SECTION 3

FINDINGS ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this second section the research findings of the study on the food practices associated with special occasions are presented. These occasions are social events of a celebratory nature and are associated with rituals and holidays. The social interaction and social behaviour of those participating in such occasions are guided by culture and more specifically their social organisational and ideological components. The celebratory occasions in which the participants partake are those associated with the rites of passage such as initiation, weddings, birthdays, graduations and funerals as well as those associated with holidays such as Christmas, Easter and New Year's Day.

It emerged from the findings that the participants grouped special occasions into two categories, namely traditional and modern. Traditional special occasions were regarded as those that were part of the celebrations of the participants for generations, and included those associated with the rites of passage such as initiation and traditional weddings. Modern special occasions were regarded as those that have become popular during the lifetime of the older participants and were associated with those introduced in the recent past. These were not considered as part of the celebrations when they were growing up. However, they grouped those occasions that had undergone considerable change in format, such as the modern wedding and funerals, as being modern occasions specifically with regard to the food practices, compared to the traditional.

In Chapter 4 (see 4.4.2) the religious beliefs and world views of the participants were briefly described. Some church groups prescribe whether their members are allowed to participate in traditional rites and customs or not, and/or the degree of participation. This is mainly dependent on whether the church group endorses belief in the ancestors and allows participation in ancestral veneration or not. Due to the prescriptions of the various church groups three groups of participants were distinguished. On the one hand there were those who had completely abandoned belief in the ancestors and on the other there were those who still adhere to traditional African religious views in which the ancestor spirits form the foundation of their belief system. In between these two opposite poles there were those

who belong to Christian churches that allow their members to continue to engage in ancestral veneration and the associated rites. This is similar to the viewpoint of Theron (1996:1,45) that, in spite of Westernisation, modernisation and acculturation, traditional religion continues to play a central role in the life of Africans, even in the lives of Christians. This ties in with the finding that, in several cases, both ancestors and the church were equally recognised in a number of the social occasions mentioned by those taking part in this study. This underscores the central role that religion plays in the lives of the participants. The presence of the ancestors and their role in the lives of their descendants are, for example, acknowledged in the important rites of passage celebrations and are an imperative for the future well-being of those undergoing these rites.

The ancestral religious component and the role of the church are addressed and indicated in the description and discussion of the special occasion where it applies. The chapters in this section respectively deal with the following:

Chapter 6: Food practices and their meanings during initiation rites and associated celebrations
Chapter 7: Food practices and their meanings at weddings and other special occasions
Chapter 8: Food practices and their meanings on religious occasions

CHAPTER 6

FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS DURING INITIATION RITES AND ASSOCIATED CELEBRATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This first chapter on the findings of the food practices at special occasions deals with the traditional rites of passage of initiation and the associated celebrations that were observed by those who still engage in the practice of initiation. Traditional rites are cultural practices and forces from both the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are prominent in the execution of these rites as well as the associated food practices. The interrelatedness and interdependency of these two environments are demonstrated specifically through the ideological component of culture where the beliefs, values, world view and social organisation of those participating in these rites are in interplay. In this chapter the focus thus shifts to the socio-cultural and the socio-psychological environments of the conceptual framework. The two theoretical perspectives closely associated with these two environments, namely the cultural perspective and symbolic interactionism, are mainly used in the explication of the meaning of the food practices.

A fair amount of attention is given to the course of the traditional rites of passage and the associated celebrations, to assist in the contextualisation of the food practices related to them. In the academic literature dealing with the traditional rites of passage of South African cultural groups, the emphasis is often on the ritual procedures with limited attention, if any, being given to the accompanying food practices. It is therefore deemed appropriate to address the related food practices in some detail as they were practised at the time of the study. This chapter is devoted to this theme.

Of all the ethnic groups who participated in the study, the Ndebele group gave the most extensive description of the course of both the male and female initiation process. Known as one of the most conservative South African cultural groups, they continue to practise the traditional customs related to these rites more rigorously than any of the other groups. The different phases of the Ndebele initiation are described and interpreted with attention being paid to the associated food practices. The procedures followed by the other ethnic groups

are then compared to those followed by the Ndebele group to juxtapose the similarities and differences among the different groups.

The traditional rites of passage that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, is no longer practised by everyone belonging to a cultural group that engages in these rituals. Some churches have been instrumental in campaigning against the custom but whether the custom is still practised in a family or not, has remained their choice. However, those who still engage in this practice follow the traditional procedures as explained by one of the participants: *"It is still the same* [the following of the traditional procedures]. *Some they follow it* [the custom of initiation] *but some have changed and they don't follow them anymore, because of modern churches".*

Different church groups have different viewpoints in this regard. Some allow their members to follow this custom and they then participate in the traditional procedures, while others totally prohibit members from being involved in any way, even to the extent of them being barred from attending the celebrations of family and friends who follow these customs.

The Ndebele male and female initiation is very involved and there are different phases in the process that are demarcated by different celebrations during each phase. It has to be kept in mind that the participants of this study were all females which naturally limited the information with regard to some aspects regarding the male initiation rites. However, the emphasis of the study is on those aspects relating to or applicable to the food practices associated with these rituals and in this regard the female participants were fully enculturated and could provide the needed information.

6.2 COURSE OF THE NDEBELE MALE INITIATION (*INGOMA)*

The *ingoma* (male initiation) was traditionally only performed every four years and males of 20 years and older attended the three-month process during the winter months from May to the end of July (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992: 303; Fourie, 1921:127). The traditional leader had to grant permission for the process to take place and this was acquired before any preparations could start.

Currently the initiation takes place annually instead of once every four years, and the traditional leader's permission is still required. The preparation phase would only start after permission had been granted, and this is usually one month to three weeks before the initiation rite officially begins.

6.2.1 Preparation phase

During the preparation phase the *abasegwabo* (Ndebele boys in preparation for initiation) have already had to abide by rules with regard to their clothing, food, and social interaction with family, friends and the community. They are assembled in a specially prepared enclosure in the yard of one of the fellow initiates, where they are kept under the strict supervision of a specially appointed male. Social restrictions prescribe that they should be isolated and they are not allowed to have any contact with females and are therefore not allowed to visit their girlfriends, family or neighbours. In preparation of the process, specific rules and information are given. Van der Vliet (1974:229) gives a similar account of the time the boys spend together before "the opening of the school".

6.2.2 Departure and seclusion

On the last day of the old moon the older brothers of the *abasegwabo* who have already been initiated would fetch and take them to the traditional leader's residence where they would spend the night together with their fathers. Early the next morning around three o' clock *"when the morning star shines"* they leave the homestead of the traditional leader to be circumcised at a nearby river before sunrise. The two month seclusion period follows directly after this procedure. There are different stages during the seclusion period and the type of food, its consistency and preparation are different in each of these stages. During the course of the seclusion phase the parents of the initiated attend a number of celebrations that coincide with the stages of the seclusion phase.

6.2.3 Home-coming

On their return to the community after the two month seclusion phase there are various celebrations in their honour to welcome the *amasokana* (plural for initiated Ndebele males) back into the community.

Table 6.1 gives an overview of the course of the Ndebele male initiation process. The major events during the different phases and the associated food practices are indicated together with the celebrations associated with each phase.

TABLE 6.1: PHASES OF THE MALE NDEBELE INITIATION AND ASSOCIATED FOOD PRACTICES

Phases	Major event	Associated food practices	Concurrent celebrations at home
Pre-preparation phase Immediate months before preparation phase		Preparation and serving of *bogobe* guided by beliefs	Not applicable
Preparation phase	*Abasegwabo* secluded in preparation for the initiation Depart on the last day of the old moon	Restrictions on fat, oil, eggs, milk, and other fatty foods enforced by male supervisors Each a*basegwabo's* food prepared by his own family	Not applicable
Seclusion phase First 3-6 days	Circumcision. Stay in temporary enclosure during the initial days of severe illness	Pumpkin *umdoko* prepared by grandmother or elderly female	Not applicable
Following weeks (middle period)	*Abakhethwa* move to *mphado* – special initiation enclosure	Only stiff salt-free *umratha* of a specific consistency and water is allowed. Prepared by the individual households of initiates	Fathers celebrate their new status Parents thank traditional leader at *ukungenisa umrhubo*
Last stage (re-introduction)	Mothers celebrate at each home Goat slaughtered at each home	Salt added to *umratha* Meat included. Mothers who celebrate the *igwabo* send meat Tea and *amakuke* left at dancing place	*Iqwabo* celebration of initiates' mothers *Isithwalela* celebration
Home-coming celebrations First visit to traditional leader Celebrations at each individual home Second visit to traditional leader	 Sleep over at traditional leader with fathers Wear traditional attire Inform ancestors Receive new clothes and other presents Ritual cleansing Wear headbands and new clothes	 Only traditional beer and traditional food served Beast slaughtered Traditional beer prepared Traditional and modern food served	
Visit maternal grandparents	Maternal ancestors are informed	Slaughter goat Traditional and modern food served	

A description of the meanings attached to the food practices associated with each of the phases of the male Ndebele's initiation process follows.

6.3 THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES DURING THE *INGOMA*

From the discussions with the participants and the description of the food practices provided by them on the different phases of the male Ndebele's initiation it is evident that the traditional customs were still adhered to by this group. The male initiation is characterised by a number of rites and ceremonies that take place while the initiate is in seclusion (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:334). These rites are closely associated with the consumption of food, which forms an integral part of the ceremonies and celebrations paralleled by the initiate's family at home (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:350). A description and interpretation of the food practices during each phase and those associated with the celebrations at home is given.

6.3.1 Preparation phase

Even before the *umsegwabo* (singular for Ndebele boy in preparation for initiation) enters the preparation stage certain beliefs dictate the manner in which the staple food, stiff maize-meal porridge, is prepared and served in the households of some of the prospective initiates. It was explained that in the preparation of the porridge, when the additional maize-meal is poured into the cooking pot, the *lefetlho* (stirring stick) has to be removed from it. If it is not removed, it is believed that the boy could get splenalgia when running or participating in hard physical labour. Some also believed an *umsegwabo* should never dish up his own food; it has to be dished up for him. It was also important that his portion of *bogobe* had to be taken from the middle part of the pot, meaning that he should not be served first but also not last. These beliefs with regard to the serving of the staple food relates to the ability to endure the physical demands of the initiation.

The interplay of socio-psychological forces is evident during this preparation phase. It was explained that the *umsegwabo* is considered to be very vulnerable during this time and the above measures are regarded as precautions to prevent him from being harmed or being unable to endure the physical demands that are required during the initiation process. Other groups also seemed to experience a certain degree of anxiety before sending their children to initiation. Van der Vliet (1974:227) gives the example of the Cape Nguni who took certain protective measures against the fear that the boys would become mad or even die during the initiation rites. The fathers of these boys therefore each killed a goat before their sons were sent to initiation. The boys then had to consume the meat from the right foreleg of this goat as protection.

During this first separation phase, the rules with regard to the preparation and serving of the food, as well as to certain food restrictions, were already in place, enforced and strictly

followed. The food for the *umsegwabo* had to be prepared and served separately from the rest of the household's food. In some families the maternal grandmother provided some of the cooking utensils such as the stirring stick and spoon (*lefetlho* and *leso*) and the *amathunga* (the containers used to transport the food from the household to the initiate, previously wooden containers were used, at the time of the study enamel dishes were used) or the mother would purchase additional ones. Other participants said that the father of the *umsegwabo* was responsible for carving the *lefetlho* and *leso* that was to be used for the initiate's food preparation. The separation from his family further reinforces the requirement that the initiate's food to prepared separately and with other special cooking utensils. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:332) confirms this practice of separate food preparation during initiation, and explains that it relates to the physical protection of the initiate who is in a state of ritual uncleanness during initiation. Fourie (1921:126) mentions briefly that the family of the initiate is not allowed to eat of the food prepared for him, but he does not give an explanation for this custom.

Certain food restrictions are also enforced. The *umsegwabo* only receives boiled food, without the addition of salt, fat, oil or other flavourings. All food with a high fat content such as milk, fatty meat, offal and *vetkoek* as well as eggs are thus restricted. He is not allowed to receive the tasty food he has become accustomed to as a young boy. The diet therefore consists mainly of *bogobe* and boiled *morogo* as relish, prepared by his mother or another responsible adult female in the household. If meat is prepared it has to be a very lean cut of meat (according to some participants only steak, with all visible fat trimmed off, is allowed) prepared by either boiling or roasting over the coals to ensure that it does not contain any fat at all. The prepared food is closely scrutinised by the appointed male *(modoto)* who supervises the boys during this preparation phase. Participants could not give reasons why this has to be done and indicated that they just do it this way, because, *"… it was the law* [rules] *of the men".*

Although the participants could not provide a reason for the fat restriction, one possible explanation could relate to the function of fat in food preparation and the role it plays in enhancing taste thereby contributing to the sensory pleasure of food. Alternatively it could be getting the *umsegwabo* accustomed to the food that be will be eating during his forthcoming two month period of seclusion when only a limited variety of bland (salt-free) food is on offer. In this regard Van der Vliet (1974: 230) remarks that "unsavoury food" is part of the many hardships that the initiates have to endure. In the preparation of relish-type of dishes, as explained by Coetzee (1982:122), fat or oil are used extensively. There is a traditional belief that the function of the side dish or relish is to ease the swallowing of the staple food or main dish - the stiff maize-meal porridge. This ties in with the Richard's (1939:172) reasoning that

cooked millet or sorghum porridge is “tasteless and hard to swallow” and that it is difficult to eat any cereal porridge without an accompaniment prepared in the form of a stew. Elizabeth Rozin (2000:138) similarly explains that throughout sub-Saharan Africa a savoury sauce or stew is required to make the porridge balls “slide down the throat”.

The cited restrictions could probably also be associated with certain norms and values while others relate to certain beliefs. The restriction on egg consumption was for example associated with the belief that eggs would lead to an increased desire for sexual relations. The *abasegwabo* were traditionally strictly prohibited from engaging in any sexual activity before undergoing initiation. The sanction on the consumption of eggs prior to initiation could possibly be related to this belief. Another restriction was that meat containing connective tissue, called *umsipha* meat was to be avoided as it was believed its consumption would lead to the *abasegwabo* experiencing problems with circumcision. The participants indicated that these traditional or customary rules were strictly adhered to as it was believed that by complying, misfortune, harm or even death could be prevented. One of the participants explained why these rules had to be followed as follows: *“ … the older people still tell them; you must not eat this, or do this, because the new* [younger] *generation, they don’t follow these rules, and then they have problems at initiation”.* The adherence to these customary rules seemed to serve the psychological purpose of providing the assurance that the initiate would be protected from harm and that the adults involved in the event had contributed or could contribute to his protection by following the prescribed customs regarding his food.

The examples given reflect that meanings are derived from the socio-psychological and socio-cultural environments. According to the cultural perspective, collective values are produced and reproduced through food and its associated practices. In using food as material culture, the following come to light:

(i) The status of the *umsegwabo* in the community is illustrated during this time of separation. He is removed from the community in which he had, up to this point in his life, been regarded as a child. The separation symbolically indicates the end of this phase in his life cycle. The fact that his food is prepared separately further symbolises separation from his family and the community. Although physically separated from his family, the food sent to him still binds him to them and signifies the physical and psychological support of his family and their relationship with him. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:334) draws attention to this spiritual bond that is maintained with the initiate’s family through the food.

(ii) The type of food allowed and the food restrictions are also symbolic of the initiate’s status in the community. He is only allowed *bogobe* and *morogo* during this time of preparation.

Morogo is generally regarded as a low status food, usually associated with poverty and as food suitable for women and children (Jansen van Rensburg *et al*., 2007). The serving of *morogo* during this phase could thus be interpreted as a representation of his current status in the community, namely that of a child. In her study of the dietary habits of the Swazi people, Jones (1963:70) mentions in this regard that although some men consume these vegetable dishes, "the remainder spurn" them.

Enforcing the rules about the type of food and their preparation further illustrates how food is used as mechanism of control and simultaneously serves as a salient code of social relationships between different groups in the community. The enforcement of these rules by the males reflects the degree of social control they exercise over the *abasegwabo* and within the community at large, signifying the strong paternalistic nature associated with the *ingoma.*

From a symbolic interactionism viewpoint, meaning arises during the process of interaction between people. The meaning attached to the type of food served to the boys during the preparation stage, is derived through the people who regulate and participate in the food provisioning, namely the senior males in charge of the initiation and the females responsible for the food preparation.

6.3.2 Seclusion phase

As illustrated in Table 6.1 the type of food eaten during the different stages of the seclusion period varies as does its consistency, variety and method of preparation. The food for each initiate, now referred to as *umkhethwa,* is prepared by the initiate's family for the duration of the seclusion phase. Initially their *abarhugi* (instructors), fetch the food from their families but, at a later stage, it becomes the task of the younger children in the family, to take the food twice daily to a specific spot near the enclosure where the initiates stay, from where they themselves then collect it.

During the first few days when the a*bakhethwa* (initiates) are still ill, they are only allowed a serving of very soft, salt-free pumpkin and maize-meal porridge. Each initiate's grandmother or any elderly female in the family prepares this pumpkin *umdoko.* It was ascertained in this research that only the older females were allowed to prepare the pumpkin *umdoko* for the first couple of days after circumcision. The pumpkin *umdoko* is carried to the *abakhethwa* in a special container called *isixwepa.* The custom to serve the soft pumpkin porridge during the period directly after circumcision and for the first three days is still followed. Both Fourie (1921:130) and Jansen van Vuuren (1992:353) confirm this practice, although the number of days they mention differs from four to six days. In reaction to the question why this specific

dish had to be served, most of the participants could only offer explanations such as that it is *"... a law* [rule] *made by males".* One elderly informant, however, explained that the *abakhethwa* are ill and therefore need soft food.

In the description of this dish in the book on African culinary practices, Coetzee (1982:151) mentions that this pumpkin and maize-meal dish is often prepared during winter months. The soft porridge called *umdoko* was generally regarded as suitable for invalids and thin porridges were served to babies and toddlers (Coetzee, 1982:136; Van der Vliet, 1974:218). The pumpkin *umdoko* served several days after circumcision could be related to the fact that the *umkhwetha* is regarded as an infant in his new life stage as a grown-up man and, apart from this, that he is still ill after the circumcision. Therefore this dish, associated with convalescence, is prepared. Drawing from the principles of semiotics, the pumpkin *umdoko* signifies the *umkhwetha* as an infant and convalescent (Kaiser, 1997:48; MacCannell & MacCannell, 1982:9). Jansen van Vuuren (1992:353) mentions that it is believed that certain foods are "strengthening" (such as the pumpkin *umdoko*) as opposed to others, that could cause the death of the initiates. The provision of the pumpkin *umdoko* is believed to serve another function, namely, that of protection against harm from outside sources. The pumpkin *umdoko* signifies the protection offered the *umkhwetha* who is regarded as an infant.

The explanation for why the grandmother had to prepare the food was that the grandmothers are not sexually active anymore *"... they are grown-up and don't sleep around".* According to cultural customs certain rules that relate to women of childbearing age are no longer applicable to women after the menopause. The latter are not subject to ritual uncleanness any more (Jansen van Vuuren; 1992:349). The *umkhwetha* is believed to be in a very vulnerable state of ritual uncleanness during the period directly after the circumcision and, having his food prepared by somebody who is not subjected to ritual uncleanness, can thus be regarded as a precaution to protect him from harm. These observations not only illustrate how the various forces from the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are in interplay but also how underlying cultural values and beliefs are reflected in the food practices during this stage of the initiation process.

After the initial days of severe illness, the *abakhethwa* move from a temporary enclosure to the *umphadu* (special initiation enclosure) where they would stay for the rest of their two-month seclusion period. Various opinions were given on what is allowed after the three days of soft pumpkin porridge. According to some participants it is replaced with salt-free *bogobe* and only water for the following week, and afterwards other salt-free relishes could be added. Other participants indicated that a salt-free relish of either *morogo* or meat could be included with the salt-free *bogobe* directly after the pumpkin *umdoko* and that this would be consumed

most of the time during the two months. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:353-354), on the other hand, indicates that the *umkhwetha* is allowed to eat the same kind of food as that prepared for his family following the initial pumpkin porridge diet, although he emphasises that large quantities of stiff maize-meal porridge were also consumed. It seems as if what follows on the pumpkin *umdoko* varies, and that there is no set cultural rule or prescription. However, eating salt-free stiff maize-meal porridge seems to be the most common practice.

Although there were various views on what the diet of the *abakhethwa* consisted of directly after the pumpkin *umdoko,* the participants agreed that the consistency of the porridge had to be according to set standards. If it did not comply with the set norm, sticks were placed in the *bogobe* by the instructors and it was not given to the *umkhehtwa* but sent back home. When this happened, it was regarded as a social disgrace. If a household failed to conform to the prescribed consistency, according to some of the participants, compensation was in the form of sacrificing a goat. The father of the *umkhwetha* had to give the animal to the instructors who looked after the initiates in the *veld.* Therefore, great care was taken in the preparation of the food for the *abakhethwa.* Time and again the participants emphasised that strict rules are enforced with regard to the consistency of the *bogobe.* The salt-free porridge with a dry consistency could be seen as part of the hardships and unpleasantness they had to endure during seclusion.

In the limited literature on the Ndebele food practices, the only reference to the consistency of the porridge was in the work of Jansen van Vuuren (1992: 355), who describes that a piece of the stiff porridge was cut from the middle of the porridge and placed on the wooden storage platform where it was delivered by the younger siblings of the *abakhethwa*. The researcher assumes that this could perhaps be related to the testing of the porridge.

As the time of seclusion draws to an end the type of food served, and its preparation, changes, and it seems as if the strict food preparation rules are gradually lifted by the males who supervise the *ingoma*. Other foods can be introduced and served together with the *bogobe*. Some participants indicated that it is only at this stage that meat could be added to their daily menu, and that salt could be used to flavour their food. This would happen during the immediate two weeks prior to their home-coming and concurred with the time of the *igwabo* celebrations that their mothers attended. Meat from the goats slaughtered at each of the *abakhethwa's* homes during the *igwabo* celebrations would be sent to them together with a variety of other foods. According to some participants cooked meat was sent, while others said that it was cooked by the *abakhethwa* themselves.

To sum up, the different stages of the seclusion phase are also defined through the food they receive. The type of food provided typifies the different stages of the seclusion phase. A number of similarities can be drawn between the type of food and the different stages of the seclusion phase. In the beginning, just after circumcision, the *umkhwetha* is regarded as an infant in his new life stage of being an initiated man but also seen as a convalescent. Therefore food associated with infants and invalids is provided. During the next stage (middle period) which could be compared to the childhood stage, the bland stiff maize-meal porridge with limited quantities of any relish could be associated with the food given to children. This signifies the childhood stage in the seclusion phase. They have no freedom and have to submit to the authority of elderly males. Through the type of food offered to them during the last stage of the seclusion period, they are introduced, not only to adulthood, but are also gradually reintroduced into society as adult males. During this stage they are provided with larger quantities of meat on a daily basis, and other special treats such as tea and *amakuke* and other sweet treats are also included.

6.3.3 Celebrations during the seclusion phase

The parents of the *abakhethwa* attend a number of celebrations while their sons are in seclusion. The fathers of the *abakhethwa* who stayed with them for the first three days, attend a celebration at each of the initiates' homes upon their return. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:350) and Fourie (1921:129) give similar descriptions of this joyous welcoming back of the fathers of the initiates. Jansen van Vuuren explains this as a two-fold occasion, first as a celebration of the fathers' new status, as father of an initiated son, and second to give thanks to the ancestors. *Bogobe*, traditional beer and meat from a slaughtered animal are served on these happy occasions attended by the males. The Mmotla participants indicated that this is a celebration attended exclusively by male relatives and friends of the father of the initiated. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:351) describes the participation of both males and females in this celebration that he refers to as *ukungenisa umrhubo* (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:350).

At some stage during the first month of their sons' seclusion, the parents of the initiates attend a celebration at the home of the traditional leader to thank him for granting permission so that the initiation could take place. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:364-366) gives a detailed account of this celebration and explains a two-fold reason for this celebration. It is not only to thank the traditional leader, but simultaneously an opportunity for the parents of the initiates to express their gratitude to all who participated in the organisation of the initiation. Towards the end of the seclusion period, in preparation to the home-coming of the *abakhethwa,* the *amagwabo* and the *isithwalela* celebrations are held.

Igwabo celebrations During the last week or two before the initiates return home their mothers attend the *igwabo* celebrations at the home of each of the initiates to celebrate the anticipated homecoming of their sons. This celebration is marked by the slaughter of a goat together with merry singing and dancing. The procedures for the *igwabo* celebrations as given by the Mmotla participants are similar to those Jansen van Vuuren (1992:370) describes for the Manala Ndebele.

The participants interpreted the goat slaughtered at each home as a symbol of the mother's joy that her son had attended initiation and would be home soon. An elderly informant compared this goat to the goat slaughtered at the first celebration of the *iqude,* and explained that it is of similar significance as the goat slaughtered at the first *iqude* celebration for the girl (see 6.6.3). *"This goat is equal in importance as the umhlonyani, however, in the case of the boys, it is called igwabo".*

Another meaning attached to the goat agrees with the interpretation given by Jansen van Vuuren (1992:366). He explains the *igwabo* celebration as a rite of integrating or reuniting the unclean initiates with their relatives at home, although this reunion is temporary and no physical contact takes place. The Mmotla initiates participate in these celebrations by dancing in the *veld* some distance away from the village during these celebrations. Part of the slaughtered goat is then sent raw to the initiates who roast the meat at their enclosure. They share the meat from the same goat as their mothers, and through this act the reunion with their families is symbolised.

6.3.4 *Isithwalela* celebration

The *isithwalela* celebration takes place during the last week of seclusion and is associated with joy and fun**.** During this time the *abakhethwa* are often seen dancing at a distance from the village to express their joy of coming home soon. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:370) gives a complete description of the dances and the *isithwalela* (closure) of the seclusion period. Some of the participants associated this celebration as the celebration where the young girls afterwards go out and sing and dance in the *veld,* and then leave special treats such as tea and cake for the *abakhethwa*.

The clay oxen moulded by each *umkhwetha*, and sent to the girl he chooses to become his girlfriend, is an example of the fun experienced during this time period. The *umrhugi* (instructor) hands the clay oxen to the family of each initiate and gives them the name of the chosen girl. The clay oxen, together with a bowl of *umthombo* (sorghum grains) and traditional beer, is then taken by each initiate's family to the family of the girl. The participants

offered the following interpretation for this. The clay oxen serves as symbol of the *lobolo* cattle and signifies that the *abakhethwa* are now adult men, ready to be married. The sorghum grains and traditional beer symbolise a gesture of friendship, and serve to strengthen the social relations between the two families. Fourie (1921:133) also mentions this practice, and describes it as a mockery of the *lobolo* procedures**.**

6.3.5 Home-coming celebrations

On their return to the community the initiated are now referred to as *amasokana*. There are a series of homecoming celebrations to welcome them back into the community. At these celebrations their re-introduction as adult men into the community is celebrated and therefore they wear the traditional attire of a young initiated male. The first of these celebrations is held at the traditional leader's residence and is exclusively for the *amasokana* and their fathers. They have to stay over at the traditional leader's house the first night for this important celebration. Only traditional food, mainly meat, traditional beer and *bogobe,* brought along by the families of the *amasokana,* is consumed. If the traditional leader has the financial means he could slaughter a beast for the occasion.

6.3.6 Individual celebrations at the homes of the *amasokana*

The account of the home-coming celebrations given by the Mmotla participants differs from that which Jansen van Vuuren (1992: 373-376) describes. According to them, the following day the *amasokana* form groups according to their surnames[25], and then over the next couple of days they visit each member of the group's families according to the ranking of the surnames. They move from house to house in their groups and overnight at each member's home, and thus participate in the celebrations at each home as a group. At each family a big celebration is held where a beast is slaughtered. The procedures at the individual celebrations portray a strong interaction with the socio-cultural environment. This is reflected in the manner in which the customary Ndebele procedures and even the food practices associated with these celebrations are still adhered to. For example, the traditional prescriptions, such as the visits to each *isonkana's* family, which has to be according to the traditional hierarchical ranking of the surnames, and the traditional attire that has to be worn for the next month while the celebrations are attended, serve as examples. Contrary to Jansen van Vuuren (1992:376), who states that the individual celebrations were no longer part of the homecoming celebrations, it is still celebrated by the participants of this study.

[25] Jansen van Vuuren (1992:337) gives a full explanation of this ranking, which is according to seniority in terms of the clan names. This is not discussed further as it falls outside the scope of this study.

Another example of how powerful the forces from the socio-cultural environment are, relates to adhering to the prescriptions regarding the traditional food that must be served during the individual celebrations. It was emphasised that it was compulsory to slaughter a beast and serve *ting mabele* (fermented sorghum porridge)*, bogobe, tlhabalala* (traditional beer) and the meat from the slaughtered beast. It was explained that the elderly males insisted that these traditional dishes be prepared. The explanation for adhering to these customary norms probably lies in the fact that at these celebrations the ancestors of the *amasokana* are informed of their homecoming. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:333) explains that slaughtering and communication with the ancestors took place as an integral part of the various rites performed throughout the entire initiation period and even thereafter. The participants emphasised that traditional food had to be prepared on occasions where communication with the ancestors took place because they demanded that traditions be observed. Transgression of these prescriptions could result in the wrath of the ancestors. The cultural perspective indicates that collective values are produced and reproduced through cultural forms. In the above example the traditional food as cultural form, signifies the collective values. Honouring and obeying the ancestors through adhering to traditions and customs are symbolised by means of the traditional food provided.

According to custom, certain parts of the slaughtered animal are allocated to specific family members. The *isifunzi* part of the slaughtered beast must for example be handed over to the maternal grandparents (see Figure 6.1). This has symbolic meaning. The *isifunzi* is part of the back section (sirloin) of the slaughtered beast and is given to the maternal grandparents at this celebration as a symbol of gratitude for what the maternal grandparents have done for the *isokana*. The grandmother would have carried him on her back as an infant. Some participants even regard grandmothers as being the backbone of the family. The *isifunzi* symbolises the back of the grandmother, but it also signifies the social relationship of the grandparents and specifically the grandmother, with the *isokana*. According to symbolic interactionism, meaning arises in the process of interaction between people and symbols are often used to define or represent these meanings. In this instance the grandmother carried her grandson on her back. The back of the grandmother is associated with caring and comforting. The *isifunzi* also serves as a symbol of this intimate bond with a caring and nurturing grandmother. From the cultural perspective point of view, culture often provides abstract pictures or representations of social life. Here the *isifunzi* illustrates the social relationship between the grandmother and her grandson.

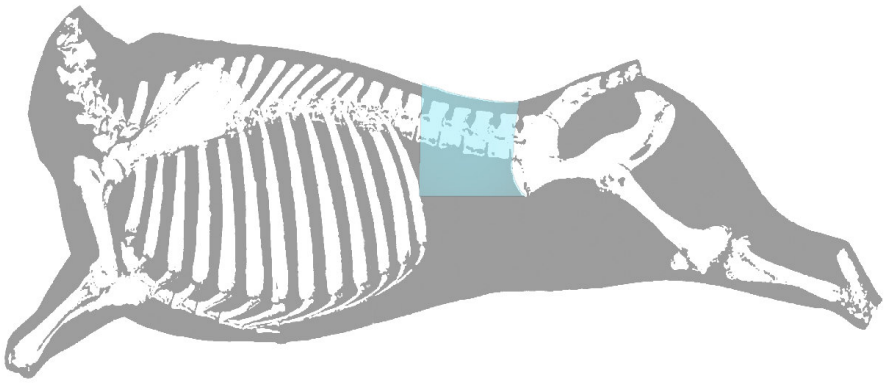

FIGURE 6.1: *ISIFUNZI* PART OF THE SLAUGHTERED BEAST

Side by side with the traditional dishes, modern food[26] was always indicated as important menu items served on these occasions. The variety of modern food served, depended on the money that the specific family had available. However, it was emphasised that it is of the utmost importance to also prepare modern food. This yet again portrays how traditional and modern foods are juxtaposed. On the one hand, traditions need to be honoured by demonstrating obedience and respect to the ancestors through the traditions that are still in place, thereby indicating that the ancestors are respected. On the other hand, influences from the socio-psychological environment in terms of what is currently (at the time of the study) the social norm, namely to be regarded as educated, is also an important consideration in terms of the prestige and status value that is attached to the serving of modern food. Salient forces from both the socio-cultural and the socio-psychological environments are reflected in these food practices.

6.3.7 Second visit to the traditional leader

After they have visited each family, the *amasokana* return to the chief's house. During this visit they undergo the ritual cleansing and officially take off their traditional attire. They then wear the new clothes they received as presents from their families together with the traditional headband as a sign that they are now grown-up men. During the first month after the *isokana* has returned home from initiation he is not allowed to touch girls or enter the kitchen if cow dung was used on the floor. These prescriptions are enforced for as long as he wears the headband. The reason for this taboo is given by Fourie (1921:136) who explains that he is still in a state of uncleanness, although Landgraf (1974:76) similarly refers to this state of uncleanness, she also mentions the fear that existed that if a woman touched the initiated or even his clothes, she might become sterile or even die.

[26] "modern food" is the phrase used by the participants when referring to Western-oriented food or dishes as illustrated in Table 5.2.

6.3.8 Celebration at the maternal grandparents

After the second visit to the traditional leader, the last in the series of homecoming celebrations follows. This is the visit the *isokana* has to pay to his maternal grandparents. During this visit the maternal ancestors have to be informed that their grandson is now an adult man and a goat is slaughtered. A friend of the *isokana* or the whole group could accompany him to this celebration (this depends on the funds that the grandparents have available for the celebration). The food prepared at this celebration is once again a combination of traditional and modern food. Apart from the meat of the slaughtered animal, *tlhabalala, bogobe* and *ting mabele* have to be prepared. The grandmother of the *isokana* usually receives the *amathunga* and the *lefhetlo* that were used for his food preparation while at initiation, as presents. These are handed over to her at this visit.

This visit as part of the home-coming celebrations again reflects the importance attached to obeying customs. The important role that the ancestors continue to play, including the underlying beliefs, is again highlighted. To ensure the continued goodwill of the ancestors it was regarded as essential to inform them of all the major incidents in the lives of their descendants, and specifically of the major life-stage transitions as, for example, initiation.

6.4 INITIATION AMONG THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS

In Table 6.2 the Ndebele male initiation is compared to the other cultural groups in the Mmotla who still practise it.

TABLE 6.2: COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA

	NDEBELE	NORTH SOTHO	TSONGA
Time of year and period	Winter months From May up to the end of July Previously only every 4 years	Winter months From May up to the first week in August	Winter months From May up to end of July or first week in August
Age	Males of 20 years and older	Males of 20 years and older	Males 16 years and older
Preparation for initiation	Special traditional dress (short trousers, *"umtjhotjho"* – headgear and knobkierie) Males are called *abasegwabo*	No special preparation or dress Called *bagwera*	No special preparation or dress
Food restrictions	No fat allowed in food preparation. Consumption of fat, vetkoek, eggs, fatty meat and milk forbidden	No food restrictions	No food restrictions
Social restrictions	Not allowed to visit friends, relatives or girlfriends	No restrictions	No restrictions
Visit to maternal grandparents	Gifts exchanged with grandparents He receives a blanket and cooking utensils for his food preparation	None mentioned	None mentioned
Departure for initiation	Fetched by older brothers who have attended initiation Overnight at traditional leader's house Leave early next morning No rules mentioned	Gather at traditional leader's house from where they leave in a group at sunset All the women and children must be indoors – they are not allowed to see them leave Rules for parents – they are not allowed to attend any social functions during the time that their son is at initiation such as funerals or weddings	No rules mentioned
Food preparation and serving procedures during seclusion	Paternal grandmother prepares *isijeza* for the first three days Food is prepared by own family Food is fetched by the *abarhugi* in special containers *izixwepa* during the first part of the seclusion After some time younger siblings take the food to a special collection point .	Food is prepared by own family without salt Food is fetched by the *baditi* of the initiate	*Bogobe* is prepared by own family *Batapi* fetches food in special containers

TABLE 6.2: COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA – *continued*

	NDEBELE	NORTH SOTHO	TSONGA
Celebrations during seclusion phase	Parents celebrate and thank traditional leader for initiation. Mothers wear a thin headband *umkhala* as sign that sons are attending initiation. A number of celebrations are held during the last month. ***Igwabo* celebration** Initiates are now called *abakhethwa* Goat slaughtered at each home ***Isithwalelo* celebration** Fun celebration. During the week before the *abakhethwa* come home.	No celebration during this phase. Parents of initiates not allowed to attend any social functions.	*Hondolela* celebration after first month. This celebration will take place on the Friday night Families take the special dish *tihove* and traditional beer to the boys in the veld. The Saturday the boys dance in the distance.
Celebrations to mark home-coming **First visit to traditional leader**	The group as a whole attend the first big celebration at the home of the traditional leader. They wear traditional attire. Traditional food is prepared by families – *ting mabele*, *bogobe* and traditional beer. After this celebration they are called *isokana*	The initiates wear traditional attire. A big celebration is held at the home of the traditional leader. A beast is slaughtered for the initiates now called *badikana.* The *badikana* return home with their parents after this celebration and no other celebration is held at home. Each family informs their ancestors one week before the boys leave for initiation and again when they return home.	Only one big celebration at the end. On the last Saturday everything is burnt down where the initiation school was. A big celebration called *botshwele* is held. Blankets and scotch skirts are bought and worn by the initiates – this must have red in. The big celebration will be held at the home of the traditional healer. The mothers of the initiates cook the food *Bogobe*, meat and traditional beer will be served.

TABLE 6.2: COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT MALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA – *continued*

	NDEBELE	NORTH SOTHO	TSONGA
Celebrations at the home of each initiate	**Groups are formed according to the surnames. The group as a whole attend the celebration at the home of each *isokana*.**	None mentioned	None mentioned
Food	A beast is slaughtered at each family and the meat is prepared together with *umratha, ting mabele* and traditional beer. This is regarded as compulsory food at this celebration. "Modern food" is also served.		
Second visit to traditional leader	After every *isokana's* family has been visited they return to the traditional leader They undergo the ritual cleansing and henceforth don't wear the traditional attire anymore. They however, still wear the headband – as a sign of a grown-up man.		
Visit to maternal grandparents	The maternal grandparents are visited after the last visit to the traditional leader. The maternal ancestors are informed that the *isokana* returned from initiation and is now a grown-up. A goat is slaughtered and traditional and "modern food" is prepared.	None mentioned	None mentioned

From the comparison given in Table 6.2, the initiation rites of the North Sotho and Tsonga appear less complex than those of the Ndebele group. However, a number of similarities and differences in the procedures followed by each group are highlighted. All groups indicated that the initiation takes place during the winter months and the males attend initiation in groups from the age of 16 years or older. Only the Ndebele group had specific phases such as a preparation phase, characterised by an initial separation from the family, associated with a special dress code and food restrictions that are strictly imposed. They were the only group that had different stages for the seclusion phase with food practices that changed between the stages. The food preparations for all three groups took place at the family homes of the initiated. The food was then carried by their younger siblings to an specified collecting point near the enclosure from where it is collected. The home-coming celebration of the North Sotho and Tsonga is marked by one big celebration whereas the Ndebele group have a number of celebrations to mark the home-coming and re-introduction of the initiates into society. It is evident, that, when compared to the other ethnic groups, the Ndebele group has conserved and adhered to their customs more strictly than the others have done. The same tendency was noted by Jansen van Vuuren (1992:378).

Forces from the socio-cultural and psychological environments are reflected in the food practices of the Ndebele group during the initiation rites and the celebrations associated with it. The traditional customs of this group are honoured and continued by those who practise them. The paternal nature of the initiation rites contributes to ensuring that this happens. The control exercised by senior males during initiation rites, such as the insistence on traditional food practices, contributes to their preservation. This is understandable because, as explained by Turner (1967:7), the purpose of the male initiation is, amongst other aspects, primarily to inculcate tribal values. In this regard, Jansen van Vuuren (1992:389) concludes that initiation contributes to the establishment of a cultural identity with the Ndebele. From the accounts given by the Ndebele participants in Mmotla, it can be concluded that adhering to the traditional food practices associated with the male initiation, contributes to this sense of cultural identity.

6.5 COURSE OF THE NDEBELE FEMALE INITIATION (*IQUDE)*

In contrast to the Ndebele males who undergo initiation in a group, the Ndebele female attends the *iqude* (initiation) on her own. The *iqude* takes place after the second or third time that the girl menstruates and this is similar to the information given by other researchers (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:380; Trollip, 1991:153; Jansen van Rensburg 1987:189; Fourie, 1921:139). Some participants indicated that the *iqude* used to take place during the winter

months, at the same time when the males attended initiation; while others were of the opinion that there was no fixed time and a girl could go anytime of the year after she started menstruating. In Mmotla, girls, however, usually attended the *iqude* during the long summer school holidays during December/January, and the reason given was to prevent interference with school. With the exception of the people of the senior lineage, the *iqude* nowadays only lasts four weeks and it starts on a Friday. For members of the senior lineage[27] it takes two months, due to their strict observance of the traditional customs. A girl from the senior lineage has to go into seclusion a month before the first *iqude* celebration takes place, and then stays in seclusion thereafter for another four weeks. Similar information is reported by Jansen van Vuuren (1992:392, 405) and Jansen van Rensburg (1987:189). The account of the *iqude* given by Trollip (1991:154-156) resembles the process of members of a senior lineage. The participants in her study were all relatives of the traditional leader, which explains the difference in the course of the *iqude* recorded by her.

Another important feature of the Ndebele female initiation is that the big celebration is held during the first weekend when the *iqude* commences. The main phases and events in the course of the *iqude* are given in Table 6.3 to highlight the food practices associated with each. A brief description of each phase is given first, followed by a description of the associated food practices during the *iqude*.

[27] In the South Ndebele the Mahlangu lineage for example, as one of the senior clans or lineages are regarded as the custodians of the traditional customs of the Ndzundza-Ndebele. Due to this function and their seniority in the lineage they continue to strictly adhere to the initiation rites as customary practice. See Jansen van Vuuren (1992: 225-238 and 348-349) for a complete description regarding the importance and role of lineages in traditional rites among the Ndebele.

TABLE 6.3: PHASES OF THE NDEBELE FEMALE INITIATION AND ASSOCIATED FOOD PRACTICES

PHASE	MAJOR EVENT	ASSOCIATED FOOD PRACTICES
Preparation phase		
Soon after first menses	Food restrictions enforced	Eggs, milk, fat and oil restricted by some
	Selection of *abangenisi*	
	Inform ancestors that the girl referred to as *umthombi* is ready to undergo the initiation rite	Preparation of traditional beer during week before *iqude* commences
Seclusion phase		
Ipuku stage (1st weekend)	Beginning of the seclusion for the girl, now referred to as the *isigoyi*	Appointed *abangenisi* prepares the *isigoyi's* food
	***Iqude* celebration**	
	Friday Celebration for females Girl goes into seclusion at the house of her paternal grandmother	Father of *isigoyi* slaughters the *umhlonyani* goat
	Saturday Ritual cleansing of initiate Males join in the celebrations *Isigoyi* and her family receive gifts from guests	*Iqude* beast is slaughtered Mainly traditional food and traditional beer are served with meat
	Sunday Celebrations continue Highlight of the celebrations as more guests join to celebrate	Large variety of modern food prepared and served with meat Bread and red jam served to females to indicate closure of weekend's celebrations
Next four weeks	*Isigoyi* secluded in her mother's house	Mother and sisters of the *isigoyi* prepare her food
Completion of initiation	***Ukuhlubula* celebration** Girl comes out of seclusion and is welcomed back into the family as a young initiated woman	Small family celebration Modern food and traditional beer served
	***Ukuhlabisa* celebration** Young woman visits maternal grandparents Maternal ancestors are informed	Slaughter goat

6.5.1 Preparation phase

After the first menstruation the mother of the girl informs the father and the matter is discussed with the elders in the family to decide if the girl is ready to undergo the process of the *iqude.* Jansen van Vuuren (1992:380) explains that physical, psychological and cultural

aspects determine the readiness of the girl. Certain food restrictions are imposed on the girl after the first menstruation.

The mother of the girl starts with the preparation as soon as it is agreed that the girl should now attend *iqude*. She looks for two suitable girls to be the girl's *abangenisi* (instructors) during the *iqude*. According to Trollip (1991:154) these girls are carefully selected by the mothers and must already have undergone the *iqude*. Apart from their role as instructors the *abangenisi* are also responsible for the food preparation of the *isigoyi* (girl undergoing initiation) during the first four days of the girl's seclusion and to assist in the food preparation for the big celebration during the first weekend of the *iqude*.

Before the *iqude* begins, it is imperative that the paternal ancestors be informed that the girl *"… is now big and going through the process of iqude".* Therefore the preparation of the traditional beer begins during the week before the celebration. The beer is used to inform the ancestors that the girl is now "*grown-up"* and that she would be undergoing *iqude.* Jansen van Rensburg (1987:188) gives a similar account of the communication with the ancestors before the *iqude* commences.

6.5.2 Celebrations during *iqude*

There are three celebrations associated with the *iqude*. The first is the big celebration held during the first weekend of the *iqude*, and guests are invited to this important occasion in life of the girl and her family. The other two smaller celebrations are, one that marks the end of the seclusion period, called *umhlubulo,* and the other is the celebration hosted by the maternal grandparents thereafter, referred to by some as *ukuhlabisa*.

6.6 THE MEANING OF THE FOOD PRACTICES DURING THE *IQUDE*

From the discussions it emerged that the food practices employed during the female initiation rites, specifically those associated with restricting food, have become more relaxed in Mmotla.

6.6.1 The preparation phase

Some participants said that food restrictions were no longer enforced during the *iqude*, while others stated that certain food restrictions were in place once the girl started menstruating. It was mentioned that eggs, milk, fat, oil and a certain hard part of the intestines of a beast,

were disallowed prior to undergoing the process of *iqude*. The reason for the egg, fat and oil prohibition was related to the belief that these foods would awaken sexual desires in the girl and she was not allowed to participate in any sexual activities until after the initiation. The participants' concerns were illustrated as they gave the following reasons for these restrictions: *"… girls will lust after men"* and *"… you will have feelings for boys …".* In other studies (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:382; Trollip, 1991:156) similar reasons for these food restrictions were offered. Responses from the Ndebele group of Mmotla led to similar findings as reported on in the studies by Trollip (1991: 156) and Jansen van Rensburg (1987:190). It is still regarded as a disgrace if a girl fell pregnant before attending the *iqude.* Therefore some families continued to enforce these food restrictions before and during the rite of *iqude*.

No acceptable explanation for the milk restriction could be given, except that *"… it is just a rule that she should not eat it".* This again serves as to illustrate how some cultural beliefs are perpetuated and that some practices are deeply ingrained as part of the cultural customs. Often people do not know the reason for following a practice and simply accept it as the way things should be done and continue with the practice without questioning it. The symbolic interactionism assumption about society applies in this instance. The symbolic interactionism recognises that individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes. This implies, according to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993:144), that people's behaviour is constrained by societal norms and values and hence they fit their own doings in some way or other, into the actions of others without questioning them.

Although various studies (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:394; Jansen van Rensburg, 1987:135; Landgraf, 1974:71; Fourie, 1921:140) refer to the restriction of milk during the first phase of the *iqude*, only Jansen van Rensburg (1987:135,138) explains it. One idea is that an unclean person is prohibited from consuming milk because this could cause harm to the cattle in the sense that cows in calf would abort. Another relates to the belief that, if a menstruating woman drinks milk, it would cause the cows to stop giving milk. This relates to the traditional belief of the cattle-owning tribes, such as the Nguni, that menstruating women were in a state of uncleanness and thus a "source of danger". It was believed that harm could be done by such women to the cattle in the form of misfortune or illness (Kohler, 1933:15).

The examples given concerning the continuation of the food restrictions portray the prominence and interplay of the idea system (as part of the socio-psychological environment) on the food practices of some members of this group, who still believe that food enhances or could cause adverse effects on humans and cattle.

6.6.2 The seclusion of the *isigoyi*

On the Friday of the first celebration the *isigoyi* (girl undergoing initiation) goes into seclusion and stays at the house of her paternal grandmother during this first weekend of her *iqude* celebrations. She is therefore not seen at this celebration and only the *abangenisi* (female instructor of the *isigoyi)* and some of her friends are initially allowed near her. When she has to move outside she is covered in the *umbhalo*-blanket (striped Ndebele blanket) and surrounded by her friends, and is not visible to anyone. The explanation for this practice could be found in the custom that unclean persons have to be secluded for a certain time period. A female could be in the state of uncleanness during menstruation, when undergoing the process of initiation and when giving birth or after the death her husband (Jansen van Rensburg, 1987:132; Landgraf, 1974:91; Van der Vliet, 1974:214).

The reason why the *abangenisi* are responsible for food preparation of the *isigoyi* during the initial stages of her seclusion is related to this state of uncleanness. The participants explained that the *isigoyi* is regarded as an infant in her new life phase and therefore her mother is not allowed to be involved in her food preparation during these first few days. Mothers of newborn babies were customarily not involved in food preparation directly after childbirth because of their unclean state after childbirth (Van der Vliet, 1974:214). The relationship between the mother and her daughter undergoing the *iqude* is symbolised through these practices related to the preparation of food. The *isigoyi* is regarded as an infant in her new life-phase and her mother is therefore associated with a woman who gave birth.

The mother is, however, allowed to be involved in the food preparation for her daughter after the *ipuku* stage. This is when the *isigoyi* is secluded in her mother's house for the four week period after the first weekend of the celebration that marked the beginning of the *iqude*. Traditionally the *isigoyi* was only allowed to eat *bogobe, morogo* and *dinawa* (cowpeas) and only salt was used to flavour food. Nowadays the *isigoyi* can eat practically any type of food she wishes and fat, oil and other flavourings are generously used in her food preparation. It was explained that some adaptations had to be made. The *iqude* is not only restricted to the winter months, as was the custom before. The result was that it was not possible to prepare some food items, such as certain legume dishes, that were previously closely associated with the *iqude*, throughout the year, due to the seasonal unavailability of certain indigenous ingredients such as *morogo* and cowpeas. Another reason for the adaptation related to the inability to produce these crops due to the natural environment of Mmotla as explained in Chapter 4 (see 4.3.1). Changes in food acceptability and preferences of the younger

generation due to acculturation and modernisation were other reasons given for the lifting of the food restrictions.

The girl remains in seclusion for four weeks, and during this period her mother and sisters are responsible for the preparation of her food (the *abangenisi* returned home after the first weekend). The *abangenisi* visit the *isigoyi* from time to time during the seclusion period and their task is *"… to give her the rules of being a woman".* Various sources (Trollip, 1991:154-155; Jansen van Rensburg, 1987:188; Landgraf, 1974:75; Fourie, 1921:140) indicate that the *isigoyi* receives instruction and, as was the case in these studies, the Mmotla participants were also reluctant to give more information on exactly what is taught. Both Jansen van Rensburg (1987:117) and Landgraf (1974:75), however, suggest that the instruction given relates to issues regarding women's relationships with men, especially with regard to *hlonipha*[28]*,* sexual relations and childbirth, although instruction on housekeeping and motherhood are also addressed. Turner (1967:7) similarly indicates that the purpose of the female initiation is to prepare a girl for marriage.

The meanings attached to the food practices associated with each of the three celebrations associated with the *iqude* are now discussed.

6.6.3 The first *iqude* celebration

This celebration is held during the first weekend when the *isigoyi* goes into seclusion. The celebrations start on Friday and continue to Sunday and officially mark the beginning of the *iqude* for a girl.

Young girls usually start the proceedings by singing and requesting the goat that has to be slaughtered as part of the rituals associated with the celebration on Friday. This celebration is exclusively for females and even girls who have not undergone the *iqude* are allowed to attend the celebration on Friday when the *umhlonyani* goat is slaughtered. The festivities and singing continue throughout the night and the meat from the slaughtered goat is prepared and served to the guests, followed by tea and *vetkoekies* (fat cakes) later in the evening.

The significance of slaughtering this *umhlonyani* goat was emphasised by phrases such as:

"Thank you that you have grown up and went to initiation, ...".

[28] *Hlonipha* means showing respect towards someone or to treat someone respectfully (Landgraf, 1974:81; Fourie, 1921:164).

" It is tradition to slaughter a goat, it is compulsory".

" It will be a mistake if it is not done".

" … 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 reasons given why the *umhlonyani* goat is slaughtered are closely related to the ideology and specifically the belief system of this group. During the slaughtering process the ancestors of the girl are informed that the girl is undergoing the rite of initiation. A similar account of this part of the procedures is also described by Jansen van Vuuren (1992:395). This is an important procedure, whereby it is ensured that the ancestors would not negatively influence the fertility of the girl or cause the girl to bear disabled children. This relates to the belief that this act expresses respect and recognition of the ancestors. In doing so the ancestors are kept happy and satisfied and this ensures a prosperous and good life for the descendants of the ancestors. It was emphasised that to keep the ancestors satisfied, customs have to be followed. If these are observed, it directly contributes to the happiness and satisfaction of the ancestors who would then ensure a prosperous future for the girl, of which the most important is related to her fertility. Jansen van Rensburg (1987:189) also mentions the offering made to the ancestors with the request to ensure the girl's fertility.

The slaughtered goat signifies that the ancestors were informed and that the ritual was performed to ensure her fertility, and simultaneously prevent the wrath of the ancestors that could result if this was not done. Collective values are portrayed through the slaughtered goat and the high value that is placed on fertility and can be linked to the belief system of the group. Some participants provided an additional explanation as to why a goat is slaughtered. They said that to slaughter the goat is a sign that the parents and grandparents of the girl had reached consensus that she was no longer a child, but was now becoming a woman and the goat therefore signified this agreement.. Both Jansen van Vuuren (1992:380) and Fourie (1921:139-140) too mention certain physical, psychological and cultural criteria that have to be met before a person is allowed to undergo intitiation. Yet another explanation given was that the goat is slaughtered for the girl to symbolise her good behaviour for not being sexually active and falling pregnant before undergoing the *iqude* as described (see 6.6.1). The goat thus also serves here as a code that she may now engage in sexual relationships and would be allowed to marry, if she wishes to do so, after the initiation, and the following explanations were given:

"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 married".

In this regard Jansen van Rensburg (1987:190) similarly refers to the permission that is granted to the *isigoyi* to have boyfriends and to get married after the *iqude*.

The celebration continues on Saturday, and *amacebelengwana* (small steamed breads) are served together with the rest of the goat meat for breakfast on Saturday. During Saturday morning the *isigoyi*, accompanied by her a*bangenisi* and friends, traditionally went to the river to wash. Various sources refer to this ritual cleansing of the *isigoyi* on Saturday morning (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:395; Jansen van Rensburg, 1987: 131-136; Fourie, 1921:140). Because there is no river near the Mmotla village, water and a basin to wash in is placed in the *veld* near the girl's home where she is then able to wash. Although the participants of this study were unable to give reasons why the girl had to wash, this ritual of washing with water probably relates to the removal of her uncleanness as explained by Jansen van Rensburg (1987:134).

The girl and her *abangenisi* would then wait there in the *veld* until her father is ready to slaughter the beast for her *iqude* celebration. It could take some time before they are called back home and therefore food is taken along. This usually consists of the left-over goat meat from the previous day and *amacebelengwana* (small steamed breads). Before the beast could be slaughtered all the goat meat **had to** be consumed. Therefore, any remaining goat meat had to be eaten by the older women. The goat was slaughtered for the *isigoyi* at the women's celebration and therefore the meat should be finished before the *iqude*-beast was slaughtered and the males joined in. No reason could be given for this rule.

Upon their return from the river the father of the *isigoyi* slaughters the beast for her *iqude* celebration and the presents from her family, friends and neighbours are handed over to her family. The handing over of the presents could take place on the Sunday afternoon according to Jansen van Vuuren's observations. A detailed description of this part of the celebrations is given in his study (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992: 399-404).

The food prepared for Saturday's festivities for the invited and uninvited guests, who drop by during the day, was described as mainly traditional. According to the older participants certain traditional dishes are closely associated with the *iqude* celebrations and should, where practically possible, be prepared for Saturday's festivities. These include meat from

the slaughtered beast, *tlhabalala* (traditional beer), *ting mabele*, *idombolo*, *bogobe, isidudu* and *irhayi*. It seemed as though the food prepared for the Saturday of the *iqude* complements the traditional customs and rituals that are performed. A possible explanation for mainly serving traditional food relates to the fact that the ancestors are honoured during this part of the celebration through the slaughter of the *iqude* beast for the girl. As explained under the home-coming celebrations after the *ingoma* (see 6.3.6), only traditional food is served when communication with the ancestors takes place. This also serves as evidence to the ancestors that traditions are honoured even with regard to the type of food that is served. It further emphasises that traditions are still followed and above all *"… shows to the ancestors that they still remember them".* The powerful influence of the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments is again evident.

Certain parts of the slaughtered beast are allocated to specific persons. These people all have a close association with the *isigoyi,* and the part handed to each represents either their relationship with her, or their position within her kinship group. The older women are served meat from the rib cage of the beast and the two *abangenisi* receive a front leg that they share. The maternal grandmother of the girl receives the *isifunzi* (see Figure 6.1) as interpreted under the home-coming celebrations of the *amasokana* (see 6.3.6) this symbolises that the maternal grandmother is the backbone of the family who carried and comforted her granddaughter on her back. It also symbolises the close relationship of the grandmother and her granddaughter. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:397-398) includes a brief description of the slaughter and division of the meat of the beast. According to his observations the back section was given to the maternal uncle of the *isigoyi*. The Mmotla participants explained that this is the procedure if the maternal grandmother could not be present at the celebrations. The uncle is then responsible for taking this section of the meat to her.

According to symbolic interactionism perspective, it is through social interaction that individuals work out the details of their social structure (Blumer 1969:6-7). Through the sharing of the meat, kinship and family ties are confirmed and strengthened thus simultaneously portraying aspects of their recognition of relationships and social organisation. During the interaction resulting from the allocation of certain parts of the *iqude* beast to specific persons close to the *isigoyi* her relationship with them and her position in the social structure of the group is confirmed.

The joyous celebrations continue on Sunday, and more guests join to participate in the feast which is considered the highlight of the weekend's celebrations. The type of food that is served on Sunday includes, apart from traditional dishes, a large variety and quantity of

modern dishes. The preparation of these modern dishes is often made possible through the help of the support group to which the mother of the *isigoyi* belongs. Breakfast consists of *bogobe* and meat, while the lunch typically includes dishes associated with the Sunday midday meal as described in Chapter 5 (see 5.3.2.2), with the exception, that the variety of dishes would be larger. The importance and special attention given to the food served on Sunday of the *iqude* is reflected in the following quotations:

"Sunday they will cook extra [food such as rice, salads, dessert]*, this will depend on the available money".*

"On Sunday everyone will be there. On Sunday the celebration is special – the celebration is over the whole weekend and the cake and dessert will only be [served] *on Sunday".*

"Ja, even now they got a lot of modern food, but in the olden days it was mealies [maize]*, the cow* [beast] *and the goat and jam, but now – modern food, rice and everything on Sunday".*

The importance of the celebrations on Sunday and the special food prepared for lunch on Sunday was also briefly referred to in other studies (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992: 385, 399; Trollip, 1991:155). Both studies give descriptions of Western-oriented menus. The status and prestige value attached to being a generous host is often measured in the ability to serve a large variety of modern food and much emphasis is placed on these dishes. The nature of the food provided often confirms the social group to which the initiate's family belongs, or even may aspire to belong.

An important "dish" closely associated with the *iqude* celebration is the bread and jam served on Sunday afternoon after lunch. It has become an accepted symbol of this event in recent times and tins of red jam[29] are collected before the *iqude*. When this is served on the Sunday afternoon it is a sign that the weekend's celebration was drawing to a close. The older participants remarked that this had become a special treat at the *iqude* celebrations when they were young. However, it was not served then in such large quantities as it was a scarce and expensive commodity. The older women expect this treat to be served and, in wealthy families, each female guest with a daughter who has already gone through the *iqude*, receives a tin of red jam at the end of the celebrations as a departure gift to take home. It was mentioned that it was important to serve this, because," … *there must be bread and jam, because jam is special. Ja, jam is very special in the Ndebele tradition".* The importance of serving bread and jam on the Sunday afternoon has even become a yardstick to measure

[29] Red jam refers to mixed fruit jam available in the retail in 450g and 900g tins.

how enjoyable the food was. It was aptly explained in Afrikaans by one informant that when jam is not served at the party, it was not regarded as a nice party.

" … as hy nie jam het nie, daardie 'party' van jou was nie lekker nie".

[30] *"… if there is not jam, that party of yours was not enjoyable".*

Some participants had a different version about the serving of the jam. According to them the family of the girl had to collect large quantities of tins of jam (several hundreds were mentioned) before the *iqude* celebrations. This information differs slightly from Jansen van Vuuren's (1992: 386), who observed the practice of giving guests tins of jam and loaves of bread to the guests on their departure after the weekend's celebrations. The number of tins of jam recorded by Jansen van Vuuren (1992: 385) was 240. It seemed as if a prestige value is also attached to the ability to hand these tins of jam and bread to the guests on departure (Jansen van Vuuren, 1992:400-401). It was explained that the tins of jam were given to the guests as compensation for the gifts and money received from them.

The presentation of bread and jam to each of the female guests who attended the celebrations symbolises the host's gratitude to them for having attended the celebration, rendering support and giving gifts to the family of the initiate. At the same time the gesture can be regarded as a status symbol of hosts who are in a position to extend their hospitality to each guest by giving them this special treat to take home. The sharing of food from the celebration thus actually extends the *iqude* festivities. The bread and jam has therefore become a means to evaluate the celebration and the hospitality of the hosts. Also represented here is the aspect of female unity – the participants in this study emphasised that the tin of jam was only handed to those women who already had an initiated daughter. This ties in with Jansen van Vuuren's (1992:408) interpretation that both the *ingoma* and *iqude* celebrations are opportunities to strengthen kinship ties and to form or solidify social relationships with neighbours and friends.

Underlying forces from both the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are clearly instrumental in directing not only the *iqude* customs and traditions, but also the nature of the celebrations and their characteristic food practices as experienced on the first weekend. These are reflected in the importance attached to the slaughter of the *umhlonyani* goat and the practice of informing the ancestors, as well as nurturing kinship, family and other social relationships.

[30] Quotation translated directly from Afrikaans.

6.6.4 Celebrations at the end of *iqude*

The second celebration associated with the *iqude,* is the small celebration that marks the end of the four-week seclusion period and the *"coming out of the girl".* This smaller celebration, called *umhlubulo* does not receive the same attention when compared to the first. The reason for this is limited funds and only a small celebration is held to mark this occasion. The celebration takes place after the girl has performed the ritual cleansing of washing. She is then dressed in the traditional attire of a young initiated woman. Depending on the money available, a beast, goat or chicken(s) is slaughtered or meat is purchased and mainly modern food is prepared. The participants mentioned that traditional beer is always prepared for this occasion. Jansen van Vuuren (1992:405) gives a similar description of this second celebration to mark the end of the *iqude.* He, however, indicates that a goat is slaughtered in honour of the ancestors, whereas the Mmotla participants made no mention of the fact that the animal was slaughtered to communicate with or inform the ancestors.

Celebration at the maternal grandparents At the end of the festivities the girl has to visit her maternal grandparents, to inform them that she is now a young woman and that the process of the *iqude* has been completed. Reasons for this visit and the small celebration called *ukuhlabisa* (to slaughter),were similar to those explained for the males (see 6.3.8). During this important visit to the maternal grandparents, the maternal ancestors have to be informed that the grandchild has undergone the process of *iqude* and is now a grown woman. The ancestors want to know what has happened to the child, therefore *"… they must know".* If the maternal grandparents cannot slaughter a goat (due to a lack of funds), at the time the girl comes out of initiation, it has to be done at a later stage, but they **must** do it. It was explained that the goat has to be slaughtered for the maternal ancestors to enable them *"… to witness and agree with the family that the girl has grown up".* If this goat is not slaughtered the ancestors would be unhappy, because they were not notified. Again ideological aspects are reflected through the beliefs expressed during this celebration. The importance attached to it was expressed by the following phrase: *"… it will be a mistake if it is not done".*

Apart from being used to inform the ancestors, the goat also symbolises gratitude. The maternal grandparents slaughter the goat to thank their daughter and the family of the father of the granddaughter that they adhered to the traditional customs and initiated her in an appropriate manner. This is explained in the following quotations:

"Then the symbol of slaughtering the goat on the side of the grandparents of the child, is to give thanks to the child, and to the family that they have brought up the child very well [according to traditional customs]*".*

"They are thanked that they have brought up the child very well [according to traditional customs]*, and that the child is now grown-up and can be married".*

The importance and values attached to the traditional rites and customs are also expressed here. The maternal grandparents are grateful and proud that the customs of the group were taught to their grandchild and that the traditions were honoured. Conveyed here are the notions that not only is the adherence to traditions and customs important to this group, but also the value attached to maintaining their cultural identity through the continuation of the process. This is similar to the conclusion made by Jansen van Vuuren (1992:409-411) regarding the Ndebele's cultural identity.

In Table 6.4 the procedures followed during the Ndebele female initiation is compared to those of the North Sotho and Tsonga.

TABLE 6.4: COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT FEMALE INITIATION GROUPS IN MMOTLA

	NDEBELE	NORTH SOTHO	TSONGA
Time of year	July or December school holidays	June-August	July or December school holidays
Duration	One month	One month	1-3 months
Age	After first menstruation	Before menarg starts	After first menstruation
Group or individually	Goes on her own	Attends in group or alone	Goes on her own
Place	At home	At chief's house	At home
Preparation	Mother chooses two a*bangenisi*	None mentioned	A "boyfriend" is chosen Dish containing maize-meal, egg and seeds sent to boy's family
Food restrictions	Eggs, milk, fat and oil (for some)	No food restrictions	No food restrictions
Food preparation	*Abangenisi* prepares food during first weekend for *isigoyi* Thereafter mother and/or sisters prepares her food	Food prepared by *mogokane* (instructor of initiate)	*Motapi* is chosen to cook and care for the girl
Type of food	Previously only *bogobe, dinawa* and *morogo* Currently anything except those restricted	No restrictions	Special dish "*semphemphe*" prepared on first day
Celebrations	Three celebrations	Only one big celebration to mark the end of the rite	Two celebrations towards the end of the rite
Time of celebrations	***Iqude* celebration during first weekend of seclusion** *Friday* – goat slaughtered *Saturday* – beast slaughtered and traditional dishes prepared *Sunday* – special celebration modern food and some traditional served. Bread and red jam to signal the end of the celebration **Second celebration** Celebration at end of seclusion period Beer prepared during 4th week Friday ritual cleansing Dresses in traditional attire Small celebration depends on available money Chicken or goat is slaughtered or meat is purchased If money is available a beast is slaughtered	**Single celebration at end of rite** Beast is slaughtered at the chief's house *Bogobe,* meat and traditional beer is served Nowadays modern food also included	***Bokoro* celebration** Celebration, before the girl completes initiation The chosen boyfriend's family hands over a whole set of new clothes for the girl to her family A chicken is slaughtered Traditional beer is served together with *bogobe* and tea **Second celebration** The last celebration takes place on the last weekend and the main celebration called *mojelejele* is on Saturday On Friday the girl is taken to a secret hiding place in the *veld* A small celebration called the *kerekere* is celebrated in the *veld* Young woman is smeared with pig fat and red oxide, and only returns home the Saturday evening
Visit to maternal grandparents	Important last part of celebrations Grandparents will slaughter a goat or beast to inform the maternal ancestors that the girl is now grown-up and attended the *iqude*	Not done	Not done

Again the similarities and differences in the procedures followed by the Ndebele and the other two groups are compared. The time when the initiation takes place varies. The North Sotho group indicated that the process takes place during the winter months, whereas the Ndebele and Tsonga are initiated during the longer July or December school holidays. The Ndebele and Tsonga girls go through the process individually while the North Sotho female

initiation takes place in a group at the homestead of the chief's wife. Unlike the Ndebele there are no food restrictions enforced on the North Sotho and Tsonga girls before and during the process. It was, however, revealed that the Tsonga prepare a special dish for the initiate on the first day called *semphemphe,* that is similar to the pumpkin and maize-meal dish, *isijeza,* served to the Ndebele males during the first days of their seclusion. The North Sotho have only one celebration associated with the female initiation, namely that to mark the end of the process, whereas the Ndebele and Tsonga celebrate on two occasions. The Ndebele place more emphasis on the celebration to mark the beginning of the process, followed by a smaller celebration at the end to celebrate the coming-out of the girl. The Tsonga have two celebrations to mark the end of the process, namely one where the chosen boyfriend's family presents the set of new clothes to the family of the girl and the other one during the last weekend when the girl has completed the process. Only the Ndebele group pays a visit to the maternal grandparents for a celebration to honour the maternal ancestors.

The traditional food practices during the *iqude* have become more relaxed and even the food restrictions have been adapted, or are not enforced as strictly as before. Even though a high premium is placed on adhering to traditional customs, traditional food practices were only adhered to when ancestral veneration took place. The values of the Ndebele group are portrayed through these practices. On the one hand, status and prestige are reflected through the hosting of the celebration, and in offering the variety and quantity of modern food to the guests. On the other hand, the importance of honouring and adhering to cultural traditions is most striking through the practice of preparing and serving traditional food when the ancestral veneration takes place. Again, the importance of the juxtaposition of the traditional and modern in their lives is clearly evident. Both facets of their real life world are continuously accommodated and accepted, and fitting adjustments have been made.

6.7 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The most salient finding that emerged was that the Ndebele group, regarded as one of the most conservative South African cultural groups, continues to practise most of the traditional customs related to male and female initiation rites when compared to other population groups. The male initiation process closely resembles that described nearly a century ago by Fourie (1921). This phenomenon endorses the value this group attaches to preserving traditional customs, a feature also reflected in the food practices followed during the various phases of the initiation process. How forces from both the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments interplay and effect food practices, and specifically the role of food as symbol of material culture, and how it is used in the male initiation process, is of

significance. Moreover, the role of food as material culture in the perpetuation of traditional customs is particularly noteworthy. During the entire male initiation process the type of food prepared, including how and by whom it is prepared, serves as being salient to traditional codes of communication, and to signify and symbolise aspects of the beliefs, values, world view and the social organisation of the Ndebele. The interrelatedness of the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments in creating meaning amongst members of this group is thus illustrated through their food practices.

That the eating of certain foods is prohibited, and the way in which those that are allowed to be eaten are prepared during the pre-preparation and seclusion phases, are examples of measures taken in the belief that it will not only protect the *abasegwabo* from harm, but also strengthen and equip them to physically endure the demands of the process. Through the enforcement of these protective measures important features of the social organisation come to the fore simultaneously to denote cultural identity. Through the enforcement of these food preparation rules by senior males, the social control they exercise over the *abasegwabo* and in the community is signified, as is the strong paternalistic nature of *ingoma*.

The type and consistency of the food prepared during the seclusion phase not only characterises the stages of this phase, but is also symbolic of the different “life stages” the *abakhethwa* go through up to the time when they are regarded as adult males and ready to be re-introduced into the community as such. Again food is used during this phase not only to portray symbolic meaning, but it also simultaneously reflects some of the beliefs and values and world views of those participating in the event.

The pivotal role of ancestral veneration in the adherence to traditional food practices, during certain stages in the initiation procedures and celebrations is significant. During the celebrations at the specific time when communication with the ancestors takes place, it is regarded as compulsory to serve traditional food. It is specifically stipulated that traditional beer, the meat from a sacrificial slaughtered animal and other traditional dishes be served.

Conversely, the food practices associated with female initiation seem to have become more relaxed, in the sense that food restrictions were not as rigid or not enforced at all. Even though the food practices associated with female initiation were regarded as being more lenient than before, traditional food practices, however, continued to be closely adhered to, when ancestral rituals were performed as part of the process. The effects of acculturation and modernisation were more implicit in the food practices and celebrations associated with the Ndebele female initiation, in contrast to the male initiation where the senior males enforced and regulated the continuation of the traditional food practices (see 6.5). The

change in food preparation practices was ascribed specifically to the food preferences and food tastes of the younger generation, which were changing due to modernisation, urbanisation and acculturation. Apart from modernisation and acculturation, the changing food practices were also attributed to changes in the natural environment in that certain indigenous food items were no longer available. Compared to the Ndebele group, the initiation process and associated food practices of the other cultural groups were not as involved and have been adapted to suit the people's current way of life.

The next chapter deals with the findings associated with the other important rite of passage, namely, marriage. As the traditional and modern wedding are both celebrated by most people living in Mmotla, the main events and associated food practices and their meanings for both wedding formats are given. Other special occasions that have gained popularity, such as birthday celebrations and a number of other smaller celebrations are included in the discussion on modern special occasions.

TERMINOLOGY LIST

abakhethwa	Plural for initiates during the seclusion phase of the male Ndebele initiation
abangenisi	Chosen female instructor for the girl undergoing the *iqude*
abarhugi	Instructor during the seclusion phase of the male Ndebele initiation
abasegwabo	Plural for Ndebele boys in the preparation phase for initiation
amacebelengwana	Small steamed breads (plural). See Addendum C
amakuke	IsiNdebele for *dikuku*
amahlubulo celebration	Celebration to mark the end of the seclusion phase of the *iqude*
amasokana	Plural for initiated Ndebele male
amathunga	Containers to carry food from the household to the initiate
badikana	North Sotho for initiate
bagwera	North Sotho boy preparing for initiation
bogobe/umratha	Stiff maize-meal porridge
dikuku/amakuke	Popular biscuit-type baked product. See Addendum D
dinawa	Cowpeas
hlonipha	*Hlonipha* means showing respect towards someone or to treat someone respectfully
idombolo	Steamed bread
Irhayi	Dish prepared from dried maize and cowpeas. See Addendum C
ingoma	Ndebele male initiation
ipuku	Seclusion phase of the Ndebele female undergoing initiation
iqude	Ndebele female initiation
igwabo	Celebrations attended by the mothers of the Ndebele initiates during the last (re-introduction) phase of the *ingoma*
isidudu	Soft maize-meal porridge prepared from the discarded water during the beer brewing process. See Addendum C
isifunzi	Sirloin section of the beef carcass. See Figure 6.1
isigoyi	Ndebele girl undergoing initiation
isijeza	Soft pumpkin and maize-meal porridge. See Addendum C
isithwalelo	Celebration during the last week of the seclusion phase of the Ndebele male initiation
isokana	Singular for initiated Ndebele male
icebelengwana	Small steamed bread (singular)
lefetlho	Stirring stick used in the preparation of stiff maize-meal porridge
leso	Wooden spoon used in the preparation of stiff maize-meal porridge
lobolo	Bridal wealth
umratha	isiNdebele for stiff maise-meal porridge.
modoto	Appointed male who supervises the Ndebele boys during the preparation phase of the male initiation
morogo /umrorho	Collective name for indigenous green leafy vegetables
semphemphe	Tsonga name for soft pumpkin and maize-meal porridge. See also *isijeza* in Addendum C
tihove	Popular dish prepared from samp, jugo beans and peanuts. See Addendum C
ting mabele	Soft fermented sorghum porridge
tlhabalala	Ndebele for traditional sorghum beer
ukuhlabisa(to slaughter) celebration	Celebration held by maternal grandparents after completion of the *iqude*
umbhalo blanket	Striped Ndebele blanket
umdoko	IsiNdebele for soft porridge
umhlonyani goat	Goat slaughtered for the Ndebele girl undergoing the *iqude* on the first Friday of the *iqude* to ensure her future well-being and fertility
umkhwetha	Name for initiate during the seclusion phase of the male Ndebele initiation
umsipha meat	Meat containing large quantities of connective tissue
umthombo	Sorghum grains
umsegwabo	Singular for Ndebele boy in the preparation phase for initiation
veld	Field
vetkoek	Doughnut-like nuts of bread dough deep-fried in hot oil until golden-brown. See Addendum D

CHAPTER 7

FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS AT WEDDINGS AND OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this second chapter on the findings related to food practices on special occasions, another important celebration in a person's life, namely marriage, is described. Marriage rituals of black South Africans have undergone considerable change over the past 150 years (Wilson, 1972:192) and not only have new ritual characteristics emerged, but alongside these the associated food practices have also changed and developed due to acculturation, the influence of Christianity and modernisation. It has become common practice in black South African communities to have two weddings.

The second wedding, popularly referred to as a *"modern*" or "*white*" wedding is regarded as a prestigious occasion. It is called a white wedding because the bride wears a white gown. To have a modern or "*white wedding"* is the choice of the bride and the groom, and this second wedding only takes place after the traditional wedding and after the full amount for the *lobolo* has been delivered. It was emphasised that the traditional wedding procedures have to precede this wedding, because the traditional wedding is regarded as "…*the core wedding*" and *"… you can't just go to the white wedding."* Although the modern "*white wedding*" has become popular among the younger generation, the traditional wedding is still the norm in the Mmotla community, and people are first married according to traditional procedures and only afterwards does the white wedding follow, if they have the financial resources.

It emerged that the Ndebele group continued to follow their intricate traditional wedding procedures prior to the modern wedding, with minor adjustments. This was mainly determined by how strong the influence of the church to which they belonged was. Although the procedures could differ slightly from family to family, the main events in the traditional Ndebele wedding and the associated procedures were still binding. The traditional Ndebele wedding procedures are described in order to contextualise the associated food practices and the meanings attached to them.

This is followed by a description of the modern wedding and other celebrations that have gained popularity such as birthdays and New Year's celebrations and a few others that could be linked to either a particular stage of life or celebrated as cyclical events are included. These were classified by the participants as modern celebrations and have gained considerable popularity in recent times. The associated food practices of these celebrations all have a similar format and are comparable to the Sunday midday meal.

7.2 THE TRADITIONAL NDEBELE WEDDING AND THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES

In Figure 7.1 the main events of the traditional Ndebele wedding are summarised. This includes the *lobolo* (bridal wealth) negotiations and first years of marriage with which a number of food-related practices are associated. However, food practices are not part of the *lobolo* negotiations that take place in preparation for the marriage. In this section only the main events in which food practices form an integral part of the wedding procedures are described, from the time of the *isimanje* to after the first years of marriage when the strictest *hlonipha*[31] rules are lifted.

[31] *Hlonipha* means showing respect to someone or treating someone respectfully (Landgraf, 1974:81; Fourie, 1921:164). After her marriage, the young bride has to follow the strict *hlonipha* rules. In practice, the *hlonipha* refers to the respect shown by the bride towards her in-laws and specifically to her father-in-law. In showing respect towards the father-in-law, the bride has to avoid him. She may not look at him, speak to him directly or even to mention his name. Above all her upper body (breasts and back) has to be covered.

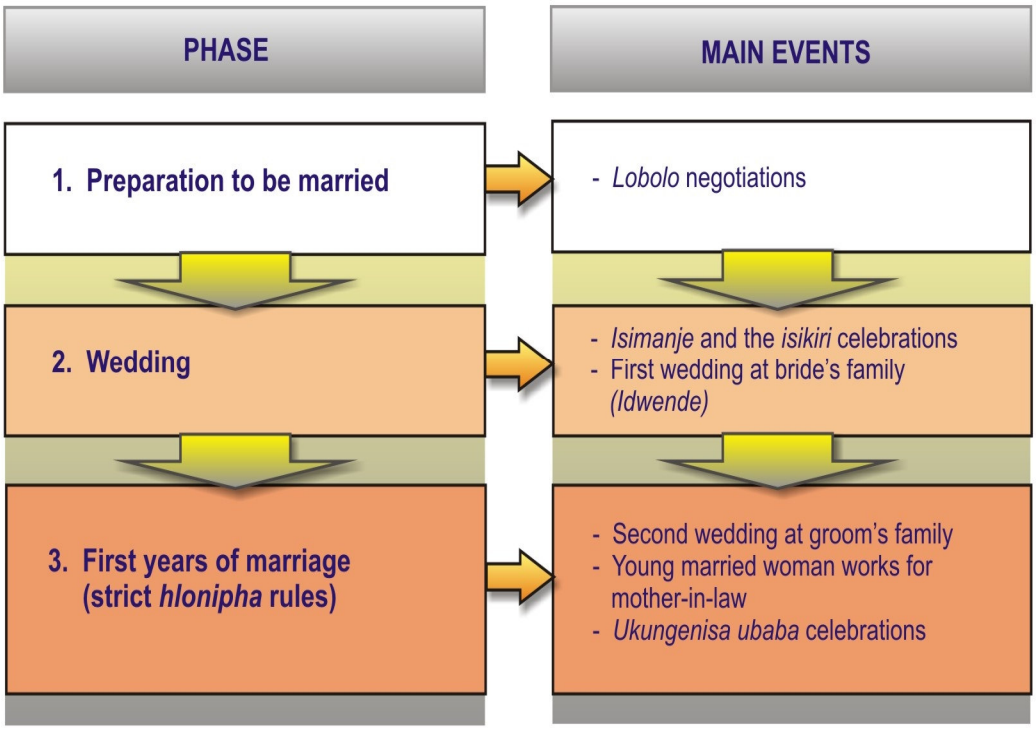

FIGURE 7.1: FLOW DIAGRAM OF THE MAIN EVENTS IN THE TRADITIONAL NDEBELE WEDDING

The influence of powerful forces from within the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments on the food practices are again prominent, as observed in the initiation rites (Chapter 6). Food plays an important symbolic role throughout the different stages of the wedding celebrations. Where applicable, influences from the two environments, as it manifest during the different stages of the wedding procedures, are discussed and interpreted.

7.2.1 The *isimanje*

The *isimanje* refers to the couple of days that the bride spends at the home of the bridegroom in preparation for her marriage into his family. The *isimanje* only takes place once the groom's family have the *lobolo* ready. In the week before the full delivery of the *lobolo* is made, the groom *"steals the bride"* and takes her to his parents' home for the *isimanje.* This usually happens on the Wednesday at dusk.

The bride is then secluded inside a specially prepared part of the house of her future in-laws screened off with *umseme* (woven grass mats) that are strung together to form an enclosure for her. During her stay, certain procedures would take place on specific days. On the first

morning after the bride arrives at her future in-laws' house, a messenger from the groom's family, usually an uncle, is sent to the bride's family to inform them that she is with them. When the parents of the bride raise no objections to her getting married, they reach the stage where they grant their final consent to the marriage to the uncle of the groom. Only then can the groom's family proceed with the *isimanje.* When the uncle returns from the bride's home and the news that her parents have agreed to the marriage, she is first taken to the river to wash as part of the ritual cleansing. Thereafter the ancestors of the groom's family would be informed that the marriage was going to take place.

It is important that the bride be properly covered with a blanket during the *isimanje* to ensure that nobody sees her face as a sign of respect towards her future in-laws. It was explained: "*You are going to hide with the blanket, they must not see you. So if you hide yourself it means that you respect them"*. According to Fourie (1921:111), the covering of the bride's face is the beginning of the *hlonipha* practice for the bride.

On the second day of the *isimanje* (on the Thursday) the older women from the groom's family come and *"… give the Makoti the rules".* At this point they inform her of the rules that apply to the family into which she is marrying. These rules concern household chores and the specific traditions and customs of the groom's family, including the respect she has to show to the kith and kin of her future in-laws.

During the *isimanje* forces from both socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are present in the food practices and often reflect the social relationships of the bride and her future in-laws. The first social interaction where food comes into play is during the first stage of the *isimanje,* after the bride has arrived at the home of her future in-laws. A first she is not supposed to do anything there, unless permission to do so is given, and this even applies to eating. She would therefore initially not eat anything and only eat after permission to do so is granted to her. Offering food to her, together with a sum of money, serves as a sign that she is now allowed to eat. The participants could not give an explanation as to why she is not allowed to eat anything unless money is given, and only stated simply that *"… it is tradition, she must not eat it."*

A possible explanation could perhaps relate to the Zulu custom of the bride paying a betrothal visit to her future husband's homestead. Kohler (1933: 49) explains that the Zulu bride and her companions were not allowed to consume any food there until a goat, called the *"indlakudla*", had been slaughtered for them. This is a sign that they were given permission to consume food at this homestead and the meat of the goat was prepared for them. Kohler (1933: 49) further indicates that the eating of *amasi* was strictly taboo at the

homesteads of strangers, even though the bride was marrying into this family. Jones (1963:75) gives a similar explanation for the Swazi, who are only allowed to eat *amasi* at the home of people belonging to their own clan and may not consume *amasi* at the home of the family into which they are marrying.

It was customary to hand money to the bride as a sign that she could consume the food offered. This custom has been in practice for some time. An elderly participant, who had been married for over 50 years, also indicated that, at the time of her first visit to her in-laws, a sum of money was given to her for this purpose. The meaning attached to the refusal to eat any food by the bride has symbolic meaning and could relate to the *hlonipha*. Out of respect for her future in-laws she refrains from eating anything until a sign from them is received, that indicates that they accept her as a guest. Her refusal to eat any food until she receives money should not be interpreted as a sign of hostility or rejection of their hospitality or kindness, as would be the case under other circumstances or in other cultures when a guest refuses the food offered, as explained by Bryant *et al*. (2003:191).

The *nomyezani* (a future sister-in-law, usually the wife of the brother older than the groom) is responsible for taking care of the bride and cooking for her during the *isimanje*. She prepares special tasty dishes for the bride similar to what normally would be prepared for important guests, to express the hospitality and goodwill of the groom's family. They want to impress the bride, and ordinary food would therefore not be prepared. This was made clear by statements such as:

"… they don't cook umrorho [indigenous green leafy vegetables]*, because they want to show you that they like you".*

"They cook anything but not umrorho".

"… [no] it is just to show that they like you, they don't give you umrorho".

Therefore dishes such as *isidudu* with jam or sugar is served to her, or when *bogobe* is served for breakfast, sugar is added. *Isidudu* is regarded as a special dish that is served to family members or the in-laws when they are visiting. Other tasty treats included tea and *vetkoek* or bread. Some of the older participants confirmed that *"…the bride had to be treated nicely …"*, therefore special food was served to her.

It was important to make a good impression on guests and demonstrate hospitality through the serving of special foods and treats, as illustrated here. Emphasis was placed on

preparing and serving speciality dishes and those that were regarded as special treats. Therefore, low status food such as, for example, *umrorho* would not be considered for guests. Indigenous wild vegetables are regarded as having a low status as opposed to the cultivated, more expensive vegetables available in the retail trade and regarded as the only ones appropriate to serve to guests. Jones (1963:70) similarly describes that the Swazi "scorned" wild vegetables and "lauded" what she described as "foreign" vegetables such as potatoes, carrots and cabbage. In a recent publication Jansen van Rensburg *et al*. (2007) confirm that this perception with regard to indigenous vegetables continues to exist in South Africa even today.

The cultural perspective spells out that collective values are produced and reproduced through cultural forms (Kaiser, 1997:49). In other words, certain material artefacts represent shared values within a culture. In this chapter this is demonstrated through how food as a cultural or/and material good is used during the i*simanje*. The collective value of showing respect to her future in-laws is symbolised in the refusal of the bride to eat any of the food offered before permission is granted to do so. Once this has been done, she is accepted as a guest. Moreover, the type of food and how it is prepared signifies that she is honoured as a guest through the speciality dishes prepared for her. These gestures reflect not only the hospitality and goodwill of the future in-laws but also the collective values of how to treat a guest.

Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals work out the details of social structure through their social interaction in everyday situations (Blumer, 1969:6-7). How the bride and her future in-laws act toward each other during the *isimanje* represents the social structure as it prevails at this stage of their relationship. Through her initial refusal to eat, she not only shows respect but acknowledges her own social position, namely that of a stranger. The act of giving her money is a sign that she may eat and is accepted as a guest. Her position as an honoured guest is further emphasised through the type of food served to her.

7.2.2 The *isikiri* celebration

The *isikiri* as the last stage of the *isimanje* takes place on the Friday evening. Married couples, who are the friends and family of the groom, come to spend the evening with the bride and the groom. This is a significant occasion for the bride, as she becomes a married woman during the night of the *isikiri* celebration. On this occasion, a goat has to be slaughtered in her honour to mark her passage from girlhood to being a married woman. It was emphasised by various participants that it is of the utmost importance that *"… the goat must be there".* In this regard, Van Warmelo (1930:39) refers to what he calls the *isikaria*

goat as "that meat killed for the bride." Only after the goat is slaughtered for her, is the groom's family entitled to dress her in the bridal attire prepared for her.

This goat is cooked inside the *imiseme* hut and the bride and groom serve each other from the *amanganga* (breast section) or brisket as indicated in the purple part of Figure 7.2 below. The bride also has to sip traditional beer during the night after she has eaten goat meat and *bogobe.* On this occasion, other prepared foods include traditional beer, *ting mabele, isidudu*, and *bogobe.* According to the participants, the other married couples give the bride and groom sex education, and leave them afterwards. Early the next morning, before anyone else wakes up, the groom has to burn the bones of the goat.

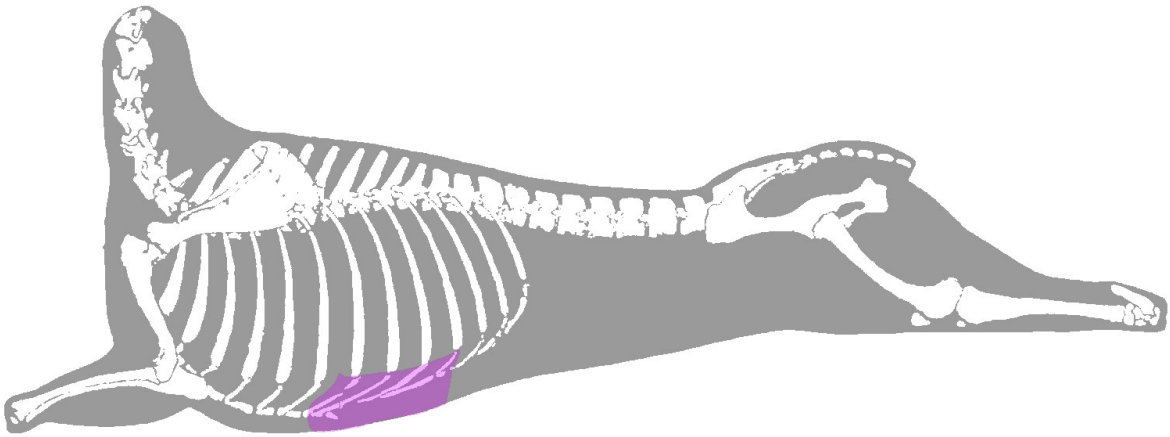

FIGURE 7.2: BREAST SECTION OF THE *ISIKIRI* GOAT

The *isikiri* celebration as mentioned is a significant celebration for the bride. Her change in status from being a young woman to a married woman is symbolised by the goat meat and traditional beer she consumes. The importance of the *isikiri* goat was emphasised by various participants. The slaughtered goat seemed to have various meanings. The consumption of the *amanganga* by the bride and groom symbolises, according to some, the unity of marriage, and this was supported by statements such as:

"… it stands for they are going to be united in marriage".

"… the reason why they eat the breast part is they bind themselves, - somewhere in the Bible it stands that you are the bones of my bones and the rib" (referring to the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam - Genesis 2:23)

"… to bind themselves "

This ties in with the symbolic interactionism point of view that humans react to things on the basis of the meanings that they have for them, as explained by Blumer (1969:2-3). In this process of interaction, symbols define and represent meanings on the basis of how individuals understand and respond to them (Sandstrom *et al.,* 2006:7). The obvious meaning is that through the act of eating together from the rib section of the goat, unity is represented, but more specifically the unity in marriage.

Another interpretation given is that it shows that the bride is welcome in the family of the groom and some participants referred to the *isikiri* goat as:

"… it is just a symbol that she is welcome at the in-laws".

The *isikiri* goat not only denotes the unification of the two in marriage, but also the acceptance of the bride by the groom's family. To symbolise that the bride is about to become a married woman, she not only has to eat from the goat meat, but has to sip from the traditional beer prepared for the *isikiri* as well. Sipping traditional beer during the night signifies that *"… she is now a woman …"* and also shows *"… that she is no more a girl or a teenager …"* In other words, her changing status from that of a girl to a married woman is celebrated, because: *"At the day of the isikiri, then they are husband and wife."* The beer the bride drinks has symbolic meaning. McAllister (2003), in his description of the different occasions where beer drinking takes place in the Xhosa culture, refers to the beer drinking ritual that is linked to a change in a woman's status. The examples he gives relate to the change in status of a woman either after the death of her husband or when a married woman's position from a junior to a senior wife changes.

Some participants interpreted the beer sipping as a reminder that one of her future duties as a married woman is to make beer for her husband. The beer therefore symbolises an obligation she has to fulfil and it was explained that the beer is given to her to become acquainted with the taste of properly prepared beer.

Apart from the goat meat and traditional beer, which serve important functions at this celebration, other traditional foods such as *bogobe* and *ting mabele* are always prepared for the celebration together with a number of modern dishes. The reason given for the preparation of modern dishes, such as *amakuke*, cooldrinks and *vetkoekies,* was that these dishes were prepared in honour of the bride by the *nomyezani* who is responsible for the food preparation at this celebration. The invited guests are also served from the rest of the goat meat and the prepared dishes.

There are also certain beliefs as to why the *isikiri* goat has to be slaughtered. An elderly participant explained: *"… it is compulsory to slaughter the goat, because if it is not done before the bride has children, there will be bad luck associated with this".* The example of her sister who had a paralysed child was given. The child was only healed after the in-laws slaughtered a goat for her sister, which they had not done at the time of the wedding. Reflected here is the strong belief of the participants that, if the ancestors are not appeased by honouring them by adhering to customs, such as, for example, informing them of important changes of life stages of their descendants, adversity is likely to follow.

The values and beliefs of the group are reflected in the importance attached to following traditional customs. In doing so, the ancestors are pleased and it is communicated to the guests that this family still honours traditions. However, on the other hand, it is also important to portray that they are modern, educated and successful. The inclusion of modern food is not solely to please the bride, but also to impress and show hospitality to her and the other guests. The dualism of following the traditional prescriptions on the one hand, and then on the other, to ensure the image of being modern, educated and in a favourable financial position is portrayed here. The importance attached to both these worlds they live in, is once again reflected in the traditional and modern food that is prepared and served.

The influence from the socio-psychological environment is not only evident through the belief that, if certain customs are not adhered to, *"bad luck"* would follow. It is further illustrated by the belief that the groom has to burn the leftover bones of the *isikiri* goat early the next morning to erase all evidence of what had happened there the previous night. One of the two explanations given for this was that the bones are burnt out of *"tradition*", and the other explanation dealt with the belief that if the bones were not burnt, someone could come and cause harm to the couple through practising witchcraft with these bones. Bones were therefore burnt to avoid witchcraft thus ensuring that no-one could come and harm the bridal couple. Once again, this illustrates the strong psychic influence of the belief system and the fear of harm that could be bestowed upon people through witchcraft.

The belief system is not only connected to the fear of witchcraft but also to the importance of following the correct traditional procedures and, in doing so, the ancestors would be kept satisfied and not punish the married couple by causing them to be infertile. The importance of slaughtering the *isikiri* goat for the bride is again confirmed by the emphasis that is placed on taking along a part of the goat to the bride's family the following day. This serves as evidence that her future in-laws have accepted and welcomed her into their family, and have followed the correct procedures and informed their ancestors of the marriage. Her family

needs this assurance that the future son-in-law's ancestors would not bestow ill fortune on the marriage like infertility or having a paralysed or malformed child.

7.2.3 First wedding celebration

The following day she returns to her parents' home with the groom accompanied by friends and relatives of the groom for the first of the traditional wedding celebrations. The groom's relatives take along the outstanding *lobolo* (this could be money or cattle) as well as presents for the bride's family. Apart from the *lobolo* cattle, another beast is taken along for slaughtering and exchange during the celebration at the home of the bride's parents. It is also required that the bride take a part of the *isikiri* goat that was slaughtered in her honour back to her family.

When the wedding party arrives at the gate of the bride's family home, the next phase in the marriage procedure takes place with the finalisation of the *lobolo*, which is delivered and accepted by the bride's family. Similar to the previous phases, food again features prominently and certain meanings and symbolisms are attached to it to convey specific messages. Meanings attached to food not only have symbolic significance but also serve as codes or signs that certain customs were followed.

The people from the groom's family, who accompanied the bride, do not enter, but wait outside. The bride's brother comes to greet her at the gate and she enters the home with the *"arm of the goat"* slaughtered in her honour the previous day. This is given to the older female relatives of her family, who are the only persons allowed to eat the meat. This part could be either a front leg of the goat, referred to as the *"arm of the goat"* or a section of the rib cage. When the rib cage is taken, bread is also included and this is then referred to as *amavenge* (the rib section and bread). In Figure 7.3 the sections that could be taken are indicated.

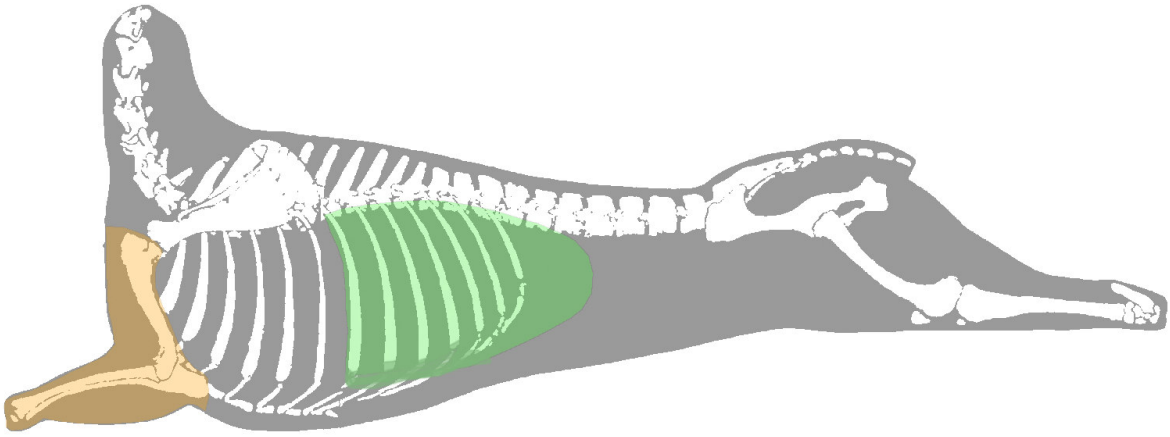

FIGURE 7.3: PARTS OF GOAT TO BE TAKEN TO BRIDE'S FAMILY

Some of the older participants were of the opinion that traditionally it was the *amavenge* that was taken as *isibiko* (evidence) and that the *"… arm of the goat is a modern thing*". They also stated that some people would take the *amavenge* and the *"arm of the goat",* while others take only the *"arm of the goat"*.

The *"arm of the goat"* (or the *amavenge*) of the *isikiri* goat is therefore significant to the bride's family as it proves to them that her future in-laws did slaughter the *isikiri* goat for her. It is regarded important to have evidence that the goat was slaughtered. As explained there are numerous meanings attached to slaughter the *isikiri* goat. The *"arm of the goat"* not only serves as a sign that the ancestors of the in-laws have been informed of the marriage, but also that the groom's family did dress the bride in their traditional bridal attire, thereby recognising that she is accepted by the groom's family. This was explained as follows: *, "… it is just a symbol that she is welcome at the in-laws. It is also a symbol that they have dressed her".* The "*arm of the goat*" is therefore a salient traditional code that communicates to the bride's family not only that the traditional procedures were followed and that the traditional customs were honoured, but also that their daughter is accepted and welcome in the family of her future in-laws.

Meanwhile the rest of the procedures, including the finalisation of the *lobolo,* take place at the gate. The groom's family are still outside the gate and they cannot talk without *"taking off the dust".* This means they need something to drink. Two female relatives of the bride (usually two aunts) then serve traditional beer.

The people who accompanied the bride (the *idwende*) have to wait at the gate and can only enter after they have been served traditional beer. Traditional etiquette rules requires that guests wait at the gate until invited inside (Coetzee,1982:61). The serving of the traditional

beer not only signifies to the groom's family that they are welcome, but also that they are accepted as guests. The relationship between the two families through the marriage is simultaneously acknowledged through this act. Only after the bride's family is satisfied that the agreed *lobolo* is there, is the groom's party allowed inside the yard.

7.2.4 The *idwende*

Once the groom's family enters the yard and the bride's family have confirmed that the *lobolo* is satisfactorily dealt with, can the next phase, called the *idwende,* begin. The *umhlambiso* (slaughter) could also take place at the *idwende"*, but this, however, only happens if the bride's family has all the *umhlambiso* presents ready – otherwise it is done later. If they have the presents ready, they hand them over either before or after the slaughter of the beasts. The *umhlambiso* is a very complicated and involved process and is not reported here, as it falls outside the scope of the study.

During the *idwende* a number of goats and two beasts are slaughtered. Some parts of these animals are handed over as a symbol that certain procedures have been completed to the satisfaction of the other party. Other parts of the carcass are given to specific people with whom there are close kinship ties.

After they have agreed that the *lobolo* has been delivered and everyone is satisfied, the bride's family welcomes the groom's family. A goat, the *umseme* goat, is handed over to the older men of the groom's family as a token that they are welcome. The *umseme* goat is slaughtered early the next morning at 03:00 and the meat cooked and served with *bogobe* before sunrise to the groom's family. The one front leg of the *umseme* goat is taken back to the father of the groom (who does not attend this celebration). Drawing from the principles of semiotics this leg of the goat has a number of meanings. It is a sign that the groom's family is welcome at the family of the bride, and it also provides evidence to the groom's father that the *lobolo* has been delivered and that the bride's family agrees to it and is satisfied. The leg of the slaughtered goat is a salient traditional code, namely, that the correct procedures have been followed, and that both parties have agreed and are satisfied with the *lobolo* transaction.

The wedding celebration officially starts with the slaughter of two beasts, one from each family. The beast from the bride's family is slaughtered first, and then the bride's family would slaughter a goat, sheep or beast for the groom, depending on the size of the *lobolo* delivered. In most cases, it would be a goat, and this goat is known as *imvu yabayenyana.* A sheep or beast is, however, slaughtered in those cases where the *lobolo* is larger than usual.

The number of *lobolo* cattle handed over is reflected through the slaughter of a goat, sheep or beast for the groom by the bride's family. The kind of animal slaughtered is thus a sign of the number of *lobolo* cattle that was given and could serve as a subtle indication of the wealth and social status of the two families.

Next the beast from the groom's family is slaughtered. As mentioned above, the groom's family brings a special beast to be slaughtered during this part of the wedding celebration together with the *lobolo* beasts. The part of the ceremony where the beasts are slaughtered is called *umhlambiso*. Certain parts of these beasts slaughtered by the bride and groom's family, are then exchanged between the families with half being swapped. It was explained that it was compulsory for the two halves to be exchanged, serving as an acknowledgement by both families that the marriage had taken place. The exchanged halves are divided between certain members of both the groom and the bride's families and are not eaten at the wedding celebrations. The other two halves that were not exchanged are used as meat for the celebration. A family who could not provide a beast was in debt with the other family.

Figure 7.4 indicates the various parts of the two carcasses that are allocated to specific people from both the groom and bride's families as discussed below.

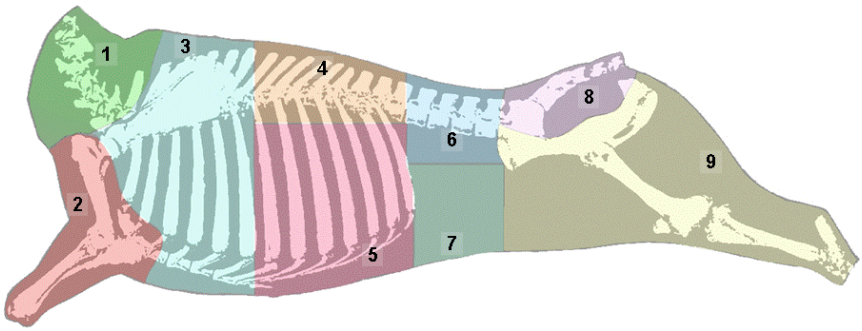

FIGURE 7.4: ALLOCATED PARTS OF SLAUGHTERED BEASTS

After the head and neck have been cut off, each of the two carcasses is divided in two along the spine. The two families then exchange the following parts from the one half: the front leg (part 2), the hind leg part (part 9) and the middle section marked parts 4, 5 and 6 and each of the two families would then have a complete carcass again. Certain parts from each carcass are allocated to specific family members from each of the families of the bride and the groom, who receive these parts from the beasts to take home. The head, neck and part of the hump (part 1) from each beast is allocated to the fathers or other males in each of the families of the bridal couple (the groom's party take the head, neck section and skin of the beast slaughtered back to the father of the groom as evidence that the beast was

slaughtered). The head and neck are consumed at home by the male family members of the groom on their return from the wedding. Quin (1959:97) gives a similar account for the Pedi, where the head was taken back by the male family members of the groom to serve as evidence that they had attended the wedding. Similarly Manning *et al*. (1974:490) and Bryant (1967:266) point out that the head of a beast is considered to be the meat of adult males in a family. The front leg (part 2) goes to a younger brother of the father. The hind leg section (marked 8 and 9) goes to a brother older than the father. The middle section (marked 4, 5 and 6) goes to a sister of the father. According to some participants, it is for *ukghari* (eldest sister) of the father; others indicated that it could be or all the father's sisters. These parts represent the brisket, part of the flat rib and the prime rib.

The participants gave various accounts about the allocation of the middle part of the carcass. According to some, the whole section marked 4, 5 and 6 was given to the eldest sister of the father. Others were of the opinion that part 6, also referred to as *isifunzi,* was given to the grandmothers of both families. This is in accordance with Quin's (1959:97) statement that the spinal column and tail section is reserved for the senior women. It was indicated that part 4 was given to the other sisters of the father and that the eldest sister only received the rib section of the part marked 5. This is similar to what Bryant (1967:267) says, namely, that the sirloin part of a ritually slaughtered animal belongs to the daughters in a family. Some mentioned that the rib part of the beast from the bride's family is given to those aunts of the bride who were responsible for serving the beer during the ceremony at the gate and during the night. It seems as if the allocation of this middle section varied and also depended on the number of female siblings the father had, which could explain the different comments given by the participants.

The entire hind leg section marked 8 and 9 (these are cuts from the hindquarter up to the rump and includes the shin, silverside, topside, aitchbone and thick flank section) is given to the brother older than the father in each family. In the groom's family this section of the other side goes to the oldest brother of the groom's mother (his oldest maternal uncle) with the proviso that he had contributed one of the required *lobolo* beasts. The maternal uncle then has to give the *setlhana* (whole rump) of this hind leg section to the groom's maternal grandparents. Some participants, however, indicated that it is only the part marked 8 in Figure 7.4 whereas others indicated that it is the whole rump section as illustrated in Figure 7.5 below. Another comment was that part 8 from the beast of the bride's family was given to the maternal grandparents of the bride. The meat allocated to the specific family members is received raw, and this is then taken home for later consumption in their individual households.

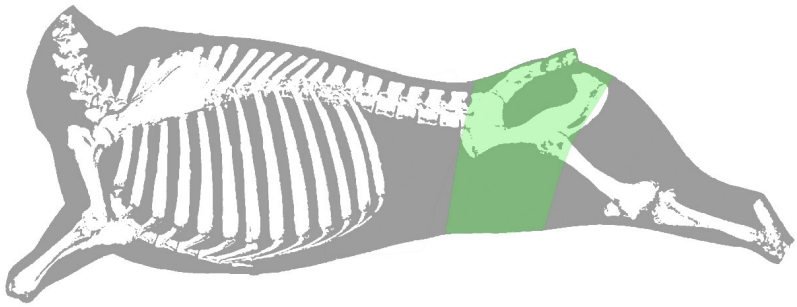

FIGURE 7.5: THE RUMP SECTION - *SETLHANA*

The *amathumbu* (intestines) and *umrhori* (tripe) from the beast of the groom's family are given to the family of the bride. It was explained that this is a symbol of respect shown to the bride's family by the groom's family. The *amathumbu* from this beast is divided amongst the siblings of the bride. The *umrhori* from the beast slaughtered by the bride's family is given to her grandparents. Quin (1959:97) similarly indicates that the *umrhori (mogodu)* goes to the elderly family members.

According to some participants, the section marked 3 in Figure 7.4 of one side of the carcass is kept by the bride's family from their carcass, this is to be consumed later by the bride's family. The section marked 3 of the other side of the carcass from the beast of the bride's family, is prepared for the wedding guests together with these sections from the beast of the groom's family (this part according to some was then specifically for the male guests). This means that three sides of the section marked 3 in Figure 7.4 are prepared for consumption by the male guests. Some participants intimated that the other foreleg from the carcass of the bride's family is prepared for the male members of her family. The part marked 7 is prepared for the female guests. With the exception of this part for the female guests, the rest of the meat prepared for the guests comes from the front quarters of the slaughtered animals. This is similar to the account by Sekhukuhune (1993:68) who states that in the Pedi culture "haunch and flank were not shared with commoners"; this thus implies that the hind sections were reserved for the immediate family members. The allocation of the meat as described above is in agreement with that given by Quin (1959: 97-98) who also reports that the hind sections of the ritually slaughtered beast were given to the immediate family. These parts usually include the prime or softer cuts of meat.

It should be noted that the above account of how the beasts were divided and the meat allocated, is according to how it is done by the majority of those participants who still engage in the traditional wedding procedures. Variations on how the division was done did seem to exist. There were some who said that the whole beast was exchanged between the two

families and the whole carcass was then divided between members of the family. They said that the meat from these beasts was not used as meat for the wedding celebrations. Others stated that one half of each beast was exchanged and divided as described above, and the two halves that were not exchanged, were prepared for the wedding feast.

The exchange of parts of the slaughtered beasts between the two families has symbolic meaning, as it represents the consummation of the marriage and unification of the two families through this marriage. It is therefore compulsory for both families to give a beast for slaughter. The participants expressed the importance of both families having to provide a beast to slaughter as follows: *"… it stands that the two families are now binded* [bound] *together"* and *"…as an announcement for both families that the wedding is done* [consummated]".

In this regard, Fourie (1921:115) refers to a blood covenant that is formed through the act of killing these beasts and mentions a custom where the bride and groom had to lick the blood from the assegai that killed the beasts provided by each of the other family. Richards (1932:185) explains that the sacrifice of these beasts at the wedding feast serves to "demand the co-operation of the family spirits" in the complicated marriage contract that is formed by the two families. The sacrifice to the ancestors on the occasion of marriage binds them to observe this tie. Without the offering of a sacrifice from the relatives of the bride to the spirits of the bridegroom's family, the marriage is in some cases incomplete. Richards (1932:186) further explains that, through this act, the ancestors are publicly included: "... to the marriage contract of their earthly children, and can revenge the violation of this tie." The slaughter and sharing of the sacrifice bind them with their living descendants and could, according to her, be regarded as a "replica of the family meal" that the ancestors share with their lineage on this occasion.

According to the participants, a family who could not do this, would be indebted to the other family. At the time of the study, the family of one of the participant's daughter-in-law had only recently gathered enough money to slaughter their beast, and they were preparing to complete this part of the wedding celebration. The *isikiri* had taken place the previous year and the *lobolo* was then also paid in full. The family of the participant (the groom's family) had slaughtered their beast the previous year at the *idwende* celebration. It therefore appeared as if the traditional wedding procedures could be done in phases over a period of time. The time that it takes to complete the process seemed to depend on the availability of money.

In the first place, the slaughter and exchange of meat from the slaughtered animals serves as symbol of the acceptance and acknowledgement of the new social ties that are formed between the two families as a result of the marriage. Second, it provides evidence that the *lobolo* transaction was completed to the satisfaction of both parties concerned. In the third instance, the allocation of specific parts of the slaughtered animal to certain family members solidifies the kinship ties between these members and the families of the groom and the bride. That this was done according to established rules and prescribed allocation of specific parts to certain family members reflected the social relationship of the recipients with the person who provided the animal (Sekhukhune, 1993; Manning *et al.* 1974: 490; Bryant, 1967:266-267). And, then in the fourth place it also acknowledges the importance of informing and involving the ancestors in the wedding celebration.

Meanings associated with the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are clearly in interplay here. From a semiotic point of view the slaughter of the beasts symbolises that the *lobolo* transaction had been completed to the satisfaction of all concerned. Drawing on the cultural perspective, cultural forms produce and reproduce collective values. In using the two slaughtered beasts as material culture, the value and importance of having sound social and kinship ties is portrayed through the act of their slaughter, exchange and division. The new social ties formed between the families of the bride and groom are publicly acknowledged and accepted by both families through the slaughter and exchange of parts of the slaughtered beasts. The high premium placed on cherishing and strengthening family and kinship ties is reflected in the allotment of the meat amongst the immediate family members in both families.

Through the slaughter of the beasts to inform and include the ancestors in the wedding process, cultural beliefs and values are perpetuated. From a symbolic interactionism point of view, meaning arises in the process of interaction between people. The meaning attached to the act of slaughter, exchange and sharing of the meat from the animals is derived through those who participate in these traditional wedding celebrations.

The food served at the *idwende* phase of the celebrations includes meat from the slaughtered beasts, traditional beer, *bogobe* and *ting mabele*. Some mentioned that a traditional legume dish *"irhayi"* is also part of the traditional food prepared at wedding feasts. At the time of the study when a traditional wedding was celebrated, chicken or goat meat was served together with the meat from the slaughtered beasts. Rice, vegetables and salads were also part of the menu together with the traditional dishes mentioned and traditional beer.

After the celebration, the family and friends of the groom return home. On their departure, the ladies from the groom's family who accompanied the bride to her parents' home the previous day, receive a dish of *umkhupha* from the bride's family. It was explained that the *umkhupha* was not only given as *"something for the road"*, but also signifies an extension of their hospitality, as well as the bride's parents' gratitude that they took care of their daughter and brought her back home.

Traditionally the bride had to wait at her parents' home until her own house at her husband's family was ready, because, according to the *hlonipha* rules, she was not allowed to live in the same house as her father-in-law (Jansen Van Rensburg, 1987: 80). At the time of this study, not everybody followed this custom, because some couples nowadays preferred to have their own homes and do not reside on the same premises as the husband's family anymore.

It is still customary for the bride to take a basket of food to her in-laws during the first week after the first wedding celebration, while she waits for her house to be completed. If she already has her own home, she will still give them a basket of food. This basket contains treats such as tea, sugar, cookies and even beer to express her gratitude to the in-laws for taking care of her during the *"isimanje".* It was explained that the basket of food was not only a *"… symbol for thanking the in-laws for looking after her at the isimanje …",* but was also used to make a good impression on the in-laws with the decorated basket containing special and nicely prepared treats. The participants in the study by Trollip (1991:160) also described this practice and mentioned the *isekwa* (bread and beer) that had to be delivered by the bride to her in-laws. Furthermore, this basket of food serves to smooth the social relations between the bride and her in-laws, and to solidify the ties between them.

7.2.5 The second wedding celebration

The second wedding celebration takes place at the house of the groom's family only when the house of the young married couple is ready. On the bride's arrival at the in-laws, she waits at the gate until the goat that is slaughtered in her honour is shown to her. It was explained that this goat, slaughtered in her honour, is a symbol to welcome her to her new home. Some participants indicated that an amount of money is also given to the bride before she enters the premises of the in-laws. The food served on this occasion is similar to that served at the first celebration at the bride's family. The festivities and celebrations also take place in different phases.

If the *umhlambiso* has not taken place during the celebrations at the bride's parents it could take place at this stage, or it could even be later. During the *umhlambiso* the bride hands

over her presents to her in-laws. These presents, apart from household articles and clothing, include various woven grass items that are given to the mother-in-law. Amongst these is the same number of *imiseme* as were used for the *imiseme* hut during the *isimanje*. Some of the traditional grass items, apart from the *imiseme,* include brooms, *isithebe*, beer sieves and baskets. The bride also brings along traditional beer from her own family for this celebration, when it takes place. These grass items symbolise the bride's gratitude that the in-laws have given *lobolo* to her family as bridal wealth for her.

As a sign that the bride could move into her house, the *nomyezana* and other female relatives of the groom and bride would start to build the *lapa*[32] of her house. This is an indication of the beginning of the next phase in the life of the young married woman where she then also has to work for her mother-in-law. Some participants mentioned that the traditional dish *irhayi* is associated with this occasion and it is served together with traditional beer. With regard to *irhayi,* the following explanation was given: *"This dish is also to show that the makoti can now come and stay in her house".*

7.2.6 The first years of marriage

During the first part of her married life the young newly wed woman has to behave according to certain prescribed rules as dictated by the *hlonipha.* The *hlonipha* not only impinges on her behaviour with regard to her language usage and how she dresses, but also on what she is allowed to eat. In this regard, she is, for example, forbidden to eat eggs and *amasi* (sour milk) at the homestead of the in-laws. She also has to perform certain household tasks for her mother-in-law such as cooking and cleaning.

The reason given for the food restriction is that *"girls and young women who eat milk and eggs will have more feelings for men".* Another reason given is that the bride does not eat these items as a way of showing her respect for the in-laws. It was explained that *"… it was a shame if you eat it".* A married woman could therefore only use milk at her husband's family home after her father-in-law had given her milk. This only happens after the birth of her first child and after the celebration where she is allowed to invite her father-in-law to her house. It was explained that the milk and egg restrictions of the young married woman only applied at the home of the in-laws, and that she is allowed to have these at her own parents' home.

She is also not allowed to eat *molatsa* (the previous day's *bogobe* or other leftovers). Permission to do so is granted by handing over money together with the leftover food. This was explained as: "*She would also get money to eat molatsa*". The participants explained

[32] Small un-thatched reed enclosure at the back of the house.

that the permission to eat *molatsa* symbolises her acceptance by the in-laws. From then on she is regarded as their own child when in the house of the in-laws and allowed to eat leftover food.

Cooking for the mother-in-law is one of the main responsibilities she has to fulfil. If she is employed elsewhere, she usually has to work for the mother-in-law over weekends and during holidays. At the time of the study, it seems as if this practice is not followed by all families anymore.

Working for her mother-in-law reflects the young married woman's social position in the family of her in-laws as well as the social relationship between her and her mother-in-law. She demonstrates her respect and submission to her in-laws by working for the mother-in-law, avoiding her father-in-law and through adhering to the food restrictions that are imposed on her as part of the *hlonipha* practices. The cultural values of respect and submission of the younger person to the authority of the elders, as well as the social position of the young married female in her new family, is established through these actions. Symbolic interactionism contends that it is through social interaction in everyday situations that the individual works out the details of social structure. Blumer (1969: 6-7) explains that social structure is represented, amongst others, by social position, roles and authority. Social structure thus emerges from how people act toward each other during social interaction. Symbolic interactionism emphasises that structure is an ongoing dynamic process.

According to the participants the mother-in-law, however, has to give an indication to her daughter-in-law when she no longer needs to cook for her, after which she will only cook for her own household. This *"announcement"* must come as a surprise to the young woman. Therefore, the mother-in-law comes unexpectedly and *"… messes the cooking place up…*" by spilling cooked *mabele* grains, maize or beans in the cooking place. The spilling of the food serves as sign to indicate that permission has been granted to dismiss her from working for the mother-in-law.

After this "*announcement"* by the mother-in-law, a small celebration, called the *"hlanza maseko"* takes place. The young married woman has to provide the bread and traditional beer for this celebration, and her in-laws the *bogobe* and relish (usually something is slaughtered, although it is not compulsory to slaughter). Guests are invited to this celebration and, as a rule, she is not present at this celebration, but visits her own parents and then returns in the evening after the celebration. From this celebration onwards, she then no longer needs to cook for her mother-in-law.

According to one of the older participants, this is the last of the series of celebrations associated with the traditional wedding. Van Warmelo (1930:44) also mentions that the traditional wedding celebrations end on this occasion.

At the time when the young married woman is dismissed from performing certain tasks for her mother-in-law she is usually also granted permission to *"take the blanket off"* in her own home. This is the blanket she had to wear over her shoulders as sign of respect for the ancestors of her husband's family. A goat is slaughtered as a symbol that she has received permission to no longer wear the blanket that covers her arms and shoulders in her own house. It is only after this that she is allowed to invite her father-in-law to her house. He is not allowed to come into her house before this *"blanket off procedure"* has taken place. According to Trollip (1991:161), this occasion signifies that her in-laws now acknowledge her as a fully-fledged married woman.

7.2.7 Ukungenisa ubaba

After the bride has been granted permission to "*take the blanket off"*, she is in the position to invite her father-in-law to her house for the celebration of *ukungenisa ubaba.* The *hlonipha* prevented the young married woman from talking to her father-in-law. Therefore, an official celebration has to take place to indicate that she is now allowed to speak to him. This is a very important compulsory celebration given to the father-in-law by the young married couple. It is compulsory, because if this is not done the woman is not allowed to host any other traditional celebrations in the future, such as initiations or weddings.

The father-in-law is invited to her house and he comes with a goat. Before he enters the premises, the daughter-in-law has to make an announcement to indicate that she also has a goat for the father-in-law. He then enters and declares that he too has a goat for her. The goats are slaughtered and the *imiseme* arranged. Each sits on their own *umseme*. The daughter-in-law then greets her father-in-law, and this is the first time she greets and talks to him. This greeting serves as sign that she accepts him in her house. In some families, the young woman gives presents to her in-laws on this occasion. Some participants mentioned that the restriction of drinking milk at the home of the in-laws could be lifted on the occasion when she invites her father-in-law to her house.

The celebration takes place over the whole weekend and starts on Saturday morning and continues until Sunday. On Saturday the meat from the daughter-in-law's goat is cooked and on Sunday that from the father-in-law's goat. The meals prepared for the celebrations over the weekend include tea and *amakuke* or *umtsikitlana* (sour porridge) for breakfast; and

lunch and supper would consist of meat from one of the slaughtered goats and *bogobe*. On Sunday a variety of modern dishes are also served with the meat and *bogobe* for lunch and supper, such as rice, vegetables and salads. Traditional beer and "modern" beer (commercial beer) are also served on Sunday.

Another part of this celebration is the *"umgubani*" that takes place on Sunday afternoon from 13:00 to 16:00. During this part of the celebration, the daughter-in-law and the father-in-law both go outside and dance in the open yard. Two calabashes of traditional beer are consumed during this dancing ceremony. One is poured on the ground for the ancestors and the families of the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law drinks the other calabash of beer.

After this celebration, the young woman does not have to avoid her father-in-law anymore, she can greet him and talk to him and need not avoid him by, for example, walking another way when she sees him coming in her direction. The cultural perspective proposes that people use codes to decipher the meaning of cultural representations of social life. This celebration serves as a code to communicate to the community that she is from then on allowed to have a closer relationship with her father-in-law and some of the strict *hlonipha* rules are more relaxed. The beer that is shared between the daughter-in-law's and her father-in-law's families symbolises this new union and more intimate relationship between the two families. The beer poured for the ancestors serves to inform them of the relaxation of the strict *hlonipha* rules.

Similar to the findings given by Trollip (1991:162), the participants of this study indicated that these traditional wedding procedures are, to a large extent, still followed by the majority of the Ndebele people in the Mmotla community. Sometimes the completion of all the different phases could take months, and in some cases even years, because it is highly dependent on money being available to host certain parts of the procedures, especially those where the slaughtering of beasts or goats is required. Contrary to the account given by Trollip (1991:162, 163), it was emphasised by the participants of this study that the traditional wedding is a prerequisite for the modern wedding. The traditional wedding will therefore always precede the modern or white wedding, and not vice versa.

7.3 THE MODERN WEDDING

The modern wedding, as explained, is an optional celebration and depends on whether the couple have enough money available to host the event. This was emphasised by phrases such as:

"The modern wedding is there, if they have enough money, so that they can do both. But before you do the modern wedding you must do the traditional wedding".

"The fact that people have the modern wedding is that it is something that will come after the traditional wedding, if you have enough money, and it is not compulsory, and it is to show people that now we are married".

It emerged during discussions with the participants that traditional customs are important to the people and thus are honoured. That the prerequisites for the modern wedding had to be met before the arrangements for the modern wedding could even begin to be made was repeatedly stressed. To respect traditional customs was required by the ancestors and given as the reason why the traditional wedding had to precede the modern wedding, as explained in this quotation:

"Sometimes if you only have a white wedding, maybe the ancestors will come - you will dream - they will show you this blanket, this blanket with the stripes called mokwetwaya - so if they show you this blanket, they show you something is wrong, you must follow the tradition. So that is why you must start with the traditional wedding".

On the other hand, the younger generation is eager to demonstrate that they are modern, educated and successful people. The hosting of the *"white"* wedding celebration is regarded as a sign that the couple are modern and educated and have (or pretend to have) the financial means to do so. To be regarded as a modern, educated person is important because it gives that person status in the community, implying achievement. It also became apparent that to create the impression that you have money and are financially well off, was an equally important consideration and reason to have a modern wedding. However, apart from displaying wealth it seemed as if the association of being modern or Westernised was equally important as portrayed by the following impressions expressed by some of the participants:

"… if you make two weddings it is just that you want to show the people that you want to be modern".

"… the reason is that most of the people now take the white culture".

In her study on the Ndzundza-Ndebele in the Nebo district, Trollip (1991:162-163) similarly reports that a modern Western-oriented wedding has high status value attached to it. The

effect of urbanisation and acculturation is given as the reason why this tendency has developed.

It thus became clear that to host a modern wedding celebration was regarded as a prestigious occasion in the Mmotla community. Another motive for having a modern wedding is that the couple do not want to be left out when their friends have a modern wedding. The parallel was drawn to the rule of who is allowed to attend the *isikiri* celebration at the traditional Ndebele wedding (see 7.2.1.1). Some regarded the "white/modern" wedding as a replacement for the *isikiri* celebration, and they were afraid that they would be barred from going to others' modern wedding celebrations if their own had not been a modern wedding. One participant explained this as follows:

"She thinks the thing that makes us to have a modern wedding, is because when they do the isikiri, other people who are not married are not allowed to go there. So they think there are certain secrets at the white wedding that is why they want to qualify by making a white wedding, so that if maybe there is a white wedding from other friends, they must be included. They want to make the white wedding so that if someone has the white wedding, they will be invited".

Another interpretation of why the modern wedding is popular has historical significance. Various churches were instrumental in influencing their members to be married according to the Christian tradition (Pauw, 1974:429; Schapera, 1962:360, 382). They encouraged the implementation of the modern wedding ceremony with or without adaptations to the traditional wedding format. It seems as if certain parts of the traditional wedding procedures have remained and are still followed by those who belong to certain churches. One of the participants explained it as follows:

"What she sees is that most people still follow the traditional wedding, but according to their beliefs they don't follow the whole procedures of the traditional wedding. Some they took out magadi [lobolo] and they don't do the nomyezani stuff and everything, so it is only the magadi and there after the modern wedding".

In this regard, Wilson (1972:192-193) points out that often old rites did not vanish altogether as in the case of the Christian Nguni people in the Eastern Cape who continued with the *lobolo* practice although they are married in Christian churches.

The planning and preparation for a modern wedding could take up to a year. The bride and groom make all the arrangements for this Western-oriented event that includes organising for

the different kinds of wedding outfits worn during the celebrations, the catering for the wedding feast, wedding cake(s) and photograph sessions.

7.4 MAIN EVENTS AND MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES AT THE MODERN WEDDING

As the time of the wedding approaches, a white flag (it is sometimes beautifully embroidered) would in some cases be raised on the roof of the house as a signal that a wedding was coming up. This could be up to a month or a week before the wedding. Sometimes the wedding celebrations were spread over a period of three weeks. It could start with the *"ring-wearing ceremony"*, followed by the legal wedding before the magistrate or a marriage commissioner (officer) the following week and the wedding festivities would then take place the week thereafter. Alternatively, some couples would have the *"ring-wearing ceremony"* on the same day as the legal marriage which takes place at the magistrate's office, or it could be on the Saturday morning at the church or at the home of the bride's parents. After the church service, photographs of the bridal couple together with the bridesmaids and groomsmen are taken in a park. It was emphasised that the celebrations could only take place after the *"ring-wearing ceremony"* had been completed.

7.4.1 The first wedding celebration

A rented marquee tent is erected in the yard of the bride's parents' home to accommodate the guests (mainly family, friends and neighbours of the bride's family). The tent and the tables inside the tent are decorated in a colour scheme that usually matches the colours of the dresses of the bridesmaids. The celebrations start on the Saturday morning at the home of the bride's parents when the bride is dressed in a white wedding gown and the groom in a black suit. They usually wear these until after the midday meal, when the first change of clothes would take place. For the first change of clothes, the bride wears a two-piece suit and the groom another suit and they parade in front of the guests and photographs are taken. Some time later they change again, and this time they wear what is referred to as "modern traditional" clothes[33]. Some couples, however, only wear the white gown and black suit and the "modern traditional" clothes. After they have changed into the "*modern traditional"* clothes, the family and friends hand over the presents they have for the bridal couple.

In Addendum E photographs obtained from the participants' family albums are included to illustrate and capture some of the highlights of the modern wedding celebrations.

[33] Refers to Western clothes made from fabric with an ethnic print. See Addendum E.

7.4.2 The second wedding celebration

Late Saturday afternoon or early on Saturday evening the bridal couple and party leave for the groom's parents' home. When the bride leaves her parents' home, she is covered with a blanket and her head with a towel similar to traditional wedding practice. This, however, differs as some participants revealed that it would depend on family customs. On arriving at the in-laws, the bride would wait at the gate and only enter the premises after she receives money to do so. On Sunday the celebration at the groom's family takes place and the same procedures as followed at the bride's family, are repeated with the exception of the church service or ring-wearing ceremony. The guests at this celebration are the groom's family, friends and neighbours. The food is similar to that prepared for the bride's family and the wedding cake(s) are brought along from the celebration at the bride's family to the second celebration at the groom's family.

If a white flag had been put on the roof of the house when the preparations for the wedding started, it would be ceremoniously taken down some time after the wedding celebrations. There seems to be no specific length of time for which it has to be up. Depending on the amount of money available and family traditions, some people even prepare traditional beer for this occasion.

7.4.3 Food practices and their meanings

Apart from clothing, another important measure of the social status of the bridal couple is the nature of the food served at the two wedding celebrations. Like other modern celebrations, the norm is to serve modern food similar to that associated with the Sunday midday meal. However, the impression given was that a larger variety and quantity of food is prepared, especially meat, information that was clearly emphasised. A beast is sometimes slaughtered and could be supplemented by large quantities of mutton, goat meat and chicken. The variety of other types of dishes, such as the vegetable dishes and salads, is also extensive, as well as other specialities such as desserts, cakes, snacks and soft drinks. It seems as though the food, together with the serving of generous quantities of hard liquor apart from the traditional beer, ginger beer, soft drinks and commercial beer, contributes to the expense incurred and, consequently, to the status of the occasion.

The food served at the two wedding meals is important and contributes to the prestige of the occasion, and great care is taken in its planning and preparation. In some instances, two menus are prepared for each of the wedding meals. The menu prepared for the bridal table, is mainly modern food, and would differ from that served to the guests, and is regarded as

special. It is special because it consists of expensive dishes that are prepared separately from more expensive ingredients and/or by special preparation methods. Meat for example, is roasted instead of just boiled and examples of expensive foods were special salads *"… that you can't make for everybody …"* such as lettuce and cucumber. Other examples of expensive items were juices, champagne and snacks such as potato crisps, peanuts and cheese curls. A family member, or sometimes a contracted caterer, is appointed to prepare the food for the bridal table. The specialness of the food for the bridal table was illustrated by phrases such as:

"Because it is a special day, you must eat something special".

"The food for the wedding table will be expensive and special foods, because there are so many other people invited, it would be too expensive to give the special food to everybody".

Also reflected in this quotation is the large quantity of food that needs to be prepared and the importance attached to offering hospitality to everybody in the community. This was supported by an elderly participant, who gave the following explanation why this is an expensive celebration: *"… because we Africans, we invite the family and each and everyone".* That a large number of guests attend (both invited and uninvited) could, however, also be attributed to the white flag that was put on the roof as signal that a wedding feast would be held in the near future. This could be interpreted as a salient modern code signifying an upcoming celebration to let all know in a subtle way that the bridal couple are modern and in a position to host a modern wedding celebration.

The food preparation for the large number of wedding guests is often organised and prepared by the support group. The food for the wedding guests is usually a combination of traditional and modern dishes. It was pointed out that *bogobe, ting mabele* and traditional beer are always prepared and served together with a larger variety of modern dishes than usual.

7.4.4 The wedding cake(s)

Participants said that they associated a modern wedding with a wedding cake, because it was always conspicuously part of the celebration. From the limited literature available on the Western-oriented wedding celebrations in black South African communities, it seems as if the wedding cake became a popular item about 50 years ago. One of the older participants (72 years of age) could recollect and explained in detail what her wedding cake looked like more than 40 years ago. Wilson (1972:195-196) comments on the increased popularity of

wedding cakes at the Christian wedding celebrations of the Nguni and ascribes this to the constant interaction with whites and their Western-oriented wedding practices that were replicated as "… a copy so far as resources permitted of white patterns of display."

The cake(s) has(ve) definitely become the centre of attraction at the wedding feast as is seen by the prominent place it is given on the bridal table. Moreover, the wedding cake(s) would be always be transported with care from the one celebration to the next and placed where it would be seen by all, endorses the view that it is indeed a very important item. Photographic records too bear testimony to this assumption[34]. Wedding cakes even match the colour scheme of the dresses of the bridal party and should have at least two to three tiers depending on the money available. Contrary to the customs of the Nguni groups in the Eastern Cape (Wilson, 1972:194), where two separate wedding cakes were provided, one by the bride's family and the other by the groom's family, the participants in this study indicated that the wedding cake is purchased by the bridal couple and used at both the celebrations at the bride's as well as the groom's family gathering. Some couples have a rich fruit cake as a wedding cake as well as a sponge cake replica. The wedding cake and its replica are taken from the bride's family to the groom's family celebration. In some cases, the wedding cake is not cut at either of these events. This depends on the type of cake, and how long it keeps. A rich fruit cake could be cut and eaten later on.

It became evident that various salient modern codes and meanings are represented by the wedding cake. The number of tiers or the size of the cake is a symbol of prestige. A three tiered cake seemed to be the norm. Some of the participants explained that the goat at the *isikiri* of the traditional Ndebele wedding is replaced by the wedding cake at the modern wedding celebrations and is a recently acquired notion. The wedding cake symbolises that the bride and the groom are now a married couple as explained in the following phrases:

"She said the wedding cake is like the goat at the isikiri, because there won't be a traditional wedding without the goat at the isikiri".

"So if they [bride and groom] *eat the wedding cake, it also symbolises that they are now together".*

Different versions about the cutting of the wedding cake were given by the participants. In most cases the cake is displayed at both the bride and the groom's family homes during the celebrations at each of these venues. It is then cut at the second celebration (at the groom's family) or soon after the celebration, if the cake would not keep. If it could be kept for some

[34] See Addendum E for photographs

time, the cutting of the cake could be done at a later stage. Some couples even have a special wedding cake cutting celebration. Friends, family and the rest of the bridal party are invited to this small celebration, which could be in the form of a *"braai"* (barbeque).

The cutting and eating of the wedding cake has become closely associated with ideological aspects that tie in with the belief system closely related to fertility and the *hlonipha*. Wilson (1972:188) also mentions that the "proper division and consumption of the cakes" seem to be associated with the future health and fertility of the bride.

The time when the wedding cake is cut, seemed to differ from family to family. Some participants, as described above, indicated that it could be at the celebration with the groom's family, while others said that this would only be the case if the bride already has a child. Some couples choose to cut the cake after the wedding celebrations and then have a separate celebration at a later date after the wedding. This varies and could be as soon as a week after the wedding or up to two to three months or even a year after the wedding. In some instances the cutting of the wedding cake only takes place after the birth of the first child, a common custom. The belief is that the cutting of the cake before the birth of the first child could render the bride childless. This was explained as follows:

"… it does stand for something, because some won't cut the cake if they want children".

" … so they will say that you must cut the cake after you have had the child. So then they see if you cut the cake before you had a child, then it is sort of not right. So you must wait until you have had a child".

In some families one of the tiers or a part of the wedding cake could be sent back to the bride's family. This practice is in line with Wilson's (1972:195) observation that the Nguni Christians divide the bottom layer of the cake between the families of both the groom and bride, and the mothers of the bridal couple then distribute these to close relatives who were not able to attend the wedding.

The Mmotla participants drew a parallel between the eating of the wedding cake and the eating of the *isikiri* goat. The meat from the *isikiri* goat is only eaten by the guests attending the *isikiri* celebration. These guests are the married friends of the bridal couple. The part of this goat that is taken back as evidence to the bride's family is eaten only by certain older female relatives of the bride (see 7.2.3). The reason for this relates to the taboo on the sharing of food between relatives-in-law; that strictly forbid the son-in-law and his mother-in-law, including her sisters to eat together (Richards, 1932:191; Fourie, 1921:165). This

explains why certain female relatives of the bride are not allowed to eat from the wedding cake, namely her mother and maternal aunts. The participants explained that the wedding cake is equivalent to the meat of the *isikiri* goat, and they were customarily not allowed to eat from this meat, as a sign of respect to the groom.

Unmarried young girls of 15 years and older are also not allowed to eat from the wedding cake. It is believed that these girls will *"…fail in their own marriages…"* if they eat from the cake before being married.

Charsley (1987a; 1987b), in his discussion on the interpretation and meaning of wedding cakes, notes that a number of meanings and symbols are attached to the wedding cake. However, it seems as though the precise meaning of the wedding cake is unknown, and that people often attach their own meaning, symbolism and metaphors to it, its cutting and distribution. This also seemed to be the case with the study group.

Forces from both the socio-cultural and social-psychological environments are in interplay and evident in the food practices characteristic of the modern wedding. Again, the dualism of the two worlds in which the participants live is illustrated in how they accommodate the social demands set by each of these to ensure their acceptance in both the traditional and the modern Western-oriented world. It is also exemplified in ways in which the two weddings, both the traditional and the modern, are celebrated. The general feeling is that it is important to be accepted in each of these worlds and, that in accommodating or pleasing both worlds, one is not forced to make a choice between either of the two. In other words, both are regarded as equally important. On the one hand, there is the fear of offending the ancestors by not adhering to the prescribed customs of the traditional wedding. Therefore in following these customs the cultural values and beliefs are honoured and the wrath of the ancestors averted. On the other hand, it is equally important to be regarded as part of the modern Western–oriented world and be included in the social activities associated with the peer or social group to which one belongs or aspires to belong. The hosting of a modern wedding seems to ensure the preservation of important social relationships within the chosen social group and to prevent social isolation from it.

Also illustrated here is how certain practices and aspects that represent the material culture of the Western-oriented wedding are taken or borrowed and how these are then bent, adapted or re-interpreted to fit into the modern wedding as part of the black South African life world. At the same time certain practices from the traditional wedding are brought in and skilfully combined with aspects of the Western-oriented wedding. In this process new procedures and associated symbols and meanings are created, resembling neither the old

nor the new. As suggested by the cultural perspective, people have the potential to transform their own realities by manipulating the objects in their cultural world (Kaiser, 1997:51). This implies that objects, ideas and images provided by culture could be used in imaginative ways. They may even be reorganised or combined in new ways. Through this, cultural conventions may be applied in new ways, may be broken or bent to help the individual make sense of reality. An excellent example is seen here in the parallel of the wedding cake and the *isikiri* goat and, to a lesser extent, in the two separate celebrations held with the bride's family as well as at the groom's home that resemble practices of the traditional wedding.

7.5 OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Other celebrations that have gained popularity in the Mmotla community are birthday and New Year's Day celebrations. These are observed by the majority of the participants. A number of other celebrations were mentioned that seemed to be becoming popular although these were recognised by only a few at the time of the study and include graduation parties, family reunions and celebrations to honour or thank parents or grandparents.

7.5.1 Birthdays

Birthday celebrations have become popular and important occasions for both adults and children. In the limited literature available on the food practices of the black South African population, birthday celebrations are not mentioned and it seems as if birthdays could be regarded as one of the new or added celebrations in the personal celebration category. This could be partly attributed to the legislation enforcing the registration of all births in South Africa on the one hand in terms of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1992 (Department of Home Affairs, 1992), and on the other hand to the fact that all children from age of seven years have to attend formal schooling (South African Schools Act of 1996). These measures could possibly have led to increased awareness of a person's birth date and the significance of celebrating it. The older participants in this study confirmed that when they were growing up, birthdays were certainly not specially celebrated but they had noticed that this was now happening more frequently than before. The increased frequency and popularity of birthday celebrations seems to relate to a degree of prestige attached to it, and as one of the older participants remarked:

"… it is fashionable to have birthday parties."

Guests invited to birthday celebrations include family members, friends, neighbours and church members. Everyone who is invited brings a present for the person who is having the birthday. Most birthday celebrations are held over weekends when everybody is at home and free to participate and also because more money is likely to be available for a celebration to enable them to purchase additional and special food items for the occasion. To be *"fashionable"* means one is able to host a celebration where more and *"modern food"* is served, and to be in the position to purchase a birthday cake, referred to as *khekhe.* The importance and centrality that the birthday cake enjoys in birthday celebrations of both old and young is illustrated in the photos obtained from family photograph albums of the participants (see Addendum E). To be able to purchase a nicely decorated birthday cake conveyed the financial position of the family. Even when the hostess was in a position to bake a cake, the birthday cake was always purchased. This was explained by the following quotation:

"There are the ones that they bake themselves, but the big one, the special one for the birthday, they will buy it from the shops."

When the birthday of a person falls on a weekday, and there is sufficient money available, the food prepared for the family meal can include something special such as rice, meat (chicken in most cases), vegetables and salads, a dessert such as ice cream and cooldrinks.

The birthday celebrations for children and adults are discussed separately, because they differ according to the type of food served.

7.5.1.1 Birthday celebrations for children

The celebration for pre-school children could typically either be at home or at the pre-school. When the celebration is at the pre-school the purchased birthday cake is taken to school with the rest of the treats and the party is held at the pre-school with the friends of the child. The celebration for school-going children takes place on either a Saturday or Sunday. The centre of attraction, the colourful iced, purchased birthday cake with candles, is placed on a big table covered with a tablecloth and decorated with flowers. The invited friends of the child are seated around the table. They sing and enjoy themselves. Other party treats include *dikhekhe*, potato crisps, peanuts, *romantics* (a type of pink candy), cooldrinks, juice and dessert such as jelly, canned fruit and custard sauce.

7.5.1.2 Birthday celebrations for adults

The birthday celebrations for adults are in most cases over weekends, due to the fact that families and friends are at home and it is more likely that they then have money and time available for the celebration. Birthday parties are often organised by the children or grandchildren of an elderly person in the form of a surprise birthday party.

The type food prepared depends on the money available and in most cases more meat is served. A sheep can, for example, be slaughtered, or purchased from the butchery. In the case of a big celebration a beast is slaughtered. In most instances modern food is served and these include meat dishes (beef and chicken), rice, vegetables and salads, cooldrinks, beer (traditional and commercial) and stiff maize-meal porridge. Guests are also served *dikhekhe* (purchased, iced birthday cakes) and *dikuku* (small scone-type of home-baked cakes without icing).

A *braaivleis* seemed to be a very popular way to celebrate adults' birthdays in this community. Meat such as beef and *boerewors* are roasted over the coals. Other food and beverages include *bogobe*, rice, vegetables and salads together with traditional and commercial beer. The purchased iced birthday cake is usually served as part of the variety of sweets for dessert.

7.5.1.3 The 21st birthday celebration

This is a very popular celebration and is regarded as one of the more modern, high status, celebrations in the community. It was admitted that the celebration is borrowed from the white people, as the black people traditionally did not have such a celebration. There are, however, certain conditions attached to whether this celebration is held for a person or not. The person turning twenty-one must have undergone the initiation process (where applicable), and must not have had a child. The celebration is then given in honour of the person turning twenty-one by their parents as a gesture to thank them for behaving well by not having a child before being married. The 21st birthday celebration can take various formats. It can be in the form of an informal dance party at home, or it can be a formal celebration with a fixed programme and even have a master of ceremonies. Those who have close ties with the church indicated that this celebration could be held in collaboration with the church. In this instance the pastor or priest opens the celebrations with a prayer and during the course of the function a special prayer is said for the person turning twenty-one. No liquor is served at such a celebration.

The food served at 21st birthday celebrations consists of modern food, similar to that prepared for a Sunday midday meal, although a larger variety of food is prepared. Several meat dishes; such as fried chicken, mutton and or beef stew, meatballs, and a variety of vegetable dishes, salads and desserts are prepared. A special birthday cake with '21' iced on it and 21 candles is purchased. Other food and beverages could include items such as snacks (peanuts, potato crisps, sweets) *dikuku*, ginger beer, commercial beer and cooldrinks. Some traditional foods such as *bogobe*, *ting mabele* and traditional beer could also be served.

Forces from both the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments are prominent in the manner in which birthday celebrations are conducted. The prestige attached to hosting a birthday party is reflected in the special invitation to the guests to attend the celebration. The kind of food offered and the manner in which it is presented serves as another example. Apart from a larger variety of modern food the emphasis placed on the display and serving of a beautifully iced birthday cake and decorated table with tablecloth, crockery, cutlery and flowers all indicate that birthday parties are very special occasions. Hosting a birthday party with all the trimmings shows that the host is keeping up with the changing times, and is a modern and educated person, having a certain economic standing. The emphasis is on social relationships and this is evident in the importance that is placed on sharing it with others, through the invitations extended to friends, family neighbours and other church members.

7.5.2 New Year's Day celebration

A New Year's Day celebration is described as a happy and joyous occasion and, similar to Christmas, church services are attended on New Year's Eve or on New Year's Day. Apart from the religious emphasis, being together with family and friends is regarded as important and this day is set aside for family and visiting others.

The food served was described as similar to that which is prepared for Christmas or a Sunday and consists mainly of modern food items combined with favourite traditional dishes associated with special occasions and celebrations. The following were specially mentioned: rice, chicken and salads, *idombolo*, vegetables, dessert, cooldrinks and cakes such as the home-baked *dikuku* and biscuits. Other favourite dishes include *idombolo* and chicken, and one participant described a special complicated dish of ground *mabele* and *umrorho* that she prepares for her family on New Year's Day.

Some revealed that they enjoy an outdoor celebration and have a *braaivleis* or picnic on New Year's Day. At a *braaivleis* they have meat (beef, *boerewors*, mutton and chicken) and *bogobe.* For a picnic, food is prepared and packed at home and taken along to a museum or park elsewhere. The prepared food could include items such as scones, bread rolls, buns, lettuce and tomato. Some would even *braai* at the picnic and the *bogobe* is then prepared at home and taken along.

Apart from birthday and New Year's Day celebrations a few participants revealed that they hosted and/or participated in graduation celebrations, family reunions and celebrations to honour parents or grandparents.

7.5.3 Graduation celebrations

This celebration is held in honour of a graduate (mainly from a tertiary educational institution) and hosted by the parents, provided they have the money available for such a celebration. Friends, family and neighbours would be invited, as well as the friends of the graduate who then all wear their academic gowns and caps. The purpose of the celebration is to give the parents of the graduate the opportunity to express their gratitude to their child, because: *"the parents will show how grateful they are"*. At the celebration the graduate also makes a speech to thank the parents.

The type of celebration depends on the money available. It could vary from being a small informal get-together to a very elaborate formal occasion. A formal celebration would, for example, take place at a special venue or in a marquee tent erected in the yard of the family hosting the celebration. A master of ceremonies (programme director) and a set programme would be part of a formal function. The food served at graduate celebrations is mainly modern food and includes various meat dishes (a beast, sheep or chickens can be slaughtered), rice, vegetables, salads and desserts. Beverages such as traditional and commercial beer are served together with soft drinks.

7.5.4 Family reunions

It seemed as if this occasion is important to some families from the Ndebele group. Family reunions are usually held once or twice a year during the Christmas holidays and/or during the winter months. It was explained that family reunions were essential, because people live apart and don't have enough contact with each other to know their relatives and who they are: *"Because nowadays families are scattered …"* It also serves as a precaution to guard against children from the same family marrying each other.

On this occasion the ancestors would also be informed that the family is now together, and traditional beer is prepared. It was emphasised that families and/or individuals in a family should not be in conflict with each other, and if they experience conflict it has to be resolved before the gathering takes place. The importance of harmonious relationships between family members at such an occasion was emphasised. The reason why this is important was that the ancestors *"… will not pour good luck to you, because our ancestors are the same, …"* This again illustrates the high premium that this group places on having good relationships with family members and the belief that such good behaviour ensures the goodwill of the ancestors.

Modern and traditional food is prepared and the individual families who attend the reunion all contribute to cover the expenses for the food. The date for the next reunion is then usually determined as the whole family is together.

7.5.5 Celebration to honour or thank parents / grandparents

This is another of the newly added special occasions, celebrated by some. It is described as a celebration to honour of parents or grandparents and thank them for what they have done and meant in the lives of their children and/or grandchildren. This celebration is held at any time when the family feel that they want to organise such an event. Friends and family of the parents/grandparents are invited as well as the members of the church. A church service is first attended and the person honoured also receives presents. A beast could be slaughtered and modern food is prepared for this celebration.

7.5.6 Meanings of the food practices at other special occasions

The food practices and the meanings attached to the modern special occasions all follow the same pattern and mainly modern food, similar to the Sunday midday meal, is served. Favourite traditional dishes such as *bogobe, ting mabele* and traditional beer are included, however, the focus in on the large quantities and variety of modern or Western-oriented dishes. This serves to indicate that those who host these modern special occasions are modern and educated people who have the financial means to do so.

7.6 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Marriage rituals of black South Africans have changed over the course of time, and so have the food practices associated with wedding celebrations. It emerged that, although the

modern wedding has gained considerable popularity amongst the Mmotla participants, both traditional and modern wedding formats are celebrated, for the reason that the traditional wedding is set as a precondition for the modern wedding. In most cases people nowadays only follow the traditional wedding procedures up to the delivery of the bridal wealth. Depending on the church group they belong to, most of the Ndebele participants indicated that they continue to follow their elaborate traditional wedding procedures. To contextualise and understand the two wedding formats as celebrated by the Ndebele, both the traditional and modern wedding celebrations were given.

An outstanding feature of the traditional Ndebele wedding is that the food practices associated with the main events have special meanings and reflect that food, as material culture, is employed in the process to fulfil specific roles and functions. Throughout the entire process, forces from the socio-cultural and the socio-psychological environments are present and are represented in the food practices. During the *isimanje,* for example, food is used to communicate important messages with regard to the social relationship between the bride and her future in-laws. Out of respect to them, she initially refuses to eat the food offered to her, and only after the sum of money is handed to her as sign that she is accepted as guest, does she eat from the food prepared for her as a special and honoured guest. The *isikiri* goat slaughtered for the bride and specific parts of this goat have a number of symbolic meanings that embody not only the cultural values and beliefs of the groom's family, but also include concern for the social relationship between the bride and the family of the groom. As symbol of the traditional Ndebele wedding, its importance and centrality is further highlighted by taking part of a foreleg back to the bride's family, to serve as a relevant traditional code or as evidence that traditional customs were followed.

The slaughter of the two beasts and the exchange of the meat between the two families during the *idwende*, likewise, have symbolic meaning. The exchange of the meat and the allocation of certain parts to specific family members represent the new social ties that are formed and convey specific messages about the event thereby acknowledging the social obligations within each family. In addition, the exchange of the meat from the slaughtered animals, symbolises the acknowledgement of the new social relationship arising from the marriage and that both families are in agreement that the *lobolo* transaction has been completed to the satisfaction of each family. The allocation of certain parts of the beast to specific family members is an additional sign of the strengthening and cherishing of family ties.

That traditional wedding procedures continue to exist reflects dedication, indicating that traditional customs are not only valued, but also that due recognition is being given to the

ancestors. Adhering to cultural traditions shows that they are honoured, acknowledged and remembered, as exemplified in the practice of following ritual procedures such as informing the ancestors of the event and the slaughtering of the *isikiri* goat and the beasts at the *indwende*. Deep-seated cultural values and beliefs contribute to the entrenchment of these traditional procedures.

The modern wedding on the other hand, has become popular mainly because of the prestige and social status attached to it. It has become important to be recognised as a modern, educated and successful person and one who has the financial means to host a modern wedding celebration. This again illustrates the dualism of the two worlds that the participants are in contact with and in which they live.

Again, food as material culture has symbolic meaning and conveys messages. Of special interest is how certain Western-oriented practices have been borrowed, bent to serve a different purpose or re-interpreted. Through this process new meanings and modern codes are created. The parallel drawn between the *isikiri* goat and the wedding cake serves as an example of how the participants gave their own meaning to the wedding cake in an imaginative way. New and modern codes with regard to the cutting and eating of the wedding cake were developed and, in keeping with the traditional significance of the *isikiri* goat, these related to aspects concerning the future fertility of the bride and the *hlonipha.*

In the last part of this chapter attention was given to a number of recently introduced special occasions that have gained popularity such as birthdays and New Year's Day celebrations. These are observed by the majority of the participants, and even those celebrated by only a few of them, were also highlighted. These celebrations are popularly referred to as modern special occasions, and they all follow similar patterns with regard to food practices. Emphasis is placed on the provision of a variety of modern food dishes in large quantities to represent the socio-economic status of the host, or that to which is aspired. Birthday celebrations in particular seemed to have gained popularity and have become prestigious occasions celebrated by both young and old.

The following chapter deals with food practices associated with religious occasions.

TERMINOLOGY LIST

amanganga	Breast section of the *isikiri* goat. See Figure 7.2
amasi	Sour milk
amathumbu	IsiNdebele for intestine
amavenge	Front leg part of the *iskiri* goat taken to the bride's family as evidence that the goat was slaughtered for her. See Figure 7.3
boerewors	A coarse loose textured beef and pork sausage flavoured with spices such as coriander, cloves, nutmeg and all spice
bogobe	Stiff maize-meal porridge
braaivleis / braai	Afrikaans for barbeque
dikhekhe	Plural for purchased iced cakes. Singular *khekhe*
dikuku/ amakuke	Popular scone-type of baked product without icing. See Addendum D
hlonipha	Showing respect towards someone or to treat someone respectfully
idwende	The second wedding celebration in the traditional Ndebele wedding procedures
irhayi	Dish prepared from dried maize and cowpeas. See Addendum C
isidudu	Soft maize-meal porridge prepared from the discarded during the beer brewing process. See Addendum C
isifunzi	Back section of the slaughtered beast. See Figure 7.4 part 6
isikiri	Last phase of the *isimanje*. 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
isithebe	Woven grass mat to receive the grinded grain from the grinding stone
imvu yabayenyana	Goat slaughtered for groom at the second wedding celebration at the bride's family
lobolo	Bridal wealth
makoti	Bride
mala	Intestines
mogodu	Tripe
molatsa	Left-over food or *bogobe*
morogo	Collective name for indigenous green leafy vegetables
nomyezani	Future sister-in-law of the bride, usually the wife of the brother older than the groom
setlhana	Rump section of the slaughtered beast. See Figure 7.5
ting mabele	Fermented soft sorghum porridge. See Addendum C
ukghari	Eldest sister of the father
ukugenisa ubaba	Celebration where the young married woman invites her father-in-law to her home for the first time after the strictest *hlonipha* rules have been lifted
umhlambiso	Part of the second wedding celebration where the beasts are slaughtered and the bride hands over the gifts to the groom's family
umkhupha	Maize-meal and legume dish. See Addendum C
umrorho	isiNdebele for indigenous green leafy vegetables
umseme	Woven grass sleeping mats. Plural *imiseme*
umtsikitlana	isiNdebele for sour porridge

CHAPTER 8

FOOD PRACTICES AND THEIR MEANINGS ON RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The religious beliefs and world views of the participants form part of, and often steer, the format of a special occasion, including its food practices, to either the traditional or modern Western-oriented side. As mentioned in the introduction to this section on the findings of special occasions, the church groups to which people belong have been instrumental in persuading them to either abandon or accommodate belief in the ancestral spirits. Two types of religious occasions exist, namely those linked to ancestral devotion and Christianity.

Ancestral veneration and the associated rituals continue to play an important role in the lives of those who still adhere to the traditional African religion where the foundation of the belief system rests on the belief in the ancestors. This became clear through the emphasis placed on the strict adherence to traditional customs, following the prescriptions of the ancestors and honouring and informing them of all celebrations associated with the rites of passage such as initiation, weddings and funerals. On the other hand, through the continued contact with religious institutions, churches and the Western-oriented culture, Christian religious occasions and their associated celebrations have also been taken up in this community, as has happened in many other black South African communities. Christmas and Easter are regarded as the most significant Christian celebrations in South Africa and have thus become equally important celebrations in black South African communities (Pauw, 1974:415).

In this chapter food practices relating to ancestral ritual venerations are given first, followed by those of funerals. Funerals, as the last rite of passage, are regarded as religious occasions and the procedures, including food practices, and meanings attached to them are discussed. The chapter concludes with an account of food practices that feature at Christian religious events.

8.2 ANCESTRAL RITUAL OCCASIONS AND THE MEANINGS OF THE FOOD PRACTICES

The participants who continued to engage in ancestral veneration often emphasised the importance of regular communication with the ancestors. They regarded it of the utmost importance to remember the ancestors and to inform them of what was happening to their descendants that they had left behind here on earth. They were expected to demonstrate this to the ancestors in a tangible way such as through the blood of a slaughtered animal and traditional beer. If not done to the satisfaction of the ancestors, it is believed that misfortune and unhappiness could follow and only be rectified by performing other specific ritual procedures at a specially arranged occasion for the ancestors. In this regard, Pauw (1974:440) too comments that it was necessary that the ancestors be honoured on a continuous basis.

As described in Chapters 6 and 7, communication with the ancestors takes place at all major events in a person's life, from birth to death and burial and even thereafter at the unveiling of the tombstone. Apart from being informed about the important milestones in the lives of their descendants, they should also know about other important incidents such as moving from one area of residence to another, purchasing a new car or home, or finding new employment. The reason for this is because the ancestors *"… must know what happens to their family members."* It is believed that people have misfortunes such as becoming ill or unemployed, or experience problems in personal relations when the ancestors are not honoured and remembered. One of the participants emphasised this in the following quotation:

"… all these factors make families to worship their ancestors to inform them of their problems as well as their accomplishments."

Some families even have a special occasion in honour of their ancestors once a year to ensure good relations with their ancestors and amongst each other, as described under family reunions (see 7.5.4). When remembering and honouring ancestors, it is believed that good fortune and prosperity is guaranteed.

It can also happen that the ancestors indicate that they need to be remembered by communicating this through dreams or other signs such as illness or when misfortunes are experienced. In these instances, a traditional healer is consulted who then interprets the dream, sign or reason for the illness or misfortune. According to the participants, in most cases, the traditional healer's interpretation is that the ancestors are unhappy or feel

neglected, and that they want to be remembered because, *"…the ancestors want you to think of them*". The traditional healer usually points out that a ritual celebration has to be performed in honour of the ancestors. This ritual is called *"go phasa*" and the traditional healer would specify the procedure for the occasion called *"mphaso".* The traditional healer gives a detailed directive of what needs to be slaughtered, such as the colour and gender of the animal.

There are a number of places where ancestral communication could take place. It could be at a special place in the yard next to the house that is specifically reserved for the ancestors or sometimes at the grave of family members when communicating with a specific ancestor. During the slaughtering process and communication with the ancestors the family members are seated in a circle. Blood, beer and snuff are used in ancestral communication. The animal, usually a goat or chicken is slaughtered first and it is essential that the blood of the sacrificed animal be used. In this regard, Hammond-Tooke (1974:352) refers to "the blood sacrifice" in the rituals performed by the Nguni, Tsonga and some Sotho-groups. The participants explained that: *"You are going to serve the ancestor with the blood."* This is followed by the traditional beer and snuff. The older family members sip from the traditional beer first, and then the younger generation follows. The sipped beer is then spewed out on the ground, snuff is taken and, while sprinkling the snuff on the spewed-out beer, the communication takes place. The snuff goes hand in hand with the traditional beer and it was explained that *"…you can't have the beer and not the snuff"*.

Certain rules apply for the preparation and serving of the traditional beer for ancestral communication. The beer must be prepared by a relative of the ancestor and family members are not allowed to drink from this beer before it has been served to the ancestors. The ancestors request the beer and it is specifically prepared for them, therefore they should be the first to receive and enjoy it. The beer for the ancestors is not sieved and the malted solid sorghum parts known as *"serobe*", are regarded as *"food for the ancestors*". Only after the beer has been served or poured for the ancestors is it sieved and enjoyed by the rest of the family.

A number of reasons were given why the beer for the ancestors is not sieved. The Ndebele group explained that the traditional beer *unotlabalala* was used for ancestral communication and traditionally it was not sieved. The solid particles in it were compared to *bogobe* and regarded as the most important part of the beer because of the belief that it has strength and thus regarded as food or nourishment. The liquid part was not considered important. The beer was prepared specifically for the ancestors and they required all the ingredients in the beer, because it is their celebration. Others were of the opinion that to sieve, or not to sieve,

the beer depends on family traditions and on the information received from their ancestors via the interpretation of the traditional healer. The traditional healers know how the beer should be and, since they do not sieve it, the example of the traditional healers is followed when preparing traditional beer for the ancestors.

The central theme at ancestral occasions is to demonstrate to the ancestors that they are still remembered, honoured and respected. The *hlonipha* principle is not only demonstrated through performing ancestral rituals, but is also simultaneously symbolised in a tangible manner through the food eaten during these rituals and the festivities that follow.

The blood of the slaughtered animal and the solid particles of the traditional sorghum beer are the most essential food components associated with the ritual of ancestral communication and both are seen as nourishment required by the ancestors. Sorghum was once the most important and widely used staple food on the African continent but has been replaced by maize as staple food in the daily diet of most of southern African ethnic groups (Labadarios *et al*., 1996; Quin, 1959:24-25). The importance of sorghum and the cultural value attached to it is demonstrated through the central position it still holds in these religious traditions. It continues to be the grain of choice in religious rituals offered the ancestors. In the well-known classification system of food by Jelliffe (1967), staple foods that are involved in religious rituals are referred to as cultural super-foods. Sorghum therefore continues to hold the superior position of being a cultural super-food.

When money is not available for slaughtering the required animal, a maize-meal and water mixture could be used as an emergency substitute. This is, for example, acceptable when the ancestors request a specific animal and there isn't money to purchase it. Maize-meal and water can then be used instead of the slaughtered animal or traditional beer. An apology must, however, be made to the ancestors, with an explanation that there is no money and that their request will be obeyed as soon as it is available. Maize-meal has thus obtained a similar status as sorghum, as it is used in emergency situations as substitute for traditional beer, which is also meaningful. Hereby maize-meal is similarly acknowledged as a cultural super-food according to the classification system by Jelliffe (1967).

Communication with the ancestors either takes place late in the afternoon or early in the morning around four o'clock. The meat of the slaughtered animal is then put out for the ancestors by leaving it for a certain period of time, such as overnight or for the whole day. This allows the ancestors to see what was slaughtered for them, before it is cooked and eaten by their descendants. The meat, together with traditional beer and a jug or basin of water, is left at a specific place in the house to give the ancestors the opportunity to enjoy the

food they requested. Hammond–Tooke (1974:353) also refers to this practice where the ancestors are given their share first, before the rest of the family is allowed to eat from the meat.

After the ancestors have had the opportunity to see what was slaughtered for them, the meat of the animal is prepared as part of the menu for the family to celebrate the communication that took place. This is usually done the day after the communication took place or late in the afternoon if the animal was slaughtered early in the morning. According to an elderly participant, the family is not allowed to eat from the meat on the day that the communication with the ancestors took place. She explained it as follows:

" … *when they talk to the ancestors they are not supposed to eat anything, when they do like this* [abstain from eating], *they want the ancestors to eat and drink, it is* ***their*** *food. So they give the ancestors the whole day to eat and drink."*

Some were of the opinion that the meat from the sacrificed animals tasted different, *"… the meat, it does not taste nice. You can just feel it is for the ancestors, it is not for us people to eat."* They intimated that they could taste that the strength had been taken out of the meat because of the ancestors who had consumed from the meat. Fourie (1921:69-70) offers a similar description as provided by one of his participants who explained that "De abezimu nemen de kracht, de kracht is wegelopen, het vlees is licht".

Hlonipha is not only demonstrated through the slaughter of the animal, but also in the acknowledgement of the seniority of the ancestors by giving them the opportunity to be the first to enjoy the meat and the beer. Hammond-Tooke (1974:360) explains that the killing of the animal for the ancestors is a symbolic act of respect for the deceased seniors. Their seniority and the associated respect is further symbolised through the recognition that is given to them as seniors, in the social organisation of the family, even after their death, as explained by Richards (1932:183). The family meal that is prepared after the ancestors had had the opportunity to enjoy their food, likewise has symbolic meaning attached to it. The family enjoys the same food as the ancestors and, in doing so, the unity of the family is symbolised. Hammond-Tooke (1974:353) describes this as "a communion meal which symbolically unites the living and the dead."

The emphasis placed on the preparation and serving of traditional food at the celebration that follows reflects another aspect of respect and hospitality, namely, taking into consideration the type of food prepared. Traditional food is prepared in honour of the ancestors. No modern food is prepared and the reason given was that the ancestors do not want modern

food, because: *"It is tradition they must have their traditional food".* The participants explained that the ancestors are only familiar with traditional food, and it is assumed that they prefer it to modern food. They are honoured through this feast and, as one honours guests by serving them their preferred food, so it should be done for the ancestors, hence the serving of traditional food for them.

The ancestors require that customs are pursued and it is believed that they are pleased and satisfied when their descendants do so. To please the ancestors on these occasions is regarded as being of the utmost importance in order to win their favour. This explains why traditional food is always served when communication with the ancestors takes place. The provision of traditional food is seen as adhering to customs and ensures that the ancestors are satisfied. The importance attached to preserving and honouring traditional food customs at ritual communication ceremonies, is further contextualised through the traditional equipment and utensils that are used when presenting food to the ancestors.

During ancestral communication meanings associated with the socio-psychological and socio-cultural environments are in interplay. The cultural perspective indicates that collective values are produced and reproduced through cultural forms (Kaiser, 1997:49). Traditional food, as a form of culture, fulfils a central role in ancestral communication and, as material artefact, represents the shared values that are linked to the belief and value systems of the participants. Traditional food, on the one hand, symbolises the principal values of respect and honour towards the ancestors in a tangible manner and, on the other hand, the belief that the ancestors would be content and bestow good fortune on their descendants.

8.3 FUNERAL PROCEDURES

To contextualise the modern funeral, the course of the traditional funeral as told by the older participants is briefly described first. This facilitates the comparison of the current and traditional funeral practices. The account given by the participants is similar to that described by Eiselen and Schapera (1962:248).

8.3.1 Traditional funerals

Only the older people were informed when someone passed away. As far as children were concerned, it was kept as a secret and they were not told that a person had passed away. People were buried on the same day they passed away, usually at night. The older participants remembered that there were separate burial places for men and women. Men

were buried in the cattle *kraal* (cattle pen) and women in the *lapa*, a small, unthatched *"verandah*" at the back of the house. This information concurs with the work done by Eiselen and Schapera (1962:248) who document the absence of cemeteries and communal burial places and state that men were buried in the cattle *kraal* or near its fence and women and children behind or inside the hut. The ancestors were informed of the death through maize-meal, water, ash and snuff because there was not enough time to prepare traditional beer (maize-meal, water, ash and snuff were used as an emergency substitute for traditional beer). A beast was usually slaughtered. The Ndebele participants, however, indicated that both a beast and a goat were slaughtered. The skin of the beast was used to cover the body, and the skin of the goat was used as a vest *"iporiyana"* for a male and as *"imbeleko"* (blanket) for a female.

There were certain rules and restrictions with regard to the attendance and food preparation at funerals and for a widow directly after the death of her husband. Only people older than fifty were allowed to attend the burial ceremony. A daughter-in-law was not allowed to attend the funeral of her father-in-law, and a son-in-law was not allowed to attend the funeral of his mother-in-law due to the prescribed *hlonipha* rules.

Only meat and *bogobe* were prepared for the funeral. The meat, called *"mogoga"* in Setswana and *"umthuso"* in isiNdebele, was prepared outside the house in a special place in the yard called *"ibandla"* or *"khoro"* (family gathering place) by the older men of the family. Only men from the immediate family of the deceased were allowed to prepare the meat. According to some participants, only widowed persons were allowed to eat the food prepared for the funeral, while others indicated that it was only the older people who were allowed to eat at funerals. Fourie (1921:143) adds to this view saying that the meat was eaten only by those who dug the grave (these were the male relatives of the deceased) and older women; nobody else was allowed to eat from it. The funeral meat was prepared without salt and the *bogobe* was not made at the house where the person died, but was prepared by the neighbours and friends and then brought to the funeral. The two main reasons given for this was that they did not want the children to know what had happened and, in the second place, they were in shock because of the death of their relative and therefore did not have the strength to prepare the food. According to some of the participants, the daughters-in-law of a family prepared the *bogobe* for the funeral, brought it to the funeral, but had to return home immediately because they were not allowed to attend the funeral or eat from the food. The rule with regard to the preparation of the *bogobe* appears to have changed over time, as some participants indicated that women were now starting to prepare the *bogobe*, although they were not allowed to attend the funeral. At the time of the study, the men were still responsible for the meat preparation at funerals.

With regard to preparing and serving food for a newly widowed person, rules were clearly in place but there were different views about how long after the funeral these rules applied. According to some, another widow prepared the food for the newly widowed person for the first two to three days after the funeral, others were of the opinion that it was only for one day. Another older participant indicated that traditionally when a woman's husband passed away, these rules applied only up to the funeral and that after the funeral the widow was allowed to eat with other family members again.

8.3.2 Modern funerals and meanings attached to the food practices

Funeral procedures including some of the rules attached to them have changed over the past years. These changes relate to the funeral arrangements and procedures, the attendance at funerals and the food, its preparation, serving and eating.

The burial societies, to whom most people belong, fulfil an important role by assisting with the arrangements for the modern funeral. When a family member passes away, the death is immediately reported to the burial society to which the family belongs. The body is taken to the mortuary to be prepared for burial. The family, in consultation with the burial society decides on the date for the funeral that would usually take place over a weekend, on the Saturday. This is a practical arrangement to enable people who work, as well as those who have to travel, to attend it (it can therefore take a week or even two weeks before a person is buried after he/she passed away).

The course of the modern funeral is depicted in the flow diagram presented in Figure 8.1.

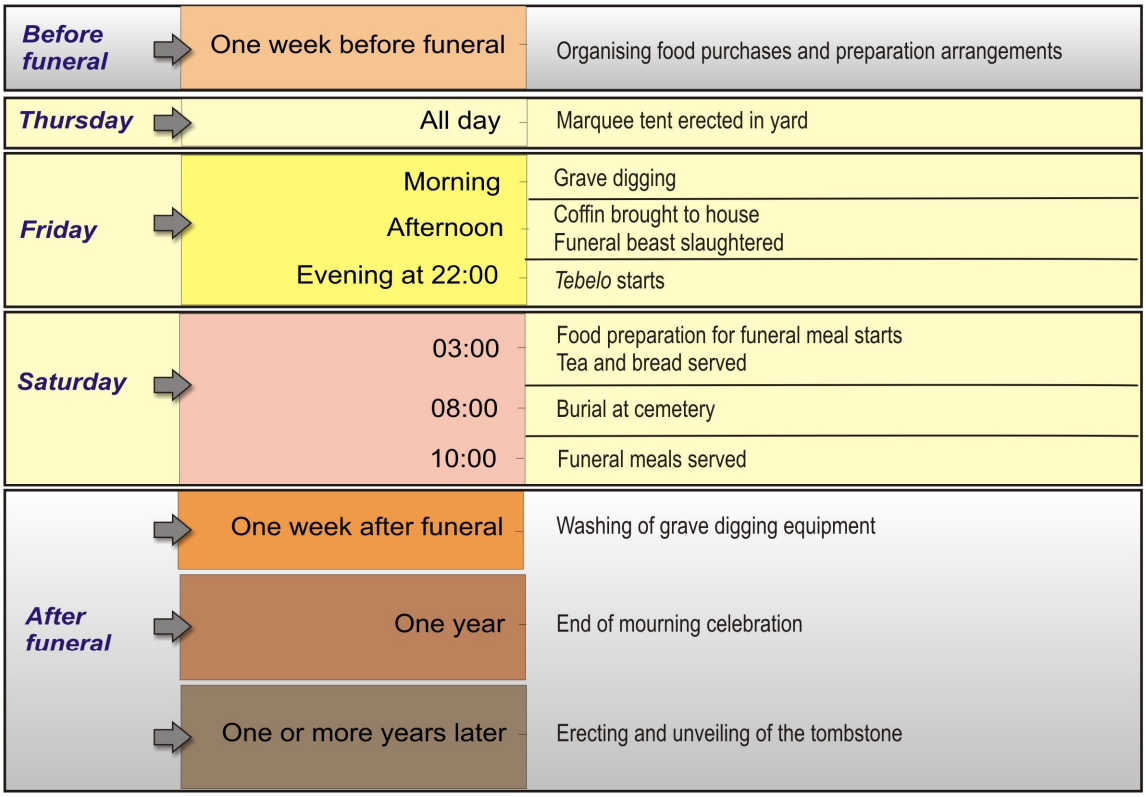

FIGURE 8.1: THE COURSE OF THE MODERN FUNERAL

During the week before the funeral, neighbours and friends come to comfort the bereaved family. Tea and *dikuku* could be served to them, and sometimes meals consisting of *bogobe*, *maotwana* (chicken feet) and cabbage are offered. A big marquee tent is erected in the yard of the bereaved family on the Thursday before the funeral, to accommodate the mourners who attend the funeral service on Friday night and the burial on Saturday morning.

The programme for the funeral starts on Friday with the digging of the grave when the *diphiri* (gravediggers) dig the grave at the cemetery. The gravediggers could either be male neighbours or relatives. In some sections in the Mmotla village there are special teams who are paid for these services. The gravediggers first come to the house as a relative of the deceased must accompany them and be present at the cemetery.

The coffin with the deceased is brought back to the house late on Friday afternoon. The coffin is placed in a specific room in the house from whence it is taken on Saturday morning to the cemetery for the burial. Some of the family members of the deceased keep vigil at the coffin during the night.

In some families the beast that is slaughtered as funeral meat, would only be slaughtered after the coffin had arrived at the house, while some participants indicated that the beast could be slaughtered before the coffin arrives. It seems as if this depends on the family traditions of the bereaved family. In the Ndebele group, the skin of this beast is buried with the deceased and the tradition to use the skin of the animal to cover the body is still followed by some. Other families, however, fold the skin and put it on top of the coffin. It appears that the slaughter of a beast is still regarded as an important part of the funeral procedures of the Ndebele group. It was emphasised that, when money is not available to slaughter a beast, it still has to be done some time later, then the skin is buried at the grave.

On Friday night, the memorial service, the *"tebello"* is held. Priests/*Baruti* (there can be up to five) from different churches in the community, lead the *tebello* service. The *tebello* starts at 22:00 on Friday evening and continues through the night until early on Saturday morning. On Saturday morning the mourners first attend a church service at the church before the burial takes place at the cemetery. The owner of the mortuary provides a hearse and family car to transport the coffin and the family to the church and cemetery on Saturday morning. The burial usually takes place between 8:00 and 10:00.

The custom of informing the ancestors of what had happened to the deceased as part of the funeral proceedings, was still adhered to by some at the time of the study. The ancestors would be informed when the funeral procession leaves the house of the deceased for the burial, or at the graveside. Traditional beer is used in this communication with the ancestors. The following quotations illustrate the role of traditional beer and the importance of communicating major events to the ancestors:

"Some, when the coffin goes to the graveyard the family will pour the traditional beer to inform the ancestors".

"In the morning of the day of the funeral, before they go to the burial, they will tell the ancestors, here we are, this one is coming to you; they must know this. The traditional beer is prepared in some families to inform the ancestors that there is this one coming to them as ancestor".

The pouring of the traditional beer serves as a salient traditional code to define the act of communication with the ancestors. Not only is the communication with the ancestors represented through this act, but it is simultaneously symbolic of the ideological beliefs associated with the rite of passage from this world to that of the ancestors.

On returning to the home of the bereaved family, the mourners wash their hands in a basin of water placed at the gate to the yard and the funeral meal is served in the marquee tent. The hand washing relates to the custom of getting rid of the pollution associated with death, as described by Eiselen and Schapera (1962:249). Those who attend a funeral have to be "ceremonially cleansed".

People of any age may attend a funeral and most of them are allowed to eat the funeral meal. Participants from the Ndebele group, however, mentioned exceptions. According to them, in some families daughters-in-law are still not allowed to attend the funeral of their father-in-law, and sons-in-law the funeral of their mother-in-law, while others indicated that they could. Attendance of the funeral by the children-in-law was, however, subject to certain strict rules that they had to follow. They were not allowed near the coffin and when the coffin came out of the house to the tent the Saturday morning they were not allowed in the tent. They could go to the burial at the cemetery but were not allowed near the coffin. They were also not allowed to eat the funeral meat if a beast had been slaughtered.

A description and interpretation of the food and food practices associated with the modern funeral is given in the next sections.

8.3.2.1 Food preparation

At the time of the study most funerals were held over weekends to enable people who are employed to attend. Family and friends of the deceased often have to travel far to attend the funeral that begins on Friday evening and continues throughout the night until the next morning as explained above. It was emphasised that these people "… *are not allowed to go back hungry".* This was given as reason why a large quantity of food has to be prepared for the mourners who attend the funeral.

In contrast to the traditional funeral, more attention is given to the food prepared at the modern funeral than was previously the case. Funerals have become important social events in most black South African communities and understandably much emphasis is placed on the food. A large variety of food is prepared, and people of all ages are nowadays allowed to attend funerals due to the lifting of the age restriction for attendance, with the result that it has become an expensive occasion.

The food preparation for the funeral meal is organised by the burial society and/or support group. Depending on the constitution of the society, they either give money to purchase the

food for the bereaved family, or the society decides what to prepare and someone is appointed to purchase the required ingredients.

The food preparation for the funeral meal starts very early on the Saturday morning at about 03:00. A male member from the bereaved family prepares the meat. Members from the support group and/or burial society prepare the rest of the dishes. This, however, largely depends on the constitution of the support group/burial society. Early on Saturday morning before the mourners go to the cemetery, tea and bread and/or *dikuku* is served to all who attended the *tebello* service during the night.

Although the menu prepared at funerals could be described as consisting mainly of modern food, certain traditional dishes are always prepared. These dishes include, apart from the meat of the slaughtered beast, *bogobe, ting ya mabele* and beverages such as *gemere* (ginger beer), juice and in some cases traditional beer. Once again traditional food is served side-by-side with modern food. However, it needs to be pointed out that traditional beer is only served by those who are not forbidden by their church to do so (see 4.4.2).

The traditional practice of preparing the food without salt is still followed by some, while others add salt and even use modern condiments such as spices and seasoning salts. Another change observed by the participants was that some years ago only tea and bread was served to the mourners before the burial early on the Saturday morning, and that, at the time of the study, cake and *dikuku* would often be served instead of bread with the tea.

It seems as if the food is used as a gauge of the social status of the bereaved family and that the opinion of others in evaluating the event has become important. The funeral meal therefore receives a great deal of attention. An elderly participant even compared a funeral to a wedding when the food served at the modern funeral was compared to the practices followed previously. She stated that:

"… they cook now like the wedding, just like the wedding. It has to be discussed".

The reason for this comparison related to the large quantities of meat and salads that were served at funerals that added to the cost. She explained that the food served at funerals has become so extravagant that most people cannot afford it but still go to a great deal of trouble and expense, and even get into debt, to supply food to the mourners who attend the funeral. Examples were given of families who were not in a position to purchase even basic food items after a funeral due to the debt incurred as a result of providing for a funeral. This is aptly illustrated in the following quotation as shared by one of the participants:

"If you cook rice and this modern food, they say oee, I see you are from today – we can't understand you – beetroot and pumpkin and Kentucky [fried chicken]. *And then after the funeral you will find that they have no food in the house, because they have spent a lot of money at the funeral to buy modern food".*

It has also become a general trend to flavour food with salt and other condiments for the funeral meal, as opposed to the traditional custom of preparing it without salt. According to the older participants this trend has become more specifically important for the younger generation. They strive to impress others by serving a large variety of tasty food rather than adhering to customs, as illustrated in the following quotations:

"In the olden days at funerals there were only pap [stiff maize-meal porridge] *and meat and it was prepared without salt, but nowadays there are no more rules at funerals, and we prepare every meal* [meaning all kinds of dishes], *and you use salt and curry. Nowadays it depends on the family if they can use salt and prepare whatever they got".*

"We [younger generation] *pour* [add] *salt".*

"Maar party mense ek sien hulle wil nie sout hê nie, maar hierdie jong mense hulle gooi sout, peper en al die goete by die vleis, hulle braai hom mooi, dat hy all right is."

[35] *"But some people I see they don't want salt, but these young people they add salt, pepper and all those things to the meat, they fry it nicely so that it can be all right".*

Clearly portrayed here are the forces from the socio-cultural and socio-psychological environments and the importance attached to including modern food to reflect the social standing and financial position of the bereaved family. Social prestige and status have become important determinants in the food practices of the modern funeral, and rules with regard to food preparation have been adapted or discarded. On the one hand, it is important to serve modern food, as it illustrates your social standing as well as showing that you are a modern, educated person who keeps on track with the times. However, on the other hand, a high premium is placed on honouring the cultural norms and rules. To overcome the predicament of choosing between the traditional and the modern, some rules and customs are bent or adapted and/or aspects from both are combined in a new manner. Modern tasty food is served to win the favour of those who attend the funeral and are served together with the ritually slaughtered meat and selected traditional dishes as custom requires. These examples reflect how food, as a cultural object, is manipulated. As spelt out by exponents of

[35] Direct translation from Afrikaans.

the cultural perspective, people have this potential to transform their own realities by manipulating the objects in their cultural world in an attempt to help them make sense of reality (Kaiser, 1997:51).

8.3.2.2 Food serving procedures

After the burial and hand washing, the funeral meal is served in the marquee tent. The mourners form a queue, men and women together, and they also eat together. Although the same food is served to everybody there are some groups of mourners who are served separately from the rest, like the family members, the gravediggers and the priests/*baruti*. The formation of these groups seemed to be based on ideological and social organisational grounds.

The family members who participated in the wake are served in the room where the coffin was kept. Although the rest of the family could be served separately, they sometimes queue with the other mourners and take their turn to be served. They, however, do not eat with the other mourners, because they are in a state of ritual uncleanness after the death of their relative and have not yet undergone the ritual cleansing procedures that follow within a few days after the funeral (Eiselen & Schapera, 1962:249). This could, therefore, be a practical arrangement to avoid direct contact between those who are regarded as ritually unclean and others. The same reason would apply to the grave diggers who are served separately and would eat on their own and are not allowed contact with the rest of the mourners. The description by Fourie (1921:142-143) that, traditionally, nobody was allowed to return home from a funeral until they had eaten from the meat prepared for the funeral and were given medicine by the *nyanga* (traditional practitioner), could serve as possible reason for the current practices observed regarding the serving of the funeral meal.

The priests/*baruti* also do not queue with the mourners but are served and eat at the tables from where they conducted the *tebello* service. This is done out of respect for the social status and position they hold in the community as leaders in the different churches, as explained in the following quotations:

"They are served separately to show respect for their position as leaders in the church".

"They won't have to go and stand in the queue for their food. The reason why they are served separately is out of respect for their position".

8.3.2.3 The funeral beast

Although the funeral procedures have undergone changes in comparison to the traditional funeral, cultural values and beliefs are still prominent in the modern funeral procedures, as reflected in the importance and underlying meanings attached to the slaughter of a beast at the funeral.

The slaughter of a beast, as part of the funeral procedures on the Friday before the burial takes place, is still regarded as important in some families, and specifically those belonging to the Ndebele group. This beast not only provides meat for the funeral meal, but certain ideological reasons are closely associated with its slaughter. First, the skin of the slaughtered animal is sometimes placed in or on top of the coffin. Aspects of the belief system of those who follow this practice are communicated through this act. It was explained that, if an animal was not slaughtered, the ancestors would be dissatisfied and express their unhappiness by troubling the family through dreams and illness as explained in the following quotation:

"So if they did not put the skin there, maybe someone would dream of maybe if someone is ill, they will go to the traditional healer. They [the traditional healer] *will tell you the father or the grandmother or the one who has passed away,* [for whom] *they did not put the skin, is not satisfied and they want the blanket to wear. So they will slaughter that cow and put that skin to the grave".*

Pauw (1974:436) gives a similar account of Christians belonging to orthodox churches "who believed that their ancestors would send misfortune if they neglected certain important traditional duties or customs".

If money is not available to slaughter a beast at the time of the funeral, this has to be done later (even if it is months or years afterwards), because it is compulsory that the skin of the slaughtered beast be buried at the grave according to the Ndebele tradition. It is believed that, when someone passes away, he or she is not dead, but only sleeping. So, when the deceased wakes up, he/she must have something to wear. If this is not done, the deceased would appear in one of the family member's dreams or as a vision, to demand the skin. When this happens, a beast must be slaughtered and they have to *"… put the skin to the grave"*. Therefore in the Ndebele group, it is regarded as compulsory, *"… because of ancestral demands, the family has to do that ritual, because the skin serves as blanket, because the deceased will be shivering".*

At the time of the study blankets were used to cover the coffin instead of skins. In such an instance, a certain part of the intestines of this slaughtered beast, called *ummoru*, is placed in the grave and the skin of the animal is not used to cover the body or coffin. It was explained that the *ummoru* is a symbol of death and by placing it in the grave it serves as *"isibiko"* (evidence) to the ancestors that a beast has been slaughtered for the deceased.

The second reason given for the slaughter of the animal has practical merit because it provides meat for the funeral meal. It was, however, emphasised that there are a number of strict rules that relate to who is allowed to eat from this meat. Not everybody eats, or is allowed to eat from the meat of this slaughtered beast. For some, the restriction ties in with their cultural beliefs, while for others it is at the insistence of certain church groups. The culturally induced restrictions relate to the *hlonipha* that is expected from a daughter-in-law as well as from a son-in-law as indicated in the following quotations:

"… this is to show respect – hlonipha. They are also not allowed to eat the meat from the slaughtered cow".

"Married women were not allowed to eat from the meat of the cow that was slaughtered for their father-in-law's funeral".

Although the daughters-in-law may nowadays attend the funeral of their fathers-in-law, and the sons-in-law the funerals of their mothers-in-law, the *hlonipha* is still enforced through the restriction placed on the meat consumption by these persons. In this regard, Richards (1932:191) similarly refers to the taboo on the sharing of food between different individuals in a community on occasions when it could be considered dangerous or unsuitable and specifically mentions the sharing of food between relatives-in-law. The participants emphasised that this rule relates to all the brothers of the father-in-law as well, as intimated in the following quotation:

" … if maybe the father-in-law passed away then the daughters-in-law must not see the coffin, also they must not eat the meat that they slaughtered for the funeral. Also with the uncle of the husband it is the same".

The participants gave the following reason as explanation. The beast was slaughtered in honour of the deceased in-law. It is regarded as disrespectful towards the father-in-law or the mother-in-law to eat from the meat of the slaughtered beast. This serves to show how strongly ingrained showing respect is as part of the cultural value system, and is still

enforced by some groups in this community. Abstaining from eating this meat serves as a salient traditional code that demonstrates respect.

Some families slaughter another goat for the daughters-in-law to eat at the funeral of the father-in-law to compensate for this restriction. This is acceptable because the animal is not slaughtered for or on behalf of the deceased in-law.

Certain churches, apart from the restriction on traditional beer, also prohibit their members to slaughter a beast for a funeral or to consume meat at funerals where a beast was slaughtered for the funeral. They are, however, allowed to eat meat at a funeral when the meat is purchased. The reason given for this restriction on the slaughter and consumption of the meat is given in the quotation below:

"They are also not allowed to eat slaughtered cows at the funeral, but can eat it at the wedding or other celebrations. The reason is when they are eating it, it is like they are eating the person who is dead".

This explains why the ritual killing of a beast for the deceased is only performed by families who are not restricted by the church to which they belong. One of the participants explained that *" … based on her church beliefs a cow is no longer slaughtered but the meat is bought from the butcher to cook a stew for the funeral".*

This could serve as an explanation why the custom of dividing the meat of the slaughtered animal according to age, gender and the relationship with the deceased is no longer practised as mentioned by Eiselen and Schapera (1962:257). Only one of the participants could recall that the *isifunzi* part of the slaughtered animal was traditionally allocated to the maternal grandmother at a funeral. Other participants were unaware of this practice.

According to custom, the preparation of meat for the funeral meal has to be done by a male member of the bereaved family. It seems as if this custom is not strictly followed by everyone but has become more flexible with adaptations being made according to the specific circumstances of the bereaved family. The preparation of the meat could be in collaboration with the burial society or the members from the support group. This seems to depend on the constitution of the burial society or the support group although family customs of the bereaved family are also taken into consideration. One of the participants explained that in her family *"… it is still like that, the men are the ones who are responsible for the meat, but if maybe there are going to be stew and chicken, this is the women's work".*

8.3.3 Other funeral related procedures their associated food practices and meanings

Death is associated with ritual uncleanness (Eiselen & Schapera, 1962:249; Hellmann, 1962:423). People have a fear of being contaminated by others who are in this state of uncleanness. A number of procedures need to be performed that are closely associated with the prevention or removal of the uncleanness associated with death. This once again serves to portray the centrality of certain beliefs about death and magic. The hand washing ritual upon returning from the graveyard is part of the cleansing ritual to wash off the contamination associated with death (Pauw, 1974: 436; Eiselen & Schapera, 1962: 249; Hellmann, 1962: 423). Apart from the hand washing and the separate serving of the funeral meal to some family members of the deceased and the grave diggers, there are other procedures that have to be observed in some families. These include the washing of the grave-digging implements, food preparation for the widow and the celebration to indicate the end of the mourning period.

8.3.3.1 The "washing of the spades"

The *bjalwa bja digarafo* (beer of the spades) or *"washing of the spades"* refers to the procedure where the grave diggers come together at the house of the mourning family a week to ten days after the funeral. On this occasion all the implements used to dig the grave are washed. Traditional beer is prepared and used to cleanse the implements. This procedure seems to be related to the cleansing rituals associated with a funeral as described by Fourie (1921:142). Meat and *bogobe* are served with traditional beer to these men at this function. The participants in this study, however, did not interpret this as part of the cleansing procedures, but associated it as a symbolic occasion to express the bereaved family's gratitude towards the grave diggers for the services that they rendered the previous week by digging the grave.

This procedure is not followed in all families. The reason being that some churches forbid this procedure, because: *"… it is the law of the church".*

8.3.3.2 Preparation and serving of the widow's food

According to some participants, the same rules with regard to the food preparation, serving and eating of the food, are applicable to the widowed person as described in the section on the traditional funeral procedures (see 8.3.1). The general trend is that, for a certain period after the death of a spouse, more specifically in the case of widows, there are strict rules to be followed regarding the preparation, serving and eating of her food. These are

precautionary because, as Hellmann (1962: 424) describes "… the concept of death casts a shadow of pollution over the survivors that persists. Until this dark shadow has been removed by the conclusion of the mourning ceremonies …". This again reflects the contribution of a belief system where it is believed that the widow is in a position to harm her relatives through an illness that is related to the passing away of her husband. These practices relate to her food preparation and serve as salient code to indicate her state of uncleanness. The rules with regard to the serving and eating of meals seem to have become more complicated and stricter when compared to the traditional customs.

The rules pertaining to the preparation and serving of her food and the people with whom she is allowed to eat, could thus be regarded as precautions that are taken to avoid this contamination. The participants revealed that the widow has to stay in her room for the first two to three days after the funeral. The widow herself and the widow appointed to prepare her food eat separately from the rest of the family in her room. The reason for this was that, if a new widow touched anybody, they would become ill, so the immediate family never prepared the food for a newly widowed person for fear that they would get the disease called *"makhome".*

After the funeral it is the custom for the traditional healer to give specific medicine to the widow and, after this, the traditional healer would assure the family that nothing would happen to them if they prepared and served her the same food as prepared for the rest of the family/household. In other cases, the traditional healer would indicate that the widowed person's food had to be served first before the rest of the household could be served, while in other families no such rule applied. The participants indicated that in certain families there are rules with regard to the food that is leftover on her plate. This is not to be eaten and must be thrown away; however, another widow is allowed to eat it. In other families the only rules applicable to the widow is that she has to eat separately and is not allowed to eat with her right hand. If she eats with her right hand it could cause "illness".

Others in the study group pointed out that, in some families, it has become a modern custom to have the widowed person's food prepared by another widow for the first year after the death of a spouse; and for the widowed person to receive medicine from the traditional healer after the funeral. In some churches such as the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) and Apostolic Church, the *moruti* gives the medicine and therefore the appointed widow only has to prepare the food for the new widow for a period of six months. After this, the widowed person goes back to the traditional healer, who then performs certain traditional acts, after which she could eat the same food as the rest of the household. In some cases, the medicine has to be taken for a year while others need to take it for shorter periods that vary

between one to six months or even a year. In some families, the appointed widow only prepares the food for the new widow up to the funeral. After the funeral she could eat from the same food as the rest of the family. Different time periods were thus indicated, for the food preparation by another widow that varied from a month up to a year after the death of the husband.

Besides not preparing food for herself, the widow had to eat alone, and no one was allowed to eat the leftover food from her plate. This could be enforced for a period of six months up to a year after the death of a spouse. Eiselen and Schapera (1962:249) as well as Pauw (1974:436) refer to the restrictions that were forced on widowed persons. However, views differed from group to group and between families, and variations in the time periods depended on beliefs and practices of the individual, family or church.

The participants referred to two other important celebrations that mark the end of the official mourning period. The one happens when the widow is granted permission to stop wearing black clothes, a convention linked to bereavement, and the other is associated with the erection and unveiling of the tombstone.

8.3.3.3 Celebration to mark the end of mourning

The *ditlhobolo,* popularly known as *"taking off of the black"* takes place at the end of the mourning period. It is a particularly significant occasion for the widow, as she can then discard the practice of wearing the black clothes of mourning. The length of the mourning period varies, and is usually a year for adults when a spouse has passed away. In the case of a widow, she would have worn black clothing for the past six months to a year. In the case of males, a black strip of fabric would be worn around the sleeve of the left arm. Hellmann (1962: 424) states that the reason for the observance of the mourning ceremonies relates to the belief that a person would not be successful in any new venture undertaken before the conclusion of the mourning ceremonies. This explains why the celebration to mark the end of mourning because the grieving widow is only entitled to resume her normal life after the actual celebration has taken place.

The *ditlhobolo* is regarded as a very special, joyous occasion for the widow and festivities take place over a whole weekend, starting on Friday morning when the black clothes of mourning are replaced by a whole set of new colourful clothes, after which the black mourning clothes are then burnt. The importance attached to symbolically marking the end of mourning by way of celebration is reflected in the following comments:

"The taking off of the black especially for the widow or widower, it is a special day, there will be a big celebration".

"This is a special day, it is a big celebration".

A service, called the *moletelo*, similar in format to the *tebello* service held at the funeral, usually takes place throughout Saturday night. On Sunday all invited guests bring presents for the widow. As explained, these presents are given *"… for soothing the feelings …"* to help her forget the past, especially the dark time of mourning (see Addendum E, photograph from family album). Eiselen and Schapera (1962:249) similarly describe what they refer to as the "final purification" after which the widowed person may again take up the former activities in which she was engaged.

On Sunday, a big meal is served to all the guests attending the celebration. Family, friends, church members or the support group are responsible for the preparation of the meal and typical special occasion fare is served. A modern celebration would have a combination of traditional and modern food. The quantity and variety of food would once again, be determined by available funds as illustrated in the next quotation:

"Pap, ntini, rice, salads. It is not compulsory to slaughter something, so meat will be bought – beef, chicken. This will depend on the available funds of the family and the support that you have".

The entire weekend is a joyous time marking this new beginning after the period of mourning and, neither the dishes prepared, nor the way they are served, have any special underlying meaning, This celebration, as well as unveiling of the tombstone, receive a great deal of attention and both are enjoyed by all.

8.3.3.4 The unveiling of the tombstone

The unveiling of the tombstone has become a prestigious occasion, reflecting the socio-economic status of a family. The celebration at the unveiling of the tombstone is one of the modern celebrations that have been introduced in the recent past. Apart from Pauw (1974:436) who briefly mentions that a meal is served to those who attend the ceremony, no other information on the food practices could be found in the academic literature reviewed. It is, therefore, deemed necessary to provide some background on this celebration and to include a brief description of the course of the events that take place at this celebration as given by the participants of this study.

Some of the older participants explained that tombstones were not placed on graves in the olden days. According to them, this practice started when people had to be buried in graveyards because "… *the white people ordered them to do so*". They then began to follow this practice of the white people. Previously, stones were only placed on graves to mark them. The eating plates and utensils of the deceased were used to indicate whose grave it was (see photograph, Addendum E). Some participants associated the tombstone with a pillow, after a verse in the Bible or a hymn, and explained that they only began to put tombstones on graves after they started reading the Bible. A tombstone is seen as a remembrance. Tombstones with names on are erected, as it is important to know where one's ancestors are buried, because the tombstone is *"… a memorial figure for communicating with the ancestors in future, future generations must know their ancestors".*

The unveiling of the tombstone is a big occasion and it is described as an important celebration *"… like maybe a wedding celebration".* After the grave has settled (it could be any time from a year or more after the funeral), the tombstone is placed on the grave, provided that money is available. It is then covered with either sheets of plastic or paper. During the week before the unveiling ceremony this would be replaced with *"… a nice cloth*". The unveiling would take place over a weekend, on either the Saturday or Sunday morning. Friends, family, neighbours, the support group and church members are invited to this occasion.

Similar to other big events, a marquee tent is erected in the yard of the family hosting the celebration. The night before the unveiling, a *"church service",* called the *moletelo,* like the *tebello* at the funeral, is held. Several priests/*baruti* lead the service that lasts throughout the night with singing, praying and reading from the Scriptures. The following morning everybody attends the unveiling at the cemetery (see photograph, Addendum E). Upon their return from the cemetery, food is served to the invited guests.

Family members and/or the support group are responsible for the food preparation; that consists mainly of modern food and a selection of traditional dishes. Some families slaughter a beast and, apart from the meat, *bogobe*, rice, vegetables and salads are served, together with traditional beer and ginger beer. The same serving procedures as described for the funeral are followed (see 8.3.2.1). The priests/*baruti* and family members are served separately.

The widow and family also receive presents from the guests *"…to show that they are happy for the family for putting the tombstone on the grave of a loved one".* It was explained that the presents were given to console the widow. Some explained that the presents serve as a

symbol of gratitude *"… it is a symbol of thanksgiving that you have putted a pillow for one of your family members".*

The ancestors are informed of the unveiling, usually the week before the unveiling when the preparation of the traditional beer begins. The beer takes approximately one week to mature and when it is ready it is used to communicate with the ancestors. The ancestors could be informed before the family leaves for the graveyard, while some use traditional beer at the grave to inform the ancestors that they are coming to finish the burial process with the unveiling of the tombstone. The procedures within families therefore differ, as some inform the ancestors at the grave, by pouring traditional beer over the structure, whereas others from the younger generation said that they *"… even smash two bottles of wine on the tombstone."* Other participants explained that they go to the grave before the actual unveiling to inform the ancestors that they *"… are now coming to finish – to unveil the tombstone and to pour the beer".* Another group mentioned that the ancestors are informed on Friday, followed by the church service led by the priests on Saturday night, and then the unveiling takes place on Sunday morning.

The erecting and unveiling of a tombstone on the grave of a family member has various meanings for the participants. It is regarded as symbol of remembering the deceased and honouring the ancestors, but also subtly serves as a status marker. By doing this, the family indicates that they have the financial means to erect the tombstone thus following the modern more educated way, whilst conforming to the traditional prescription to remember; inform and honour the ancestors is also attended to through this act as expressed in the following account:

"The tombstone is a remembrance [memorial]*. You must know where your ancestors are buried, so that you know where to go. The tombstone represents the memorial figure for communicating with the ancestors in the future, so that family members and generations to come must know their ancestors".*

It was explained that to be in a position to erect a tombstone was regarded as a remarkable achievement and it seemed as though it was important to communicate this to others. Hence the expression of joy and happiness that is then shared with everyone throughout this entire celebration. The food prepared and served during the weekend long celebration is similar to the other more modern celebrations and consists mainly of modern food, accompanied by certain traditional dishes as described before. In the following recorded comments the importance attached to the food at this celebration is reflected:

"Just like a wedding. Modern food, and also traditional food will be prepared. So pap and meat will be there and traditional beer".

" [The] *food will be a cow* [beast] *that is slaughtered. Rice, vegetables, salads, jelly and custard and even a cake with icing. In some cases the cake will have a symbol of a coffin on top".*

The large component of modern food is an indication of the financial means of the family who hosts the celebration. It also reflects that they are modern and educated people. Pauw (1974:436) also refers to "a dinner in Western style" that is given to those who attend the unveiling ceremony.

Cultural values and beliefs are, however, symbolised through the traditional beer that plays a prominent role during the procedures and celebration. The traditional beer is used to inform the ancestors that the tombstone has been erected, and that the unveiling ceremony is going to take place. The ancestors could be informed at the family home and/or at the grave during the course of the procedures that take place over the weekend. Traditional beer is then also served to the invited guests.

Although Pauw (1974:436) states that the Xhosas regard the erection and unveiling of the tombstone as a substitute for the traditional sacrifice "to bring back" the dead, the participants of the present study, however, did not associate this celebration with this viewpoint. According to them, it takes place before the tombstone is erected on another occasion when only family members are present.

Through the erecting and unveiling of the tombstone, social approval is also ensured. This is illustrated in a tangible manner through the gifts given to the widow and/or family as a symbol of the joy that they share with them. This was explained as follows when asked why gifts are given to the family who erected the tombstone:

"To support you and to show that they are happy for you for having done this".

"A symbol of thanksgiving to have done or put a pillow [tombstone] *for one of the family members".*

The modern funeral and the procedures and practices associated with it have become more involved in comparison to the traditional funeral procedures. Many changes in the social, cultural and economic environments can be attributed to Christianity, urbanisation and

modernisation and these have been instrumental in giving rise to new ways of doing things Religion and social status could be regarded as the central forces that drive some of these procedures and associated food practices. On the one hand, modern churches dictate and prescribe the practices that their members are allowed to engage in, while on the other hand, the traditional belief of honouring and satisfying the ancestors' needs and wishes have to be accommodated as well. The result is that some of the practices have been either adapted or changed or new ones have been invented.

8.4 CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS

Religious celebrations associated with Christianity have only become part of the celebrations of black people over the past 150 years (Pauw, 1974:415). The participants revealed that, at the time of the study, almost everyone celebrated Christmas and Easter. Baptism and confirmation, although closely associated as part of the Easter celebrations by most, were included as special occasions.

8.4.1 Christmas

Christmas is regarded as a special celebration because families are together and everybody is at home. Christmas falls within the summer holidays in South Africa and most people who are employed get their annual leave or part of it during the last part of December and often receive their annual bonus during this month. This was clearly explained by one of the older participants who stated: *"They make enough food, there is a larger variety of dishes, because they got bonus."* During this time most families have the opportunity to be together and *"… everybody is at home and not working."*

Attending church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day has become important and central to the festivities of those who belong to Christian churches. Special food is prepared and the emphasis is on a larger variety and quantity of food, similar to that prepared on a Sunday. Greater quantities of meat are prepared and popular choices are mutton, beef or chicken. This is served together with rice, vegetables and salads. Jelly and custard sauce is a popular dessert. Other special treats include snacks, fruit, sweets and baked products such as *dikuku* and these are eaten in between meals. The older participants associated cake and dessert with Christmas because when they were younger these were only served at Christmas time. A variety of beverages such as soft drinks or cordials, homemade ginger beer and other alcoholic beverages and traditional beer are also enjoyed.

Eating is associated with joy and togetherness and, because more money is available, the greater is the pleasure, there is more food and expensive and special food is also included. This is similar to that reported in other cultures (Kittler & Sucher, 2008: 151-152,166-167,188-189).

Although the emphasis falls on the provision of a larger variety and quantity of modern food, specific traditional dishes are also prominent. Certain dishes are available on request, or according to family members' food preferences. Dishes mentioned in this instance include *bogobe, ting ya mabele,* traditional beer, samp and beans, *morogo* and peanuts. These are prepared as a special treat for those from the urban areas. It seemed as if some of these traditional foods, as explained by Bryant *et al.* (2003:236), provide a "feeling of belonging and comfort". On the other hand, it was explained that some of these traditional dishes are prepared for practical reasons, such as the keeping quality without refrigeration. Some of the dishes, for example *ting ya mabele* and traditional beer, are of such a nature that they can be kept without refrigeration for a couple of days.

8.4.2 Easter

In contrast to Christmas where the emphasis is on the family and being together as a family, the Easter weekend is celebrated at church and associated with church gatherings. As explained by one participant: *"Good Friday means conferences."* Conferences take place from Good Friday until Easter Sunday. Some churches also combine these with baptism and/or confirmation ceremonies. The food prepared seemed to depend on what happens at the church venue. Some churches prepare food for members who attend the meetings, and these members then have to *"… donate money for the food."* In other cases, the members provide for themselves and they usually take their own provisions for the weekend. This is the case with members of the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) attending their celebrations at Moria near Polokwane. They explained that items that keep well when travelling, such as *idombolo*, chicken and Ultra-milk (Ultra Heat Treated milk) are popular and taken along.

At conferences where food is provided, it is prepared by a group of women appointed by the church. Although mainly modern food is served, some traditional items are included on the menu, such as *bogobe*, *mageu* and *idombolo.* Baked products and tea are also served. The general tendency followed seemed to be to celebrate Easter as a church group instead of as a family or household.

Festivities over Easter can thus be described as communal festivities based at the church itself where church conferences are held during the Easter weekend. As pointed out by Pauw

(1974:426), the major religious festivals in black South African communities have strong social overtones and are usually occasions for communal meals. This specifically seemed to be the case during Easter. Church members either bring along their own food to be consumed together with other members, according to the "bring and share" concept, or alternatively, these meals are in the form of each sharing the expenses of the meal prepared by the women's group. The emphasis seemed to be on commensality[36] and social togetherness. Occasions such as church picnics and potluck suppers are held to solidify a religious group (Bryant *et al.,* 2003:230; Sobal, 2000:123-125), which was also the underlying reason given here.

Modern food is prepared and consumed in most cases, and the central position of modern food is attributed to two factors. The first reason is of a practical nature, it is easier to prepare modern dishes for such a large group. The second reason relates to the restrictions imposed by some churches on the consumption of certain traditional dishes, specifically those containing fermented grains as described in Chapter 4 (see 4.4.2). Similar to the Christmas and Easter celebrations in the Protestant tradition, food is also important in these celebrations and the kind of food consumed is mainly determined by "family, ethnicity and preference rather than religious rite" (Kittler & Sucher, 2008:95). This was also the case in the food choices mentioned by some of the participants of this study.

Food proscriptions of certain churches are, however, followed during this time such as fasting or abstaining from certain food items by some. Members of the Roman Catholic Church for example, indicated that they followed the general prescription of abstaining from meat on Good Friday. They explained that: *"The Roman Catholics do not eat meat on Good Friday, because Christ has died and His blood represents the meat."* Members belonging to other church groups such as the Apostolic Churches indicated that they often fast during the last week of Lent up to Good Friday.

8.4.3 Baptism and confirmation

Baptism and confirmation celebrations form part of the Easter celebrations of certain churches while others have these as separate events. The age of baptism varies among the different church groups and some do not have confirmation and only perform baptism on adults, such as the Apostolic Church and the National Baptist Church.

[36] According to Sobal (2000:123) commensality includes "many levels and types of sharing food and is governed by a cultural code that provides a moral order for guiding food exchange and eating patterns …"

The kind of celebration also varies according to the customs of the church group. There are two kinds of celebrations. Some church groups have the celebrations at the church and all members of the congregation then participate in all the activities. This is usually the case in churches where group baptism takes place. Other churches perform individual baptism for babies and, in some cases, the family of the child then have a celebration at their home to which friends, family and neighbours are invited. Others have a celebration at the church in the form of a communal meal for the congregation. The kind of food served at both types of celebrations is modern food similar to that prepared for a Sunday midday meal. A variety of baked items such as cake and *dikuku* are served with tea. The kind and variety of modern dishes prepared depends on the amount of money available

At baptism and confirmation celebrations the same reasons that justify the serving of modern or Western-oriented food at other occasions are applicable, namely the prestige value attached to serving these, to communicate belonging to the Christian faith and being educated. Modern food has become closely associated with Christianity. The serving of traditional dishes at events associated with the Christian faith could, in some instances, portray the wrong impression of not being a devout Christian. The explanation for this is related to the opposition of the church to participation in traditional rituals and the consumption of certain traditional food items.

8.5 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

This chapter deals with the food practices and their meanings at the two kinds of religious occasions in which the participants engage, namely, those linked to ancestral devotion and those associated with Christianity. Traditional African religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of many of the participants and the extent of clinging to, or abandoning, belief in the ancestor spirits, is principally guided by the church group to which a person belongs. The religious beliefs and world views of the participants and the guidance from the church consequently often steer the format of a special occasion, including the food practices, to either the traditional or modern Western-oriented side. However, some participants often combine traditional food, which is compulsory according to the prescriptions of the ancestors, in a skilful manner with modern food, at some of these celebrations, in order to adhere to the social requirements set for being regarded as a successful, modern and educated person.

Ancestral devotion requires the demonstration of obedience and respect towards the ancestors. This is done by abiding by their prescriptions and by honouring traditional customs through informing them of all major life events of their descendants. This has

implications for the food practices at special events, such as the rite of the passage celebrations of initiation, marriage and at funerals. In order to conform to traditional customs, it is essential to follow the prescriptions and wishes of the ancestors at a certain stage of the ritual. It is then compulsory that traditional foods, specifically through the blood and meat of a sacrificial animal and traditional beer, are used in a tangible way as part of the ancestral veneration. In performing these rites the ancestors are included, not only through informing them of what is happening to their descendants, but also by making their preferred traditional food available to them for enjoyment.

The serving of the sacrificial meat and traditional beer during these celebrations thus represents the collective values, beliefs and world views of the family hosting the celebration. This not only symbolises family unity and their bond with the ancestors, but is also an expression of obedience showing respect towards them. The preservation of certain traditional food practices such as the ritual slaughtering of an animal and the brewing of traditional beer can thus be directly linked to the preservation of ancestral veneration.

Funeral ceremonies, as the last rite of passage, are regarded as religious occasions and the procedures, including the food practices and meanings attached to them, were discussed. When compared to the traditional funeral, modern funeral arrangements and procedures, including food practices and their meaning, have undergone considerable change. Modern funerals are regarded as important social events, and understandably food receives much attention. Most funerals are held over weekends for practical reasons, and therefore begin on the Friday evening and continue throughout the night, with the burial taking place early on Saturday morning followed by an elaborate funeral meal.

Similar to other modern celebrations, the food served is used as a measure of the social status of the bereaved family, and to provide large quantities of tasty modern food has become the norm. In order to accommodate the requirements of both modern trends and traditional customs, food as cultural object is manipulated and used in new or adapted ways. In many instances modern food is served side-by-side with the ritually slaughtered meat, traditional beer and other traditional dishes to overcome the predicament of adhering to the requirements of both the traditional and modern ways of life. Again, this is skilfully accommodated through the inclusion of both on the menu of the funeral meal. Cultural values and beliefs are reflected by those who regard it important to slaughter and inform the ancestors of the passing on of a family member. However, social recognition by others is equally important. Modern food and a variety of other meat dishes are therefore included not only to portray or give an impression of the economic and social status of the bereaved family, but also to provide for those who are not allowed to eat from the ritually slaughtered

meat due to church proscriptions. In the process of adhering to both the modern social needs and traditional customs, considerable expenses are incurred.

Certain procedures after the funeral are observed by some families. These are linked to the removal of the uncleanness associated with death, such as the *"washing of the spades"* and the preparation and serving a widow food after the death of her husband. Most participants, however, indicated that they celebrate the end of the mourning period and the unveiling of the tombstone approximately one year after the death of a family member. Both these celebrations have become modern and prestigious events where the emphasis is placed on providing a variety of modern foods in large quantities. The erection of a tombstone is regarded as a remarkable achievement that needs to be shared and communicated to others. The importance attached to erecting and unveiling the tombstone is not only for the social approval of others, but also in the meanings conveyed through this happening. The deceased is remembered, and according to some, the ancestors are honoured through this act. In addition, important messages regarding the social status of the family are conveyed. Not only is their financial position of being able to erect the tombstone demonstrated, but it is also seen that they still honour their ancestors even though they are modern and educated. This impression is then extended by providing both modern and traditional foods in large quantities after the unveiling ceremony.

The Christian religious celebrations of Christmas and Easter are indulged in by most participants, and modern food is served as part of the festivities. Christmas celebrations are associated with having more money, enjoying annual leave and the opportunity of being together with family. As more money is likely to be available during the festive season, large quantities of special food, both modern and traditional are included. Easter weekend is the time for church activities. In most churches Easter celebrations are combined with church conferences, baptisms and or confirmation services and are of a communal nature where the emphasis is on serving modern food.

TERMINOLOGY LIST

baruti	Priests or clergy. Plural for *moruti*
bogobe	Stiff maize-meal porridge
dikuku	Popular scone-type of baked product. See Addendum D
diphiri	Gravediggers
ditlhobolo	Celebration to indicate the end of mourning
gemere	Homemade ginger beer. See Addendum D
hlonipha	Showing respect towards someone or to treat someone respectfully
ibandla	Family gathering place outside the home
idombolo	Steamed bread. See Addendum C
isibiko	Evidence
isifunzi	Sirloin section of the beef carcass. See Figure 6.1
kraal	Cattle pen or fold
mageu	Fermented maize-meal beverage
maotwana	Chicken feet
mogoga	Setswana for funeral meat. Traditionally no salt was added
moletelo	Church service held during the night as part of the procedures to mark the end of mourning or before the unveiling of the tombstone
morogo	Collective name for indigenous green leafy vegetables
moruti	Singular for *baruti*
ntini	isiNdebele for soft sour porridge. See Addendum C
pap	Afrikaans for maize-meal porridge
tebelllo	Memorial service held during the Friday night before the burial ceremony takes place on Saturday morning
ting ya mabele	Fermented, soft sorghum porridge. See Addendum C
ummoru	Section/part of intestines of the beast slaughtered for the funeral, that is placed in the grave of the deceased