were the creative ways they employed to accommodate both the traditional and modern poles. This phenomenon ties in with current psychological thinking on acculturation, described by Sam (2006:16) as being bi-directional. This perspective assumes that it is possible to identify with or acquire a new culture without discarding or losing the old culture (Sam, 2006:16; Berry, 1980:13). According to this viewpoint, the original culture can be maintained whilst adoption of aspects of the new culture can simultaneously take place. It is thus possible for an individual to participate more or less fully in either of the two cultures in which they are involved. This was indeed the case with the Mmotla participants, although they generally adopted the Western-oriented food culture, in certain contexts the traditional food practices were strictly adhered to and/or combined with the Western-oriented practices depending on the situation and the religious affiliation of those who participated. In the exposition given by Theron (1996:18-19) on change in Africa, he aptly states that "[T]the people are actually living in two half cultures". He explains that the traditional culture (including traditional religion) is reluctant to adapt to modern changes and development, and people therefore struggle to change. The reason given is that the Western way of life cannot provide the stability and security to which they are accustomed and that the traditional world view offers them. Moreover many other viewpoints of traditional culture are still prevalent and hold sway.

The tangible part of adopting and accepting the Western-oriented culture was visible in food (as material culture) and served as evidence of the acculturation of the food practices of the Mmotla people. However, that some preserved the original culture is attributed to the intangible component of culture, namely the values and beliefs as part of their socio-psychological environment. In this research the main reason for maintaining certain traditional food practices is ascribed to the deep-seated beliefs in the ancestors and in many instances these formed part of the world view and cultural identity of the participants.

10.4   FINAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 10.1 is now expanded and strengthened by the findings relating to the acculturation responses and the meanings the Mmotla people attached to their food practices. This final

conceptual framework encapsulates the findings of the study and simultaneously serves as validation of the initial conceptual framework that sought to explore and describe the food practices of a black South African community.
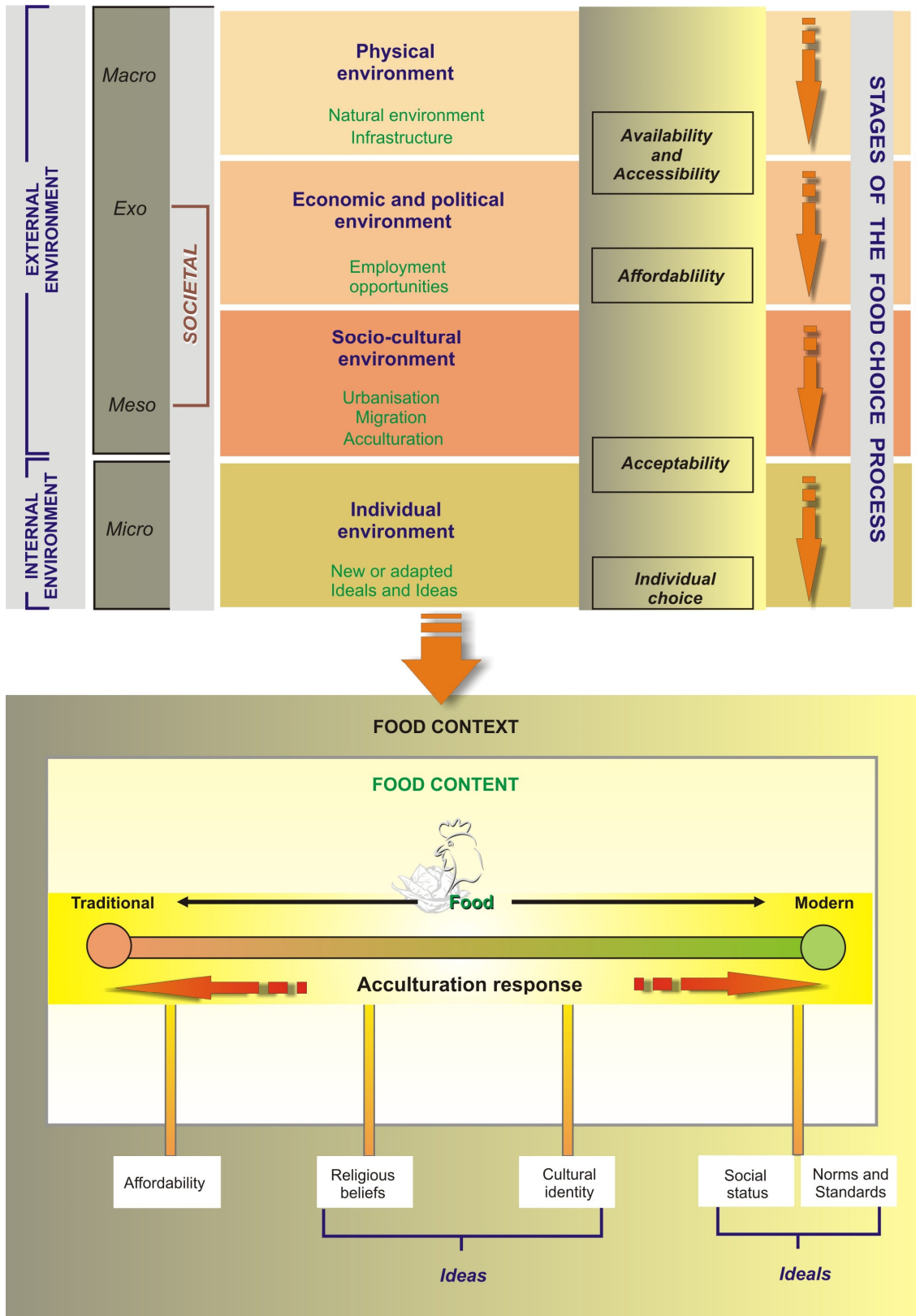

FIGURE 10.3: FINAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The first section of the final conceptual framework portrays the various human ecological environmental levels and gives recognition to the factors in each that contributed to the formation of food practices and the embedded food choice process of the Mmotla participants. The most salient factors from each environmental level that led to the shift towards Western-oriented food practices were discussed in 10.2.1 and how these factors from the external environments have a bearing on the availability, accessibility and affordability of the food choice of the participants was also emphasised.

The second section of the conceptual framework shows that food content is not only embedded in the food context, but that it is steered by factors derived from specific environmental levels. These salient factors are context-dependent and guide and steer the food practices in a specific food direction on the continuum between the traditional and the modern. In turn, this indicates that the acculturation response is context-specific as described in chapter 9 (see 9.4). This implies that not all the environmental factors enjoy the same level of importance in each food context.

This final conceptual framework presents the most important factors from the various environmental levels and how these have contributed to the food practices of the Mmotla people at the beginning of the twenty first century. This inductively developed model thus represents the potential factors that contribute to the food practices with their embedded food choice, food usage and behavioural components for the South African context, where traditional customs and affordability are important forces.

10.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A valuable and noteworthy contribution to augment existing theories and models on food choice, specifically within the South African context have been made. The inclusion of the social, cultural and other environmental dimensions, as advocated in recent publications (Bisogni *et al.,* 2007; Rozin, 2007; Cannon & Leitzmann, 2005) and justified in Chapter 1, have contributed to the acquisition of in-depth understanding of the food choice process and food practices within a typical South African situation. The expansion of existing models and theories in an integrated and holistic model applicable to the South African context has resulted.

In order to understand and describe the food practices and the meanings that the people of Mmotla attached to them required that the **what, why** and **how** of the food practices of this South African community be uncovered. As the interrelatedness and interdependency of the

different environments in which the Mmotla people live and interact needed to be explored, together with the contributing factors embedded in each, a holistic and contextual approach was followed. Three theoretical perspectives and other theoretical models, together with a qualitative research design, methods and techniques were combined to uncover, describe and interpret all the environmental levels and their embedded factors. This approach enabled the researcher to explore and describe their food practices in terms of **what** was eaten in a specific context, the reason(s) **why** it was eaten, **how** their food practices have developed and changed, as well as **why** they have changed. Exploring the underlying reasons for the changes in and development of the identified food practices, has led to an in-depth understanding of them and what they mean. The reasons why a specific South African population group follows set food practices as they do, and the meanings attached to them, have not been studied before, and this study set out to do this in the Mmotla community. The combined application of the three theoretical perspectives together with the other selected theoretical models proved to be a sound approach that not only enabled the researcher to achieve the objectives of this study, but, in addition, to augment existing theories and models relating to food practices within a South African context.

In the first instance, the researcher could expand on the ecological model relating to food choice in a South African situation. In the unfolding of the whole spectrum of contributing factors from the different environmental levels, this study confirmed their reciprocal causation, as posited by the human ecological perspective. Literature indicates that food practices are not only complicated but are multifaceted and multidimensional (Rozin, 2007:8; Sobal *et al.,* 2006:2; Bryant *et al.*, 2003:2-3; Story *et al.*, 2002; Schifferstein *et al.,* 2001:5-6; Pelto *et al.,* 2000:1), and the food practices of the study group are no exception, as described in this thesis (see 10.2).

The human ecological perspective proposes that both the laws of nature and human-derived rules guide the behaviour of people (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993:426). This is also evident in food practices, as people not only choose food for sustenance, but for various other reasons that are embedded in the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments and these are specifically noticeable when dealing with the meaning attached to food practices. The socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments guide, and in many instances even dictate what food is permissible and acceptable to eat in a specific situation through the rules, norms and standards that are derived from these two environmental levels. To augment the in-depth understanding of the meanings of the food practices of the Mmotla peoples, the human ecological perspective was complemented by the cultural and symbolic interactionism perspectives. Both perspectives supported an appreciation of the meanings attached to

food practices, including the shift in meaning that resulted from the changes and development in the underlying forces that contributed to them (see 9.2).

Apart from applying the cultural and symbolic interactionism perspectives, the human ecological perspective was further supplemented by the dietary acculturation theory of Satia-Abouta *et al.* (2002) and the developmental model of food culture (Kittler & Sucher, 2008:11). Both theoretical models were useful, not only to understand the adjustments that black South Africans had to make in their traditional food practices, due to migration, urbanisation and acculturation, but also, how these adjustments endorsed the changes observed and the development of their current food practices.

In addition, two consumer behaviour theories, that of conspicuous consumption (Solomon, 2007:474) and the VALS ™ consumer classification system (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:439-442), were used to understand and explain some of the meanings attached to modern food with specific reference to the social status of food as material culture. These theories and theoretical models, in addition to the three perspectives, were used to guide the interpretation of the findings and were valuable when seeking to understand how certain aspects, specifically in the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments, contributed to the meanings attached to the food practices of the Mmotla participants. The interpretation and explanations offered in this study are therefore not based on a single perspective or theory, but from a number of carefully selected perspectives and theories that were appropriate as they enhanced the insight into the food practices of the study group. This again underscores the complexity and multifaceted nature of human food practices. A detailed account has been given in this report to show how the three theoretical perspectives combine with other theoretical models and theories to further contribute to and augment theories related to food choice and food practices within the South African context. In addition, this approach makes it applicable and transferable to other multi-cultural contexts.

In the final conceptual framework developed from the findings obtained from this research, all the environmental levels, and the embedded factors in each that were significant in the Mmotla study, are depicted to obtain a holistic account of the food practices and the meanings attached to them. This conceptual framework could serve as point of departure in future studies on the food practices of individuals or groups within a multi-cultural setting, as it clearly represents all facets that need to be uncovered when studying this complex topic in the South African context. Although other recently published models on food choice provide valuable insight into the food choice process, they originate mainly from research based on responses from individuals living in developed countries where a larger variety of food is accessible and affordable. Even though recognition is given to the cultural environment in

these models, the emphasis is placed on the socio-psychological environment of the individual in affluent developed societies (Rozin, 2007:14; Sobal *et al.,* 2006:14).

South African society is multi-cultural, and it is inevitable that acculturation will take place between the various cultural groups. This process ultimately manifests how the world is viewed, including food and the food practices associated with it. Acculturation of food choice and use is acknowledged and reported in studies conducted on black South African groups (MacKeown *et al.,* 2007; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2002; Viljoen & Gericke, 2001; Van Eeden & Gericke, 1996). Although it is distinguished as a continuous and dynamic process, no indication or description of the bi-cultural nature of the food practices of the black South Africans is documented. Augmentation of the dietary acculturation theory as it applies to the South African setting is regarded as a theoretical contribution of this research, and is depicted in the second part of the final conceptual framework.

In this second part of the framework all aspects that drive the acculturation response or the degree of acculturation are included. The bi-cultural nature of the food practices is portrayed and, although the acculturation response is context-dependent, there is an ease or fluidity of movement between the two opposite poles of traditional and modern food. The second part of the final conceptual framework represents a dietary acculturation model for the South African context and the acculturation response depicted is of significance. It provides insight into how food is perceived and used, and how it is categorised. This categorisation assisted in the interpretation and understanding of the meanings attached to food and the associated food practices (see 10.2.2).

Insights into the traditional food practices that are still adhered to by the peoples of Mmotla, together with documentation on the current food practices provided a historical overview of the development and changes that the food practices of these peoples have undergone up to the beginning of the twenty first century. This record is a unique and valuable contribution, as it provides a concurrent indication of **what, when** and **why** specific foods are used, including the meanings these traditional and recently introduced foods hold. In doing this, a contribution is not only made to the documentation of certain traditional food practices (including the foods used and the preparation of certain traditional dishes), but also to the documentation of a neglected part of the indigenous knowledge of these peoples that has been fragmentary and limited. Through this the culinary heritage of specifically the Ndebele group, is documented in a unique manner, as the associated food practices together with the meanings and symbolism attached to certain dishes and practices are also captured, especially how they relate to the male and female initiation rites and the traditional wedding.

The comprehensive description of all the environmental levels and forces that were taken into consideration when exploring and describing the food practices of this specific South African group, in order to understand the **why** of their food practices, is presented. A detailed account of how it applies to the South African situation and this particular group of people at the beginning of the twenty first century, is documented. Food practices are not static, but are constantly changing as a result of the dynamic nature of culture and other environmental forces. It is acknowledged that these aspects might differ when studying the food practices of another black South African population group in another setting. However, as sufficient, detailed and saturated data was collected in this study, and used in the presentation of the findings, transferability of the findings is assured. In addition, it is evident that the contribution of this study goes beyond the initial objectives formulated.

10.6   METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The study is methodologically sound and 'thick' descriptions were obtained through the meticulous employment of more than one complementary technique to make the findings of the study transferrable to other contexts.

10.6.1 Research strategy and design

The in-depth understanding of the multiple facets of the food practices of the study group made it mandatory to uncover all events, actions and processes linked to it, in order to expose the underlying meanings of these various contexts. The contextual approach followed, augmented the in-depth understanding of the complex and multi-faceted topic of food practices and the meanings attached to these, and is regarded as a strong point of the study. The ideographic research strategy was a logical choice, as this strategy examines a single or specific event or case within its own context in order to understand it (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:272). It served the purpose to study the phenomenon of food practices in-depth, as it not only captured how these people viewed, experienced and interpreted their own world (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271; Janesick, 2000:382), but also identified and described the respondents' food practices and their meaning.

The ethnographic research design that included, as data collection techniques, focus group discussions, individual interviewing, participant observation and unobtrusive measures proved well suited for this study, as rich descriptions of the everyday experiences and way of life of the study group was obtained. An insider or "emic" perspective of the way of life of the study group was striven for in an attempt to understand their food practices and their

meanings, in the contexts in which they occurred. The research techniques complemented and reinforced each other, and collectively contributed to achieve the contextual approach. This in itself enhanced a holistic description and understanding of the food practices and contributed to the insights into the meanings the participants used to construe their food practices. These methods and techniques not only provided the means to viewing the research problem from different points of view, but simultaneously enhanced triangulation of the data as recommended in literature (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:275; Strauss & Corbin, 1998:11; Miles & Huberman, 1994:438). A reflection of the research methods and techniques follows.

10.6.2 Sampling

The study group was carefully selected to match the specific aim of the study (see 1.4) and comprised females living in the multi-cultural community of Mmotla. The study evolved in two distinctive phases with specific aims for each phase.

The aim of the first phase was to explore and become acquainted with the life world of the participants which included their food practices. Criteria were laid down at the outset of the study to include all cultural groups in the community. It was specified that both older and younger females would be included in the focus group discussions as well as specialists and laymen. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that those who participated in the focus groups met the set criteria. These measures proved successful, as the researcher had the opportunity to be exposed to, and become acquainted with the food practices of the different cultural groups in a relative short period of time. In this way a far wider range of viewpoints could be obtained, which served to maximise the diversity of data on the food practices between the various culture and age groups. This allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the findings from each group. The decision to delve deeper into the food practices of the Ndebele was based on the striking differences that emerged between the food practices of the Ndebele and the other groups.

Theoretical sampling was used to select five fully enculturated Ndebele female participants for the individual interviews that formed the second phase of the study, as justified in Chapter 3 (see 3.4.2.2). This was done to uncover the Ndebele food practices in particular in order to gain an in-depth understanding of why the majority of the Ndebele, in contrast to the other cultural groups, continue to adhere to certain traditional food practices. This small group comprised both older and younger females and included those who did not belong to a Christian church as well as those who were allowed to participate in traditional rites by their church, and those who were not allowed to do so. This strategy enable the researcher to

refine the theory that was developing concerning the observed distinction between those who were discarding certain traditional food practices, and those who were keeping them entrenched. Some of the individuals, who could provide the sought-after in-depth information on the Ndebele, were identified during the focus groups discussions and the others were purposively recruited. Theoretical sampling proved to be the correct technique, as it offered the opportunity to specifically seek participants who could provide alternative perspectives on the contemporary Ndebele food practices.

10.6.3 Data collection

The justification for having focus group discussions and interviewing individuals was given in Chapter 3 (see 3.4.2). A reflection on the appropriateness of each of these two dominant techniques and their contribution to this study that sought to explore, understand and describe the food practices and their meanings in a South African context, will be given here.

(i)   Focus group discussions

Introducing the data collection phase with focus group discussions proved to be the correct decision. This technique allowed the researcher to become familiar with the research setting very quickly, getting to know the participants and to find out about their way of life as well as their current food practices and how these have changed and developed. As suggested by other researchers (Betts *et al.,* 1996; Trollip, 1991), it proved to be a sound technique to use with people who value group participation and have low literacy skills. The informal and relaxed atmosphere of the focus group discussions contributed to the development of trust and the establishment of a good rapport between the researcher and the participants. This enhanced the collection of quality data, as thick descriptions of the required information were forthcoming and could not have been as easily obtained using other techniques. The focus group discussions stimulated the participants' thoughts and served as recall triggers, as pointed out by other researchers (Fontana & Frey, 2000:652; Schurink *et al.,* 1998:314; Betts *et al.,* 1996). It often happened that participants provided additional information on a topic that had been discussed the previous week. They were motivated by the discussions and often went back to others to find more information on the aspects that they themselves were uncertain of, or could not give information on. This not only augmented the data, but contributed to the quality of the data collected as they themselves often further explained or verified the information they had given.

Through the focus group discussions a basic understanding and overview of the scope of the food practices in which the participants engaged came to light. This paved the way for the

second phase of the study in that the researcher was able to identify emergent themes and issues that needed further in-depth uncovering during the second phase of the data collection process.

(ii)   Individual interviews

To achieve the aim of the second data collection phase, namely to gain an in-depth understanding of the contemporary food practices of the Ndebele participants, individual interviews were undertaken. It proved to be the correct technique to use, as the researcher could delve deeper and build on the themes that came out of the focus group discussions. As mentioned in the literature (Botha, 2001; Morgan, 1997:23), a further feature of this technique is that an opportunity is afforded to gain more information on some of the topics that were only broadly touched on, or were under-represented in the focus group sessions. In the individual interviews, each of the five enculturated Ndebele participants was in the position to provide detailed descriptions of the identified themes from their own perspectives and experiences in a more focused manner. This resulted in a truly insider-view of the lives of these participants, including their food practices, as they were able to speak for themselves and share their first-hand knowledge. Thus the researcher could delve deeper and uncover finer nuances and detail about the traditional Ndebele food practices as well as the modern food practices in which they engaged. The conversational style typical of the interview situation further contributed to creating an open and relaxed atmosphere that helped enhance good rapport with the participants. This approach ensured that the interviews were not too structured, but flexible, conveniently and fluid yielding quality data.

(iii)   Participant observation and unobtrusive measures

Two other supportive data collection techniques, that of participant observation and unobtrusive measures, proved valuable for obtaining additional data to supplement information from the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Through participant observation the researcher obtained data on the natural and structural environment of the village and observed the life world of the participants over a period of 20 months. This first-hand method of obtaining data on how people conduct their everyday lives had advantages and enhanced the insider-view of the researcher as suggested by other researchers (Henning *et al.,* 2004; Schurink, 1998:279-281; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:1-2; Adler & Adler, 1994:378). The everyday life of the village as observed on weekdays included aspects such as the available resources, activities and level of interaction that took place. This further assisted the researcher to not only place herself "in the shoes of the participants" but most certainly contributed to a better understanding of the viewpoints, values and attitudes of the

participants, and led to an appreciation of the limitations they experienced in their external environments.

A few unobtrusive measures were adopted and proved to be good and reliable sources of additional and supporting information that gave more insight into certain topics discussed in the focus groups and individual interviews. Some of the participants provided these in the form of photographs and artefacts on request, while others spontaneously brought these along to illustrate or further explain specific aspects that related to the themes under discussion. Some of these photographs served as verification of the data gathered and often such a stimulus opened further discussion that improved the in-depth understanding of the data.

The collection of recipes used for traditional and modern food dishes provided valuable information with regard to establishing the cuisine of the study group. This is an excellent technique for obtaining data on the culinary practices of a group relatively quickly. Both the recipes and the dishes prepared by the participants were a reflection of the life world of the participants. The prepared modern dishes for example, demonstrated and confirmed their adoption of some of the Western-oriented dishes and food preparation methods, including the technology available to prepare these. Through the preparation of the traditional dishes, on the other hand, aspects related to their indigenous knowledge were further uncovered and understood. A very special happening was when one of the participants invited the researcher to observe the traditional beer-making at her home where the process was in progress in preparation for the wedding celebration of her son. This opportunity contributed to a better insider-perspective of the whole procedure, including the large quantities that were prepared as well as the time and assistance of others involved in the whole exercise (see Addendum E for photographs on the beer-making process).

10.6.4 Data capturing and editing

A comprehensive dataset of each research visit could be compiled from the transcripts of the audio tape recordings, the field notes, observations and other additional information obtained through the unobtrusive measures as described in Chapter 3 (see 3.4.2.1).

The measures taken to ensure that minimum data was lost during translation as described in Chapter 3 proved to be quite successful. It is recommended that, when discussions and interviews need to be translated in cross-cultural studies, as was the situation in this study, the assistance of a scribe from a cultural group similar to that of the participants be sought to record the main points under discussion and to help with the translation and clarification of

lengthy discussions when needed. The researcher is convinced that the participants gave truthful information and that the translators gave honest accounts of the discussions, however, the language barrier between the researcher and some of the participants can be regarded as a limitation and some of the finer nuances of the narrative could have been lost despite the measures taken to prevent any data loss as described in Chapter 3 (see 3.4.2.1). Another limitation of the language barrier was the time implications posed as everything that was asked and discussed in the focus group discussions and interviews had to be translated.

The concurrent analysis and interpretation of data collected had definite advantages. The data and its interpretation was constantly being verified and clarified during the data collection process. The transcription of the focus group discussions and the interviews was done directly after each contact session and this strategy afforded the researcher the opportunity of not only familiarising herself with the data, but she could also reflect on it, and interpret it as she went along. Missing and unclear issues were detected and noted in time, and clarified at the beginning of the following contact session. Each focus group and individual interview session therefore included issues that needed further clarification and probing apart from introducing new themes.

10.6.5 Data analysis

In following the grounded theory approach to data analysis where the concurrent collection and analysis of data provided the opportunity to not only become familiar with the data, but simultaneously to reflect and theorise on it as advised by Tesch (1990:84-85), had advantages. This sensitised the researcher to further probe or delve deeper on certain aspects that needed more uncovering and explanation. This further assisted in obtaining the 'thick descriptions' and 'insider perspective' that was necessary for a study of this nature.

Initially data analysis was performed manually during the data collection process according to the guidelines by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and those of Huberman and Miles (1994). The volume of raw data from 36 focus group discussions and 26 individual interviews was, as could be expected, large and extensive. When the computer software package Atlas.ti became available to the researcher during the year after the completion of the data collection, a decision was made to re-run the analysis with Muhr's (2004) Atlas.ti software package. Although this had time implications, the advantage was that the final analysis was more detailed and refined. This was specifically of value in the selective coding step, as the find-and-retrieve function enhanced the 'thick descriptions' that could be compiled with more ease and this was very useful and assisted in theorising about the data. The advantage of the computer-aided data analysis for this research was not only the ability to better order,

structure and retrieve data which added to the quality of the analysis but, in turn, it also augmented the theory-building process.

10.6.6 Trustworthiness of the findings

Measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and a reflection and appreciation of these measures as employed during the study is presented.

(i)   Credibility

Credibility was ensured through the prolonged engagement that the researcher had with the participants. The data was collected over a period of 20 months until the researcher was convinced that data saturation had occurred. After completion of the data collection and its initial interpretation, the researcher continued to have contact with some of the key participants to verify or clarify the findings or the interpretation when necessary. Triangulation was achieved through the employment of different data collection techniques as well as using the three theoretical perspectives together with other supporting theories in the analysis and interpretation of the findings. The data collection techniques complemented each other, and not only enhanced triangulation, but contributed to the collection of extensive data of the food practices in a holistic manner. This study dealt with the understanding of how the meanings contributed to the food practices. The combination of these techniques brought about multiple perspectives, insights and viewpoints that were important when interpreting data on cultural meanings as advised by Coffey and Atkinson (1996:145). The data was manually analysed at first and interpreted following the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994) and took place concurrently with the actual collection of the data. The findings and the interpretation were consistently verified during the data collection phase through member checks. Obvious misunderstandings and misinterpretations were immediately pointed out by the participants and corrections were made to the applicable data. These clarifications often led to additional and new questions or probes that enhanced a wider point of view and contributed to the holistic and in-depth understanding of the food practices of the participants. Valuable other additional information was often spontaneously provided during the member checks which contributed to richer data. The re-analysis of the data with the Atlas.ti software package (Muhr, 2004) further enhanced and added to a refined analysis and triangulation of the data analysis.

(ii)   Transferability

Sufficient, detailed and saturated data was obtained by means of the research methods and techniques employed. The 'thick descriptions' of the data were not only strengthened by the various data collection techniques employed, but their success is also ascribed to the purposive sampling that included both specialists and laymen as well as younger and older participants. In this way the range of information gathered was maximised.

To further uncover, understand and be able to explain the meanings of the food practices of the study group, the underlying principles of the three theoretical perspectives and other applicable theories guided theorising and building on theory as proposed by Seibold (2002) and others (Coffey & Atkinson;1996:140-145). The final conceptual framework as compiled and presented as Figure 10.3 serves not only as a theoretical framework to investigate the food practices of other South African groups or individuals but is also equally applicable to other groups or contexts where cultural aspects are important. In putting together this framework the guiding principle of the theorising was to give a holistic and all-encompassing view of the food practices and their meanings, including the underlying interactions and interrelationships that are such an integral part of it. This provides an excellent point of departure for future studies on food practices.

(iii)   Dependability

Babbie and Mouton (2001:278) state that there cannot be credibility without dependability and as the former has been fully accounted for under (i) above, it is not deemed necessary to repeat the explanation. However, in summary the researcher aimed to achieve dependability through specifically ensuring the triangulation of data collection and analysis techniques and supportive theory, member checks. This report and the audit trail is available to the reader.

(iv)   Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the truth or extent to which the findings are the result of the research and not the "biases of the researcher" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278). This requires that an objective presentation of the research procedures, the data and the findings has to be available. An audit trail, as indicated, is available to judge the neutrality of the data and the findings in the form of audio tapes, transcriptions, field notes, including the data analysis and data reduction products. In addition, the experiences and insights voiced by the participants are adequately represented in the quotations provided in the presentation of the findings and the Addenda of this report.

10.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The final conceptual framework (see Figure 10.3) facilitates understanding aspects of the food behaviour of the South African black population. The second part of the model, specifically identifies the acculturation response, and provides insight into the dietary acculturation process. This could be of value in consumer facilitation and nutrition education as the bi-cultural nature of the food choice of black South Africans is evident from the findings, and needs to be acknowledged and appreciated. Apart from being context-driven, the acculturation response is further guided by specific forces. Of these, affordability (as part of the economic environment) and ideas and ideals (as part of ideology) are the most pervasive indicators of the degree of acculturation. In practice this means that not only the typical dietary habits need to be identified, but the salient cultural, environmental and socio-psychological components such as the ideas and ideals too ought to be considered as well. This will lead to a better understanding of where the person or group is in the dietary acculturation process. Dietary assessment thus should include the measurement of traditional food patterns, including the food items and behaviours associated with the Western-oriented diet.

As the goal of this study was descriptive and explanatory in nature, and centred on the meanings attached to food and how they contribute to food practices, it paves the way for future quantitative studies dealing with the food practices of black South Africans. This study gives a comprehensive and holistic account of all the facets that contribute to the food practices of a group of South African peoples, including the meanings they attach to them. This provides a sound foundation for future quantitative studies, as its comprehensiveness ensures transferability that can aid in the interpretation and explanation of future quantitative data, as quantitative investigations are more often concerned with the role of variables in describing and analysing human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:49).

10.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The final conceptual model proposed should be examined further, to test and refine it. Future research should be directed to investigating the presence of the identified factors in other groups and other settings as elaboration is needed for each of these factors. Additional research on the role of cultural and individual identities in food choice is advised in order to investigate the deeper dynamics involved in adhering to or discarding traditional food practices.

Based on the findings of this study, future research can be directed to the following:

- An in-depth study on the role and influence of the church and the various religious affiliations on the food practices of black South Africans to obtain an in-depth understanding of the reasons why some groups enforce certain prescriptions and/or proscriptions on their members. This could include the investigation of the food rules that are applied, and the underlying beliefs and values that are in interplay. This includes the deeper dynamics that are involved in adhering to or discarding traditional food practices.

- An investigation of the food practices of the different Living Standards Measure[44] (LSM™) groups in the South African population. More in-depth information on the different socio-economic, lifestyle and generation groups is needed to assist in consumer facilitation and education. It seems as if lifestyle and relevant factors i.e. income (thus affordability), social status through visual consumption has become equally important and, in some instances, even more important in consumer buying and consumption patterns than cultural differences (Odhiambo, 2008). More research is needed on the influence of socio-economic status on food practices including the nutritional intake of the various South African population groups in order to obtain the specific empirical data on the contribution of this variable to food practices.

- To use the life course perspective to compare how the food choices of various generation groups developed in the changing South African society. A life course perspective focuses on the life history of groups or individuals in society in order to understand food choice behaviours and how they developed and changed over time in a changing world (Sobal *et al.,* 2006:2-3; Devine, 2005).

- To study the effect of urbanisation on food practices. This implies a comparison between the food choice behaviour, eating patterns and nutrient intake of urban and rural groups. Such an investigation should include reference to how individuals and groups adapt to the structural changes experienced during migration, urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation as proposed in the developmental model of food culture (see 2.3.4.1).

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[44] The South African Advertising Research Foundation Living Standards Measure is one of the ways of identifying profiles of the South African population. It is based on a set of marketing differentiators which group people according to their living standards, using criteria such as the degree of urbanisation and ownership of durables such as cars and household appliances (Haupt, 2009:1; Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:100).

- To study and describe the cuisine and culinary heritage of all South African ethnic and cultural groups before the opportunity to include members of the older generations is lost as they are the ones who are more knowledgeable regarding aspects relating to the culinary heritage. Although the transition in food practices is acknowledged and aspects of it researched, the need to investigate and promote the retention of the culinary heritage of all South African groups as part of their food practices, exists. This is important, as the conservation of the indigenous knowledge of the various ethnic and cultural groups in the South African population should be studied, and promoted. It is recommended that graduates with a food and consumer science background from these groups be encouraged to initiate and conduct such research amongst their own ethnic and cultural groups.

A multitude of factors are involved and contribute to the formation of the food practices and the embedded food choice process of groups and individuals, and these factors are not only complex, but interrelated and interdependent. In addition, due to changes in the various environmental levels as a result of ecological, technological, societal and economic changes and developments, the food practices of individuals and groups are often described as dynamic. In this study of a group of black South Africans, this was confirmed. The salient role of changing environments and culture, and more specifically the social organisational and ideological components of culture together with economic factors, emerged as most important. The holistic approach followed in this study, including the comprehensive account on how to achieve it, opens-up the study field of food practices for future research on this complex topic in a South African context. The world view and ideology of the participants and how they impinge on the food choice and usage of the participants, was uncovered and described, which contributed to the understanding of the food practices of the participants from their point of view, including the underlying meanings attached to them in the various contexts in which they took place.

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