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### Dynamics of agrarian change at a commodity frontier

*Differentiation and accumulation trajectories amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers in South Africa*

Olofsson, M.

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# Dynamics of agrarian change at a commodity frontier:

Differentiation and accumulation trajectories amongst  
smallholder tree-crop farmers in South Africa

Malin Olofsson



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# Dynamics of agrarian change at a commodity frontier:

Differentiation and accumulation trajectories amongst  
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## *Promotiecommissie*

<i>Promotores:</i>	dr. M.A.F. Ros-Tonen	Universiteit van Amsterdam
	prof. dr. J. Gupta	Universiteit van Amsterdam
<i>Copromotor:</i>	dr. C.B de Steenhuijsen Piters	Wageningen University and Research
<i>Overige leden:</i>	prof. dr. M.W.H. Leung	Universiteit van Amsterdam
	prof. dr. M.Z. Zwarteveen	Universiteit van Amsterdam
	dr. G. Nooteboom	Universiteit van Amsterdam
	prof. dr. M.J. Spierenburg	Universiteit Leiden
	prof. dr. R. Wynberg	University of Cape Town

Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

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# List of abbreviations and acronyms

AIC	Akaike Information Criterion
ANC	African National Congress
ARC	Agricultural Research Council
CLRA	Communal Land Rights Act
DAFF	Department of Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
EDD	Economic Development Department
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GIS	Geographical Information System
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IQR	Inter Quartile Range
LARC	Land and Accountability Research Centre
LDARD	Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
LRC	Legal Resource Centre
NAMC	National Agricultural Marketing Council
NPC	National Planning Commission
PCP	Petty commodity producer
PTO	Permission to Occupy
SAMAC	South African Macadamia Council
SPLUMA	Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act
SPSS	Statistics for Social Science
SSC	Small-scale capitalist
SUBTROP	Subtropical Fruit Growers Association
TC	Traditional Council
TKLB	Traditional Koi-San Leadership Bill
TLGFA	Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference for Trade and Development
VAGA	Vhembe Avocado Growers Association
VCC	Value Chain Collaboration (in Inclusive VCC project)
VDM	Vhembe District Municipality
WDR	World Development Report
WOTRO	WOTRO Science for Global Development
ZAR	South African Rand

# Note on publications and co-authorship

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis were written as scientific articles. All the articles were single-authored, except the article that makes up Chapter 6. In the latter case, the doctoral candidate did the conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and writing of the original draft. Mirjam Ros-Tonen and Yves Van Leynseele contributed to the conceptualisation, writing, reviewing and editing process, while Bart de Steenhuijsen Piters and Joyeeta Gupta contributed to the writing, reviewing and editing.

## Chapter 4

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## Chapter 5

Olofsson, M. (2020). Expanding commodity frontiers and emergence of customary land markets: A case study of tree-crop farming in Venda, South Africa. *Land Use Policy*, 101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.105203>

## Chapter 6

Olofsson, M., Ros-Tonen, M., Gupta, J., de Steenhuijsen Piters, B., Van Leynseele, Y. (2021). Rethinking the divide: Exploring the interdependence between global and nested local markets. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 83, 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.02.018>

## Chapter 7

Olofsson, M. Production relations in the shadow of tree crops: exploring land-sharing arrangements as a form of social reproduction. *Journal of Peasant Studies* (under review 2022)

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# Preface

Driving along the R524 from Louise Trichard towards Thohoyandou on my first trip to the field in early February 2015, two starkly contrasting realities struck me. For the first 30 km or so, both sides of the road are flanked by large commercial farms, mostly owned or managed by private enterprises, and a few community-owned farms acquired through the post-apartheid land restitution programme. Macadamia, avocados, bananas, litchi and mango orchards, planted in perfect uniformity, extend down into the lush and fertile Levubu Valley to the right and up the slopes of the southern side of the Soutpansberg mountain range on the left to where the commercial forestry plantations begin. Characteristic of commercial farming, these orchards demonstrated the apparent signs of being highly mechanised, surrounded by tall ominous razor wire fencing. Further along this road towards Thohoyandou, one enters what was formerly the independent homeland of Venda, and the landscape immediately changes. Dotted along the roadside are fresh fruit, and vegetable vendors beyond which densely populated settlements expand on either side of the road. High up on the hillside beyond the settlement, I could make out some orchards. Far from resembling the commercial orchards, these orchards are considerably smaller, often ageing and unpruned with grass and weeds and, in some cases, maize competing for space between the trees. No uniform matrix of trees here, but rather staggered rows, interrupted to accommodate the uneven mountainside and indigenous trees. Large areas of the land within the orchards appear uncultivated, sometimes showing signs of runaway fire damage or dead trees which have not been replaced. Due to their remote location on the hillside, many orchards appear only accessible by foot. This stark contrast between the commercial orchards and those of smallholders is evidence of the broader dual agrarian structure that characterises South Africa. When I arrived on my first trip to the field back in 2015, I wondered with some trepidation how I would manage to navigate this foreign landscape during the years that lay ahead.

Prior to arriving, having few contacts in the area, I did a quick internet search for accommodation in or around Tshakhuma, which appeared to be a relatively central location from which to be based. When this did not render any positive results, I decided just to arrive and find things out from there. You cannot miss Tshakhuma, a large yellow MTN-sponsored billboard that welcomes you to town, and its famous 24-hour roadside fruit market. I decided to take a drive up into the village of Tshakhuma to get a sense of the place. One circular road leads you up the hillside and through the village. I passed some roadside stands selling live chickens and freshly barbecued half chickens, then the local tavern and bottle store with a crowd of rowdy drinkers hanging outside.

Further along the road, I passed the old Lutheran church, one of three mission stations set up by the Berlin mission in the late 1800s. As I rounded the next corner and passed a busy local car wash, all the while driving very slowly to take in all the sights and sounds, people hanging around the car wash approached me, curious about my presence there. The children were excitedly shouting Mukuwa (white person)! An overwhelming sense of my foreignness replaced my initial curiosity and excitement, and with it came a sense of vulnerability. The combination of my whiteness, gender and my reason for being there left me feeling an overwhelming sense of discomfort. I ended up making my way back to the main road and decided to take a room at a roadside lodge and navigate my first few days from there.

Fast forward five years, I returned to Tshakhuma for a final fieldwork trip in March 2019. I arrived long after dark and made my way up the same winding road through the village. I knew every bump and pothole by now. There was no trace of life on the streets at that hour. I arrived at the gate of the house, which had become my home during my fieldwork trips over the previous five years. The gate was locked with a chain, and two large new guard dogs alerted by my presence started barking viciously. I called over their incessant barking, but there was no sign of life in the house. I stood there, alone in the darkness, plotting my next move. I started going through my options. There were numerous families in the village with whom I had become well accustomed and felt comfortable knocking on their door at this time of night. Despite my unannounced arrival, I knew I would be warmly welcomed. At that moment, I recalled the first trip up the hill on my arrival five years earlier and how uncomfortable and strange I felt. I have come a very long way.

I was also warmly welcomed in what felt like a parallel reality amongst the large-scale commercial farmers in the area. I recall attending a farmer's study group during that first fieldwork trip. These study groups are organised by the commodity association and mostly happen in parallel, one for the white commercial farmers and another for the black smallholders. On that particular occasion, I was at the commercial farmers' study group hosted at one of the large commercial farms. These meetings were usually followed by a hearty South African 'braai'. As these evenings wore on and the booze consumed, the stories and experiences of these white farmers started to flow. These occasions provided good opportunities to gain insight into the local politics and dynamics of this dual agricultural landscape. During the first such meeting I attended, I introduced myself and my research objectives. Later that evening, one of the farmers approached me, looking concerned. He said very bluntly, "you are wasting your time. Those guys [referring to the black smallholders] will never be able to farm. All they are good for is building mud huts". This was followed by much laughter from the group. The conversation turned to a concern for my well-being as they realised that I planned to live in the local village.

This was the first but certainly not the last time I encountered such blatant racism. Despite the physical proximity of the commercial white farming areas to the former homeland villages and smallholder orchards, very few of these commercial farmers had ever actually gone into a village or visited a smallholder orchard. This and the enduring racism, enabled stereotypes of the black smallholder as 'backward' and 'incompetent' to persist. I hope this thesis goes some way in shedding light on the incredible endurance, resilience and innovation of the smallholder tree-crop farmers despite the persistent deep structural inequalities and the marginal space in which they operate.



# Chapter 1

# Setting the context<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter integrates relevant material from the four published papers that make up chapters 4-7 (see note of publication and co-authorship page xi).





## 1.1 Introduction

The rural world is undergoing dramatic changes, fuelled by multiple interconnected factors, including environmental and climate change, expanding industrial agriculture linked to land and resource concentration, population expansion, and limited and declining employment opportunities. Land-based livelihoods have become increasingly vulnerable in the wake of these changes, prompting a renewed emphasis on smallholders and their agricultural production systems to address both poverty and food insecurity. Integrating small-scale farmers into formal agricultural value chains via agricultural commodification has become the dominant approach of international development organisations such as the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and has been adopted by national governments to address rural poverty. This is based on a neoliberal development model premised on trade liberalisation and a free-market economy.

This neoliberal approach assumes that poverty results from small-scale farmers 'lagging behind' development processes and that poverty reduction outcomes can be achieved by integrating them into formal and increasingly global markets (Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). This typically involves a range of interventions geared towards 'modernising' agricultural production, focusing on increasing the productivity and efficiency of smallholders and facilitating their participation in a global market by overcoming the constraints and barriers preventing this. This is linked to the Sustainable Development Goal 2 to eradicate hunger and specifically to Target 2.3, which seeks to double agricultural productivity and income of small-scale producers by 2030 (UNDESA, 2022).

This perspective largely overlooks the broader social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power within which commodity relations are situated. A growing body of evidence shows that an approach to poverty reduction via formal market integration has resulted in highly differentiated and uneven outcomes for farmers, along with environmental degradation and new forms of vulnerability and risk, among others (Hickey & du Toit, 2013; McCarthy, 2010; McMichael, 2013). Despite being the most important food producers in the developing world, responsible for producing 70-80% of the overall food supply, smallholders are amongst the poorest citizens and suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition (CFC, 2016, p. 1, FAO, 2017, p. xi). This, despite smallholders only having access to 25% of farmland globally while smallholder farms comprise 92% of all farms (GRAIN, 2014).

There is substantive evidence that inclusion into global agricultural value chains does not necessarily in and of itself lead to positive outcomes and instead is marred by contradictions (Bolwig, Ponte, du Toit, Riisgaard, & Halberg, 2010; Hickey & du Toit,

2013; Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; McMichael, 2013; Rosset, 2008). However, these narratives of incorporation still dominate rural development strategies worldwide (Ros-Tonen et al., 2019), and South Africa is no exception (Greenberg, 2013). South Africa's agrarian policy has taken a commodity-focused approach and prioritised mostly tree crops for commercialisation amongst smallholders, based on their employment and growth potential (NPC, 2013). The state and the private sector actively facilitate this process through targeted commodity support to enable market access.

This study critically analyses the consequences of such a commodity-centred approach. It is positioned broadly within the debates of smallholder commodification (Chapter 2). It deviates from the dominant discourses of incorporation, which approaches smallholders as a relatively homogenous group, equally positioned to benefit from tighter integration into markets, and narrowly focuses on economic returns and growth potential. It also moves beyond the narrow focus on commodity chains which tend to be disembodied from the broader agrarian social relations within which these chains are embedded. Instead, this thesis explores the politics and processes of agrarian change in an expanding smallholder commodity frontier by focusing on processes of differentiation and accumulation, particularly amongst smallholders engaged in the cultivation of high-value tree crops. The geographic focus is on the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province in the northeastern corner of South Africa, as this is one of the regions where tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders is most most actively supported and rapidly expanding (Chapter 3).

This chapter proceeds by elaborating on the overarching problems associated with incorporating smallholders into global commodity chains (Section 1.2), followed by the specific knowledge gaps this thesis addresses (Section 1.3) and the context of smallholders in contemporary South Africa (Sections 1.4). This is followed by the specific research objectives and questions (Section 1.5) and ends with an overview of the chapters that comprise the remainder of this thesis (Section 1.6).

## **1.2 Problematising smallholder incorporation into global commodity chains**

The 2008 World Development Report (WDR) 'Agriculture for Development' signalled an important recentring of agriculture as a critical driver of rural development, arguing that by linking smallholders more closely into markets, sustainable development and poverty reduction objectives can be achieved. It was the first time in more than 30 years that the WDR has explicitly focused on agriculture, demonstrating an important shift in mainstream banking and investment policy circles towards realising the 'untapped' potential of agriculture for achieving development objectives. This coincided with mounting new pressures on land-based natural resources that threaten and undermine

farmers' livelihoods, food security, and the environment more broadly. The report defined three key pathways out of poverty: shifting to high-value agriculture through improvements in smallholders' asset position and making them more competitive; promoting non-farm economic activity and labour market participation, thereby enabling the diversification of income source; and facilitating the complete movement out of agriculture via migration to urban areas (World Bank, 2007, p. 8). This report was criticised for oversimplifying complex production relations, ignoring conflicts of interest and power relations embedded in these relations, and having a strong bias towards agri-business and corporate inputs (McMichael, 2009; Oya, 2009). However, the central message of achieving win-win scenarios by integrating smallholders into private sector value chains still permeates the international and national development policy agenda. More recently, doubt has been cast on the ability of the majority of smallholders to lift themselves out of poverty through agriculture alone. Instead, it is argued that more is to be expected from employment opportunities elsewhere in the food system (IFAD, 2021). However, linking smallholders to high-value markets in fruit and vegetables is still deemed a way to achieve poverty reduction and development objectives in smallholder agriculture (IFAD, 2021; Ogutu, Gödecke, & Qaim, 2020).

A fundamental premise of this approach to linking smallholders to these high-value markets is based on the idea that smallholder production systems are backward and inefficient and need to be 'modernised' to become competitive and enter the global market. The FAO sums this up nicely in its 2017 State of Food and Agriculture report:

Small farmers have been *left behind*, owing to a lack of policies, infrastructure and institutional arrangements that would enable them to gain scale and improve their access to technologies and markets. With the increasing consolidation of global input markets, agribusiness firms providing inputs and technologies may be less motivated to invest in small farmers in smaller developing countries. This underscores the need for policy interventions that address market failures and respond to small farmers' need (FAO, 2017, p. 50, *emphasis added*).

This approach is primarily informed by modernisation narratives that focus on 'improvements' in production processes to make them more 'efficient' and 'remunerative'. It focuses on specific commodities and related innovations from large-scale, industrialised farming systems. This reading of the problem leads to policies that focus on creating a favourable investment environment for the private sector, deemed the key actor in facilitating smallholder incorporation into commercial commodity chains (FAO, 2017).

However, this approach overlooks the social relations in which commodity production is embedded and does not recognise that the same integration into ‘modern’ markets via commercial agro-food commodity chains can produce and even reproduce poverty and inequality and result in ‘adverse incorporation’ (du Toit, 2004, 2008; Hickey & du Toit, 2013; McCarthy, 2010). These authors have highlighted how the terms of incorporation into agri-food value chains mediate the consequences of this integration and lead to new forms of risks and vulnerability, including increased poverty, debt, and environmental degradation (Bolwig et al., 2010; Hickey & du Toit, 2013; McCarthy, 2010; McMichael, 2013).

These views are based on a political economy reading of poverty and the social exclusion of smallholders, calling for a more nuanced understanding of the social processes involved in smallholder production and integration into markets. Agrarian political economy approaches foreground the “social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change both historically and contemporary” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 1). This thesis is broadly framed within this agrarian political economy approach to agrarian change (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2010) and critically analyses the specific case of smallholder tree-crop commodification and integration into global markets to understand how these processes shape and transform agrarian social relations.

### **1.3 Knowledge gaps**

This thesis addresses several gaps in knowledge relating to agricultural commodification amongst smallholders. Agricultural commodification – defined as farming for markets – has a long history across sub-Saharan Africa, driven by diverse actors over time and motivated by a range of ideological positions. The process has taken different forms across space and time in terms of institutional arrangements and labour regimes, with highly differentiated outcomes for land, labour, livelihoods, and the local economy (Hall et al., 2017). Broadly, agricultural commodification has been pursued through three models: large-scale estates and plantations, contract farming or outgrower schemes, and independent commercial smallholders (Hall et al., 2017). Agricultural commercialisation via independent commercial smallholders arguably presents significantly more potential for rural development than the other two models due to their embedding within the local economies with strong backward and forward linkages and reliance on local investment (Hall et al., 2017). However, there is a need for closer scrutiny of the longer-term impacts of farming investments on the agrarian structure and class dynamics, particularly across generations and between genders (Hall et al., 2017, p. 532). This study does so by analysing the expanding commodification of subtropical tree crops amongst smallholders. Tree crops – defined as commercial products from trees other than timber

such as cocoa, oil palm, macadamia and avocado (Yan et al., 2020) – form a subsector targeted explicitly for growth amongst smallholders in South Africa. There is extensive literature on smallholders’ engagement in globally traded tree-crop commodities such as cocoa, coffee and palm oil. However, the more niche subtropical tree-crop sector, which includes macadamia and avocado, has not yet been the subject of in-depth analysis. Hence, this thesis explores the class structure, dynamics, and outcomes of the commercialisation of tree crops by smallholders in South Africa to address this gap.

Second, there is a lack of understanding of the nature and degree of differentiation amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers and, more specifically, the class character of this process. Mainstream narratives that place smallholders at the centre of rural development (e.g. FAO, 2015; UNCTAD, 2015; World Bank, 2003, 2007) tend to obscure high levels of heterogeneity amongst smallholders, which results in generalised definitions of smallholders such as:

Smallholders are small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers who manage areas varying from less than one hectare to 10 hectares. Smallholders are characterised by family-focused motives such as favouring the stability of the farm household system, using mainly family labour for production and using part of the produce for family consumption (FAO, 2012, p. 1).

However, identifying and interpreting heterogeneity amongst farmers is important to inform policy and meet the diverse needs of farmers who may appear to have similar characteristics but, in practice, are very diverse. Three main typology classes aim to shed light on smallholder diversity (Whatmore, 1994), but each has its shortcomings, creating a knowledge gap in our understanding of smallholder diversity.

The first group is rooted in a positivist epistemology that focuses on observable physical characteristics such as farm size, income, assets and resources, labour, market integration, and livelihood diversification (Nyambo et al., 2019). Such typologies fail to provide a more nuanced and situated understanding of smallholders and the politics that underpin their construction. Moreover, they say little about patterns of social and economic relations between farmers and the structuring context.

The second group – class-based typologies (e.g. Cousins, 2010b; Scoones et al., 2012) – takes the socio-economic relations and structuring context as starting points to analyse smallholder diversity. A class-based typology emphasises the structural context of agricultural practices – land access, capital, labour markets, and employment opportunities. While these factors remain critical to understanding social differentiation and class formation, they are unable to capture variations that may originate from

subjective notions embodied in individual agency, such as those related to gender and cultural values.

Therefore, the third group – actor-oriented approaches – shifts the focus to farmer's agency. Variables such as farmers' attitudes, goals, and objectives become the focus of analysis in determining meaningful categories within a highly diverse population (Brodt et al., 2006; Fairweather & Klonsky, 2009; Karali et al., 2013). An example of an actor-oriented approach to identifying farmer heterogeneity is the farming styles research developed by Van der Ploeg (Van der Ploeg, 1994, 2010a, 2012; Van der Ploeg et al., 2009) which emphasises the social nature of agriculture. This approach highlights how farmers interpret, translate, and respond to similar circumstances differently, which results in distinct farming strategies. Focusing on farming styles helps capture farmers' attitudes, objectives, and management styles. As such, it can improve the development of policy and decision-making (Etage et al., Herbohn, & Harrison, 2006; Karali et al., 2013) and help tailor interventions (Brodt et al., 2006; Fairweather & Klonsky, 2009). However, existing studies on farming styles tend to lose sight of the socio-economic dimensions that determine smallholder diversity.

Combining a relational and actor-oriented approach could provide a more comprehensive approach to typology construction, taking both structuring social relations and individuals' subjective accounts into account. Whereas structuring social relations (based on a class-based analytic) can explain causal processes, individuals' subjective accounts can help explain dynamic behavioural processes. Studies that do so are, however, scarce. The analysis in this thesis is a first attempt to apply such a combined approach (Chapter 2 and Chapters 4-7 on farmer heterogeneity, vernacular land markets, operating on nested markets, and social reproduction, respectively).

The third gap relates to the lack of knowledge on how the commercialisation process amongst smallholders in contexts of customary land tenure systems is driving changes in land access, tenure security and land governance. There is a longstanding debate on how best to secure the tenure security of rural people and thereby promote rural livelihoods. This debate has been polarised between those in favour of formalising property relations, most notably via land titling initiatives (Soto, 2000) and those in favour of protecting forms of customary tenure (Cotula et al., 2006; Hornby et al., 2017; Sjaastad & Cousins, 2009; Springer, 2013; Toulmin, 2008). This debate assumes that customary tenure systems operate outside of market principles. However, a growing body of literature demonstrates that vernacular land markets are becoming increasingly common across sub-Saharan Africa, particularly where agricultural commodification expands (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006).

Existing literature on vernacular land markets emphasises the local institutional innovations taking place around recording and securing land transactions (Delville,

2003; Mathieu et al., 2003; Odgaard, 2003); the local dynamics and trends that shape the processes of commodification of customary land (Colin & Woodhouse, 2010; Sjaastad, 2003); and, more recently, the tensions and conflicts and social inequalities that emerge and are perpetuated by these transactions (Bartels et al.; Boone, 2019; Chitonge et al., 2017b; Flower, 2018; Maganga et al., 2016). Far less attention has been given to how customary institutions and land governance evolve, adapt and respond to the emergence of customary land markets. In addition, the geographical scope of customary land markets has been documented in several countries across the African continent, but few studies have focused on this phenomenon in South Africa, except for a passing reference to the sale of land allocations by chiefs (Claassens & Hathorn 2008) and conflicts over customary land access and transactions involving ‘outsiders’ such as mining companies (Capps & Mswana, 2015; Claassens & Matlala, 2014; Claassens 2014, 2018; Huizenga, 2019; Matlala, 2014; Phillan, 2019; Yeni, 2019). Much less attention has been given to inequalities in land access at a micro level, meaning between individuals from within a community and the senior traditional leaders responsible for allocating customary land. Chapter 5 addresses this gap by analysing the changing patterns of land access and transfer, the emergence of informal or customary land markets, and the related governance arrangements following the expansion of tree crops in South Africa. This is particularly relevant since the materiality of these commodities requires tenure security.

A fourth gap relates to understanding how, why, and with what implications farmers straddle both local and international markets. Debates around smallholder commodification and relations to markets tend to pit integration into global value chains against local and regional markets. Pushing smallholders’ integration into global commodity chains is driven by assumptions that this will increase farmers’ incomes and purchasing power and thus enable economic growth and development (FAO, 2018; World Bank, 2007). Alternative approaches, grounded in ideas of food sovereignty and food justice, seek to counter the multiple risks associated with integration into global commodity chains, such as financial risks, losses and debt dependency (McMichael, 2013), environmental degradation and poverty (Bolwig et al., 2010; Hickey & du Toit, 2013), and loss of autonomy over production and agricultural diversity with wide-reaching implications for food and nutrition (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Rosset, 2008). Instead, these alternatives – broadly referred to as ‘alternative food networks’ – foreground, to varying degrees, resilience and autonomy as key principles of alternative food systems, with locally embedded food systems and agroecological practices as important enablers (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Rosset & Altieri, 2017).

This dichotomy between locally embedded and globally integrated markets largely obscures the interactions and relations between these different markets and the related food systems they sustain (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). Scholars see these relations as

“spaces of contestation” (González, 2017) or a competitive ‘battleground’ of “competing agri-food geographies” (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006, p. 196) that ultimately undermine re-localisation processes embedded in alternative food systems (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). In the alternative food networks literature, locally embedded markets are often seen as “the outcome of social struggles” (Hebinck et al., 2015, p. 3), whereby peasants actively seek to distance themselves from global integration. This idea has been critiqued for not paying attention to the variable degrees of commoditisation amongst petty commodity producers and that the way they are integrated into markets does not necessarily result in loss of autonomy (Castellanos-Navarrete & Jansen, 2018; Manley & Van Leynseele, 2019; Vicol et al., 2018). Scholars have also argued that the coexistence and continuous connections between alternative food networks and broader agri-food markets strengthen these alternatives, making them more robust strategies for rural development (Schneider et al., 2016). However, how different markets interact and under what conditions they present more robust strategies for rural development needs to be better understood, particularly by centring on the class-differentiated character of the smallholder sector. Chapter 6 addresses this gap by analysing how tree-crop smallholders follow distinct commodification trajectories by operating simultaneously on global and local markets.

A fifth gap relates to how agricultural accumulation is linked to social reproduction. Agrarian political economy scholars have tended to focus on processes of accumulation (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2013), giving much less attention to how this is related to social reproduction. On the other hand, Marxist-feminist theorists have highlighted the interdependence between relations of production and reproduction within capitalism and the importance of centring social reproduction within this context (Bhattacharya, 2017b), particularly emphasising how production and accumulation processes intersect with class and gender. Land is central to both these processes and provides a key site for analysing how they articulate with one another.

In particular, the enclosure of the commons through tree-crop planting has been widely linked to conflict and competition over land, resulting in exclusion and dispossession across sub-Saharan Africa (Amanor, 2012; Berry, 2009). It has also been linked to a reduction in access to land for food provisioning and provisioning ecosystem (Asubonteng, Pfeffer, Ros-Tonen, Verbesselt, & Baud, 2018; Boafo & Lyons, 2019; Evans, Mariwah, & Barima Antwi, 2015; Fonjong & Gyapong, 2021) as well as mounting resistance and contestation from below (Amanor, 2010; Peters, 2004). Counter to these largely negative outcomes of the enclosure of the commons, a growing body of literature demonstrates how land enclosure, coupled with labour shortages, have prompted a wide variety of land-sharing arrangements, which enable access to productive land for the landless (Amanor, 2010; Colin, 2005, 2017a; Ruf, 2010).



Land-sharing arrangements have a long history in tree-crop cultivation and have been particularly well documented in the case of cocoa in West Africa (Amanor, 2010; Colin, 2017b; Ruf, 2010). Here the focus has been on cocoa and the incentives and rationales that drive share arrangements (e.g. Takane, 2000; Colin, 2005); the outcome they generate (e.g. De Zeeuw, 1997); and the broader contextual, social and political dynamics within which they are situated (e.g. Amanor, 2010a). Much less is known about how the enclosure of the commons for tree planting affects land relations, access, use, and related share arrangements in the context of tree cropping across southern Africa. In addition, the analysis of land enclosures and land-sharing arrangements has not been explicitly addressed by centring class, gender and social reproduction in direct relation to production and accumulation from a 'unitary' account as advocated by Marxist feminists (Bhattacharya, 2017a; Vogel, 2017). These knowledge gaps are addressed in Chapter 7 by analysing how new share arrangements emerge due to the expansion of tree-crop commodification.

#### **1.4 Contextualising smallholders in contemporary South Africa**

South Africa was chosen for a single case study because it prioritised high-value tree crops as key commodities to promote amongst smallholders to generate employment and growth in rural areas (NPC, 2013). Agricultural and land reform policies in the democratic era have focused on developing a class of commercially oriented smallholders, commonly referred to as 'emerging farmers'. These commercially oriented smallholders tend to be viewed as a relatively homogenous category because of their marginal position in relation to the large-scale white commercial farming class. However, efforts to address rural poverty and racialised inequality, such as targeted commodity-specific support programmes (Section 1.4.4), overlook important contextual and social dynamics that differentiate this group. Hence the importance of situating smallholders in the social and political context of contemporary South Africa. This requires a short reflection on the historical processes that have shaped the current context and smallholders' marginal position in contemporary South Africa.

##### **1.4.1 The legacy of apartheid**

South Africa is somewhat of an exception in sub-Saharan Africa due to settler colonialism and the apartheid regime that systematically dispossessed the black majority from the land and related livelihoods and from having any political rights. The black majority was confined to ten overcrowded, ethnically divided territories or 'homelands' where basic subsistence agriculture was practised at a level insufficient to ensure social reproduction. These homelands became labour reserves for the fast-growing, white-dominated industrial economy and cheap labour for the expanding white commercial farming

sector.<sup>2</sup> Through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which these widespread processes of dispossession were taking place, the state played a vital role in shaping the direction of agricultural change. The establishment and consolidation of the white commercial farming sector into the current modern and globally competitive agri-business sector was not an inevitable or 'natural' process.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it can be attributed to the targeted state interventions, which included the injection of public funds through direct and indirect subsidies, the implementation of market and tariff protections, and favourable policies that secured land and water rights and access to cheap labour for whites (Jeeves & Crush, 1990; Keegan, 1990; Wolpe, 1972). From the 1980s onwards, the apartheid government reduced agricultural support as it had become financially and politically unviable, and the ANC government continued the process of deregulation and trade liberalisation after 1994 as part of the general shift towards a neoliberal governance model (Genis, 2015). These processes effectively enabled commercial farming and agribusiness to maintain their privileged and dominant position in post-apartheid South Africa through their continued access to and control over land and water resources and their grip on economic and institutional power (Bernstein, 2013).

The white commercial farming sector still owns and controls an estimated 72% of the arable land in the country (DRDLR, 2017), and accumulation within this sector continues to outpace most other sectors. In 2020, the value of primary agricultural production increased by 15,9% (DALRRD, 2020). This is happening through a combination of strategies, including expanding the scale and scope of production; expanding into upstream or downstream enterprises such as processing and exporting; increasing economic efficiency or engaging in political action to reduce uncertainty; and establishing preferential access to and control over crucial resources, markets or policy processes (Genis, 2015). The consolidation of farms has increased the average farm size and decreased the number of farms, while production has also shifted towards high-value commodities, mostly horticulture for export (Genis, 2015). An estimated 35,000 large-scale white commercial farms exist, 5% of which account for around half the aggregate gross farm income (Aliber & Cousins, 2013, p. 142).

Despite the state's effort at transformation, little has been done to change the inherited structure, which remains defined by racialised inequality which is sharply visible in the dual agrarian structure (Bernstein, 2013; Bundy, 2019). Attempts over nearly three decades of land reform have resulted in a mere 10% of commercial farmland being transferred (Mahlati et al., 2019, p. 12), while whites own as much as 72% of total

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<sup>2</sup> For the history of dispossession and marginalisation of the South African peasantry see Bundy, 1979; Van Onselen, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> For the rise and success of the white commercial farming sector, see Keegan, 1990; Morris, 1976; Wilson, 1971.

agricultural land in the country (DRDLR, 2017). Capitalist developments in agriculture since 1994 have effectively consolidated the barriers to the growth and viability of the production of small-scale farmers (Bernstein, 2013).

#### 1.4.2 A marginalised black farming sector

In South Africa, supporting smallholders is primarily a political imperative, driven by the need to deracialise the agricultural sector (Van Leynseele, 2013). Moreover, there is a social and economic imperative to address pervasive levels of unemployment and poverty. This differs from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, where smallholders and family farmers are mainly approached as food producers, responsible for producing around 80% of the food consumed (FAO, 2017, p. xi).

The small-scale black farmers are still mostly confined to the overcrowded former 'homelands'. Economically the 'homelands' remained extremely poor and have seen limited development, becoming heavily dependent on remittances from migrant labour. The communal land tenure system, governed by Traditional Authorities, ensured that until the 1970s, most households had access to communal land for subsistence agriculture and grazing. However, the land parcels were too small to sustain subsistence needs and hence only contributed a small share of households' subsistence requirements (Lahiff, 1997). The homelands became increasingly congested, and mounting pressure on the limited natural resource base put livelihoods increasingly under pressure. This led to mass resettlement through 'betterment' spatial planning projects aiming to improve agricultural and natural resource use to sustain the cheap supply of migrant labour whose wages were below the cost of reproduction (Wolpe, 1972). However, these 'betterment' projects effectively reduced people's access to land and livelihoods (Letsoalo & Rogerson, 1982).

After the 1970s, there was a shift in the homelands' agricultural policy towards creating a range of large-scale agricultural projects through semi-state organisations. These were highly inefficient and declined by the 1980s, although they produced some opportunities for 'accumulation from above' by a few elites aligned to the homeland government (Cooper in Lahiff, 1997, p. 16). In addition to the growing pressure on the natural resource base, agriculture in the homelands suffered from extreme neglect by the apartheid government and a lack of investment.

Despite the regime change in 1994 and the dawn of democracy, the post-apartheid era continues to exhibit similar racialised inequalities as the past. In 2022, many of the same issues persist. More than half the population is estimated to be living in poverty, with 25.2% living in extreme poverty<sup>4</sup> (Statistics South Africa, 2017b). Despite the

<sup>4</sup> Extreme poverty is calculated based on earning below the food poverty line which in 2017 was set at ZAR 531 (USD 33) per person per month (Statistics South Africa, 2017b).

marginal decline in absolute poverty across South Africa (Leibbrandt et al., 2010), which is attributed mainly to the extensive welfare system implemented in the democratic era since 1994, inequality has increased, and South Africa is now the most unequal country in the world (Francis & Webster, 2019) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related regulatory responses in South Africa have perpetuated and exacerbated this (World Bank, 2020), particularly within the food system (Hall & Wegerif, 2021). This inequality is most sharply visible in the spatial legacy of apartheid planning, with the highest levels of poverty and deprivation being experienced in the former homelands (Noble & Wright, 2013). Unemployment is one of the key drivers of poverty in the democratic era, and the unemployment rates doubled between 1994- and 2014 (Seekings & Nattrass, 2015, p. 125). Currently, the official unemployment rate is 30%, while the expanded definition that includes discouraged job seekers (those who have given up looking for work) is 39.7% (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Against the declining opportunities for wage labour and increasing poverty levels, social grants have become a vital safety net, particularly for those living in the poorest provinces of Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Northern Cape. In total, 31% of people benefitted from social grants in 2018, and 44.3% of households received at least one grant. Grants represent the second most important source of income for most households after salaries, although this trend is reversed in Limpopo (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

An estimated 4 million<sup>5</sup> small-scale black farmers (around 2 million households) are trying to maintain an agricultural base within this context. However, this group is very diverse, and the majority is broadly categorised as engaging in subsistence agriculture to supplement household food supplies (Aliber & Hart, 2009). Only around 200,000 of these smallholder farms provide a source of income to the farmers (Aliber & Cousins, 2013, p. 142). This thesis focuses on a subgrouping of the latter market-oriented farmers.

### 1.4.3 Situating smallholders in South Africa's agri-food system

It is important to situate the group of market-oriented farmers in South Africa's broader agri-food system. Unlike the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the South African agri-food system<sup>6</sup> is concentrated and vertically integrated, whereby food production, processing, distribution and retail systems are dominated mainly by a few corporations (Greenberg, 2017). The food supplied into this system comes primarily from white-owned large-scale commercial farms, and distribution happens via a network of supermarket chains. Aside from historical land dispossession (Section 1.4.1), the nature of South Africa's agri-food system can be attributed mainly to the post-1990 neo-liberal capitalist influences on

<sup>5</sup> For a more differentiated overview of the agrarian structure see Cousins (2015, p. 258).

<sup>6</sup> The term agri-food systems includes agricultural inputs, primary production, logistics and trade, manufacturing and distribution (Greenberg, 2017).

South Africa's trade and agricultural policy requiring privatisation, trade liberalisation, state deregulation and corporate self-regulation (Bernstein, 2013; Greenberg, 2017). By 2010, nearly 70% of food marketing was via the formal retail sector, of which 94% was controlled by six supermarkets. Of the processed staple food, 80% originated from a mere four corporations (du Toit & Neves, 2014, p. 838). These supermarket chains have penetrated even the most remote rural areas and rapidly expanded (Crush & Frayne, 2011). Hence, food availability is not the problem in South Africa; the commercial agri-food system produces and distributes ample food to meet domestic demand and exports a surplus. It is the lack of access that is driving food and nutrition insecurity. As many as 26.0% of the population experienced hunger in 2012, and a further 8.3% of the population are at risk of hunger, with the highest prevalence being amongst urban informal and rural households in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces (Shisana et al., 2014, p. 10). In rural Limpopo, as many as 53% of households experience severe food insecurity (De Cock et al., 2013). With high unemployment and dependence on social grants, rising food prices disproportionately affect the poor (Faber & Drimie, 2016). Thus, food and nutrition security is fundamentally a question of geographical access and affordability (Greenberg, 2015).

In particular, the informal sector and informal food markets are vital, if not the most important, sources through which the poor in South Africa access food (Battersby, 2011). The main reasons for this are the spatial accessibility of these markets, lower prices, particularly for fresh produce, the ability to purchase smaller quantities and the possibility to buy on credit (Skinner & Haysom, 2016, pp. 7-8). On the supply side, the strict requirement of the formal markets regarding large volumes, quality, food safety, consistency, and year-round supply make accessing these markets prohibitive for most smallholders (Louw et al., 2008). In this way, smallholders are largely excluded and marginalised by the corporate food system that controls the formal food retail sector, and they tend to engage mainly in informal market channels through local traders and, to a lesser extent, greengrocers and the national fresh produce markets due to the ease of entry associated with these markets (Louw et al., 2008). Policies have widely ignored the important role of the informal sector in employment generation and food provisioning to the poor. This is despite estimates that there are 750,000 *spazas* (i.e. informal trading stores) and street traders operating in South Africa with a turnover of R35-50 billion (EUR 2-2.8 billion) (Coetzer & Pascarel, 2014).

#### **1.4.4 The political imperative to address smallholder marginalisation**

South Africa's agrarian sector is made up of between 2-2.5 million black subsistence-oriented smallholders; 200,000-250,000 market-oriented black smallholders for whom agriculture comprises only part of their overall livelihood; and 5,000-20,000 market-

oriented black smallholders who supply value chains under contract, some of whom have off-farm incomes. In addition, there are 19,000 small to medium-scale commercial farmers, mostly white, for whom agriculture comprises only a part of their overall livelihood; 9,000 medium-to large-scale commercial farmers, mostly white; and a mere 9,000 large-scale commercial farmers, almost all white, who are responsible for 80% of the national food supplies (Cousins, 2015). Most smallholders are found in communal areas, where they operate in the shadow of the increasingly consolidated white commercial farming sector. Therefore, scholars have emphasised that agrarian policy needs to focus on creating and supporting a class of smallholder farmers that functions as the ‘missing middle’ between large, mostly white commercial farmers and subsistence farmers (see Aliber & Hall, 2012). More broadly, in the current context of structural inequalities (Section 1.4.2), a marginalised position in the agri-food system (Section 1.4.3), and a stagnant and declining job market, providing opportunities and support to smallholder producers in gaining access to productive land and related agricultural production inputs is critical to achieving a more just society, progressive economic transformation (Greenberg, 2015), and rural food security (Baiphethi & Jacobs, 2009). This is both a political imperative to address the vast inequalities in the food system and a social imperative to generate sustainable rural livelihoods (Aliber & Hall, 2012; Greenberg, 2010). The state has primarily attempted to address this by combining a land reform programme with a commodity-focused approach to support smallholders.

The national land reform programme (Department of Land Affairs, 1997) set out to transform the racially skewed land ownership through three distinct approaches: restoring dispossessed land rights through land restitution, securing the land rights of those without secure tenure, and transforming the racially skewed land-ownership patterns through land redistribution. The state has transferred 4.9 million hectares of land through the land redistribution programme and a further 3.5 million hectares as part of the restitution programme between 1994 and 2018 (Mahlati et al., 2019, p. 12). This translated as less than 10% of commercial land having been transferred, falling far short of the initial target of transferring 30% by 2014 (Mahlati et al., 2019). The High-Level Panel Report and President Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture both critique the shift in focus away from the original ‘pro-poor’ focus of the land reform programme and the overall lack of vision for inclusive agrarian reform as overarching issues that have plagued the land reform process to date. Notably, both high-level reports argued that smallholders need to be at the centre of this programme if livelihood outcomes are to be achieved at scale (HLP, 2017; Mahlati et al., 2019). In particular, it has been argued that land redistribution should focus on commercially-oriented smallholders who are able to engage in accumulation ‘from below’ (Cousins, 2015, 2016; Hall, 2009).

The commodity-focused approach focuses on high-value, export-oriented crops such as macadamia and avocado. These commodities have been prioritised for having high growth, employment and livelihood-generating potential (NPC, 2013). The broader objective of this commodity-focused approach is to create a class of 'black' commercially-oriented smallholders linked to global supply chains. State and private sector actors, incentivised mainly through the national broad-based black economic empowerment agenda that seeks to deracialise the economy, have converged in their efforts to support and actively facilitate farmers' access to these markets.

The Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD) started to follow a commodity approach to support and develop the sector in 2005. This entailed grouping smallholder producers according to their main agricultural activity and municipality, with interventions to help emerging fruit farmers in Vhembe District on a project basis. One such project (2008-2012) was the 'massive planting project' to encourage commercial fruit production for national and international markets. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and Agricultural Research Council (ARC) jointly funded the project, making seedlings available to farmers at a 50% subsidy rate. During the implementation period, 282,292 fruit-tree seedlings were distributed amongst 181 beneficiaries (Namadzavho, 2019, p. 8). LDARD entered into a public-private partnership with the South African Subtropical Growers Association (Subtrop) to provide technical advice, skills, capacity building, and research and development. The primary means through which this collaboration took shape was via quarterly study groups and bi-annual information days. Department officials and farmer representatives jointly identified the content of these sessions, which generally covered topics related to the phenological cycle of the crop and specific issues such as disease and pest outbreaks. Scientists, researchers, extension officers and commercial farmers provided inputs for these sessions.

The introduction and promotion of subtropical tree crops in the region was initially for local consumption (Section 3.3). This has significantly changed over the past decade as state actors have identified these crops as essential drivers of economic growth and employment (DAFF, 2014a; LDARD, 2015; NPC, 2013). This shift is illustrative of the broader trend in agricultural policy towards a commodity-focused approach to agricultural development and small-scale farmers' integration into national and international markets and especially visible for macadamia and avocado (Chawiche, 2015; Jaskiewicz, 2015).

Agricultural extension exemplifies this commodity-focused approach, with each extension officer having a specific commodity specialisation and supporting and training farmers grouped according to their production focus. This commodity-focused approach has also translated into a growing role for commodity organisations

supporting small-scale farmers (Aliber et al., 2013). In Venda, this is particularly evident where Subtrop and the Southern African Macadamia Growers Association (SAMAC) – both representing white commercial farmers in the region – assumed an active role in supporting smallholders who produce avocados and macadamia. Their support includes training and skills development and provision of inputs. This is particularly the case for smallholder macadamia farmers where a statutory levy was implemented in 2014, of which 20% of the revenues are earmarked for smallholder ‘transformation’ (DAFF, 2014a), amounting to around R2 million<sup>7</sup> (approximately EUR 138,400) in the first 4-year period. Most of this money has been spent on the enterprise development of smallholder macadamia farmers. Despite these initiatives to support smallholders’ integration into high-value commodity chains, there are substantial entry barriers beyond access to land due to these commodities’ capital-intensive nature and long maturation period. Establishment costs are substantial. Subtrop (2015) estimates that to establish a commercial macadamia orchard under a dryland scenario (which is the case for most smallholders), the cumulative investment cost after six years is R121,356 (EUR 8,637) per hectare. Orchards are estimated to become profitable around year 10, with returns estimated at R100,000 (EUR 7,117) per annum.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these substantial capital requirements, control over access to the market and the highly profitable downstream activities such as processing, logistics, and marketing remains highly concentrated and dominated by white-owned capital. For smallholders to gain access to markets, they need to compete on the same terms as large-scale commercial farmers. However, the payment terms, minimum volumes, quality and communication requirements are proving exceedingly difficult for most black smallholders whose historically determined class position puts them in a highly disadvantaged position vis-à-vis white commercial farmers.

Efforts to create a class of commercial black tree-crop farmers tend to be enacted through a translation process, whereby the large-scale white commercial farming sector is considered the blueprint that needs to be rescaled to ‘fit’ the smallholder context. In this view, smallholders follow a linear trajectory towards specialisation, greater efficiency, and closer integration into formal markets and global value chains. This perspective renders invisible the ‘pervasive heterogeneity’ that constitutes the rural world and smallholders in particular. This thesis aims to render these ‘invisibilities’ visible and contribute to the

<sup>7</sup> SAMAC Evolution project PowerPoint presentation 2017 shared with the author.

<sup>8</sup> Many variables determine a cash flow projection model such as distance between trees, cultivar, agroecological zone etcetera; hence, these figures are merely an estimate. In addition, this model was generated based on the experience of large commercial agricultural developments in a corporate environment and smallholders operate on a much lower cost structure. SAMAC (n.d) estimates somewhat lower average costs for establishing an orchard: R100,000/ha in the first year, followed by around R25,000/ha/year until the trees come into full production after 7-8 years.



lack of scientific understanding of the social and relational nature and context of tree-crop commodification in South Africa.

### 1.5 Research questions

Against the above background, this thesis addresses the following overarching question: *How is the commodification of tree crops among smallholders (re)shaping smallholder accumulation trajectories and agrarian social relations, and what does this imply for the current debates on land and agrarian reform in South Africa and the commodity-focused approach towards smallholders?*

This question is broken down into four sub-questions, which are addressed sequentially over the four empirical chapters:

- i. What is the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers, and which dynamics are shaping this? (Chapter 4)
- ii. How is the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfiguring land access arrangements and tenure security, and how does this affect customary land governance? (Chapter 5)
- iii. How does the commodification of subtropical tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets amongst smallholders? (Chapter 6)
- iv. How and under what conditions does the enclosure of the commons for orchards present a space that sustains land-based social reproductive functions? (Chapter 7)

### 1.6 Thesis outline

This thesis is structured into eight chapters. This chapter has provided an introduction to contextualise and frame the research problem and outlined the knowledge gaps this thesis addresses. Chapter 2 elaborates on the theoretical strands that guide the analysis. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the methodological approach, the methods employed, and how they are combined to address the research questions. The subsequent four chapters (Chapters 4-7) deal with the empirical findings. These chapters were written as journal articles so that they could be read independently. However, when compiled into this thesis, they were edited to avoid repetition and overlap when read in their entirety. This is especially the case regarding the contextual, theoretical, and methodological sections elaborated on in Chapters 1-3. Chapter 4 explores the nature and degree of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers using a class-analytic approach and identifies the key dynamics underlying this differentiation process. The subsequent three chapters elaborate on the drivers and dynamics of differentiation and accumulation. Chapter 5 unpacks land access and transfer dynamics in the context

of evolving customary tenure institutions and new forms of land access. Chapter 6 hones in on the diversification strategies within orchards, the relationship between the different market channels in which farmers engage, and how these relate to each other. Chapter 7 investigates the relationship between commodity and non-commodity production within orchards through the conceptual lens of social reproduction. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by drawing together the various arguments and synthesising the empirical findings to answer the overarching research question. I then discuss the theoretical implications, reflect on the methodology, and discuss what these findings mean for policy and practice.

## Chapter 2

# Theoretical framework





## 2.1 Introduction

This thesis is positioned in and contributes to five broad theoretical debates that have a long history in the agrarian studies literature. These debates include agrarian polarisation, differentiation, and diversity (Section 2.2), agricultural commodification and processes of accumulation (Section 2.3), agricultural commodification and changing customary land relations (Section 2.4), agricultural commodification and market relations (Section 2.5), and agricultural commodification and social reproduction (Section 2.6). I trace the contours of these debates and how this thesis will contribute to each of these debates. The last section (Section 2.7) brings the various strands together in a conceptual scheme that guides the analysis in the empirical chapters.

## 2.2 Polarisation, differentiation and smallholder diversity

Debates around the form and character of social change amongst the peasantry have been at the centre of understanding rural transformation for centuries. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the primary concern was understanding capitalism's early origins and development and how this process fundamentally transformed production relations in the countryside. Classic Marxist interpretations were underpinned by the idea that agrarian transformation through the penetration of capitalist relations in the countryside would lead to a permanent polarisation of social relations. On the one hand, a bourgeois class of landowners would emerge through what Marx has termed 'primitive accumulation' (Marx, 2018). Simultaneously, the peasantry would come under increasing pressure, initiating a gradual 'deagrarianisation' process to create a class of landless people – the proletariat. Through this polarisation process, the peasantry was considered to ultimately disappear, becoming labourers, compelled by economic necessity to sell their labour in the burgeoning urban industrial centres. The agrarian transitions from feudal systems to capitalism have followed different pathways in different regions (Bernstein, 2010, pp. 31-32). Although social relations the world over have been fundamentally transformed through capitalism, this polarisation thesis, originally put forward by Lenin (1899) and Kautsky (1899), was overly deterministic.

In contrast to the original polarisation thesis, a very different conceptualisation of rural social transformation was developed by the influential Russian economist Alexander Chayanov (summarised in Van der Ploeg, 2013). Chayanov argued that the peasantry would not disappear. Instead, social differentiation would occur on a cyclical and demographic basis. He argued that these changes would result from the critical balance between labour and consumption within the peasant family/household. Labour would correspond to the immediate subsistence needs of the family and not to the logic of accumulation. Hence, intensification and extensification would proceed in accordance with the family composition. Despite the deeper penetration of capitalist forces into

the countryside, Chayanov argued that a degree of autonomy would be maintained by a semi-independent peasantry partially engaged in market relations but not operating according to a strictly capitalist logic of surplus extraction and accumulation. As such, differentiation would be cyclical, and 'depeasantisation' and 'repeasantisation' would be constant features of the social dynamic of the countryside.

These two contrasting views have largely informed debates around the nature of change within agrarian societies until the present, albeit that they have been adapted and refined in response to observed differences that have emerged in different parts of the world over time. Chayanovian ideas have largely informed agrarian populists (for example, Van der Ploeg) who position peasant-like production in the contemporary world as distinct from highly capitalist agriculture in that it exhibits values and aspirations that are not centred on accumulation and exploitation but instead on autonomy and an ethics of care. Van der Ploeg (2015b) refers to a 'new peasantry', a highly diverse group of agricultural producers, essentially unified in their relative position vis-à-vis large-scale industrial agriculture. From this perspective, diversity is acknowledged through how individual agency shapes production through endogenous development pathways (see, for example, Van der Ploeg's (2010) farming styles theory).

Agrarian Marxists today (Ben Cousins and Henry Bernstein, for example) challenge this view that contemporary peasant or family farmers can be considered a unitary class purely by their position as 'exploited' or overshadowed by industrial agriculture (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2010). As Bernstein put it, "Can we identify a class, in any useful sense, by an aspiration or set of values?". From a political economy perspective, he states that "class is based in social relations of production. As such, a class can only be identified through its relations with another class" (Bernstein, 2010, p. 101). Agrarian Marxists centre agrarian relations within contemporary capitalism, where the market and economic exchange relations mediate all aspects of production and social reproduction. From this perspective, contemporary peasantry can better be conceptualised as 'petty commodity producers'. Bernstein (2010) stresses the importance of paying attention to the processes of social differentiation within and between petty commodity producers, highlighting the contradictions and tensions this generates. In particular, he stresses the analytical importance of how capital (land, equipment, fertilisers etc.) is combined with family and household labour within petty commodity production, creating a 'contradictory unity' (2010, p. 103). The contradiction he refers to stems from the fact that capital and labour are unevenly distributed within and between households and between reproducing the means of production (capital) and the producer (labour). Marxists consider this combination of capital and labour within the farming unit as the source of differentiation in the countryside today.

Bernstein (2013) develops and enriches Lenin's classic scheme of poor, middle and rich peasants accompanying the polarisation thesis. This thesis predicts that through the commodification process, middle peasants would ultimately either expand and become rich peasants and ultimately landlords commanding labour while others would be squeezed, becoming poor and ultimately landless labourers. Bernstein argues that the middle peasant – or what he prefers to call the petty commodity producer – is not a pre-existing state as Lenin would have it, but rather a product of class differentiation. He argues that the broader commodification process has increased the costs of entering into farming, as well as the related risks and competition that accelerates differentiation. Those entering into petty commodity production need to be seen as enabled by those less well-positioned to bear those extra costs and who are, in turn, pushed out. This also needs to be viewed in relation to increased livelihood diversification, whereby farming is seldom the primary or only livelihood activity but instead forms part of a broader portfolio of livelihood activities that increasingly combine both farm and off-farm activities (Ellis, 2000; Neves and Du Toit, 2013; Neves, 2017). This has also led to significant changes in labour dynamics in the countryside, as family labour – the primary source of farm labour in the traditional family or peasant farm – is often replaced or combined with hired labour in petty commodity production. In this process, labour no longer constitutes a singular class but rather 'classes of labour'. Those who constitute these classes of labour may still have access to the means of production, albeit they can no longer sustain themselves through these means and depend directly or indirectly on selling their labour to sustain themselves. Consequently, Bernstein (2010, p. 112) asserts that "it is difficult to adhere to any notion of farmers...as a singular class and constituted as a class through any common social relation with capital".

In contrast to the classic division that seems to exist between agrarian Marxist and populist interpretations of agrarian differentiation as outlined above, White (2018) argued that key concepts from both Marx and Chayanov are essential and relevant in understanding the persistence of middle farmers and contemporary smallholders. By tracing the contours of the evolution of Java's peasantry from the mid-nineteenth century, White (2018) asserts that these traditions are not as irreconcilable and conflicting as they are often presented. Instead, he emphasises the need to approach agrarian social relations in a flexible and non-reductionist manner that is not averse to integrating aspects of both the Marxist and Chayanovian traditions.

Turning to the South African context, the highly racialised class relations defined by the broader political economy of the apartheid system have meant that smallholders tend to be approached as a relatively homogenous group by way of their marginal position vis-à-vis large-scale white commercial farmers. This has meant that diversity and differentiation processes taking place within and between groups of smallholders

have been mainly overlooked. This is particularly evident in agrarian policy, which has tended to interpret this category as comprised broadly along the lines of subsistence, smallholder and commercially oriented or what is commonly referred to as ‘emerging’ farmers (DAFF, 2010, 2013; DRDLR, 2009; NPC, 2013). It is increasingly acknowledged that such broad categories obscure important differences that need to be recognised if agrarian policy is to be effective in creating opportunities for accumulation ‘from below’ and the much-needed ‘missing middle’ at the scale needed to enhance food security as well as reduce income inequality (Cousins, 2010b; Gwiriri et al., 2019) (Chapter 4). This has particularly been highlighted in relation to land reform, where, amongst other factors, the lack of understanding of diversity amongst potential land reform beneficiaries has been a significant challenge hampering the progress and impact of land reform (Aliber, 2019; Aliber et al., 2006; Cousins, 2016; Mahlati et al., 2019; Zantsi et al., 2021).

Some valuable studies have attempted to address this lack of analytical clarity in understanding the diversity among smallholders. These have typically generated a range of typologies that make different dimensions of difference visible, determined mainly by the analytic focus and stratification methods used. Some of these studies have focused on the diversity amongst smallholder irrigation scheme farmers (Chipfupa & Wale, 2018; Cousins, 2013; Ncube, 2018; van Averbeké & Mohamed, 2006), while others shed light on smallholders more generally (Cousins, 2010; Pienaar, 2013; Pienaar & Traub, 2015), smallholder livestock farmers (Gwiriri et al., 2019) and commercially oriented smallholder (Zantsi et al., 2021). Depending on the conceptual starting points, the nature of differentiation has been identified based on farmers’ aspirations (Ncube, 2018), strategies in response to prevailing ecological and socio-economic conditions (van Averbeké & Mohamed, 2006), socio-economic conditions (Pienaar & Traub, 2015) and psychological capital (Chipfupa & Wale, 2018). These studies have generated important insights, emphasising different axes of differentiation and similarities. They illustrate that smallholders are differentiated in relation to the nature of livelihood diversification and access to social welfare and that these largely shape the nature of production.

By focusing on a range of assets and, in some cases, aspirations, we get a relatively static overview of smallholder stratification. In contrast, the contribution by Cousins (2010) emphasises the importance of centring the analysis of rural differentiation from a class-analytic perspective, which he argues is essential to understanding the dynamic and relational character of change underway in the countryside. He argues that the dynamic process of accumulation should be at the centre of the analysis of smallholder trajectories and that this requires focusing on the degree to which agriculture contributes to social reproduction and expanded reproduction and the degree to which labour is used in the production process. Six distinct classes are identified related to smallholders in South Africa, but the boundaries between these categories are both blurred and fluid.



This typology is very useful in illustrating the broad contours of difference. However, the general tendencies and trajectories of change and the underlying causes are not self-evident (Cousins, 2010). Understanding the actual process of differentiation is key and involves focusing on the social relations of production:

Agrarian or rural ‘differentiation,’ as the term implies, is a dynamic process involving the emergence or sharpening of ‘differences’ within the rural population, but it does not itself consist of (and in some cases, at least in the short term, may not even involve) increasing income inequalities. It’s not about whether some peasants became richer than others, but about the changing kind of relations between them (or between peasants and non-peasants, including extra rural groups), in the context of the development of commodity relations in the rural economy (*White, 1989, pp. 19-20*).

This thesis contributes to this literature by unpacking the concept of smallholder and demystifying its assumed homogeneity (Chapter 4). With the growing importance of the subgrouping of smallholder tree-crop farmers both in policy and practice and no studies to date that specifically focus on diversity amongst this sub-group, such a focus is timely. In addition, the analytical utility of using a class-based approach, as outlined by Bernstein (2010), is vital considering the highly capitalised nature of these commodities and, thereby, the high entry costs for participation in these commodity markets. To generate jobs and livelihoods at the scale needed, it is important to understand both the diversity amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers and the underlying dynamic processes that shape this diversity. A typology alone is inadequate to do so. Understanding accumulation trajectories and the social relations that shape and are shaped by these trajectories is key in this regard. As Marxists have long emphasised, fundamental to this process is people’s relation to the primary means of production, namely land, capital, and labour, and how these shape accumulation processes. This thesis engages with each of these to varying degrees in relation to their role in accumulation. Section 2.3 provides a brief overview of theories of accumulation in the agrarian context elaborating on the concept of accumulation ‘from below’, which informs my analysis in this thesis. Land is approached in relation to the process of commodification and accumulation within a context where land is governed by customary tenure (Section 2.4 and Chapter 5). Capital is not dealt with in the classic sense but rather in terms of local and global market relations as a source of surplus that can be reinvested in tree crops (Section 2.5 and Chapter 6). Lastly, labour is approached in relation to social reproduction and gender relations (Section 2.6 and Chapter 7).

### 2.3 Agricultural commodification and theories of accumulation

A second debate relates to accumulation in the agrarian context. Gaining access to and control over land and related resources has been and continues to be central to the process of capitalist expansion and accumulation. Different theories have been put forward that help explain this process. As discussed in the previous section, Marx theorised the origins of capitalism as hinging on ‘primitive accumulation’. Contemporary Marxists focus on the context of globalisation, where capitalist relations have expanded and penetrated even the most remote spaces across the globe through the ever-expanding flows of goods, services and capital (Harvey, 2004). Accumulation in this context proceeds through the reinvestment of profits in the form of expanded reproduction. Harvey (2004, p. 74) argues that the mechanisms of predation, fraud and violence of dispossession that accompanied Marxist ‘primitive accumulation’ are still present and play a stronger role today than in the past, albeit in different forms and the different contexts of today. He argues that ‘primitive accumulation’ is not only a stage in the process towards capitalism but also an ongoing feature of it and refers to ‘accumulation by dispossession’ to describe how capitalist relations expand through the perpetual search for profits, which continues to be based on the dispossession of people from their means of production. In particular, he refers to the expansion of the credit system, financial capital, and speculative investments as new forms of accumulation. These new forms of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ enable land and water grabbing (Edelman et al., 2013; Franco et al., 2013). The growing number and changing nature of large-scale land deals are fuelled by the converging global crises in food, energy, finance and the environment. Powerful economic actors, enabled through national policies, encourage land-based investments on what is deemed marginal underutilised and empty land, resulting in the dispossession of local peoples of their land-based livelihoods (Borras et al., 2011; Fairbairn, 2014; Hall, 2013).

Another debate about accumulation in the context of post-colonial Africa has focused on the state’s role in accumulation processes. Here accumulation is conceptualised in terms of ‘from above’ when it is broadly state-driven and exclusive and ‘from below’ when it is more democratic and people-centred. It is argued that the post-independence ‘developmental state’ across much of Africa has provided “the vehicle of accumulation for large sections of the ruling classes as well as the systematic economic plundering and political oppression of the masses of the people of Africa” (Neocosmos, 1993, p. 5). This has led state actors and those closely aligned with the state to engage in ‘accumulation from above’ through ‘parasitic’ and ‘bureaucratic forms’ (Neocosmos, 1993, p. 6). In contrast, Neocosmos (1993) recognises class differentiation amongst the oppressed, using the concept of accumulation ‘from below’ to distinguish the “voluntarily” entered into unequal relations characteristic of “free” commodity production (Neocosmos, 1993, p. 6).

In the post-apartheid era in South Africa, agrarian and land reform have been state-led. This benefited the elite and those closely aligned with state actors through a process of ‘accumulation from above’ (Hall & Kepe, 2017; Mtero et al., 2019). Likewise, during much of the apartheid years, until the deregulation and liberalisation process began, white commercial farmers rose to the prominent position they have today through ‘accumulation from above’. So, what are the prospects of broad-based accumulation ‘from below’ amongst smallholders in contemporary South Africa, where they remain overshadowed by the large-scale capitalism farmers and agri-business-dominated value chains? Analysing the case of smallholder irrigation scheme farmers in KwaZulu Natal who primarily supply informal fresh producer markets, Cousins (2013) argues that they achieve relatively high productivity levels and respond quickly to market opportunities. However, there are significant restraints to accumulation ‘from below’. This is primarily attributed to the prevailing property regimes, with strong social sanctions against engaging in the rental of unused plots on a large scale and relatively few unused plots available for this purpose due to the existing high demand for land (Cousins, 2013, p. 134). Accumulation ‘from below’ results from multiple factors, including employment status, off-farm income and ownership of the means of production. It is widely argued that agrarian policy in South Africa should focus on facilitating processes of accumulation ‘from below’ if it is to be inclusive, pro-poor and achieve the scale of livelihoods needed (Aliber & Hall, 2012; Cousins, 2013). Here, the state is key in facilitating accumulation ‘from below’.

#### **2.4 Agricultural commodification and changing customary land relations**

A third debate relates to the commodification and changes in customary land relations. Sub-Saharan Africa seems to be “land abundant”, with an estimated 201,546 million ha of available and uncultivated land, significantly more than any other continent (Deininger & Byerlee, 2011, p. xxxiv). However, this estimate is inaccurate. When the lack of infrastructure, ecological costs, and other constraints are considered, the unutilised and suitable cropland is probably closer to 80-167 million ha, of which 20 million have already been transferred to foreign investors (Chamberlin et al., 2014, p. 57). Hence, arable land in sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly scarce. Demand – not least due to agricultural commercialisation – is mounting rapidly and driving land access and transfer dynamics (Jayne et al., 2021). This leads to land concentration, fragmentation and dispossession (Knapman et al., 2017). These rapid changes have animated the debate around how best to secure informal or customary land rights. Together with global financial institutions, governments have been implementing projects that seek to increase the formalisation, individualisation, and titling of customary land over the past few decades. Such formal titling of land is justified as increasing security, promoting investment, and driving

productivity, growth, and income. These arguments were elaborated in the highly influential book *The Mystery of Capital* (Soto, 2000), which despite being published over two decades ago, still has tremendous traction and continues to underpin land-titling programmes by national governments worldwide. However, these programmes have not achieved the anticipated results and have generated numerous adverse outcomes instead (Benjaminsen & Sjaastad, 2008; Bromley, 2009; Sjaastad & Cousins, 2009). The adverse outcomes include opportunism and corruption by powerful actors, exclusion, dispossession and increasing inequality and social differentiation (not least in terms of gender, generation and class) while intensifying contestations and conflicts (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Chitonge et al., 2017; Knapman et al., 2017; Maganga et al., 2016; Springer, 2013). In a systematic review of property rights interventions on agricultural investment, the impacts were found to be highly varied and context-specific, and in cases where stable informal and customary systems were in place, these interventions had little impact on agricultural investments, productivity and livelihoods (Lawry et al., 2017).

In contrast, it is argued that strengthening customary tenure security and land rights are more effective, appropriate and feasible means to secure land tenure (Hornby et al., 2017; Platteau, 1996; Toulmin, 2008). Customary land governance practices are often considered more inclusive because of social and cultural norms that ensure land access through group membership and protection of the rights of poor and vulnerable groups (Cousins, 2007). Here, an important distinction is made between ‘codified’ and ‘living’ customary law. Inappropriately ‘codified’ customary law enabled colonial governments in their project of control and rule of the rural populace. ‘Living’ law, in contrast, encompasses the norms and rules that govern the daily lives and practices of people who access and manage land and resources collectively. These norms and rules are considered flexible and evolving in response to the changing social, cultural and economic conditions (Claassens, 2011). In South Africa, customary practices in land governance have, in particular contexts, adapted and responded to changing socio-economic conditions in a manner that protected and secured the land rights of vulnerable groups, such as single women (Cousins, 2017).

Both the arguments for and against the formalisation and titling of land tend to see access and control over land taking place outside market relations. Even though legally constituted and enforced property rights are not established across most of the rural world, this has not hampered the development of commodity relations, where land becomes property and acquires an exchange value. Vibrant vernacular land markets have emerged whereby land is treated as private property in practice even if not formally recognised as such (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006). Evidence of such land markets has been documented across sub-Saharan Africa (Sitko, 2010; Chitonge et al., 2017a, Chauveau & Colin, 2010, Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2010, Knapman et

al., 2017), and this phenomenon of customary land commodification is accelerating in scale and scope (Jayne et al., 2021, 2019; Knapman et al., 2017). Important drivers of this change are medium-scale farmers<sup>9</sup> – a diverse group encouraged into agriculture by the rapid development of land rental, purchase and long-term lease agreements (Jayne et al., 2019, p. 75). These transformations in land relations have highlighted the importance of supporting and strengthening smallholders' land rights and security (Jayne et al., 2019, p. 75).

The 'evolutionary theory of land rights' predicts that with increasing population pressure on land and increased market integration, land rights naturally evolve towards increased individualisation and that this evolution leads rights holders to push for duly formalised private property rights (Platteau, 1996). These cases illustrate that a vibrant and growing land market exists under customary tenure regimes, and communal land is becoming individualised despite the lack of a formal legal title. The emergence of a market for customary land has drawn attention to the changing nature of customary tenure institutions and the social and political conflicts these generate (Berry, 2010; Chimhowu, 2019). It has also created opportunities for corruption and collusion by traditional leaders, state officials and, more generally, elite capture (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2010; Chitonge et al., 2017b; Cotula & Cisse, 2007; Knapman et al., 2017). This has had complex and differentiated effects and created inequalities (Bartels et al., 2018; Chitonge et al., 2017b; Mathieu et al., 2003; Sitko, 2010; Yaro, 2010). Despite the growing literature documenting these processes across sub-Saharan Africa, their distributional effects and broader socio-economic effects remain poorly understood (Jayne et al., 2021).

The literature highlights the insecurity and vulnerability of customary land tenure rights within the former homelands of South Africa in the context of rich mineral deposits and extractive activities. These have sparked conflicts over land rights, authority over land and the interpretation of custom. Since most mineral deposits are found in communal areas, land acquisition and collusion typically occur between traditional leaders and mining corporations (Phillan, 2019; Yeni, 2019). Much less attention has been given to the emergent 'vernacular land markets', essentially the micro-processes of land access and transfer that hinge on financial transactions taking place on communal land between people within these communities. There is some evidence that a land rental market exists where there are unused plots within irrigation schemes, but this is limited due to social and cultural norms that prohibit the practice at scale, thereby limiting opportunities for accumulation 'from below' (Cousins, 2013, p. 134).

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<sup>9</sup> Medium-scale farmers are considered here to be those operating land between 5-100 ha (Jayne et al., 2019).

## 2.5 Agricultural commodification and markets

A fourth debate relates to smallholders' relationship to different markets and the implications for smallholder development and accumulation. Two largely polarised positions exist. First, the neoliberal approach places globalised and unregulated markets at the centre and seeks to integrate smallholders into these markets via agri-food value chains as a key mechanism to accelerate growth and development, increase incomes and thereby purchasing power to enhance food and nutrition security (NPC, 2013; World Bank, 2007). Public-private partnerships and inclusive business models are the main vehicles to facilitate market access (FAO, 2015; IFAD, 2016). Addressing 'market failures' (i.e. low productivity, low farm gate prices, lack of information, etc.) is considered the key to unlocking the potential benefits of the market for smallholders (Wiggins & Keats, 2013) – an approach that neglects processes of 'adverse incorporation' (Section 1.4).

Second, and in response to these adverse outcomes, transformative and radical approaches mainly embodied by the food sovereignty movement advocate for a radically different food system centred around sustainable, agroecological food production systems, grounded in specific localities, with local production and distribution and consumption networks, transparent and participatory governance structures, and greater autonomy for actors engaged in the system (Patel, 2009; Rosset & Altieri, 2017; Van der Ploeg, 2015b). This strand assumes that distancing and having greater autonomy from the global trade system creates greater resilience. These alternatives fall broadly within the ambit of 'alternative food networks', including a range of alternatives to the mainstream global industrial food system. Two main concepts that focus on the nature of markets within these alternatives are 'territorial markets' and 'nested markets'. The first concept focuses primarily on the spatial dimension of these markets (Kay, 2016; Lamine et al., 2019; Wiskerke, 2009). The 'nested markets' concept emphasises the distinctive socio-material features of 'connectedness', 'specificity' and 'rootedness' as their distinctive features (Van der Ploeg, 2015a; Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). What these 'alternatives' share is that they are constructed in opposition to the globalised agri-food systems, whereby peasants and smallholders are constructed as seeking autonomy and greater distance from the 'corporate food regime' and 'food empire' (Van der Ploeg et al., 2012) (Chapter 6).

The polarisation between these different food systems and the production relations that sustain them obscure their interactions and relationships. Some argue that this relationship is a competitive 'battleground' that undermines 'alternative food systems' (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). Others have argued that the coexistence and continuous connection between these food systems potentially strengthen alternative food systems, making them more robust strategies for rural development (Schneider et al., 2016). The need to acknowledge smallholder agency and their desire and accompanying struggles to be incorporated into broader commodity circuits and compete in national and global

markets has become increasingly evident. This is particularly emphasised in debates that critique food sovereignty and the accompanying notion of a homogeneous category of smallholder ('peasant') that is constructed as searching for autonomy rather than inclusion in global capitalist markets (Bernstein, 2014; Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Jansen, 2015; Manley & Van Leynseele, 2019). Jansen (2015, p. 227) emphasised the importance of acknowledging smallholder differentiation to rethink 'capitalism from below' and engaging in global markets to enable 'expanded reproduction'. Centring the idea of 'differentiated agrarian classes' (Bernstein, 2010) opens up the scope for understanding differentiated market engagement by commercially oriented smallholders and the related implications for accumulation.

As discussed in Section 1.4.4, the commodity-focused approach to smallholder development in South Africa tends to obscure the highly differentiated nature of this category and thereby also the differentiated production and market relations. Particularly in the case of tree crops, which are highly capital-intensive and require multiple years of investment before returns are realised, product diversification and related market strategies are key to understanding opportunities and constraints for accumulation 'from below'. This thesis contributes to this debate by unravelling the differentiated engagement of smallholder tree-crop farmers in markets (Chapter 6). It thereby addresses the knowledge gaps regarding how smallholders straddle different markets and the related motivations and outcomes of these practices.

## **2.6 Agricultural commodification and land-based social reproduction**

The final strand of debate is the relationship between capitalist accumulation, specifically through agricultural commodification and social reproduction, mainly through land-based food production and provisioning. Agrarian political economy scholars have focused on the expanding capitalist relations and modes of production in the countryside in terms of the related processes of agrarian class differentiation and accumulation. This is usually framed within the highly uneven development of capitalism in the countryside that hinges on the exploitative relationship between capital and labour (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010a, 2010b; Bernstein, 2010). Far less attention has been paid to the contingent forms of social reproduction and their implicit gendered nature.

Razavi (2009) illustrates how 'impoverished' and 'individualist' the reading of gender has generally been within the analysis of agrarian social relations, where she highlights how 'female' and 'male' have tended to be dealt with as rational choice actors, abstracted from the broader political and social context. Hence, feminist scholars advocate for 'engendering' the political economy of agrarian change and analysing the "interlocking, and socially and historically specific, ways in which class and non-class forms of oppression articulate to structure agrarian change, inequality and politics"

(Levien et al., 2018, p. 856, emphasis added). The recent theorising of social reproduction highlights the interconnection between commodity and non-commodity, production and reproduction, and the public and private spheres within contemporary capitalism (Bhattacharya, 2017a; Fraser, 2016). Central to this 'unitary account' has been how the spheres of production and reproduction are linked to class, gender, and other categories of social difference (Vogel, 2017).

Land is central to theorising processes of capitalist accumulation (Hall, 2013), and despite broader processes of deagrarianisation (Bryceson, 2002), it is increasingly highlighted for the varied social reproductive functions it sustains (Cousins et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2013). Ferguson (2013) focuses on the 'distributive relations' anchored by the land for Southern Africa. These involve claims made to a 'rightful share' of the resources held by families and kin networks, which increasingly derive from social welfare distribution, amongst other things (Ferguson, 2013, p. 170). He argues that an overemphasis on smallholder production can blind us to the myriad of other things people do with the land. Focusing on forms of social reproduction in rural South Africa, Cousins et al. (2018) also argue for greater emphasis to be placed on the dynamics of social reproduction as a key aspect of contemporary capitalism. They argue that "social relations through which households, families and communities are constituted need to be taken into account and land and its subtle and varied roles in social reproduction are critically important" (Cousins et al., 2018, p. 1082). They highlight key aspects of social reproduction that hinge on land beyond its productive function: the importance of land and property relations for establishing a homestead, the locus of daily and generation reproduction, anchoring family structures and kinship networks, providing a base for subsistence production, and wild harvesting of resources. These authors emphasise how these are enabled through customary norms and practices that ensure rights to landed resources for accepted community members to enable and ensure social reproduction. They illustrate how customary practices have adapted to the changing circumstances to ensure the basis for social reproduction through land access. They highlight two examples of this. Firstly, the recent changes in family structures, where a declining marriage rate has increased female-headed households, has led to unmarried women with children being granted land access rights, where in the past, according to customary practices, land access for a homestead was only enabled through a male spouse.

Another example is the limits placed on informal land markets in irrigation schemes primarily used for social reproductive purposes. Despite the growing need for such plots by 'would be accumulators', most irrigation scheme plot owners see selling or renting these plots as a threat to social reproduction; hence, a socially sanctioned limit exists on the emergence of informal land markets in irrigation schemes. It is only condoned to a minimal degree in cases where land rental is between family members and thereby



socially embedded and only partially commoditised (Cousins et al., 2018). Cousins et al. (2018) emphasise the customary norms and practices to safeguard modes of social reproduction through ensuring land access. They also emphasise that these modes of social reproduction are heavily shaped and conditioned by the broader dynamics of labour migration, increasing social protection and the marginalisation of smallholder farming. While these accounts emphasise the importance of land as the basis of social reproduction, their analytic approach links social reproduction to wider circuits of capitalist accumulation mostly taking place outside of these rural spaces.

How land-based forms of social reproduction articulate emergent accumulation patterns within specific rural spaces and how this affects gendered access to land and social reproduction deserve greater attention. Chapter 7 addresses these knowledge gaps by unravelling the relationship between commodity and non-commodity production within orchards.

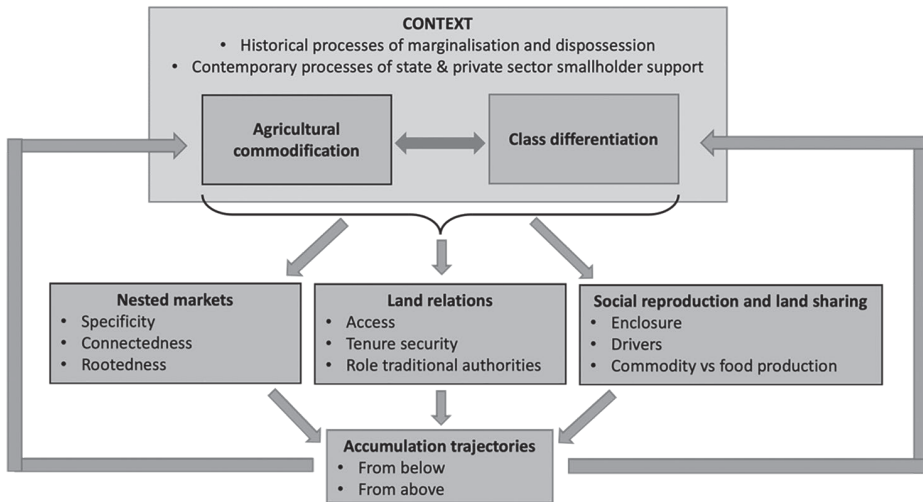
## 2.7 Conceptual scheme

This thesis takes agricultural commodification, focusing on tree crops, as an analytical starting point. The process of agricultural commodification is fundamental to the expansion of capitalist relations in the countryside, transforming modes of production and the accompanying social relations in the process. I approach agricultural commodification as deeply contingent on historical and contemporary political processes. The historical process is associated with the dark legacy of apartheid that resulted in the dispossession and marginalisation of the South African peasantry. The contemporary processes partly seek to address this through state and private sector policies supporting the integration of smallholders into high-value commodity circuits. Both processes provide the broad contours within which the contemporary processes are unfolding.

I take a Marxist agrarian political economy perspective and therefore centre the concept of class relations, differentiation and accumulation to foreground the unevenness of this process and how it affects smallholder accumulation trajectories. But “the extent of agrarian differentiation can be measured by indicators such as land ownership and access to capital, labour and other resources, but analysis of the processes through which it occurs requires attention to *social relations, meanings and practices*” (Li, 2002, p. 417, emphasis added). I use a rural anthropology perspective to embed the broad agrarian political economy perspective in these everyday situated practices. I conceptualise class differentiation as both an outcome of and an influencing factor in processes of agricultural commodification, mediated by changing land access relations (Chapter 5), market relations (Chapter 6), and social reproduction relations (Chapter 7). By examining these processes, I draw conclusions on how and what shapes uneven accumulation trajectories amongst smallholders (Chapters 4 and 8). Figure 2.1 visualises

how these theoretical strands and concepts relate and guide the analysis in the empirical chapters and the key dimensions used to explore each concept.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual scheme



Source: Author

## Chapter 3

# Research methodology<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> This chapter integrates relevant material from the four published papers that make up chapters 4-7 (see note of publication and co-authorship page xi).



### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that underpins this thesis. I first describe the overarching approach that informs the research and the research design (Section 3.2). This includes positioning the research within the broader research project of which it was part (Section 3.2.1), the choice and implication of a mixed-method sequential design (Section 3.2.2), and the adoption of an ethnographic orientation and the related implications (Section 3.2.3). Following this, I contextualise the study area and the choice of a single case study (Section 3.3), present the data collection process and related methods (Section 3.4), and how the data was processed and analysed (Section 3.5). The chapter ends with a brief reflection on the quality and limitations of this study (Section 3.6).

### 3.2 Research design and approach

#### 3.2.1 Embedding within the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration project

This research project falls within a larger research project– the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration (VCC) project<sup>11</sup> funded by the Global Challenge Programme of NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development. The project was carried out by a consortium of universities and public and private organisations involved in agricultural research and business from the Netherlands, Ghana, and South Africa. The project aimed to examine whether and how value chain collaborations with smallholders could be made more inclusive of poor farmers, women and the environment. The overall project is based on a comparative case study design to explore these dynamics in Ghana among cocoa and oil palm farmers and South Africa among macadamia and avocado farmers. It envisaged using action research<sup>12</sup> to facilitate institutional innovation, with learning platforms being the primary means of doing so. Learning platforms in this context are intended to be areas for joint learning and negotiated knowledge (van Ewijk et al., 2022, under review). “Our primary aim is to mediate between different knowledge systems across different governance levels. We thus hope to contribute to facilitating technological and institutional innovations” (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015, p. 535). The project was designed around annual learning platforms in both Ghana and South Africa, which comprised an essential component of the project’s research agenda.

My role within the project was to conduct research focused on the South African case in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. My research intended to focus on three themes: identifying the characteristic differences between smallholder tree-

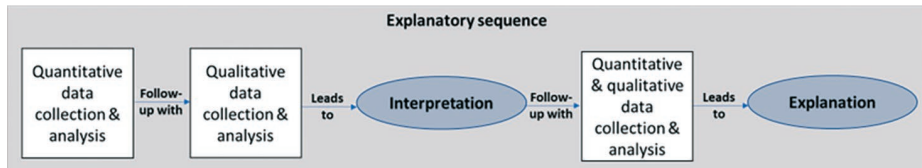
<sup>11</sup> See <https://inclusivevcc.wordpress.com/home/>.

<sup>12</sup> Later discussions in the research team questioned whether the limited presence of researchers in the field and hence limited contribution to transformative change justified the label ‘action research’ and whether it is was not better to speak of ‘engaged research’ instead (van Ewijk et al., 2022, under review).

crop farmers and their different livelihood trajectories, gender dynamics, and food sovereignty amongst the smallholder tree-crop farmers engaged in the macadamia and avocado value chains (Ros-Tonen, 2014, p. 4). Besides doing the research, I was expected to participate in the annual learning platforms by sharing my research findings and being involved in related project activities such as collecting baseline survey data at the commencement of the project. My positioning within this broader project had several implications for my research. Most significantly, the annual learning platforms meant that I returned to the field annually. Although the bulk of my fieldwork was conducted during the first two years (Appendix 1), during the subsequent years, I planned time for my research activities alongside the learning platform activities. This allowed for a unique opportunity to build trusting relationships with the farmers, who were seeing me returning year on year and thus became more willing to open up and share information. In addition, it allowed me to follow closely the rapid developments related to tree-crop commercialisation and expansion. Being part of this project also posed some challenges. In particular, it generated research fatigue amongst many farmers, as numerous students, postdocs and researchers from local consortium partners and enumerators conducting the project baseline survey all came and went, often covering similar ground in their research interests. Most farmers never saw any results from these activities, leaving some reluctance to talk to yet another white person coming and asking questions.

### **3.2.2 Sequential mixed-method research design**

This research focuses on the social and relational aspects of tree-crop commodification and its effects on the livelihood trajectories of smallholder farmers (Chapter 1). The analysis comprises two levels. At the individual level, I examined what determines the nature and degree of socio-economic differentiation between farmers (sub-question 1). At the relational level, I explored how changing land-access arrangements, land-use patterns, and market relations affect accumulation trajectories (sub-questions 2 to 4). In addressing these questions, this study uses a sequential mixed-method design (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 71) (Figure 3.1). This enables an iterative research process that moves from quantitative to qualitative data collection and analysis during an explanatory sequence (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 81). This sequential approach ideally stretches over time, each phase building on the previous one. I structured my fieldwork and related sequential phases of this research design around the annual learning platforms of the Inclusive VCC project. Fieldwork and data collection took place over 10.5 months, spread over seven separate trips between 2015 and 2019 (Appendix 1).

**Figure 3.1** Sequential mixed-method design

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Clark, 2011.

The sequential design creates a basis for explaining the nature and degree of differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers (Chapter 4). It took place in two distinct yet iterative steps. Firstly, collecting and analysing quantitative data gathered via a farmer survey (Section 3.4.2), followed by collecting and analysing qualitative data through in-depth interviews (Section 3.4.3), focus groups (Section 3.4.4) and participant and non-participant observation (Section 3.4.5) to interpret the initial survey findings in more depth.

A subsequent quantitative and qualitative data collection phase was added to the sequence to develop and further explore and explain the findings relating to land access dynamics (Chapter 5), involving secondary data analysis from municipal and traditional authority records (Section 3.4.6). This additional step aimed to extend qualitative findings centred on a few in-depth individual cases to a larger sample (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 86).

Using a sequential approach was especially useful due to the dynamics inherent in the nascent form of tree-crop commercialisation in the area (Section 1.4.4). In addition, the sequential design proved particularly useful for sampling respondents, whereby the quantitative methods provided an overview of the population from which purposive sampling methods were then used to identify individuals for follow-up interviews (Bryman, 2008, p. 619; Section 3.4.3). Moreover, the mixed-methods approach was valuable for triangulation, ensuring greater validity and credibility of findings (Bryman, 2008, p. 611; Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 62; Section 3.6).

Regarding the relationship and interaction between the qualitative and quantitative methods in this study, the qualitative findings are emphasised and given greater priority both in the collection process and the subsequent analysis. This is mainly because much of the survey data collected dealt with production and yield variables, which proved highly unreliable. First, orchards are generally in varying stages of development, with a large portion of respondents having large numbers of trees which have not yet come into production. Second, accurate data on production costs was also difficult to acquire because few people kept records, and many could not remember the prices of inputs. Third, figures on earnings were difficult to acquire, particularly for macadamia, where

payments are usually made over four separate payments that span a year, making it difficult for people to recall their total earnings. This said, the survey provided valuable insights into general characteristics, particularly land relations, which subsequently informed the qualitative inquiry. In this manner, the quantitative data provided a general overview, informing the subsequent qualitative methods, and finally, the qualitative findings, which in turn were triangulated by returning to and following up with additional quantitative and qualitative data.

It must be noted that the general focus of the research and preliminary questions were predefined within the general scope of the Inclusive VCC project. However, the research questions and methods evolved in response to the empirical findings. The explanatory sequential designs described above emerged largely from the research process. The prominence of land relations, particularly access and control over land, was not initially identified but emerged as a critical factor from the survey results. Similarly, the importance of land-sharing arrangements between orchard and non-orchard owners only became evident during the qualitative phase. In both cases, the findings informed a new set of research questions and methods.

### **3.2.3 Ethnographic orientation, positionality and related dilemmas**

An ethnographic orientation, as the name suggests, provides orientation as opposed to a specific method that relies primarily on participant observation. All the methods elaborated below are used as opportunities for ethnographic observations and encounters. For example, instead of getting a research assistant to conduct the surveys, which may have been more efficient, I conducted all the surveys myself with the help of a research assistant only for translation where necessary. Where possible, I arranged to meet farmers at their farms, and when it was feasible, I got involved in the activities that were taking place at the time. This allowed ample opportunity for general observations about agricultural practices and farm characteristics. Such observations, coupled with the informal interactions with the interviewees and labourers or family members encountered at the farm, all provided invaluable insights recorded in a logbook. While in the field, I immersed myself in the social setting to gain a deeper understanding of the culture, values, and practices and understand these and the choices people make by focusing on their experiences, perceptions, and the meanings attributed to them. For most of my time in the field, I lived with a local family, which gave me great insights into the local culture and practices. This also helped me build a local network and provided many opportunities to be involved in community life by attending church, funerals, marriage ceremonies, or simply preparing and sharing food. Such occasions provided ample opportunities to build relationships, leading to fruitful discussions about life,



culture and politics, all of which assisted me in situating and making sense of changing agrarian relations that formed the foundation of this research.

Working from an ethnographic orientation entails specific methodological considerations stemming from the direct role of the researcher during data collection and analysis. The positionality of the researcher and accompanying reflexivity on how this impacts the research process has received much attention in the context of ethnographic research, especially from feminist scholars (Abbott, 2007; Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997; Stacey, 1988). The centrality of the researcher in this approach is key during both the process of accessing knowledge and the subsequent theorising and analysis. Rose (1997) elaborates on this concept by referring to ‘situated knowledges’, the idea that all knowledge is produced through deeply social and embodied forms of interaction of which the researcher is an important part. All knowledge from this perspective is recognised as partial, socially produced and situated. As an educated white woman from Cape Town, I was immediately perceived as a privileged outsider by most black smallholder farmers. However, I was quickly accepted and easily gained access to these spaces among the white commercial farming community. Both race and gender remain very pertinent and defining features in contemporary South Africa and had important implications for my navigating the study area. Although my research primarily involved smallholders, I also engaged with white commercial farmers as they play an increasingly important role in providing support to smallholders. They do so both as individual enterprises and as the main stakeholders in the commodity association in the area that is actively engaging with the national transformation agenda (Section 1.4.4 on Subtrop and SAMAC). While my positionality as a white South African female gave me privileged access to the white commercial farming sector and related activities, it often left me in a compromised position. The blatant racist attitudes I encountered in some quarters of the white farming community became increasingly difficult to negotiate. When encountering comments such as “why are you bothering with those guys [smallholder farmers], all they know how to do is build mud huts”, I felt like I needed to challenge and provide a counter-narrative, but I knew this could lead to heated and confrontational situations, potentially compromising my future access to such spaces. Holding back on calling out and challenging such attitudes and hiding my ethical values to ensure my future access and thus prioritising my research agenda left me feeling deeply compromised.

My identity also set up many expectations amongst the farmers I was researching. For many, I was perceived as someone with the financial means or at least links to extensive networks that could provide inputs and related support. Despite communicating my role and position and clarifying that my research would not directly impact the farmers, many of the farmers I encountered still saw me as someone who could potentially assist them in accessing resources. Such perceptions and expectations biased our interactions

and responses to questions, whereby on my arrival, I was often presented with a wish list of all the farmers' needs, and during conversation and interviews, responses were often steered towards the extensive needs of farmers for agricultural inputs and other support. In some cases, I felt that farmers downplayed the productivity of their orchards and related income to emphasise their need for support with the expectation that my visit could somehow facilitate access to inputs and other support. Contrasting cases were well-established orchards with high yields, where farmers were often reluctant to disclose their earnings. This meant that the accuracy of much of the quantitative data around income and expenses became questionable. This was no reason to disregard this data but to use it as an indication rather than an accurate reflection of reality.

Having no knowledge of the local languages, Tshivenda and XiTsonga, I worked closely with a local research assistant. I was lucky to have been introduced to Mr Prince Mageza, a middle-aged Tsonga man fluent in both languages and with extensive experience working as a research assistant and translator. With a background in sociology and psychology, a sensitivity to cultural etiquette, and a keen sense of observation, he proved invaluable throughout the research process. Initially, I conducted many farmer visits with Prince meticulously translating and relaying both what was said and explaining the cultural nuances. Working with Prince helped in the initial phase, especially with navigating our way across the very remote areas of Venda and meeting people for the first time. Even if their English was quite good, arriving and being introduced by a local made people more open to receive me. However, working with a translator had limitations, like slowing the conversation and providing less space for spontaneous dialogue. I ended up relying less and less on Prince as I developed closer relationships with farmers, especially those with a good command of English (which ended up being the majority of the farmers in the area). Although this somewhat biases my sample, it enabled more fluid and spontaneous conversations, yielding greater insights.

When conducting focus group discussions with women from the various communities, I decided to work with a female translator and someone familiar with the communities. I worked with Mrs Mphatheleni Makaulule, a well-respected community activist who works in the area of indigenous knowledge preservation and education. She had a strong network across numerous villagers and used these networks to mobilise women for the focus group discussions. Gaining access through Mphatheleni to the women in these communities had the advantage of immediately being trusted and welcomed, but it also posed certain limitations. Mphatheleni had previously done a lot of work with these communities around indigenous knowledge and developing a specific ecological consciousness, and many of the discussion points I had prepared for the focus groups ended up being discussed related to key concepts and ideas that came out of Mphatheleni's

previous work with them. Perhaps the terminology she used in her translation also played a role in the subsequent framing of the discussion.

### 3.3 The study area

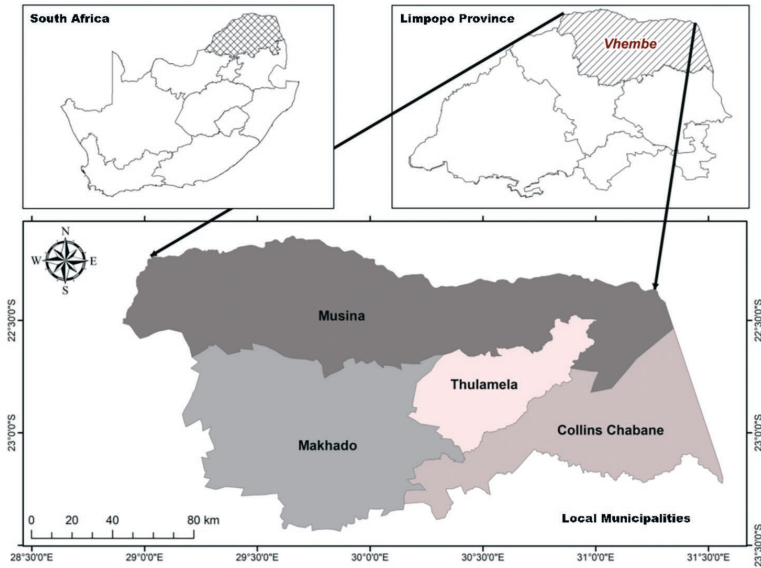
This study is located within the Thulamela and Makhado local municipalities in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (Figure 3.2). These municipalities broadly fall within the former homelands of Venda and Gazankulu. I selected these locations as they constitute the main area where smallholders practise subtropical fruit and nut production.

Limpopo Province is important for agriculture as it has the country's highest number of households involved in agriculture, with 41% involved in agricultural production of some kind (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). For only 1.7% of these, agriculture is the primary source of income, and for only 1.8%, it is the main food source. Most farming households (91.5%) practise agriculture on a subsistence level as an additional source of food, and 4.4% engage in agriculture as an additional income source. A minority practises agriculture as a leisure activity (Statistics South Africa, 2017a, p. 58). The smallholder tree-crop farmers in this study are situated within the small niche of farmers gaining an income from agriculture. Despite their market orientation making them a minority in the broader context of agricultural production, they are an important group to focus on, given the growing attention on agricultural commercialisation amongst smallholders in the province (LDARD, 2015).

The Vhembe District's total area is 2,140,708 ha, of which only 249,757 ha is arable, most of which is spread between the Thulamela and Makhado municipalities (Figure 3.2). The arable land suitable for subtropical fruit and nut cultivation is concentrated in the district's southwest and east. Of this arable land, 174,830 ha (70%) is owned by large-scale, primarily white commercial farmers, and 74,927 ha (30%) is communal land farmed by small-scale black farmers (VDM, 2020, p. 158).

The Soutpansberg mountain range runs from east to west through a large part of these municipalities, dividing the area into two agroecological systems. The northern side is mainly semi-arid, with livestock farming and game ranching being the main activities and limited horticulture where water is available. The southern side is a subtropical regional hub with high rainfall, above 700mm per annum, making it suitable for cultivating subtropical fruits, nuts, cereals and vegetables (Oni et al., 2012). The Levubu Valley falls on the southern side and is the main growing area for large, primarily white-owned, commercial farmers producing subtropical fruits and nuts. On the other hand, smallholders cultivate takes place in comparatively small orchards spread across ten traditional authorities across the southern side of the Soutpansberg (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.2** Vhembe local municipalities and their location within South Africa



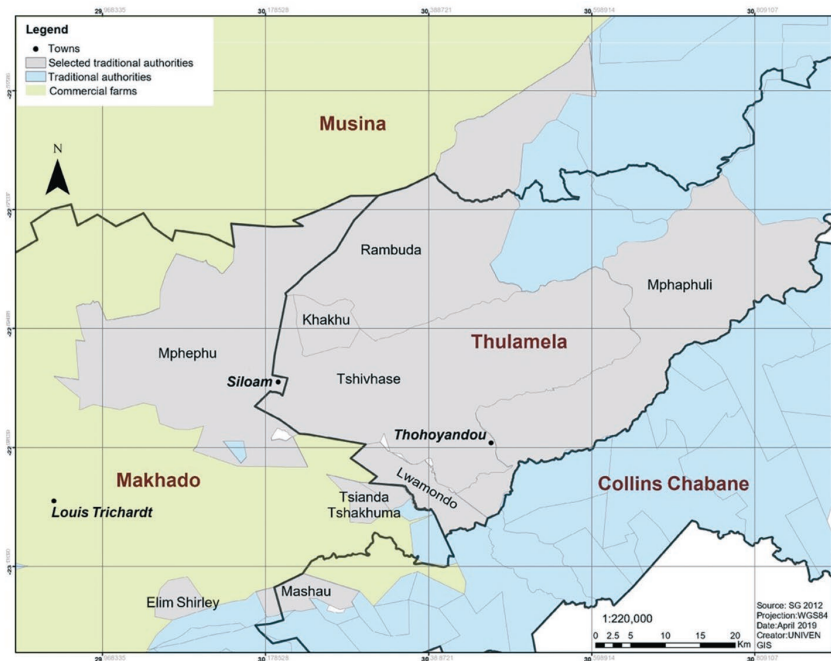
Source: Prepared for the author by Farai Dondofema, GIS Resource Centre, University of Venda, edited by Kwabena Asubonteng.

Over the past half-century, tree-crop orchards have been essential landscape features. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Venda Department of Agriculture (VDA) actively promoted independent small-scale farming and supported smallholders by helping with marketing, input provision, and extension services (Lahiff, 1997). Mango, avocado and, to a lesser extent, litchi, banana and guava were cultivated in orchards, and by 1985 it was estimated that there were 563 orchard farmers, owning on average 6.7 ha each (Lahiff, 1997, p. 115).

Around 2002, the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD) started encouraging smallholders in this district to grow new cultivars of fruits and nuts required by fast-growing export markets as part of their new commodity-focused approach to agricultural development (Section 1.4.4). Commodity-focused study groups, subsidised trees, and later project financing through revenues generated by the statutory levy on macadamia (DAFF, 2014b; NAMC, 2018) and various other public and private sector initiatives to support smallholders in these high-value commodity chains contributed to the rapid growth of an emergent smallholder tree-crop sector. How much of this area is cultivated with which crops is not clear from the available data.

Also, the exact size of the smallholder tree-crop farming sector is difficult to determine. Data from LDARD in 2018 indicates that there are 1,113 smallholder orchard owners in Vhembe District.<sup>13</sup> The actual number could be substantially higher based on data collected from eight tribal authorities<sup>14</sup> who collectively reported to have 1,546 registered orchards covering 9,746 ha. The area of land allocated to individual orchards was 6 ha on average<sup>15</sup>, but the sizes vary considerably depending on available land, geographic features and patronage.

Figure 3.3 Traditional authorities where smallholder orchards are located



Source: Prepared for the author by Farai Dondofema, GIS Resource Centre, University of Venda, edited by Kwabena Asubonteng.

<sup>13</sup> Data acquired from LDARD records updated in 2018.

<sup>14</sup> These tribal authorities were selected based on the proliferation of orchards in their respective territories and included: Tsianda, Lwamondo, Khaku, Njhakanjaka, Tshakuma, Rambuda, Mphephu, Tshivase.

<sup>15</sup> This number was determined from the data collected from the records of eight tribal authorities that comprise the main growing areas.

The most commonly grown tree crops in the area are macadamia, avocado, litchi, citrus and mango. The high initial investment and ongoing input cost of farming subtropical fruit and nuts<sup>16</sup> have meant that most farmers have only partially developed their land. Even where orchards are established, smallholder yields are comparatively low compared to the large-scale, highly mechanised commercial farmers, as smallholder orchards rely on limited input and are farmed mostly under dryland conditions. In addition to orchards, there are also 42 irrigation schemes, covering 6363 ha, where cash and subsistence food crops are cultivated and a further 13,145 ha under maize cultivation. Like other former homelands, land access is governed by a traditional authority, and use rights are secured via a permission to occupy (PTO) certificate issued by the local municipalities based on an authorisation from the relevant traditional leaders.

### 3.4 Data collection and sampling methods

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the sequencing of the respective fieldwork phases. The iterative nature of the mixed method design enabled each fieldwork phase to advance from the previous ones, and the research questions evolved during this process as emergent themes and findings prompted a revision of the initial questions.

#### 3.4.1 Literature review

The literature review followed an ad hoc method, guided by my research questions and the related key concepts. Three strategies were used to search for relevant literature. Firstly, I searched the scientific indexing database Scopus to find the most relevant scientific publications, including journal articles, academic books and monographs. This was combined with a Google Scholar search to find relevant material not captured by Scopus, such as grey literature, non-indexed articles, and working papers. Search terms were grouped based on key terms that defined the overall scope of the study<sup>17</sup>, and these were then combined in varying combinations with groups of terms related to the key concepts.<sup>18</sup> I limited the search for these terms in Scopus to the title, abstract and keywords, with no specific time frame applied.

<sup>16</sup> Establishment costs for an orchard are estimated to be around R100 000p/ha for the first year and R25,000p/ha per annum until the trees reach maturity after 7-8 years (Interview with SAMAC representative, 15 August 2018, via phone).

<sup>17</sup> The main keywords (“smallholder\*” OR “small-holder\*” OR “small-scale farmer\*” OR “small landholder\*” OR “small scale\*” OR “small farm\*”) AND (“politic\*” OR “socio\*” OR “social” OR “empower\*” OR “power\*” OR “relation\*” OR “agrarian change” OR “agrarian reform” OR “agrarian transition\*” OR “inclusive” OR “livelihood\*” OR “tenure”) AND (“tree-crop\*” OR “fruit tree\*” OR “olive\*” OR “macadamia\*” OR “avocado\*” OR “pecan\*” OR “nectarine\*” OR “plum” OR “plums” OR “mango” OR “mangos” OR “banana\*” OR “litchi\*” OR “apple\*” OR “pear” OR “pears” OR “citrus\*”).

<sup>18</sup> Key concepts groupings (polarisation OR differentiation OR diversity) (commodification AND accumulation) (“customary land market\*” OR “vernacular land market\*” OR “customary land sale\*”).

**Table 3.1** Sequential overview of methods, respondents and objectives

Phase	Focus	Method	Who	When
1	Socio-economic differentiation: overview of demographics, production, farm, markets, changes over time, institutional support and challenges	Survey Participant and non-participant observation	Orchard farmers (n=80)	Aug-Oct 2015 March-May 2016
2	Explaining socio-economic differentiation and exploring farmers' livelihood trajectories	In-depth semi-structured interviews Participant and non-participant observation	Orchard farmers (n=27)	March-May 2016 Aug-Sep 2016
3	Orchard expansion and food production: exploring the relationship between orchards, environmental change and food production	Focus groups Non-participant observation	Focus groups (n=4); total participants (n=28, M=7 F=21)	July-Aug 2017
4	Land relations: land acquisition and transactions	Semi-structured interviews Non-participant observation	Farmers (n=14) Traditional leaders (n=10)	June-July 2018
5	Land-sharing arrangements: exploring the relations between orchard owners and subsistence farmers	Structured and semi-structured interviews Non-participant observations	Subsistence farmers (i) using orchards n=13 (ii) using communal land n=17	March 2019
6	Triangulating findings on land transactions	Semi-structured interviews Quantitative document review	Municipal officers from the planning division (n=2); municipalities (n=2); traditional authority records (n=9)	
7	Institutional support	Semi-structured interviews Qualitative document analysis	State officials (i) National (n=1) (ii) District (n=11) Private sector (i) Commercial farmers (n=3) (ii) Commodity associations (n=2)	March 2016- March 2019

Source: Author

(“agrarian market\*” OR “nested markets” OR “alternative food system\*” OR “territorial markets”) (“Social reproduction” OR “agrarian feminism” OR “land-based social reproduction”).

Secondly, I searched using backwards citation tracing, whereby the reference list of relevant articles was reviewed for relevant articles based on their titles. In addition, I also used forward citation tracing, whereby I reviewed work citing specific articles deemed highly relevant. The number of citations for a specific article was also used to gauge the relevance of specific articles. Thirdly, a broad scoping search using a less refined search strategy was conducted in the two most relevant critical agrarian studies journals.<sup>19</sup> These two journals were selected as they both take an agrarian political economy perspective and are highly ranked in the critical agrarian studies domain. Articles were appraised according to their relevance based on the titles and abstracts. The relevant literature was organised according to concept categories using the referencing software Mendeley and prioritised according to their relevance and importance.

### 3.4.2 Survey

The first quantitative data collection phase started with a survey of tree-crop farmers (Appendix 2) to gain a general overview of the sector and the nature and degree of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers (Chapter 4). This was complemented and elaborated with qualitative data to explain how structural and relational dynamics influence individual livelihood trajectories. Focusing on the unfolding processes, participant and non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3 and 4) and focus groups (Appendix 5) were used to elaborate and explain findings from the survey.

The survey (n=80) was conducted between August-October 2015 and March-May 2016. Respondents for the survey were identified from the Department of Agriculture's database and the supplier database of the three leading processors and exporters of macadamia and avocados. From the respective databases, an attempt was made to cover both local municipalities in Limpopo where tree crops are being cultivated, namely Makhado and Thulamela. Only individual smallholders growing tree crops in these areas were included; land reform beneficiaries were excluded.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the geographical spread, an attempt was made to ensure an as diverse a sample as possible. Farmers were included if they were growing macadamia or avocado trees regardless of scale or primary focus of their production. To avoid a sample bias favouring those already integrated into

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<sup>19</sup> The Journal of Peasant Studies and The Journal of Agrarian Change.

<sup>20</sup> There are a relatively large number of land restitution cases in the Limpopo Province, whereby communities who were dispossessed of land after 1913 could claim land through the national land reform programme. The dynamics that unfolded in these cases are very specific, most notably due to the commercial farming model that underpinned these community farming ventures. For this reason, they are excluded from this study which focuses on smallholders.



markets and visible to the state<sup>21</sup> – which could have been the case if only the databases mentioned above were used – snowball sampling followed the initial farmer interviews. In this way, farmers working outside of state support structure or not selling through formal channels were also included, comprising about 50% of the final sample. Respondents were individuals who had the *de facto* use rights to the land where their orchards were planted.<sup>22</sup> The final sample (n=80) was made up primarily of farmers whose primary crop was macadamia<sup>23</sup> (n=37), avocado (n=22), and vegetables (n=21)<sup>24</sup>. For the latter, tree crops only had secondary importance.

Data collected included demographic and income-related data and farm-related variables (total land area under the control of the interviewee; access to and use of land and other natural resources); the nature of labour and market relations; ownership and access to capital assets; the focus of production; and livelihood diversification. In addition, data was collected on gender relations and changes in agricultural production over time.

### 3.4.3 Semi-structured individual interviews

A total of 78 individual semi-structured interviews (Table 3.2) and 30 structured interviews (Table 3.3) were carried out over several fieldwork phases. Interviews were broadly structured around key themes, depending on the interviewee, with a series of open-ended questions intended to steer the interview but ample space for other unplanned topics to emerge (see interview guides Appendix 3-6). As discussed in Section 3.2.2, each data collection phase informed the next phase, both in terms of themes and selection of informants.

Initially, 27 farmers were identified using purposive sampling based on the cluster analysis of the survey data (Section 3.5 and the results in Chapter 4), ensuring that each of the four clusters was represented. These individuals were interviewed during Phase 2. Key themes for these interviews emerged from the quantitative survey results and included a specific focus on land access, production, markets, livelihood activities and contextualising farmers' trajectories related to key events in their life course and farmers' perspectives on factors shaping the broader patterns of socio-economic differentiation

<sup>21</sup> Only 9.9% of households reported receiving agricultural-related support from the government (Statistics South Africa, 2017a, p. 59).

<sup>22</sup> Ownership was usually determined by the person having the permission-to-occupy registered in his or her name or the *de facto* rights to the orchards in the case of inheritance where the permission-to-occupy certificate had not yet been transferred.

<sup>23</sup> Note that very few farmers focus on a single tree crop.

<sup>24</sup> Estimates of the total number of smallholder tree-crop farmers are varied. According to the 2018 records of LDARD, there are 1,113. My own calculation based on records from 9 traditional authorities arrived at 1,546 registered orchards. Subtrop had 228 registered smallholder tree-crop farmers in 2017.

identified from the survey. This round of data collection informed the analysis presented in Chapters 4 through 7.

**Table 3.2** Interviewee profiles for semi-structured interviews

Profile	n
Farmer (m)	46
Farmer (f)	4
Government official <sup>25</sup>	13
Traditional leaders and traditional authority administrators	10
Commercial farmers in processing and exporting	3
Commodity group representative (Suptrop and SAMAC)	2
Total	78

*Source:* Author.

Land relations, particularly land access and transactions, emerged as an important dynamic during the first two fieldwork phases, which became the focus during Phase 4 (Chapter 5). Having collected a significant amount of information on how land was acquired historically via the survey and the subsequent explanatory interviews conducted in Phase 2, I focused on interviewing individuals who had recently acquired land. These interviews (Appendix 6) aimed to cover how land is accessed (e.g. via traditional authorities or private land transactions), the scale, and the temporal and spatial dynamics of these land transactions. Initially, respondents were identified via the survey and subsequently via snowballing. This way, 16 farmers were selected for in-depth interviews on land-related dynamics. Based on these interviews, four farmers were identified for annual follow-up interviews over the subsequent two years due to their active engagement in land acquisition (Boxes 5.1-5.4). The individuals interviewed on land relations do not necessarily represent the broader population of smallholder tree-crop farmers. Instead, they demonstrate emergent dynamics that are deemed of critical importance considering the projected growth of this sector and the growing emphasis from both the public and private sectors on promoting and facilitating smallholder access to these commodity chains. As land access is central to the development of these new commodity arrangements, the documented emergent processes provide important

<sup>25</sup> This included representatives from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, the municipal Division of Spatial Planning, and the National Agricultural Marketing Council.

indications for possible future trajectories of the scope and scale of land access, accumulation and consolidation, and the growing inequalities in land access that could accompany these processes. To situate the detailed individual cases in the broader scale and scope of land transactions within communal areas, data collected from individual farmers was triangulated with interviews with traditional leaders (Appendix 7), non-participant observation and numerous informal conversations. In addition, this was triangulated with the records of nine traditional authorities and two municipalities within which these subtropical commodities are grown (Section 3.4.6).

Another theme that emerged from the first two phases was how orchards are used as a site for subsistence cultivation (Chapter 7). These arrangements were explored during Phases 3 and 5 using data gathered during the first two phases, complemented by interviewing villagers who use orchards to cultivate maize. The latter set of structured interviews (Appendix 8) was conducted with subsistence-oriented farmers who cultivate maize and other food crops in other people's orchards to gain insight into the role of orchards in subsistence production. Interviews were also conducted with subsistence cultivators using communal land to understand better the conditions under which orchards become an important site for subsistence production.

**Table 3.3** Interviewee profile for structured interviews

Profile	n
Subsistence farming in orchards (f)	9
Subsistence farming in orchards (m)	4
Subsistence farming on communal land (f)	12
Subsistence farming on communal land (m)	5
Total	30

*Source:* Author.

Respondents were purposively selected by identifying the orchards where maize was grown, tracking down the cultivators, and subsequently using snowball sampling. These interviews explored basic demographic information, motivations for entering into land-sharing arrangements with orchard owners (or not), the nature of these arrangements, production dynamics, changes over time and general perceptions of the relationship between orchards and food production (Appendix 8).

#### **3.4.4 Focus groups**

Focus groups were conducted to gain insight into the perceptions of community members about the expansion of orchards and the related implication for livelihood activities (Chapters 6 and 7). The focus group format was selected to stimulate conversation and interactions within the group in response to key topics and questions (Appendix 5) and to observe how meaning is jointly constructed. In a group setting, participants in all three groups preferred to speak their native tongue, which presented somewhat of a practical dilemma as the facilitator also needed to do the translation. The simultaneous translation disrupted the group discussion, and the focus groups became more of a dialogue between the facilitator and individuals within the group. These focus groups were conducted in three villages (Tshivhale, Duthuni and Vuvha) selected based on the prevalence of tree-crop farming, coupled with Mphatheleni (the translator) having established networks in each of these locations. No specific attempts were made to define any criteria for participation. The invitation was sent out via an elder in the community. We conducted the focus group with those who turned up. Women were in the majority in all the four focus groups, and they comprised both wives of orchard owners and those who did not have orchards in the family. The men who participated represented a mix of orchard and non-orchard owners. The various perceptions and meanings of orchards for these different groups ensured animated interactions and discussions.

#### **3.4.5 Participant and non-participant observation**

Using an ethnographic orientation entailed not only relying on oral testimony but also giving importance to how people act and interact and the nuances of non-verbal communication. This follows feminist approaches to testimony which have emphasised that “people have different abilities to ‘speak’ and to ‘hear’, that reliance on direct speech alone, as evidence is unwise, and that speech is not to be equated with power and silence with weakness” (Jackson, 2006, p. 541). Beyond becoming sensitised to these social dynamics, observations of the physical environment lead to important avenues of enquiry. For example, the initial fieldwork trips were during the dry winter, and there was little activity in the orchards. However, subsequent trips in summer showed that the spaces between and around the orchards are important production areas for landless households to produce maize, the staple food. The barren alleys between the trees in winter are densely planted with maize during the rainy season. Such observations revealed that this research should also focus on landless households to explore the relationship between orchards and food production. Observing seasonal variation in land-use practices led to a new focus on land-sharing arrangements between farmers and landless households and the underlying motivations on both sides. Participant observation was employed in an integrated way alongside all the other methods outlined above. Interviews, farm visits,

informal interactions, daily life in the village, and participation in formal events such as meetings, training, and symposiums provided rich opportunities for non-participant observation.

### 3.4.6 Municipal and traditional authority records

The available records on land allocations and transactions from nine traditional authorities and the Makhado and Thulamela municipalities (Figure 3.2) were assessed. This was done to triangulate the data collected during individual interviews. Both organisations have key roles in land governance and administration of communal land: the traditional authorities allocate land vested in them, whereas the municipalities are responsible for land demarcation and administering land-use certificates (commonly referred to as permission to occupy and, more recently, permission to use). Both keep extensive records, but these vary in data type and quality. The traditional authorities have consistent and relatively up-to-date records (although they often did not go back very far) of the number of plots allocated for orchards and their respective sizes since they collect an annual use fee based on land size. However, they did not record land transactions per se. The quality and type of information from the two municipalities were not aligned or consistent with each other, and the registration of land transactions generally did not differentiate between sales and inheritance, making it challenging to get a broader picture of the scale and scope of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, this data indicates the general trends against which the empirical cases are triangulated.<sup>26</sup>

## 3.5 Data processing and analysis

### 3.5.1 Quantitative data processing and analysis

Survey data was processed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) using cluster analysis, which is designed to reveal natural groupings (clusters) within a dataset that would otherwise not be apparent (Norusis, 1994). These natural groupings are established by classifying a set of individuals into a smaller number of mutually exclusive groups based on their shared or similar attributes. This technique maximises the homogeneity within a cluster while maximising the heterogeneity between the clusters (Blaikie, 2003). Two-step clustering was chosen based on its ability to process different types of variables simultaneously since the data comprised both scale and categorical variables. Moreover, this method allows for identifying the optimal number of clusters. The two-stage approach comprises, first, the creation of pre-clusters by measuring the variation between cases. Similar cases are grouped, creating a relatively homogenous cluster with minimal variation within the cluster (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011, pp. 255-256). Second, a

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that there were no cases of smallholders in this study who acquired individual access to land through state-led land reform programmes.

modified hierarchical clustering method uses an algorithm to combine the pre-clusters sequentially to form homogeneous clusters (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011, p. 259). This is done by measuring the distance between the pre-clusters to determine how far apart (different) or close together (similar) they are.<sup>27</sup>

Key to any clustering method is the selection of variables against which the cases are clustered. Initially, 29 variables were selected from 155 variables to run the two-step cluster analysis. These variables collectively covered the key aspects of the survey: the nature of production, market orientation, assets (mainly focused on access to water, land, agricultural equipment and capital), labour, livelihood diversification, income and demographics. The results derived from these initial 29 variables were 'poor' in terms of 'goodness of fit', illustrating that a number of the variables used were not useful in determining the cluster formation. The predictor importance indicates which variables are considered most important in determining the clusters and which are the weakest, mapped on a scale of 0-1. Only the variables that fell above 0.2 were selected to arrive at a better cluster solution. The cluster analysis was rerun based on these 15 variables<sup>28</sup>, and the resulting cluster quality was considered 'fair'.<sup>29</sup> I decided to conduct the analysis based on the 'fair' result, which allows for a nuanced analysis that could illustrate both similarities and differences between the clusters. One of the advantages of two-step clustering is that the number of clusters can be automatically determined using two different measures of goodness of fit.<sup>30</sup> The final solution used for this analysis is based on the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) measure and comprises four clusters.

<sup>27</sup> The log-likelihood criterion was used as a distance measure for its ability to accommodate both continuous and categorical variables.

<sup>28</sup> Three variables were identified as the most important by the predictor importance: the importance of farming in the overall livelihood portfolio; the source of additional income; and the amount of additional income. There were followed by land size, ability to employ labour, education, age, access to finance, production costs, area cultivated, ability to hire seasonal labour, income from tree crops, year in which the land was acquired, total income from the tree- and other crops, and nature of labour. These fell within the range of 0.2-1.

<sup>29</sup> The fact that only three variables were considered strong predictors of importance in the clusters, with the remaining variables being of less importance to the overall cluster solution, largely accounts for the quality being 'fair'.

<sup>30</sup> Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC) and Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) are two measures of the goodness of fit that can be used to compare solutions with different numbers of clusters. The AIC is known for overestimating the "correct" number of clusters, while the BIC is considered to underestimate this number. Hence it is generally recommended to compare results and evaluate each solution on practical grounds in light of the solution's interpretability (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011, p. 279). In this case, the BIC criterion resulted in a three-cluster result, while the AIC resulted in a 4-clusters result. It was decided to proceed with the 4-cluster result as this one split the largest cluster into two smaller ones and thus provided scope for a more nuanced analysis of the emerging forms of social differentiation. Clustering illustrated lower standard deviations (SD) within clusters as compared to the general SD, which demonstrates the validity of the clusters.

The choice to use a multi-variate grouping procedure such as cluster analysis to explore socio-economic differentiation amongst farmers is due to the highly diversified nature of rural livelihoods. This diversity refers to the nature, focus and objective of agricultural production and the degree of market integration and resource access. Cluster analysis presents one way to address this complexity: it is a convenient way of grouping data and identifying similarity measures when the data is highly varied and comprise both scale and categorical variables (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). However, it also has limitations: clusters emerge based on a few predefined key variables, potentially overlooking other relevant factors, while they also share other characteristics to varying degrees. Therefore, boundaries separating the clusters are often fluid, reflected in the cluster quality being considered 'fair'. However, as a heuristic tool, cluster analysis conveniently helps identify key characteristics that illustrate social differentiation from a class-based perspective.

When interpreting the data, it should be noted that the orchards of most farmers in the sample are in varying stages of development, often not having reached full maturity, and hence current yields are much smaller than anticipated future yields. This makes it difficult to do any substantial profitability analysis at this stage, as illustrated by the high standard deviations of income and costs data. Hence, the data on yields and income and ultimately farm profitability and level of surplus generation needs to be considered a tentative measure alongside the current size of land under cultivation and level of mechanisation.

### 3.5.2 Qualitative data processing and analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed or recorded in extensive field notes. Digital recordings were made when the interviews took place in a more formal setting, while extensive notes were made in the many instances when interviews happened in a more dynamic and unstructured manner, for example, during a farm tour. General fieldwork notes comprising methodological, descriptive and analytic reflections were made continuously. I transcribed all the recorded interviews, making informed choices about what to transcribe verbatim and what to summarise. This was necessary as the semi-structured interviews comprised many open questions that often resembled more of an unstructured interview. Hence, large parts of the data collected provided me with important contextual information but were not always necessary for the subsequent coding and analysis phase and hence were not transcribed. Atlas.ti was used for coding and analysis, and a two-stage strategy was followed. In the first phase, descriptive coding was used – a method that essentially summarises qualitative data by using a word or phrase (most often a noun) to capture the main topic of the content being analysed (Saldana, 2009, p. 70). The basic code labels assigned to the text provide a broad and inclusive inventory of topics covered, representing something of an index

of the data content. This was followed by the second phase of pattern coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 152), whereby emergent themes, configurations or explanations identified from the first coding round are grouped under overarching meta codes that capture broader themes and dynamics.

### **3.6 Reflections on the limitations and quality of the research**

As with any academic work, this research endeavour has inevitable limitations. Firstly, this has to do with the choice of going for empirical depth by focusing on a single case study using an ethnographic orientation. This is justified by the prevalence of tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders in the Vhembe Region compared to other regions. However, this region's specific cultural, social, and geographical features could make it unique compared to other locations such as in Kwa Zulu Natal and Mpumalanga, where tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders is expanding, or even further afield in Mozambique or Malawi, where similar processes are underway. The implication of this narrow spatial focus is discussed below in relation to the generalisability of these findings.

A second limitation has to do with the temporal nature of tree-crop commodities. These crops are slow to mature and capital-intensive, which means orchard establishment by smallholders is an incremental endeavour. With the relatively new emphasis on tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders in the study area, this research focuses on emergent properties. This has inevitable limitations for the collection of data on income and profitability. This limitation is further elaborated below in relation to reliability.

Lastly, substantive limitations result from my disciplinary expertise as a social scientist taking an anthropological approach and the theoretical and conceptual framing of this thesis. By focusing on class relations and processes of differentiation amongst smallholders, important aspects of agronomy, environment and climate-related aspects are not considered. These are, of course, critical areas that stand to have significant impacts on the future trajectories and sustainability of smallholder tree-crop farming in the study area. These limitations are linked to avenues for future research that I address in Section 8.6.

The quality of this research is assessed following Bryman's (2012) elaboration on validity, reliability and generalisability. Each of these will be addressed in relation to the accompanying limitations I encountered.

Concerning validity, a key question is how appropriate the methods and observations are for measuring the concepts and addressing the research questions. In other words, do the findings present a realistic account of the phenomenon studied, and subsequently, one can gauge the credibility of one's findings (often referred to as internal validity) and the transferability of the findings (external validity, which will be dealt with below under



generalisability). Embedding this research within the Inclusive VCC project (Section 3.2.1) enabled me to use the annual learning platforms and special events convened through the project as a space to validate my research findings amongst my peers, farmers, private sector value chain actors, and LDARD staff members. These groups are deemed experts on different aspects of the subject being investigated. Presenting my ongoing research findings and related theoretical insights at these platform meetings enabled me to gain feedback and validate my findings and theoretical reflections. The inputs received this way in the form of questions for clarification and concerns directed me to strengthen specific ideas and expand on empirical material where evidence was deemed insufficient. Also relating to the embedding within the Inclusive VCC project was its long-term nature, which enabled me to visit the field at least annually over five years. This enabled me to develop relationships with interlocutors and a greater level of trust and openness to share experiences, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the data.

Regarding reliability, using multiple methods during the mixed-method sequential design enabled an iterative research process that helped with data triangulation. This was particularly important in the case of collecting data on land transactions which are a highly contentious issue. In this case, data was collected during interviews with farmers (both buyers and sellers of land) and traditional leaders, as well as through primary document analysis of municipal records and records kept by the traditional authority administrative clerks. In this way, data from the various sources could be compared, and large discrepancies were found between sources, exposing the lack of reliability of this type of data. This was not entirely unexpected as illicit land transactions are notoriously shrouded in secrecy. While the accuracy of the data itself may not be reliable, the overall trends identified are useful to build the argument made in chapter 5 about emerging vernacular land markets.

An important limitation concerning internal reliability was related to researching a commodity with a long-term horizon. The fact that many tree crops had not yet come into full production meant that the quantitative data collected on production and income dynamics was partial. For example, the area planted with tree crops was captured, but the age of the trees and the cultivars were not accounted for; hence, the income figures were not representative of the potential earnings. Another limitation was that record keeping amongst the sample group was minimal, and hence there was a heavy reliance on farmer recall of income and expenses, which meant generalisation and estimates.

In terms of generalisability (or external validity), the question arises to what extent the findings are representative of a broader population or how these findings hold in other contexts. These questions are closely related to the external validity mentioned above. In this research, the sequential mixed-method design aimed to provide a broad overview of the population of tree-crop farmers against which the individual cases could

be contextualised. Thus, some degree of generalisability within the specific research context of Vhembe was achieved. However, generalising the findings to other contexts across South Africa and further afield requires some important qualifiers. I attempted to provide a thick description and explicit contextualisation of the research context to contribute to possible future comparisons to other contexts. Unique to Vhembe are the customary tenure practices which have specific implications for land access arrangements and the proximity to market intermediaries, making Vhembe somewhat unique compared to other tree-crop areas in South Africa. However, this research does not aim to achieve statistical generalisability and make inferences based on a population sample. Instead, it aims towards analytical generalisability. Hence, the focus is on the processes and relations within which tree-crop commodification occurs.

Lastly, I draw on Lincoln and Guba's notion of *confirmability* as a key criterion for assessing quality in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). My ethnographic orientation meant that the data collection process was reflexive. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I considered my positionality and the broader context of the research. Hence, more than a standard set of tools to ensure reliability, the self-reflexive nature of the research and the wider project setting and multiple stakeholders involved strengthened the accuracy, reliability, and overall trustworthiness of the research.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

I end this chapter with a brief reflection on ethical issues. As a social scientist, I am well versed in the norms of research ethics and conducted my research in a reflexive manner applying ethics discretion. I made sure participants were informed about the nature of my research and how the research output would be used before they gave their consent to participate. They were also informed about their right to withdraw from interviews without any repercussions. This was usually done over the phone before making face-to-face contact and once again when meeting the person. To manage expectations, it was made clear to participants that they should not anticipate any direct or immediate benefits from the research. Rather, the findings will be shared with key stakeholders during the learning platforms and published as open access articles in academic journals, in this way contributing to informing policy.

Anonymity was particularly important in this research given the highly sensitive nature of the production and financial data collected from individual farmers and, perhaps more importantly, in the case of the highly sensitive and elicited nature of financial data on customary land transactions. I ensured the anonymity of participants by coding and aggregating the survey data, and where individuals are quoted, only the name of the village and interview date are provided. In the case of the detailed vignettes, pseudonyms are used for narrative purposes. Where data was collected from traditional authorities on

land transactions, I only refer to the Traditional authorities by number. The original data with personal details is securely stored on my password-protected laptop and password-protected cloud storage provided by the University of Amsterdam.

I attempted to conduct fieldwork following the ethics of care. This involved the consequences of my research for the safety and well-being of those I interacted with in the field, whether research participants or research assistants. In this way, I attempted to ensure that the data collection process was not just extractive but that those I engaged with also gained something through the interaction. This took different forms but mostly involved allowing time for interlocutors to lead the conversation and follow their own interests and concerns. My positionality as a white South African woman studying in the Netherlands and interested in agrarian change in rural South Africa drove a deep curiosity from the interlocutors. These exchanges, usually accompanied by food and drinks I bought to share, were highly valued. During my fieldwork, I also gathered a vast amount of information about relevant markets, training opportunities, and funding networks. I was able to share this information which was particularly relevant for those farmers who were very remotely situated and had limited access to information. In this way, a modest attempt was made to shift the extractive nature of data collection slightly.





## Chapter 4

# Socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This chapter has been published as: Olofsson, M. (2020). Socio-economic differentiation from a class-analytic perspective: The case of smallholder tree-crop farmers in Limpopo, South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 20(1), 37-59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12335>. It has been slightly modified to avoid repetition within the thesis and for style and language.



## 4.1 Introduction

South Africa's former homelands continue to exhibit some of the country's highest poverty and unemployment levels. National policy has favoured agricultural development as the driving force for rural development by focusing on linking smallholders<sup>32</sup> to national and global commodity chains of specific agricultural commodities deemed to have the highest potential for growth and employment (DAFF, 2013; EDD, 2011; NPC, 2013). Among these commodities are subtropical tree crops such as macadamia nut, avocado pear, litchis and mangoes.<sup>33</sup> This approach tends to view market-oriented smallholders as largely undifferentiated, as if they were economically, socially and politically homogenous, assumed to be equally capable of developing along a linear path of expansion and commercialisation.

A growing body of literature has illustrated that South African smallholders are highly differentiated, with land and non-land-based livelihoods highly interdependent (Francis, 2002; Neves, 2017b; Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Evidence comes from case studies of smallholder irrigation schemes (Cousins, 2013; van Averbeke & Mohamed, 2006) and amongst smallholders more generally (Aliber et al., 2009; Aliber & Hall, 2010, 2012; Cousins, 2010a; Greenberg, 2013; Hazell et al., 2007; Paul Hebinck & Cousins, 2013; HLPE, 2013; Okunlola et al., 2016), and rural Africa more broadly (e.g. Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010a, 2010b). This calls into question transition narratives such as the one that broadly informs current agrarian policy in South Africa, which sees the category of market-oriented smallholders as largely undifferentiated with limited consideration of contextual factors that produce and exacerbate the unevenness between them. These narratives assume such smallholders are equally able and aspiring to 'graduate' via what is commonly referred to as 'emerging' farmers into full-fledged commercial farmers that resemble the existing class of large-scale white commercial farmers. Such narratives echo mainstream thinking as articulated in the World Bank's Agriculture for Development Report (World Bank, 2007), which follows the same linear trajectory as the modernisation thinking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, stereotypes such as 'smallholder' need to be deconstructed to understand better socio-economic differentiation processes and vulnerabilities and inequalities resulting from them. Furthermore, where heterogeneity is acknowledged to some degree, what shapes the understanding of these differences and their underlying processes illustrates important assumptions about smallholders and their livelihood trajectories.

<sup>32</sup> The term smallholder is used in this thesis in its broadest sense and is considered synonymous with small-scale farmer.

<sup>33</sup> This study focuses on macadamia and avocado as these commodities are being most prominently promoted amongst smallholders on the grounds of the rapid increase in market demand, high value and labour intensiveness.

Despite the growing acknowledgement of smallholder diversity, there is a gap in knowledge of socio-economic differentiation among market-oriented smallholders engaged in commodities prioritised for smallholder development, such as avocado and macadamia. It is to these specific cases that this chapter turns, asking: *what is the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers, and which dynamics are shaping this?*

This chapter employs a class-based analytic as it is deemed to have the most analytical traction in this particular case study. This is due to its ability to foreground the processes of rural social differentiation by its focus on social relations of production and accumulation within the context of contemporary capitalism (Bernstein, 2001, 2010; Cousins, 2010). It also brings to light the inequalities that emerge and are perpetuated as part of the social-economic differentiation processes by focusing on the social relations between land, labour and capital and related processes that facilitate and constrain accumulation. Highlighting these aspects is critical in the context of agrarian reform policy in South Africa if a broad-based and inclusive trajectory for agricultural development is to be achieved.

Current efforts to promote the commodification of macadamia nuts and avocado pears amongst smallholders are most prominent in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province (Section 3.3). Smallholders in this region have a long history of growing subtropical tree crops mainly for subsistence and locally distributing surpluses. After 1994, with the dawn of democracy, smallholders growing these crops have become increasingly market-oriented. Since then, both the state and the private sector have implemented numerous initiatives to increase the pace and extent of commercialisation amongst smallholders.

This chapter proceeds by exploring the conceptualisation of socio-economic differentiation, focusing on a class-based analytic (Section 4.2). Next, it presents the findings and critical processes shaping socio-economic differentiation (Section 4.3) based on the cluster analysis explained in Section 3.5.1. After discussing the implications of these findings for smallholder development in South Africa (Section 4.4), the concluding Section 4.5 answers the research question.

## 4.2 Conceptualising socio-economic differentiation amongst farmers

Any attempt to create a farmer typology illustrates a compromise between capturing the infinitely diverse nature of reality, where each individual is unique, and the need to reduce this complexity into meaningful categories (van Averbek & Mohamed, 2006, p. 139). How this compromise is managed depends mainly on the analytical purpose, e.g., identifying class relations, property relations, support needs, or development interventions. Depending on the analytical purpose, the unit of analysis differs and can focus



on the farmer, household, commodity, or geographic area. The classification criteria differ accordingly – for example, landholding, type of agricultural practices, livelihood strategy or level of diversification. On a more fundamental level, typologies represent different assumptions about the world and how social phenomena can be interpreted and explained, each differing in terms of how they emphasise the relationship between observation (empirical), representation (experience) and theory (explanation). Hence their ability to explain and describe social phenomena varies significantly (Whatmore, 1994, p. 32).

Many different metrics and approaches have been used to study socio-economic differentiation. Analysing these different approaches in terms of the context in which they emerged and the reason for which they were developed provides a useful way to explore their utility in describing social and economic characteristics and other dimensions of farmer diversity. The sub-sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 below highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, ultimately arguing for the utility of using a class-based analytic (Cousins, 2010) to capture the dynamic relations of social production.

#### **4.2.1 Mainstream approaches: Smallholders from an international and national policy perspective**

Mainstream approaches to studying farmer diversity are rooted in a positivist epistemology that focuses on observable phenomena (physical characteristics such as farm size, income, assets and resources, labour, market integration, and livelihood diversification) as a basis for classification. Such typologies are technically easy to reproduce over time and across space for their use of standardised units of measurement that are relatively accessible from official data sources (Whatmore, 1994). Farm size appears as the main criterion to define smallholders, generally set at a limit of 2 ha (UNCTAD, 2015; World Bank, 2003) or an upper limit of 10 ha (FAO, 2012). This obscures enormous variance in average farm size across countries and regions (c.f. 50 ha in Brazil versus 0.5 ha in Bangladesh, UNCTAD, 2015, p. ix). It also obscures the types of production systems, the focus of production, level of market integration, yields, etcetera. Despite these differences, land size can be useful where land-holding patterns are pretty uniform, and limits are set on average large farms. This particularly holds when combined with other qualifying characteristics that differentiate farmers, allowing for a more nuanced and situated understanding of smallholders. An example of such a qualifier is the one used by the World Bank (2003): having a low asset base. Another is the one proposed by UNCTAD (2015), which considers farmers cultivating larger-sized plots still smallholders when “they are small relative to the median farm size; they use primarily family labour; and they have limited interaction with input, output and credit markets” (UNCTAD, 2015, p. ix). The choice of such indicators sheds light on some of the underlying assumptions and objectives that

inform the construction of these definitions. For example, the World Bank's focus on 'low asset base' points to its objective to address rural poverty through increased investment as a basis for improving farmers' asset base and their returns on labour, land, and capital (World Bank, 2003, p. 16). Similarly, UNCTAD's (2015) additional qualifier points to its objective of increasing farmers' access to markets and – assumedly – associated increase in productivity and incomes.

Turning to the South African context, policy and planning documents, in general, tend to use the term smallholder synonymously with 'emerging' farmer (DAFF, 2012, 2013, 2014a; DRDLR, 2009), implying that they are not considered a category of farmers in their own right, but in the process of 'becoming'. They are considered 'real' farmers only once they resemble existing commercial (white) farmers. The development of the smallholder sector is thus premised on creating an enabling environment for farmers to progress in a linear trajectory towards becoming increasingly commercially oriented and finally operating as full-fledged commercial farmers and thus building "a modern and competitive smallholder sector" (ANC, 2007, p. 22). A taxonomic approach has underpinned most conceptualisations of farmers, with scale and objective of production being the most important criteria for differentiation. Table 4.1 summarises the main classifications, showing a shift from broad-stroke typologies to more nuanced conceptualisations of smallholder farmers, acknowledging that the first is highly deficient in terms of capturing the diversity amongst smallholders and focused policy development (Aliber et al., 2009; Cousins, 2010; Greenberg, 2013; Hebinck & Cousins, 2013; Okunlola et al., 2016).

The typology in DAFF (2010; Table 4.1) remains vague in describing the qualitative differences within and between each category. In the Rural Economy chapter of the National Development Plan, land access is the key determinant of difference between farmers in communal areas (NPC, 2011, p. 220; Table 4.1). The key objective of this typology is to identify where opportunities for job creation or livelihood improvement exist, identified as being smallholders farming between 0.5-5 ha. In this context, land area as a differentiation criterion becomes questionable due to the lack of reliable data on smallholders and land access (Aliber et al., 2009, p. 86). Also, the relationship between land access and livelihood opportunities is not elaborated, calling into question the credibility of the proposal (Cousins, 2015, p. 265).

The DRDLR (2009) typology was developed in response to criticism of land reform projects for ineffectual targeting of land redistribution beneficiaries, which had previously been done only on a demand-driven basis (DRDLR, 2009, p. 18). This typology, comprising five categories (Table 4.1), includes farmers who represent the whole spectrum from subsistence to commercial farmers and illustrates a new focus on an individual's aspirations, resources, capabilities and constraints unseen in other policy

documents. However, there are no obvious distinctions between the last two categories of well-established and financially capable black commercial farmers.

**Table 4.1** Prevailing smallholder typologies in South African policy documents

Agency	Typology	Criteria	Reference
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)	Subsistence, smallholder and commercial farmers	A diffuse mixture of production orientation and land size	DAFF (2010)
National Planning Council (NPC)	Subsistence farmers (<0.5 ha) and smallholder farmers (0.5-5 ha or >5 ha)	Land area	NPC (2011)
Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDL)	Landless households, commercial-ready subsistence producers, expanding commercial smallholders, well-established black commercial farmers and financially capable, aspirant black commercial farmers	Assets, aspirations	DRDLR (2009)
DAFF	(i) Part-time smallholders for whom agriculture contributes only a small share of livelihood, (ii) Middle-of-the-spectrum smallholders for whom agriculture is the main livelihood source, and (iii) Commercial smallholders who have not reached the threshold for income tax or VAT registration.	Importance of agriculture in farmers' livelihood and degree of commercialisation.	DAFF (2013)

*Source:* Author's compilation from the documents referred to in the table.

The typology in the Strategic Plan for Smallholder Support (DAFF, 2013) acknowledges the varying role that agriculture plays in farmers' livelihoods but seems to problematically imply that the part-time smallholders who only rely partly on agriculture as a livelihood and those for whom agriculture provides the main livelihood are not commercial smallholders.

The latter two typologies represent significant steps towards acknowledging and unpacking diversity amongst smallholders and black farmers. However, the typologies have not been significantly linked to strategies and plans for addressing this diversity, and the concepts used to define the different categories are not consistently applied. None of the typologies says anything substantive about the coherent patterns of social and economic relations between farmers and the structuring context, which form the basis of analysing diversity in a class-based approach.

#### 4.2.2 A class-based approach

Class-based analysis has informed many studies of rural differentiation amongst agrarian political economy scholars (e.g. Bernstein, 2001b, 2010; Cousins, 2010; Oya, 2004; Scoones et al., 2012; Zhang, 2015). It is an approach to understanding agrarian social relations by foregrounding the “social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change, both historical and contemporary” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 1). This approach centres on the analysis of rural social relations within contemporary capitalism, a “distinctive socio-economic system, established on a world scale, which is based on the class relations between capital and labour” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 124). The relations between these classes are essentially exploitative, with capital or capital classes extracting surplus value from labour or the working class. Under constant pressure to remain competitive, capitalists have a compulsion to reinvest surplus into production to generate further profits, fuelling the dynamic process of accumulation. Those who do not own the means of production are compelled to sell their labour to enable their social reproduction. The capitalist system is inextricably linked to commodity circuits and peasants who were once able to reproduce themselves outside of commodity relations became compelled to enter into a wider division of labour and markets through the process of the “commodification of subsistence” (Bernstein, 2010). The process is essentially the driving force of the development and expansion of capitalism. Once peasants are compelled into wider commodity circuits within capitalism, they become petty commodity producers (Bernstein, 2010), essentially small-scale producers who combine capital and labour in varying degrees. Petty commodity producers (PCPs) are under constant pressure to reproduce themselves as capital or labour, referred to as the “simple reproductive squeeze” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 104). This leads to class differentiation through the pressure of competitive market forces to generate surplus through accumulation, reinvestment and expansion. This process can lead to the emergence of successful petty commodity producers and possibly small-scale capitalists. However, if unable to remain competitive, PCPs can be compelled into wage labour. In the case of wage labour, the concept of “fragmented classes of labour” has been used to encapsulate the effects of increasing pressure under the conditions of contemporary globalisation on classes of labour to meet their simple reproduction, which has increasingly meant combining wage labour and small-scale agricultural production (Bernstein, 2006, p. 455).

**Table 4.2** Class categories of South African farmers

Class category	Criteria
Supplementary food producer	Cultivate small plots or gardens. Without access to wage income, they rely on additional forms of income such as a social grant, craftsmanship or petty trading to enable their simple reproduction.
Allotment holding wage workers	Cultivate small plots or gardens but primarily depend on wages for their simple reproduction.
Worker-peasants	Farm on a substantial scale while also engaging in wage labour. These are combined to enable their simple reproduction.
Petty commodity producers	Reproduce themselves from farming alone (or with only minor additional forms of income).
Small-scale capitalist farmers	Rely substantially on hired labour and start engaging in expanded reproduction and capital accumulation.
Capitalists whose primary income is not from farming	Farm on a small scale, but their primary source of income is not from farming but from another business.

*Source:* Cousins (2010, p. 14).

The trajectories of rural social differentiation are highly uneven and non-linear (Li, 2014). In the South African context, however, due to apartheid's racialised class relations, inequalities between rural households in the former homelands tend to be downplayed (Cousins, 2010, p. 12). A class-based analytic can provide a useful lens for exploring the processes of rural class relations, enabling a deeper appreciation of the varied and uneven manner in which the processes of social differentiation unfold. Cousins (2010) developed a class-analytic typology for small-scale agricultural producers in South Africa, distinguishing six class categories (Table 4.2).

This typology highlights the combination of agriculture, wage labour and the varying degrees to which these contribute to social reproduction or accumulation. It further emphasises the structural context of agricultural practices – land access, capital, labour markets, and employment opportunities.

Other studies applied a class analytic to analyse the agrarian structure more broadly.<sup>34</sup> Only a few studies have used this approach to hone in on a subgrouping of market-oriented farmers. This study does the latter by applying a class analytic to commercially oriented smallholders engaged in tree-crop farming.

<sup>34</sup> C.f Levin et al. (1997) for South Africa; Cousins et al. (1992) and Scoones et al. (2012) for Zimbabwe; and Zhang (2015) for China.

Table 4.3 Key characteristics of farmer clusters

Variables	Cluster 1 (n=33; 41%) Welfare-dependent petty commodity producer	Cluster 2 (n=17; 29%) Agricultural petty commodity producer	Cluster 3 (n=23; 21%) Salaried small-scale capitalist	Cluster 4 (n=7; 9%) Agricultural small-scale capitalist
Non-farm income	Average annual non-farm income Median R16,920 IQR R1,200 min, max R0, R132,000	Average annual non-farm income Median R0 IQR R9000 min, max R0, R80,004	Average annual non-farm income Median R168,000 IQR R156,000 min, max R0, R448,920	Average annual non-farm income Median R154,800 IQR R300,000 min, max R0, R480,000
Income % from agriculture	Median 18% IQR 54% min, max 0%, 100%	Median 100% IQR 92% min, max 0%, 100%	Median 3% IQR 16% min, max 0%, 100%	Median 78% IQR 83% min, max 1%, 100%
Importance of non-farm income	High	Very low	High	Low
Origin of additional income sources	Pensions	Very limited and varied	Civil servants	Diversified sources
Farm income	Average annual gross income from tree crops Median R3,840 IQR R11,737 min, max R0, R52,840	Average annual gross income from non-tree crops Median R0 IQR R620 min, max R0, R55,000	Average annual gross income from non-tree crops Median R4,000 IQR R11,000 min, max R0, R56,000	Average annual gross income from non-tree crops Median R420,500 IQR R769,000 min, max R0, R812,000
Average annual gross income from farm income	Median R4,000 IQR R24,550 min, max R0, R67,500	Median R4,650 IQR R67,800 min, max R0, R350,000	Median R0 IQR R670 min, max R0, R130,000	Median R0 IQR R90,000 min, max R0, R100,000
Diversification of farm income between tree crops and other crops	Tree crops important, with secondary importance given to non-tree crops	Non-tree crops important	Both important	Tree crops important

Variables	Characteristics	Cluster 1 (n=33; 41%) Welfare-dependent petty commodity producer	Cluster 2 (n=17; 29%) Agricultural petty commodity producer	Cluster 3 (n=23; 21%) Salaried small-scale capitalist	Cluster 4 (n=7; 9%) Agricultural small-scale capitalist
On-farm expenses	Average annual variable costs	Median R8,325 IQR R12,670 min, max R250, R61,000	Median R8,380 IQR R68,098 min, max R0, R144,600	Median R19,300 IQR R39,600 min, max R500, R85,000	Median R230,000 IQR R223,500 min, max R33,000, R473,400
Agricultural surplus	Net annual agriculture surplus (median)	None -R4,325	Yes R5,620	None -R14,300	Yes R190,500
Labour	Type of labour	Own labour, limited hired labour and some family labour	Own labour and limited hired labour	Hired labour and some family labour	Hired Labour
	Number of labourers (median)	Fulltime median 0 Seasonal median 2	Fulltime median 0 Seasonal median 2	Fulltime median 1 Seasonal median 2	Fulltime median 6 Seasonal median 20
Type of farmer	Reliance on own labour	Mostly fulltime farmers	Mostly fulltime farmers	Part-time farmers and employers	Fulltime and employers
Land	Land size	Median 7 ha IQR 6 ha min, max 5 ha, 22 ha	Median 5 ha IQR 9 ha min, max 5 ha, 15 ha	Median 7 ha IQR 5 ha min, max 5 ha, 54 ha	Median 40 ha IQR 24 ha min, max 22 ha, 54 ha
	Percentage of area cultivated	Median 80% IQR 47% min, max 4%, 100%	Median 50% IQR 71% min, max 8%, 100%	Median 65% IQR 60% min, max 9%, 100%	Median 67% IQR 52% min, max 17%, 100%
Year land acquired		Median 1986	Median 1998	Median 2003	Median 2004

Variables	Characteristics	Cluster 1 (n=33; 41%)	Cluster 2 (n=17; 29%)	Cluster 3 (n=23; 21%)	Cluster 4 (n=7; 9%)
		Welfare-dependent petty commodity producer	Agricultural petty commodity producer	Salaried small-scale capitalist	Agricultural small-scale capitalist
Capital and assets	Source of investment capital	Personal	Personal	Personal	Bank
	Value of agricultural equipment	Median R500 IQR R4,260 min, max R0, R70,640	Median R200 IQR R41,100 min, max R0, R500,000	Median R7,000 IQR R24,400 min, max R150, R149,750	Median R155,000 IQR R482,640 min, max R19,600, R950,000
	Access to finance	None/limited	None/family	None/banks	Banks and other
Demo-graphics	Education level	Low (primary)	Medium to high (secondary through tertiary)	High (tertiary)	Medium (secondary)
	Age category	Retired, early retirement	Early to mid	Mid to late	Mix
	Gender	Proportionally similar	Proportionally similar	Proportionally similar	Proportionally similar

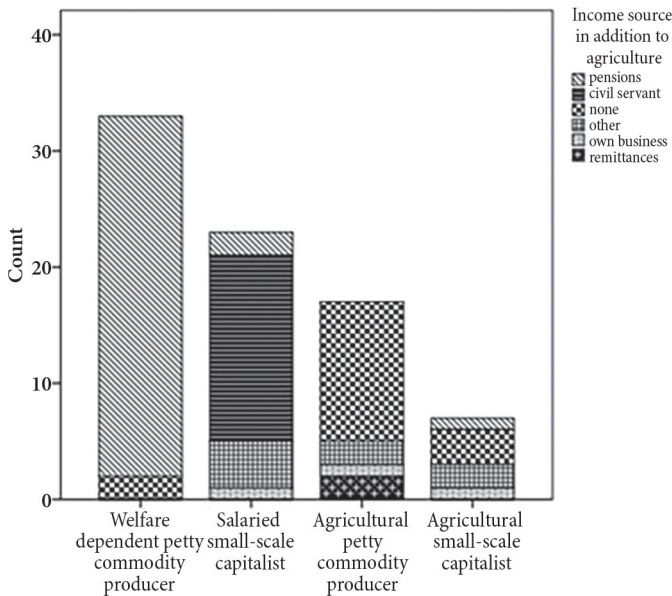
Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.



### 4.3 The nature and dynamics of class formation amongst smallholders

The analysis of the farmer survey data reveals four farmer clusters (Table 4.3). Three variables appeared to have a disproportionately strong influence on determining cluster membership: the primary means of securing a livelihood, capital investment in agricultural production and the degree to which hired labour could be accessed. Of these, the nature of livelihood diversification – measured by the proportion of non-farm income in relation to agricultural income – emerged as the single most important differentiating variable. For most farmers, non-farm income comprises the most important livelihood source, with state pensions and salaries being the principal means of livelihood (Figure 4.4). Non-farm income sources proved to be critical in sustaining agricultural activities by cross-subsidising initial capital investments, running costs, and labour. The fact that these dimensions emerged as the most influential in determining the clusters affirms the appropriateness of using a class-based analytic to explore socio-economic differentiation.

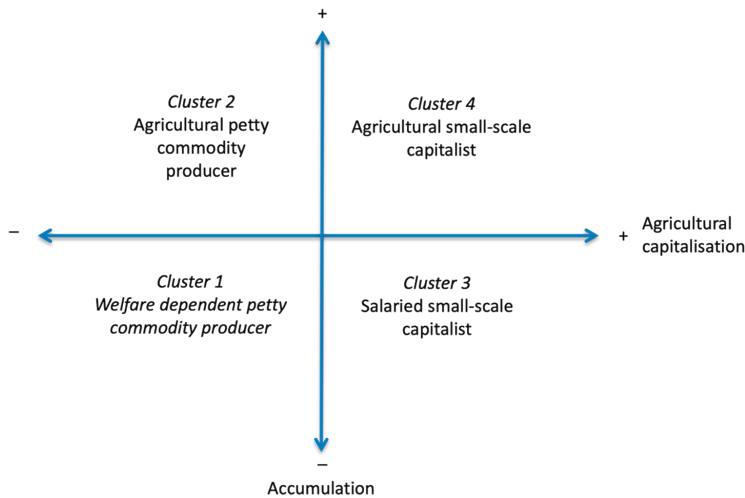
**Figure 4.1** Clusters and income sources



Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

Two class categories are distinguishable: a large group of petty commodity producers (70% of the sample, comprising clusters 1 and 2) and an emerging class of ‘small scale capitalist’ farmers (30% of the sample, comprising clusters 3 and 4). These class positions are internally differentiated based on the primary livelihood source. The petty commodity producers comprise those who rely primarily on social welfare and those who derive their primary source of livelihood from a diversified agricultural portfolio. The small-scale capitalists are differentiated according to those relying primarily on salaried income and those whose principal livelihood comes from their agricultural enterprise. The class places that emerge and the lines along which they are internally differentiated illustrate distinct differences in terms of accumulation capacity and degree of agricultural capitalisation (investment in labour, inputs, mechanisation) (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Typology according to agricultural capitalisation and accumulation



Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

### 4.3.1 Welfare-dependent petty commodity producers: Ageing farmers ‘hanging in’<sup>35</sup>

The majority (41%) depend primarily on welfare in the form of state pensions (available from 60 years onwards<sup>36</sup>) as their primary livelihood source (median non-farm income

<sup>35</sup> The labels given to the different categories – ‘hanging in’, ‘inching up’ and ‘stepping up and out’ – draw from Dorward et al.’s (2009) typology of livelihood strategies available to the poor.

<sup>36</sup> An individual needs to earn less than R78,120 per year and have a net asset value below R1,115,400.

being R1,410/month<sup>37</sup> (Table 4.3) or 18% of total income). They are characterised by low total farm variable costs (median R8,325 annually), illustrating low levels of mechanisation, with plough and hoe and sometimes a small backpack spray being the most important farming implements. Their median gross farm income is lower than the farm expenses, indicated by the negative value of agricultural surplus. This requires cross-subsiding from other income sources, whereby social grants, in most cases pensions, account for meeting the deficit. These investments are generally rationalised as being worthwhile based on anticipated future returns from their orchards once they reach maturity. Annual tree-crop income, while still very limited (median R3,840), constitutes the main agricultural income. In the few cases that there is additional income from non-tree crops (median R0; IQR R620),<sup>38</sup> it is generated from a wide range of vegetable crops and contributes a minimal share of agricultural income. Those producing vegetable crops alongside tree crops marketed these primarily through informal markets via traders, with only a small portion consumed at a household level. These farmers rely primarily on their own labour, with additional help from seasonal labour and family members. Land access was around 7 ha (median), comparable to the other PCPs. However, farmers in this group cultivate around 80% of the land available to them, which is comparatively high compared to the other clusters. These farmers reported either having no access to finance or were risk-averse in the few cases where they did have access, choosing not to make use of credit. In terms of demographics, these farmers are mostly elderly in retirement, and their general formal education is low, with most having only completed primary school. In sum, these farmers have access to the means of production. Their production is primarily market oriented. They rely mainly on their own labour with occasionally hired labour, and their production scale is relatively small. Farming alone is not sufficient to facilitate their simple reproduction, and there is currently limited scope for engaging in accumulation (see Box 4.1 for a detailed vignette).

The demographic dimension speaks most prominently to many of the features and shared experiences that distinguish this cluster. Most farmers attached great value to farming beyond economic motives, with farming representing strong links to a past and lifestyle that they felt nostalgic about. Farmers became animated when reflecting on their youth and memories of growing up in a largely subsistence agricultural context. Herding cattle, ploughing the fields and helping parents with seasonal agricultural activities were fondly remembered, and many considered these experiences as formative moments that inspired their interest in agriculture. Many also commented that they somehow connected to the past by working on the land, which gave a sense of belonging, meaning,

<sup>37</sup> At the time of data collection (2 May 2016) R1 was equivalent to USD 0.07.

<sup>38</sup> IQR = the interquartile range or middle 50% between the second and third quartile. This measure was preferred above the average for better indicating the spread where the standard deviation is high.

and well-being. As one old man explained, “I continue farming because it’s in my blood” (Interview, Maelula, 23 May 2016). Another farmer commented, “I’m a pensioner, but I choose to be here [on the farm]. If I don’t have a place to go during the day, I will die soon” (Interview, Dopeni, 13 May 2016). Another farmer echoed similar sentiments, “Even when I’m sick, I will get a driver to bring me here to the farm and drive me around, and I will feel better” (Interview, Tshixiwadza, 13 May 2016).

**Box 4.1** Vignette of a welfare-dependent petty commodity producer

Lindelani<sup>39</sup> is a 71-year-old pensioner who acquired his 5-ha farm in 1989. The local chief allocated the land according to customary practices, whereby he acquired user rights, commonly known as ‘permission to occupy’. The land had not been previously cultivated, so it took him some years to clear thick bush and indigenous trees and start planting his orchard. This happened gradually, during which time he worked as a builder in the provincial capital. Only after his retirement at age 69 he became a full-time farmer. He explained, “I became a farmer because I saw that I cannot build anymore when I am old, and I must get something to live off” (Interview, Duthuni, 16 May 2016).

He has cultivated 4 ha of land with avocados, litchis and mangoes. He hopes to cultivate the remaining hectares with trees when finances allow. Avocados are his most important commodity, which he sells via a national agent at the fresh fruit market in Johannesburg, while he sells the litchis to local traders and the mangoes to local processors who produce *atchaar* – a traditional relish. He does most of the work himself with the help of an elderly family member, but he also employs temporary labour, which is his most significant expense, followed by the purchase of manure.

Lindelani has a lot of ambitious plans for the farm. He hopes to replace the mangoes with avocado cultivars for export and eventually drill a borehole. Having water on the farm will greatly relieve his burden of collecting water in buckets and driving it to his farm regularly. He remains somewhat concerned that none of his children, who are all educated and employed, are interested in farming, but he is confident that the farm will never be sold and hopes that someday when his children see money being made from farming, this will spur their interest.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews held between March-May 2015 and August-September 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the farmers.

Farming can also be considered a very pragmatic activity. “If you are a pensioner, you can choose to farm because it gives you something to do” (Interview, Tshakhuma, 16 April 2016). These sentiments partially explain why many of these farmers continue farming but can obviously not be separated from the potential economic dimensions that remain the overarching motive for production. While future gains remain elusive at this stage, muddling through under the present circumstances, which require significant personal financial investments, can be better understood if one considers the non-material benefits these farmers gain from farming.

Future goals are often contingent on prospects for succession. Most farmers lamented that the next generation is not interested in farming, leading to critical concerns about the future and succession. “No children want to farm; they grow up seeing that people who are in agriculture are failures, so they don’t want to do it” (Interview, Elim, 5 May 2016). Beyond the hardships and lack of profitability that most young people associate with agriculture, new opportunities available to the youth make farming less desirable. “My children don’t want to get involved. My child has a PhD and is lecturing. The other is working on Bloemfontein and studying agriculture. The third one did chemical engineering and is working in Pretoria. The only son did a bachelor of commerce in accounting and the last born [is a] mining engineer. I don’t think they can take over the farm” (Interview, Maelula, 23 May 2016). These succession challenges have prompted a particular emphasis on ways to get the next generation interested in farming. “None of my children is interested in farming. ...I will never sell my farm... I will call him one year when the fruit is ripe and say here, it is for you, take all the responsibility and keep all the money you find” (Interview, Duthuni, 10 May 2016). Few cases were found where the next generation of these elderly farmers considered farming a potential career. Instead, the orchard was considered an asset that could potentially look after itself and provide some additional income.

An ageing farmer population and a lack of succession plans have resulted in many widows becoming the primary custodian of established orchards. With limited skills and experience, these women are primarily motivated to keep the orchards out of a sense of duty and respect for the project of their deceased partners, with little apparent emphasis placed on its economic value.

Situating our understanding of welfare-dependent PCPs in terms of their generational characteristics (ageing pensioners) provides important context for our understanding of their persistence despite relatively unprofitable farming enterprises. The stable, albeit very meagre, monthly pension provides a basic social safety net that ensures their reproduction and enables farm production through cross-subsidising their farming enterprise with pension income. With their basic needs being met by the state, these farmers pursue farming to muddle through and someday become profitable,

but this is not their sole motivation. The non-material dimensions of farming, such as nostalgia for a past in which agriculture played a central role and the sense of well-being experienced by working the land, provide critical non-economic rationales for this ageing cohort of farmers.

#### **4.3.2 Agricultural petty commodity producers: ‘Inching up’ via diversification within agriculture**

The differentiation between PCPs is mainly demographic, conditioned by the requirement for state pensions (i.e. 60 years and above). This has meant that younger farmers, in the absence of welfare grants and a highly constrained labour market with very few employment opportunities, have demonstrated a higher degree of agricultural entrepreneurialism. Since tree crops cannot sustain their immediate needs of social reproduction, these farmers are diversifying into food cash crops, sold mainly through informal markets, demonstrating that a small degree of accumulation can be achieved in the absence of non-agrarian capital (see also Chapter 6). Capital thus generated is then reinvested in tree crops, bridging the long maturation period until tree crops come into production. In addition to generating agrarian livelihoods, these strategies have implications for local food production as these high-value crops stimulate the production of food cash crops sold into local markets.

The agricultural PCPs represent 29% of the sample and share similar characteristics to the welfare-dependent PCPs, but with an agricultural income constituted by a median of 100% of total income (monthly median R1,167, IQR R8,010; Table 4.3). Hence agriculture plays a far more critical role in social reproduction than for the state-assisted PCPs. Non-tree crops, mostly vegetables, are primarily responsible for the agricultural income (annual median R4,650; IQR R67,800) and are perceived as a short-term strategy for income generation while tree crops reach maturity. Their overall on-farm variable costs are similar to the state-assisted PCPs, but their agricultural income is 3.5 times higher. Despite their significantly higher proportion of total income coming from agriculture (median 100% and IQR 92%), the total average monthly income is substantially lower than the welfare-dependent PCPs, making them the poorest in economic terms of the whole sample. These farmers are able to generate a marginal agricultural surplus, sufficient only to reinvest in the farm and meet the needs of social reproduction, leaving little scope for potential expanded reproduction. Access to capital is considerably restrained, and very few farmers have access to external finance or appear to be credit averse. Demographically this group demonstrates significantly different characteristics from the previous cluster. They are, on average, much younger than other PCPs, falling mainly into the early and mid-career categories. Their average educational

level is much higher, with most having completed secondary school and some with a tertiary qualification (Table 4.3 and Box 4.2 presents a detailed vignette).

**Box 4.2 Vignette of an agricultural petty commodity producer**

Rolani is 59 years old. She grew up in a farming family where her parents grew their own food at a nearby irrigation scheme, and she has been interested in farming since then. Her father managed to gain access to a 5-ha plot where he established a mango and citrus orchard. Today she has inherited his orchard, and through marriage, she gained access to a 10-ha piece of land where together with her husband, they established a macadamia nut orchard in 2008. By 2018 it was just starting to yield. Alongside and in-between the orchard, she has planted various vegetable crops and some maize.

She was not always farming. She worked on commercial farms and as a teacher before she decided to become a full-time farmer. Her husband also gave up his job as a builder to work full-time on the farm. Their children, young adults, also work on the farm after their studies and during the holidays. They grow a range of vegetables, including tomatoes, pumpkins, peppers and maize, which they sell to local traders who then sell these in the informal market, and it makes up 70% of what they consume at home. Income from food cash crops enables them to earn a basic income which they use to purchase the chemicals and fertilisers required for the orchards and electricity to run the irrigation pump. They have received a lot of support from various government institutions for start-up, establishment and running costs. This support, together with the income from the cash crops, has allowed them to get to where they are today, and their ambition is to expand their existing orchard and replant the orchard on her late father's land. Although macadamia is her primary crop, she intends to keep a section of land near the river to produce food cash crops to complement the expected income from macadamia and ensure a steady income flow throughout the year between the macadamia harvests.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews held between March-May 2015 and August-September 2016.

Many farmers in this cluster entered into farming when they inherited relatively established farms. These young farmers have long-term plans to become commercially oriented and profitable, with aspirations including expansion and upgrading within the value chain into processing.

I did research on what crops to grow. I looked at mangoes, but the mangoes don't have a market. But I see the macadamia tree is not all over, and the price is high. I want to get into business, not only farming; I want to get into the farming business. I also want to learn how to make a profit with this macadamia. I want to make butter and oil from macadamia (*Interview, Thohoyandou, 22 April 2016*).

However, farmers' goals and related strategies are contingent on their ability to access capital, which is severely limited under current circumstances (i.e. no land title, non-farm income, cash transfers, remittances). In the absence of access to finance, intercropping is used mainly as a temporary cash-flow strategy, with high expectations of income-generating possibilities of tree crops once they come into full production.

I'm doing veg only for intercropping before the mac gets too big... Cash crops I'm only doing so I can get money to do macadamia. I maintain the macadamia and buy chemicals and fertilisers and buy electricity with the money from the cash crops (*Interview, Thohoyandou, 22 April 2016*).

Besides facilitating regular income generation, diversification is also perceived as a strategy for risk mitigation.

I decided to diversify across three different crops because I want to divide my year according to the crops so [that] I can get harvest throughout the year and spread the risk (*Interview, Vondo, 14 May 2016*).

Limited financial resources coupled with ambitious goals and strategies have stimulated both production and labour-related innovations. Crop choice and crop combinations have been used to mitigate damage and loss from pests, for example, by planting mangoes, which has resulted in a significant reduction in pest damage to the litchis. Another innovation observed was using livestock to replace the manual labour of 'cleaning' the farm, thus saving labour costs. With labour being the largest expense in most cases, this poses particular challenges, as one farmer articulated:

My father had a pension grant so he could employ workers, but I can't afford it because I don't have a salary anywhere. I only rely on the production of this farm (*Interview, Vondo, 14 May 2016*).



Three innovative avenues were found in this cluster for accessing labour through non-monetary exchanges. First, the state-funded ‘Expanded Public Works Programme’<sup>40</sup> effectively provides a team of workers, paid by the Department of Public Works, who can perform the required work functions on the farm. Second, collaborating with training providers contracted by AgriSETA<sup>41</sup> allows farmers to receive labour in return for providing training opportunities on their farms. Third, a few cases were found where workers provided labour in exchange for agricultural inputs such as fertilisers.

Despite clear goals to grow and expand into a more commercially oriented business, current strategies are largely curtailed by the immediate imperative to generate sufficient income from cash crops for their productive and reproductive needs. To this end, they employ entrepreneurial and innovative strategies to generate income from the farm with limited resources while expected returns from tree crops materialise. They are gradually inching up through innovation.

#### **4.3.3 Salaried small-scale capitalists: ‘Stepping in’ into agriculture via salaried work**

Farmers in this cluster generate their primary income from non-farm employment, mostly as teachers (median monthly income R14,000; IQR R13,000). Their full-time employment status means that farm labour is performed primarily by hired labour, with the farm owners playing more of an oversight, managerial role. Despite this primary reliance on hired labour, the number of workers remains low, on average, one full-time and two seasonal workers, only marginally more than the PCPs. Their annual on-farm variable expense (median R19,300) – used as a proxy for the degree of farm capitalisation – is relatively high compared to the two PCP clusters (median around R8,300) (Table 4.3). The gross annual farm income (median R5,000) – which originates primarily from tree crops (median R4,000) – is just over a quarter of the farm expenses (median R19,300), leaving the farming operation running at a loss. With the median for non-farm monthly income being R14,000 (IQR R13,000), this results in a significant cross-subsidisation of the agricultural enterprise by the non-farm income. This translates into increased pressure on the way capital is expended in the enterprise. As the investment is more significant than in the case of PCPs, there is increased pressure for it to translate

<sup>40</sup> The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is implemented by the Department of Public Works and has its origin in the 2003 Growth and Development Summit. The aim is to create decent work opportunities for the unemployed.

<sup>41</sup> The Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority (AgriSETA) was set up under the Skills Development Act with the mandate to provide training and skills development for the agricultural workforce.

into market competitiveness. Labour is squeezed with wages in most cases well below the sectorial minimum.<sup>42</sup>

Individuals in this cluster fall mainly into the mid-to-late-career category. They are the most educated of the whole sample, with most having tertiary education. Salaried small-scale capitalists have full-time non-farm employment, effectively turning them into farm managers or absentee farmers. Non-farm employment provides for slow but consistent investment in the farm, with a tendency towards less diversified farming systems, largely modelled after the commercial white farmers.

I looked at the farm and how we were farming and [how the] white counterparts [do it], and I thought, this is not the way of farming; we must have one or two fruits in which we must specialise (*Interview, Thohoyandou, 30 April 2016*).

Non-farm employment is critical for sustaining and developing the farm in the years leading up to full production. It stabilises household consumption so profits can be reinvested, facilitating a higher level of farm capital than the PCP clusters. Non-farm employment sustains and facilitates capitalisation of the farm, but it also translates into marginalisation and exclusion of these farmers from accessing information, training and other state and private sector opportunities, which are premised on the expectation that you are a full-time farmer and therefore available during working hours.

If you stay away, the government will not help you so much. If these people [government officials] come and see you working, they know you are serious. If you are a teacher, you need to be on the farm after work (*Interview, Makumbani, 5 September 2016*).

The main strategy to deal with this situation has been to access information and support via alternate channels such as the internet, industry journals and white commercial farmers. This has seen the emergence of new actors in the form of white commercial farmers who, in some cases, have taken on the informal role of knowledge brokers, which is not without its own controversies that will not be addressed here. Educational level has also played a critical role here. It provides access to alternative resources and facilitates certain confidence that enables the development of social relations across racial and class barriers to access knowledge and support from these knowledge brokers.

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<sup>42</sup> Sectorial determination for agricultural workers (2017-2018) is set at R135.52/day.

**Box 4.3** Vignette of a salaried small-scale capitalist

Mr Dzunani is a fulltime teacher. When he finished high school, his dream was to go to Fort Hare University and study administration, but he could only find a bursary to attend a teacher training college locally. He quickly moved through the teaching ranks and is now a senior advisor. His interest in farming was sparked by his brother, a full-time farmer growing vegetable crops and seeing the success of local farmers growing macadamia. He set about trying to get access to land in 2006, describing this process as slow and expensive. Due to land scarcity in the area, the traditional authority has established rules that you can only acquire two hectares at a time through traditional authorities. Having proved he could afford the investment and establish an orchard with the traditional authority, he was subsequently permitted by the local authority to purchase another 2 ha. After some negotiations with a neighbour, he managed to acquire another parcel of land, increasing his farm to 5 ha.

He started planting chillies, green beans and peppers, but he found these crops demanded too much of his time and decided to turn to macadamia. Despite the large investment needed for this, he anticipated they would be more lucrative in the long run. Today he has managed to plant almost the entire 5 ha with macadamia trees, which have not generated any financial return since the trees have not yet started yielding. He invests 15% of his monthly salary on his farm, which goes mainly into irrigation and labour. He is fortunate to have access to a dam from which he pumps water and is developing a series of smaller dams, which will enable him to irrigate the trees all the way up the hillside. He also relies primarily on hired labour. With two full-time labourers and additional temporary labourers, he only passes by the farm a few times a week to oversee things.

He plans that his trees will be in full production when he retires, and he will be full-time on the farm in a few years. He also plans to establish a drying and dehusking facility on the farm. He wants to expand his farm but acknowledges this is very unlikely. Very little land is available in the immediate vicinity, and it has become too expensive, with 1 ha costing as much as R50,000 (USD 2,913) compared to R1,500 (USD 87) per hectare when he first purchased land in the early 2000s.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews held between March-May 2015 and August-September 2016.

Labour relations play a far more critical role in this cluster than in any of the others, as hired labour constitutes the only source of labour. Labour issues have been cited as one of the main challenges. Unsupervised labour is believed to be the main cause of labour performing acts of 'covert resistance' (Scott, 1985), whereby workers do not apply chemicals or steal inputs. A strategy for dealing with this issue remains largely absent, and farmers hold on to the expectation that returns from their orchards will eventually outstrip their current earnings and facilitate them leaving full-time employment and

being full-time on the farm. While for the younger farmers, this is seen as a viable option in the coming years, for many others who are nearing retirement age, full-time farming will only become possible after retirement (see Box 4.3 for detailed vignette).

The key strategy here hinges on the ability of individuals to capitalise on the farm more intensively through non-farm income. Hence their focus is less on production diversity, as they do not need to ensure a farm income from cash crops while waiting for their crops to mature. Farming represents a strategy towards ensuring an additional income and is largely seen as an investment for retirement or presenting the possibility of early retirement from formal employment, enabling them to become full-time farmers.

#### 4.3.4 Agricultural small-scale capitalists: 'Stepping up' within agriculture

This small cluster of farmers (9%) is characterised by their larger production scale, higher level of mechanisation, and high reliance on hired labour compared to the other clusters and the ability to accumulate capital. These dimensions enable reinvestment, expanded production and further accumulation, setting farmers in this cluster apart as relatively successful small-scale capitalists, in stark contrast to the other three clusters. Of particular significance is their access to land, which is much higher (ranging from 22 ha-54 ha with a median of 40 ha) than that of the other three clusters (an average of 5-7 ha) (Table 4.3). Patterns of acquiring land access and land holdings are highly varied within this cluster and comprised both communal land held under customary law (Chapter 5) and private land held under title. In most cases, the land was acquired in stages: via the tribal authority in cases where land was readily available, but in some cases via purchase from orchard owners. The latter consisted of those who were no longer interested in farming, unable to capitalise their orchards sufficiently to make them productive, or simply under pressure for cash and compelled to distress sales. In two cases, titled land was purchased on the outskirts of the communal area (formerly white owners' farms) based on the proximity to services and the fact that the land was already partially developed. In one case, an individual leased a large orchard from a tribal authority established under the former Venda government.

In terms of income, just over half reported having an additional income other than farming, with a monthly median non-farm income of R12,900, similar to the salaried small-scale capitalists (Table 4.2). However, the non-farm income contributed a much smaller share of total income, with the agricultural income accounting for 78% (median). The average gross annual agricultural income is R420,500 (IQR R737,200), mainly from tree crops. This clearly sets them apart from the other clusters in income terms, even though income within this cluster is highly differentiated. The farming operations of this cluster are relatively mechanised compared to the other clusters, with vehicles, tractors

**Box 4.4** Vignette of an agricultural small-scale capitalist

Mr Dakalo was born in 1980. He started his studies in electrical engineering, but due to financial constraints had to give that up and returned to assist his father on his avocado farm. After one year, when Mr Dakalo was 25 years old, his father passed away, and he inherited a 10-ha avocado farm and an additional piece of land in another location that had not yet been developed. With some basic knowledge acquired from his father, he started to expand his network, knowledge and skills with a vision to improve both the quality and quantity of his avocados to start exporting instead of selling via an agent at the national fresh fruit market in Johannesburg.

He entered into a project with a large commercial grower who provided equipment and inputs on a loan basis, whereby the loan was deducted from the payments for the product, which would be supplied to the company. In this way, he improved his quality and quantity and gained access to lucrative new markets. He now produces for export markets, a high-end niche national supermarket chain, the national fresh produce market, and the local informal market. Within a few years, he had acquired his own equipment and could afford to purchase his own inputs, so he was no longer reliant on support from the commercial company.

His father had acquired a 35-ha piece of land from a friend who was not working the land and had business ventures elsewhere, so he was willing to sell. His father had planned to develop this land, but this was not realised during his lifetime. With the growing returns from his farm, Mr Dakalo has acquired sufficient capital to develop a second farm in the last few years. He is planting about 4 ha per year and plans to have the land fully cultivated with avocados within the next few years. He recalls, “in 2005, people were thinking I was crazy getting into agriculture, people said ‘don’t go that route, you will not be going far with that; just get a job’ but, for myself, my dad was making money, so why wouldn’t I make money. People always wanted to be clean; maybe they saw farming as something not worth doing. Now maybe people see it’s a good career to get involved in. If you can go from staying at home to building your own place and having a lovely home and car, people start to think, ‘wow, he is really making money from farming, and they get interested” (Interview, Phiphidi, 3 May 2016). He is still young and very ambitious and acknowledges that he would be fine if he could get the next 30 ha into production. But then he laughs and adds, “but money is never enough”. His dreams are only growing with his expanding enterprise.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews held between March-May 2015 and August-September 2016.

and processing machinery constituting the most valuable equipment. This differs from the other clusters in which hand tools, basic irrigation equipment and backpack sprayers played a similar function. Labour relations are also distinctly different for this cluster,

with hired labour constituting the main source of labour. On average, 6 full-time and 20 seasonal workers and no family labour were reported.

The individuals in this cluster considered themselves farm managers instead of farmers, and many combined farm management with other activities. All these farms operate along the lines of a formal business, with access to finance from commercial banks, are tax registered, have well-documented administrative systems, etcetera. Importantly, all of these farming enterprises were established and developed with non-agricultural capital acquired before embarking on farming, mainly from a small business of salaried work. It was only in one case that an established orchard was inherited and hence a young farmer without any capital or additional income was able to gain access. They represented a cross-section of age categories in terms of demographics, and their educational level is also highly varied (Table 4.3; see Box 4.4 for a detailed vignette).

These farmers aim to resemble existing commercial white farmers by becoming increasingly more mechanised and productive. The idea of success is closely linked to growth and accumulation. These goals are accompanied by three main strategies – on-farm investment, non-farm investment and expansion. On-farm investment usually takes the form of increased mechanisation by purchasing equipment and inputs. Off-farm investments are generally seen as a strategy to spread risk and take the form of speculative investment in property and other small businesses. Expansion is taking place by acquiring access to additional land to establish new orchards or purchasing abandoned orchards. The diversity between the farmers in this cluster largely hinges on different emphases and combinations of these three strategies. These strategies all hinge on access to capital, largely generated from non-farm sources in the case of the older farmers or from intergenerational wealth transfer in the form of inheritance of already significantly capitalised farms by younger farmers.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

These findings challenge the simple notion of an undifferentiated class of market-oriented smallholders and have illustrated the multiple axes along which these smallholder tree-crop farmers are differentiated. It highlights the degree and nature of livelihood diversification that enables entry into and prospects for accumulation by producing highly capital-intensive and high-value tree crops such as macadamia and avocado. The critical roles of welfare grants, skilled and semi-skilled salaried work and participation in the informal agricultural economy were identified and found to largely determine material differences between farmers that affect their class position, degree and scope for accumulation or the lack thereof. Livelihood diversification as a strategy for rural people across the developing world is well documented (Ellis, 2000), and rural South Africa is no exception in this regard. The importance of non-farm income and welfare grants was

also found in a study in North West Province (Francis, 2002) and two studies in the rural Eastern Cape (Neves, 2017b; van Averbeke & Hebinck, 2007).

However, these findings demonstrate how the general patterns of livelihood diversification and the diversity and interconnectedness of livelihood strategies employed by rural population more generally are reflected amongst tree-cropping smallholders whose niche market orientation and shared commodity focus has generally led to them being considered as relatively undifferentiated (c.f DAFF, 2013; DRDLR, 2009). Recognising the nature and interdependence between different livelihood sources and agricultural production is particularly important where these high-value tree crops are considered the cornerstone for rural job creation and growth (Cousins & Genis, 2018; NPC, 2013).

Class formation and the hybrid class categories identified illustrate how they intersect with demographics, and material and aspirational characteristics in highly dynamic ways, facilitating or constraining accumulation. In exploring these emergent accumulation trajectories, it is useful to distinguish between accumulation 'from below', whereby farmers use their own resources to expand into capitalist production and 'from above', which involves sponsored accumulation facilitated by the interests of capitalist elites or the state (Cousins, 2013; Neocosmos, 1993). The former holds the most potential to generate long-term and broad-based growth and benefits for rural populations (Scoones et al., 2012). This has been demonstrated in Zimbabwe in the wake of radical agrarian reform, where a significant group of petty commodity producers are accumulating 'from below' via agricultural production with limited access to capital identified as the key constraint to the emergence of a significant class of small-scale capitalists (Scoones et al., 2012, p. 523). Accumulation 'from below' via agricultural petty commodity production has also been demonstrated amongst smallholders on irrigation schemes in South Africa (Cousins, 2013; van Averbeke & Mohamed, 2006). Unlike these cases where accumulation 'from below' and the emergence of a class of small-scale capitalists were largely facilitated via agricultural production and constrained by access to land, water and markets, the returns on high-value tree crops and a lucrative growing market pose significantly higher potential for accumulation 'from below'. However, as demonstrated, reaching this potential for those already engaged in tree-crop farming is a highly uneven and contingent process.

The concept of 'classes of labour' (Bernstein, 2006, p. 455) is useful in understanding the uneven trajectory that underpins the scope for accumulation and emergence of small-scale capitalist production. This concept captures the increasing fragmentation of labour across multiple sites of reproduction (urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, waged employment and self-employment). In the case of the small-scale capitalist identified in this study, "agrarian capital beyond the countryside" (Bernstein,

2010, p. 110) has proved key for investing in farming and sustaining the long duration until trees reach maturity. This capital was acquired largely via skilled or semi-skilled work (mostly civil servants) or formal or informal businesses outside of agriculture, as pension grants alone are insufficient to meet the investment requirements for tree crops and the simple reproductive needs. Only in cases of wage work and agricultural diversification did farmers demonstrate upward class mobility. For the agricultural PCPs, this remains highly contingent on access to water and markets. For salaried workers, it hinges on the degree to which they are able to use their capital competitively and valorise it within agricultural markets.

The limited size of the cluster of small-scale capitalists compared to the other clusters speaks to the broader constraints in terms of skills and employment. This casts doubt on the prospects for significant rural development and job creation more broadly being achieved via this route. Agricultural PCPs, on the other hand, appear to hold much more potential via their diversified agricultural strategies that are proving to facilitate accumulation ‘from below’, albeit limited for now. The prospect for increased accumulation and expanded reproduction appears promising for this group, albeit slower and more limited compared to accumulation ‘from below’ via access to non-agrarian capital in the form of salaried work.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

This chapter set out to explore: *What is the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers, and which dynamics are shaping this?* Three broad livelihood trajectories can be observed amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers, drawing from Dorward et al.’s (2009) typology of livelihood strategies available to the poor – ‘hanging in’, ‘inching up’ and ‘stepping up and out’. For most welfare-dependent PCPs, their prospects for accumulation are limited, leaving most at present ‘hanging in’ via their pension grants with uncertain prospects for tree crops to generate any significant income under the present conditions. However, considering the demographics of this ageing population, there are significant prospects via inheritance and agricultural diversification for ‘inching up’ as is currently demonstrated by agricultural PCPs who are diversifying into cash crops as a means to engage in limited accumulation.

The dynamics shaping socio-economic differentiation relate to income from non-agricultural sources, as these determine the scope for accumulation. With access to non-agrarian capital in the case of small-scale capitalists, some are ‘stepping in’ to agriculture which subsequently enables possibilities for accumulation and ‘stepping up’ via more intensive and extensive tree-cropping practices. Significant accumulation occurs through integration into a high-value tree-crop commodity chain where capital can be generated via non-agricultural sources. This is usually through informal or formal businesses



or salaried work. Considering the high unemployment and a highly restrained labour market, such possibilities remain very limited. Despite the differentiated prospects for accumulation and employment generated through smallholder tree-crop farming, there are significant constraints to its growth. Foremost amongst these is the restricted access to land and water and constraining agroecological, socio-political and spatial conditions.

This chapter was a brief attempt to explore some of the key dynamics and outcomes emerging from this class-analytic typology. However, a more empirically grounded account of the emergent processes, especially how class relations and dynamics explain these outcomes, is taken up in the following three chapters.



## Chapter 5

# Expanding commodity frontiers and the emergence of customary land markets<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> This chapter has been published as: Olofsson, M. (2021). Expanding commodity frontiers and the emergence of customary land markets: A case study of tree-crop farming in Venda, South Africa. *Land Use Policy*, 101, 105203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.105203>. It has been slightly modified to avoid repetition within the thesis and for style and language. The individual narratives included here as text boxes are adapted from the paper: Van Leynseele, Y and Olofsson, M. (2023). Unpacking land-associated assemblages 'from below': Smallholders' land access strategies at the commercial tree-crop frontier. *Political Geography*, 100, 102792.



## 5.1 Introduction

The nature of land tenure security is central to enhancing inclusive rural development and promoting livelihoods for rural people. How people gain access to land, with what rights, how these rights are held, by whom, and what they enable, and the nature of the institutions that mediate these processes, are some of the key questions that have underpinned debates around land tenure security (Section 1.3). Arguments for greater formalisation and land titling focus on land as an economic asset, the value and benefits of which are considered restrained by customary tenure systems. In this view, titling is a prerequisite to enabling efficient land allocation via the market, thereby increasing investment, access to credit, and productivity; all deemed necessary for addressing poverty and facilitating economic growth (Soto, 2000). This narrow economic and market-oriented approach has been extensively critiqued because it does not address the complex historical and political nature of poverty (Bromley, 2009). However, it continues to be influential in African states (Boone, 2019, pp. 386-387). Proponents of customary tenure systems, on the other hand, consider these to be more appropriate systems of land governance due to their socio-cultural embedding. Such locally embedded systems are considered better able to provide for a range of local land-based needs, ensuring secure land tenure access for different groups, including the most vulnerable, in a feasible and socially legitimate manner (Cotula et al., 2006; Sjaastad & Cousins, 2009; Springer, 2013; Toulmin, 2008). Even the World Bank, which has long been advocating and supporting land titling programmes, has shifted its position over the years and now acknowledges the importance of recognising and supporting existing forms of customary land governance (Byamugisha, 2013; Deininger, 2003).

Despite the very different assumptions and arguments underpinning these opposing perspectives, they share a common view of customary land as largely operating outside market principles. In the case of arguments for land titling, land is considered as 'dead capital' (Soto, 2000) that can be liberated by turning it into a commodity through titling. Advocates of customary forms of tenure emphasise the positive livelihood and equity outcomes precisely because land is not commoditised under customary tenure. A growing body of literature demonstrates that a vibrant and expanding land market within customary tenure systems has emerged whereby customary land is being individualised and transacted between individuals outside of the formally recognised system of land tenure (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006; Chitonge et al. 2017a; Chauveau & Colin 2010; Colin 2013). This has been apparent for more than a century and is considered more common in Africa than is generally appreciated and on the increase (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006). These changes are taking place within what has been referred to as "a 'new' African customary land tenure in sub-Saharan Africa, that is much variegated across countries but increasingly formalised, more legible and relatively more predictable

to capital than in the past” (Chimhowu, 2019, p. 902). The characteristics, features and dynamics of these emerging customary markets have taken many different forms, with highly varied outcomes (Benjaminsen et al., 2009).

This chapter traces the changing patterns of land access and transfer and the emergence of informal or customary land markets following the expansion of tree crops. This expansion is part of the broader agrarian policy to integrate smallholder farmers into high-value commodity chains (EDD, 2011). At the national level, the South African state is grappling with implementing land reform at scale to address the existing racially skewed land-ownership patterns. However, the ‘bottom-up’ processes of customary land access and transactions explored in this chapter fall outside the purview of land reform and have been largely overlooked. The chapter asks: *how is the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfiguring land access arrangements and tenure security, and how does this affect customary land governance?* The chapter draws on survey data, interviews and land-related data collected from traditional authorities and local municipalities (Chapter 3).

Section 5.2 explores customary law, emphasising its interpretation as ‘living’ law, followed by an overview of key legislation to situate current contestation around the interpretation of custom (Section 5.3). Section 5.4 explores the continuities and changes related to land access and tenure security in the wake of expanding subtropical fruit and nut orchards in Venda. These changes are then analysed in relation to the dynamics of customary law (Section 5.5). The discussion reflects on what these findings mean for contemporary understanding of customary land governance (Section 5.6), while Section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

## 5.2 Living customary law in South Africa

Around 60% of the population in South Africa lives in tenure situations that fall outside of the officially recognised system characterised by private title, while 33% live in communal areas under forms of customary tenure (Hornby et al., 2017, p. 8). The nature and dynamics of these forms of customary tenure are highly varied and do not easily or neatly fit into any fixed notion of custom (Hornby et al., 2017, p. 8), making them difficult to define. Controversies over what constitutes customary tenure practices are by no means new. To understand these controversies, I use Oomen’s (2005) conceptualisation of living law as it underscores the dynamic and situated nature of customary law. It is defined as the way in which law is lived in day-to-day reality and the norms and values that guide this practice. Informed by long-term and in-depth ethnographically informed studies of social practices, which engage with a plurality of voices and perspectives instead of voices of authority, it is increasingly considered the most appropriate means to understand customary law.

In addition to living law, Oomen (2005, p. 201) distinguishes between common, official, and stated customary law. Common customary law is a composite of customary laws and legal precedents upheld by the constitution. Official customary law refers to recorded or codified discourses of custom and customary practices. Finally, stated customary law is an idealised and normative account of custom by traditional leaders or respondents, based on what they would like customary law to be. The four categories are not mutually exclusive but influence and draw legitimacy from one another (Oomen, 2005, p. 203). To this end, local law is conceptualised as “loosely constructed repertoires” (Ibid.), whereby local custom and constitutional and development values are simultaneously drawn on and combined. As such, living customary law is seen as negotiated and fluid, situated within ever-changing social and political relations, which it simultaneously reflects and shapes (Oomen, 2005, p. 203). Claassens (2012, p. 89) emphasises the dynamic, evolving and situated nature of living customary law, arguing that it is:

...the outcome of interactions involving a range of people, of claims and counter-arguments, of different people grappling with ultimately difficult shared realities, and ultimately having to find a way forward in the face of intractable circumstances. (...) It entails recognition of the intersecting materialities that shape people’s lives and dictate which options are available, and workable, in the local context.

The dynamic nature of living customary law is constantly evolving and responding to changing social and political contexts. Moreover, colonial and apartheid-era policies and contemporary laws are widely recognised as having profoundly distorted the institution of custom. This begs the question of whether any enduring distinctive features of living customary tenure can be identified. Anthropological and historical literature have documented customary land tenure systems in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa broadly from the pre-colonial period to the present. Based on this literature, it has been argued that distinctive underlying principles and characteristics of customary tenure systems can be identified which have endured over time and are evident in contemporary practices (Cousins, 2007, 2008). Okoth-Ogendo (2002, p. 10) describes the resilience of African tenure systems despite centuries of exploitation, suppression and subversion, stating that:

Indigenous law, long regarded as a dangerous weed, simply went underground where it continued to grow and despite the overlay of statutory law that was designed to replace it.....whether regarded as ‘law’ or not, indigenous norms and structures, particularly in respect of land relations, continue to operate as sets of social and cultural facts.

Building on both Okoth-Ogendo's (1989) conceptual framework and from a variety of documented cases from across a range of African customary land tenure regimes, Cousins (2007, p. 293) identifies five general principles being embodied in African tenure systems:

1. Land and resource rights are directly embedded within a range of social relationships such as households, kinship networks, and different levels of community. Individuals may hold multiple social identities, so rights can be considered 'nested' or 'layered' in character.
2. Rights result from accepted membership in a social unit. This means they can be obtained via birth, marriage, affiliation to a group, or transactions such as gifts, loans and purchases.
3. Land and resource rights can be defined as individual, family, or communal. Individual and family rights usually refer to rights to residential and, while communal rights usually apply to common property resources such as forest, grazing and water.
4. A distinction is made between access to and control over land and resources. Control is related to ensuring access and enforcing rights, regulating common property usage, overseeing the redistribution of access across generations, and resolving land-claim disputes. Importantly control is often located in a "hierarchy of nested systems of authority" (Ibid.) with numerous functions at lower levels, such as the village or household.
5. Social, political and resource boundaries are negotiable and flexible based on the nested character of social identities, rights and authority structures.

These underlying principles and characteristics are considered common features across various geographically dispersed cases over time. Therefore, they form a useful reference point from which to explore how the commercialisation of tree crops affects land access, tenure security, and customary land governance from a living law perspective.<sup>44</sup> As tree crops require a relatively large land area compared to other cash crops and subsistence production, they profoundly impact the social relation of customary land.

### 5.3 The legislative framework and living law

Contemporary dynamics of 'living' customary law must be situated in key post-apartheid legislation relating to custom. Since 2003 several new laws have been passed (and subsequently withdrawn, as will be discussed later), which have been heavily criticised

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<sup>44</sup> Cousins (2007, p. 293) adds a caveat that the ways and extent to which these features are observable in actually existing cases is variable, and sometimes some of these features may not be observable at all, hinging on the complex histories of state intervention and responses to these from below.



for perpetuating apartheid-era distortions of custom and traditional leadership and ignoring the highly complex, varied and dynamic nature of customary tenure systems as living law (Claassens & Cousins, 2008; Buthelezi et al., 2018; Claassens, 2018). The constitution recognises the institution, status and role of traditional leadership according to customary law (Government of South Africa, 1996, p. 109). Similarly, key constitutional court judgements have upheld participatory and inclusive versions of customary law, interpreted along the lines of a living version of customary law (Bennett, 2008, p. 144). Despite this progressive interpretation of the courts, key legislation implemented in the post-apartheid era has cemented distorted apartheid versions of 'official' customary law, arguably serving politically connected businesses and traditional leaders (Claassens, 2018). The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act 41 of 2003, for example, essentially centralises power in the traditional councils and leaders, maintaining the official status that they acquired during apartheid through the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. It is important to note that this law does not give traditional leaders the power or legal authority to sign binding agreements or sell land that falls within the tribal boundaries that they govern.<sup>45</sup> The Communal Land Rights Act 11 of 2004 (CLRA) and the Traditional Courts Bill of 2008 and 2012 (TCB) would have given such powers to traditional leaders, but the former got stuck on procedural grounds at the Constitutional court, and the latter did not gain the required support in parliament and was never signed into law.

Two new and highly controversial acts were recently signed into law by the president: the Traditional Khoi-San Leadership Bill 3 of 2019 (TKLB) and the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act 2 of 2019 (TLGFA). The TKLB will consolidate powers in undemocratic traditional leaders, making them upwardly accountable instead of downwardly accountable, within territories defined by apartheid-imposed boundaries (LARC, 2015a). Importantly, both acts extend traditional leaders' current powers over land allocation. This allows them to enter into binding agreements over land without obtaining the consent of those whose land rights are undermined or eliminated, along with far-reaching punitive powers over those living within their territories (Claassens, 2018, pp. 77-78; LRC, 2019). Much of the opposition to these new laws comes from people who are not against custom or traditional leaders per se, but rather the distorted versions thereof that are deeply rooted in apartheid-era legislation and interpretations of official versions of custom that explicitly focus on the powers and status of traditional leaders (Claassens, 2014). As a growing alliance of rural peoples mobilising against the new bills states:

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<sup>45</sup> The tribal boundaries that were demarcated during the apartheid era remain highly contested (Claassens 2011), but they continue to represent the boundaries of customary authorities.

Tradition and culture need to be respected and protected...this bill [TKLB] is about giving new oppressive powers to unelected chiefs like that apartheid government did...Accountable traditional leaders and courts exist. They do not need laws like this (*"Stop the Bantustan bills," n.d.*).

Rural opposition, as articulated by the 'Stop the Bantustan bills' campaign and rural residents across the country during the public hearings conducted for the High-Level Panel Report (Parliament of South Africa, 2017, pp. 467–509), all point to 'living' versions of custom as a basis from which to interpret customary law.

In relation to land use, the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) came into effect in July 2015 with the aim being to address the fragmented, complicated and inconsistent spatial planning following the repeal of many apartheid-era laws. This law aims to "provide a uniform, effective and comprehensive system of spatial planning and land use management...and promote social and economic inclusion" (Republic of South Africa, 2013, p. 14). The regulations that provide details on how the law should be implemented assert that traditional councils are responsible for providing proof of land allocation in terms of the customary law applicable in that traditional area. Submission of such proof is required to go to the local municipality to authorise the land-use certificate (DRDLR, 2015, p. 19). Like the TLGFA, this law gives wide-ranging powers over land allocation, planning and use to traditional councils and lacks accountability measures (LARC, 2015b). These laws demonstrate a growing rift between constitutional values that support living versions of customary law and the apartheid version of official and stated versions of custom upon which they are based.

## **5.4 Continuities and changes in land access for orchards**

### **5.4.1 Access to land for orchards during the apartheid era (up to 1994)**

The expansion of orchards in Venda from the 1950s onwards needs to be seen in the context of apartheid, which confined the black majority to a mere 13% of the land area across ten ethnically divided 'homelands'. These semi-independent homelands saw little development and relied heavily on the white South African economy for livelihood opportunities in the fast-expanding mining and white commercial farming sector. Seen from the perspective of the broader political economy of the time, the 'Bantustans' were essential to ensuring the social reproduction of its inhabitants and, thereby, the supply of cheap migrant labour to the fast-growing industries in white South Africa (Bundy, 1972). "Betterment planning" was one of the key mechanisms implemented in this regard, whereby a series of land control laws ensured that rural people were stripped of their rights to control and use the land as per local customary practices. Instead, these rights were given to the tribal authorities selected by the state based on their willingness

to cooperate with the apartheid state and enforce betterment planning (Stubbs, 2013). Dispersed homesteads were consolidated into villages, and access to grazing- and cropland was curtailed.

**Table 5.1** Date of land acquisition for orchards per farmer

Land acquisition date	No farmers	Percentage
Acquired pre-1980	12	16.9
Acquired 1981-1994	27	38.0
Acquired 1995-2008	19	26.8
Acquired 2009-2016	13	18.3
Total	71 <sup>a</sup>	100.0

<sup>a</sup> The total sample was n=80, of which 9 respondents were not able to answer this question. In most cases, this was because they could not remember.

Source: Survey farmer survey 2015-2016.

The first orchards were reported to have been established during this period of betterment planning. Orchards were demarcated on plots between 5-10 ha<sup>46</sup>, depending on land availability in the specific area and geographical features. Survey data indicates the earliest recorded acquisition of an orchard dated 1954, but the 1980s and early 1990s were the real advents for orchard establishment in Venda, and many of the orchards in production today date back to this period (Table 5.1). Orchards were primarily the domain of male heads of households, most of whom worked as migrant labourers, only returning to Venda during the holiday season.

Interviews revealed that land demarcation for orchards mainly happened in two ways in these early years. In the first instance, individuals had already identified a piece of land and came to the petty headman (*Vhakoma*)<sup>47</sup> requesting access and use rights. In the second instance, individuals would voice their interest directly to the local petty headman to ascertain what land was available. The petty headman consulted immediate

<sup>46</sup> From the survey data, the average (median) size of an orchard is 6.9 ha. This figure is remarkably close to the official figure of 6.7 ha recorded by the Development Bank of Southern Africa in 1985 (cited in Lahiff, 2000, p. 96).

<sup>47</sup> The contemporary structure and function of traditional leadership in Venda, as in many other former homelands across South Africa, is a remnant of its pre-colonial form. The profound impact of colonial and apartheid rule on the institution of traditional leaders is discussed elsewhere (e.g. Ntsebeza, 2008) but suffice to say that the contemporary socio-political hierarchy of traditional leadership consists of four levels, each with varying degrees of involvement in land allocation. The paramount chief, chief, headman, and petty headman. In Venda, these are referred to as *Khosikhulu* (sing.)/*Mahosimmahulu* (pl), *Khosi* (sing.)/*Mahosi* (pl), *Khosana* (sing.)/*Vhamusanda* (pl), and *Mukoma* (sing.)/*Vhakoma* (pl) (Mahosa, 2020).

neighbours and community members to ensure there were no potential land or boundary issues regarding existing use rights. If there were no potential overlapping rights or issues from the community, the request would be taken to the headman (*VhaMusanda*) and, in turn, to the chief for final approval. The agricultural extension officer would then oversee the final demarcation, and the local magistrate would issue the permission to occupy (PTO) certificate. An application fee was paid to the tribal authority once the PTO had been issued. The amount paid was usually at the discretion of the person to whom the land was allocated and was generally referred to as a gift (*nduvho*) instead of a mandatory fee. Despite the expected payment, the land was unanimously referred to as a 'gift' from the chief. The rules and norms for demarcating and distributing land in these early years of orchard establishment (the 1980s and 1990s) were reported as being largely similar across tribal authorities and broadly echo how others have described apartheid-era land access (Ntsebeza, 2008, pp. 250–251).

Respondents described access rights as contingent primarily on one's group membership (i.e. being a clan member by birth or marriage), interest or desire to establish an orchard, and, perhaps most critically, one's ability. Ability was usually assessed based on someone's non-agricultural income, which in most cases originated from migrant work and would enable the purchase of tree seedlings to establish an orchard. Additionally, land rights were strongly gendered: only male heads of households were assigned the primary use rights in the form of a PTO.

During this time, land identified for orchards was mostly uncultivated and usually covered with thick indigenous bush and some trees. In some cases, the land was in locations that became available due to the forced removals within the framework of betterment planning, whereby scattered homesteads were consolidated into villages. Most of the orchards were demarcated on the rocky, bushy slopes of the southern side of the eastern Soutpansberg mountain range and further north on the mountain slopes on the northern side of the range, which is generally less steep and rocky. Boundaries followed features in the environment such as rivers, ridges and rocky outcrops, and access was generally via footpaths or self-made dirt tracks. The Venda Agricultural Corporation (Agriven)<sup>48</sup> also played an important role in orchard establishment by providing orchard farmers with heavily subsidised trees at a rate of R2 per seedling.<sup>49</sup>

Patterns of land access were largely uniform and relatively open and flexible. However, land access for orchards became more contentious over time, notably where multiple and sometimes competing interests in land emerged. Examples were found in

<sup>48</sup> Agriven was a subsidiary of the Venda Development Corporation, the organisation established in 1975 to promote economic development in the homeland. Agriven was tasked with farmer support to establish orchards and other forms of 'economically viable' farming units (Lahiff, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a headman, 31 July 2017.

peri-urban areas such as Tshakhuma and closer to the urban centres of Thohoyandou and Elim (see Figure 3.3). Tshakhuma was a vibrant centre for education (a by-product of the long-standing presence of the Berlin mission station) and is favourably located for agricultural wage labour on the frontier of the commercial white farming area and a major thoroughfare with the largest fresh fruit market in the area. This, coupled with its exceptional agricultural potential and rapidly expanding population, increased pressure on land. This created a situation where land access became more contingent on one's social status and relationship vis-à-vis the chief. In situations of land pressure, local power relations, kinship networks and political affiliation largely shaped access to rights:

In 1988, I received my orchard after others already had their orchards. They were all given by the chief, but it was controlled by Agriven. There was favouritism when the land was initially allocated. Those who are close to the chief, not necessarily family members but the favourites, they got land. (...) The chief only wanted to give land to nationalists. The chief was on the Venda national party; the Venda Independent party was the opposition. The Venda Independent Party wanted the homeland to be independent. The Venda National Party wanted to remain inside South Africa as a self-governing territory. These two parties did not get on well. The chief was on the side of the Venda National Party, so he only allocated land to those who were part of the VNP. I didn't get land initially because I was on the Venda Independent Party, but eventually, I got the land because I was still close to the chief. (...) Initially, I got 3 ha, and then there was another portion left, so now I have 5 ha. The owner of the bottle store was married to the sister of the chief, so he got 20 ha (*Interview, 21 July 2018*).

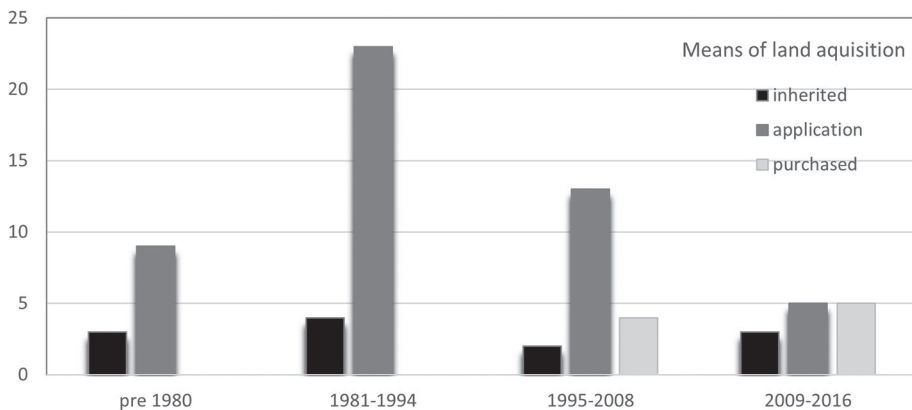
The quote illustrates how the institution of traditional leadership and, in particular, the senior traditional leader mediated land access and how the rules of access varied depending on social ties and kinship. Such disputes over land access were not uncommon in reports about land allocation during this period. It also demonstrates how traditional accountability mechanisms, whereby traditional leaders were downwardly accountable to rural residents, had been eroded. The consolidation of power in local chiefs by the apartheid government, creating what Mamdani (1996) refers to as “decentralised despots” (p. 23), enabled chiefs to wield powers and authority without downward accountability. This resembles Cousins' notion of ‘nested systems of authority’, whereby power over land allocation was located in nested systems of authority with many functions devolved to the lowest levels, including immediate neighbours and those in the surrounding area (Cousins, 2007, p. 293).

### 5.5 Contemporary dynamics of land access for orchards

As new market opportunities emerged for smallholders to gain access to commercial value chains in the post-apartheid era, so too has the demand for land to establish and expand existing orchards to produce commodities for these markets. The land acquisition process has taken different forms, demonstrating both continuities with past practices and significant changes. Survey data indicates these trends, illustrating that in terms of continuities, land access via traditional leaders continues to be the most common means of accessing land, albeit that there has been a progressive decline in land accessed this way from the 1980s onwards (Figure 5.1). Inheritance of land represents a relatively less important means of accessing land, although it remained relatively constant from the 1980s onwards. Interestingly, land purchase emerged in the mid-1990s and has been gradually increasing in frequency since, and during 2009-2016, it was as prevalent as access via traditional authorities. Of this same sample, 20% had acquired a second plot of land. After 1995, most of these plots were acquired via purchase.

This survey data indicates the changing means of land acquisition over time and, importantly, the emergence of land acquisition via purchase. This is further substantiated by triangulation with data collected from the Thulamela Municipality, where most tree crop farms are found. Records spanning the period of 2013-2019 confirm the importance of land sales, with at least 27.9% of land transactions in this period being based on sales (Table 5.2).<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 5.1** Periods and means of land acquisition



Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

<sup>50</sup> This proportion can be higher as the municipality does not always capture the reason for the transaction of a PTO – as is reflected in the large number of missing data.

**Table 5.2** Thulamela municipality records showing the nature of land transactions 2013-2019

Type of transaction	Number of cases <sup>a</sup>	%
Sale	19	28.0
Inheritance	23	33.8
Re-issue	3	4.4
Missing data	23	33.8
Total	68	100.0

<sup>a</sup> These exclude new allocations which were not available at the time.

*Source:* Author's own calculation based on available municipal records 2019.

Both the number of individuals who acquired land through purchase and the number of land sales in relation to inheritance recorded in the municipal records indicate that customary land is no longer solely accessed through the chief and that land markets are emerging in a context of growing demand for land. It is also important to note that the land area acquired, whether through sale or application, tended to be relatively comparable in most places, except densely populated areas, which have witnessed rapid urban expansion, as discussed in Section 5.5.3. While these figures give some indication of the relevant dynamics in terms of the numbers and means through which land acquisition takes place, they need to be situated within a rapidly changing rural context.

### 5.5.1 Differentiation amongst the actors in search of land for orchards

Three groups of actors are mainly driving the growing demand for land to establish orchards. The first is a minority of relatively successful farmers who have managed to fully cultivate the land they got access to during the apartheid era to establish their orchards. These are usually relatively well-off pensioners who previously worked as civil servants or had a small business which enabled them to accumulate non-agricultural capital, which was reinvested in agriculture (these are the small-scale capitalists identified in Chapter 4). In this way, these farmers were able to fully cultivate their land with trees, subsequently generating a significant agricultural revenue which they are now looking to invest by gaining access to more land and expanding their orchards (Box 5.1). Related to this group is a subgroup of young farmers – who fall within the small-scale capitalist category identified in Chapter 4 – who inherited well-established and profitable orchards from their parents and, similarly, are now looking to expand.

**Box 5.1** Vignette of a farmer navigating land access through slow consolidation

Mr Nduvho was a teacher in Johannesburg who took early retirement due to the opportunity presented by his father to acquire land to establish an orchard. His father was one of the select few from Tshakhuma close to the chief and, through this privileged position, acquired access to 20 ha in 1996. Initially, his father was only cultivating maize on a small portion of the land, financially unable to start establishing an orchard. His father's intention in acquiring the land was that his son would one day take over the farm and turn it into a commercial orchard. Having made some lucrative investments with his limited savings, he was able to use this as the initial financial investment to start his orchard. This enabled Nduvho to return to Venda from Johannesburg, where he had been teaching and started work full time on the farm. He was initially only able to establish 5 ha with tree crops which he did incrementally over a couple of years. His limited access to capital means he follows a slow but consistent expansion trajectory as his agricultural income allows. This is accompanied by a strategic diversification of tree crops. He explained, "To play your cards safe, you must have avocados, litchis and macadamia, and then if the market is not good one year, you have another crop" (Interview, 16 April 2016). While he proceeded with caution, restricted to following a slow trajectory towards expansion due to financial constraints, by the end of 2020, he had almost managed to fill his arable land with tree crops. By 2020 he was turning to new opportunities for expansion.

Nduvho's vision remains growth-oriented, and he aspires to establish a further 5 ha with tree crops over the coming years as his profits enable. To achieve this, he is negotiating access to the land adjacent to his existing orchard, which extends along a corridor to the east between the upper row of residential stands and the forest on the mountainside. He recalls how many residents once actively cultivated this area and removed the indigenous bush for this purpose. However, over time "they got tired" and now rely only on their pensions, leaving only a few maize cultivators. This posed increasing difficulties for those who remained as the indigenous bush grew back around their fields, and with it, the threats caused to their crops by wild animals increased. Hence, Nduvo observes that it's only a matter of time till those who remain to retire from cultivating. However, he does not want to wait until then, so he has embarked on negotiations with them. He is offering them each R2,500 (171 USD), essentially to stop cultivating there, justifying this amount as a token gesture to "keep good relations" rather than purchasing access rights. He explains, "these gogos [grannies] are happy to negotiate with me; they know me. I give their children work on my farm during the harvest season" (Conversation, 21 December 2020). Once they acceded to this, Nduvho approached the traditional authority to adjust his current PTO certificate to reflect the additional 4 ha he can now prove is no longer being cultivated.

*Source:* Compiled from two interviews conducted on 16 and 20 April 2016 and a telephone conversation on 11 December 2020.



A second group are aspirant farmers, who did not get access to land to establish an orchard during the apartheid era and only have access to small and often fragmented parcels of land previously used for food and cash crops. They have been in the process of converting this land from vegetables to tree crops, but due to the limited area allocated for crop production, they are looking for larger parcels of land to expand. They, too, are usually pensioners with some savings from non-agricultural activities in which they can invest (Box 5.2).

A third group are young people with jobs in the city, looking to invest in agriculture. They have witnessed the fast growth of macadamia and avocado amongst smallholders in their home villages and are looking to get in on the opportunity. Acquiring land to establish an orchard is perceived as a long-term investment opportunity. They do not plan to work the land themselves but will rely on hired labour and support from family and friends who can play an oversight and management role when they are not around. While having very different socio-economic positions and farming objectives, these actors share the common aspiration to acquire land, driving the rush for land to convert into orchards (Box 5.3).

#### Box 5.2 Vignette of a farmer navigating land access by expansion and repurposing

After retiring in 2014 from a teaching career, Mr Tendani turned his energy and dedication to full-time farming at Tshakhuma. Until his retirement, his farming activities had been limited to a small 0.5-ha plot near the river in Tshitavadhulu, on the southern side of Tshakhuma (Figure 3.3), which he had been allocated by the local headman when another elderly farmer 'retired' from cultivating it. His cultivation here had been limited to maize and groundnuts for home consumption. He was simultaneously farming another 0.5ha plot adjacent to his home, where he planted a small macadamia orchard back in the early 1990s. After retiring, his primary objective was to acquire more land to expand with macadamia. From his 0.5-ha macadamia orchard, he was generating a reasonable income despite its limited size, which motivated him to expand. He considered himself to have two options: to acquire additional land to establish a larger orchard and the other to convert the land he already had access to into a macadamia orchard. He pursued both strategies.

In terms of acquiring new land, he started exploring options within the limited budget that his teacher's pension could enable. He anticipated that the land around the Tshakhuma dam would be too expensive as orchards had already been established there. Hence he explored what he considered the more affordable option, acquiring small plots of land from the elderly farmers growing seasonal maize for household consumption on the mountainside above the residential area. He initially identified an elderly lady who had access to 1.5 ha,

and it took a few years, but finally, in 2015, she agreed to the sale once she had become ‘too tired’ to continue farming. She charged R3,000, and together they went to the tribal authority to register the transaction. “It’s not allowed to sell land, so I can’t say I paid; otherwise, she would be reported” (Conversation via phone, 19 November 2020). Land cultivated for subsistence purposes is not usually issued with a PTO certificate. However, with Tendani’s ambitions to establish a macadamia orchard, he wanted to secure a PTO to secure his land rights and qualify for potential government and private sector support initiatives. He continued negotiations with other elderly farmers who bordered his new plot, and after another drawn-out process, he acquired the adjacent 0.5 ha plot in 2019. In the four years that had elapsed since his initial purchase, the asking price for the land had significantly increased. For this 0.5 ha, he was requested to pay R4,000, but after some negotiations, he managed to secure it for R3,500 in 2019. He is currently preparing the land to establish his orchard. In addition to getting access to new land, he also started converting the land he already had. In 2015 he started repurposing his 0.5 plot of land in Tshitavadhulu by planting macadamia seedlings. Initially, he intercropped the young trees with green beans, garlic, and other vegetables for sale in local markets, which would bring in a small income while the trees mature. In 2021 he anticipated getting his first harvest from this new macadamia orchard.

Farming across the three small separate parcels of land was considered far from ideal, and he wanted to establish a much larger orchard but knew this would not be possible given the land scarcity in Tshakhuma. He had heard that land was being sold cheaply in Rambuda, a tribal authority some 70 km (close to 2 hours’ drive) from Tshakhuma. He approached the local traditional leaders and requested access to 10 ha. Eventually, he was offered a 5-ha parcel of land for R15,000. While he felt he had made a good purchase, in the five years since he purchased this land, he has been unable to afford to do anything with the land and is concerned that this land will be taken back by the traditional authority because he has not been able to finance the clearing of the land and take steps towards establishing an orchard. Given the logistics of this land being so far away and his inability to access finance, he does not think it will be feasible to do anything with it apart from maybe keeping some goats there. He is anxious to at least put up a fence so that there is a visible marker that he is investing something in the land to avoid the land being reclaimed by the traditional authority, which it is customary to do in the absence of the land being used productively. He is uncertain how the traditional authority will act in this instance as he has officially purchased the land. His trajectory of land acquisition demonstrates a much more constrained path than Lutendo due to his limited access to capital.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews conducted on 14 July 2018 and follow-up telephone conversation in November 2020.

**Box 5.3** Vignette of a farmer navigating land access through opportunistic purchases

Lutendo's entry into farming was not a conventional one. Unlike other middle-aged tree-crop farmers who mostly gain access to land with established orchards via inheritance, Lutendo's relatively well-off family – with no history in farming – financed his way into land access. Lutendo was the black sheep of the family, he didn't finish school, and by his own account, he got involved with 'the wrong crowd' and a series of illicit activities. It was against this backdrop that his father purchased him a farm in 2003 in the hope that this would put him on a more socially accepted and respectable career track.

Lutendo's first farm was acquired from the daughter of one of the original landowners at the Southern side of the Tshakhuma dam, where the then chief Mazivhandila and Venda Minister of Agriculture had demarcated an area for the establishment of avocado orchards in the 1980s and 1990s. At the time, the area was divided into eight portions allocated without payments to individuals close to the chief. Many of these original owners have since passed on. She was only willing to sell a portion (2.5 ha) of the farm she inherited even though the farm was no longer being maintained and yields from the ageing trees were very low. She needed the money but was well aware of the potential value of land and wanted to hold on to what she could. This was the first of four separate parcels of land that Lutendo purchased between 2004 and 2017, backed by the financial support of his family. Each of the subsequent purchases resulted from a drawn-out negotiation process that sometimes spanned a few years. This was largely because most landowners at Tshakhuma, both the original owners and their decedents, were generally reluctant to sell their access rights to land in the face of increasing land scarcity and dense settlement. Knowing when a particular family was under financial strain or going through an unexpected crisis that left them in need of cash posed an opportune moment enabling the transaction of land. In one instance, Lutendo acquired a land parcel from a widow of the original landowner who needed surgery, and the land sale provided the capital which enabled this. In all four cases, Lutendo's land acquisition process demonstrates the critical role of timing and having insider knowledge of the personal circumstances of the landowners, which enabled these opportunistic sales. It is also important to note that the value of orchard land dramatically increased over the years since Lutendo acquired his first farm in 2004. At the time he paid R18,000 (1,224 USD) for 1 ha, while in 2017 he paid R70,000 (4,760 USD) for 1 ha.

The value of these transactions is not publicly disclosed. As Mr Lutendo said, "I make a deal with the seller, and the seller doesn't tell the chief they are selling. We make our own contract between us, and the seller just tells the chief they are giving me the land. The chief knows we are selling but can't prove it" (Interview, 9 July 2018). In total, Lutendo managed to acquire 8.5 ha of land adjacent to the dam, spread across four separate plots. He plans to acquire a number of other land parcels that currently border his land in time. He has a

medium-term strategy to acquire these parcels and can relate the personal circumstances of each landowner and the expected time frames before he manages to secure the sales. His vision is to consolidate his separate parcels into one large farm. On the land his family purchased for him, he relies entirely on hired labour and has mostly removed the ageing avocado trees and replanted them with the macadamia cultivars desired by the market. In some instances, he has left some of the fruit-bearing avocados and intercropped them with macadamia seedlings, intending to remove the avocado trees once the macadamia starts maturing eventually.

By 2020, Lutendo had acquired 35 ha and employed 35 permanent staff and 17 seasonal workers. The rapid acquisition of land and thereby the growth of the farming enterprise has hinged on the complementary assets of Lutendo's local networks and knowledge and his brother's financial assets and business acumen. These enabled the strategic navigation of the relations with the local community and traditional authorities outside their own community. As Lutendo himself confesses, "My network is good and [my ability to] consult with people is very good" (Interview, 28 April 2016). Also, the promise of creating employment in an area with rampant unemployment and poverty helps him gain access to land as an 'outsider' uncontested.

*Source:* Compiled from interviews conducted on 28 April 2016, 9 July 2018, 7 March 2019 and telephonically on 18 February 2021.

### 5.5.2 The process of gaining access to land

The practice of gaining access to land reported by those who have acquired land in recent years confirms that the role of the petty headman in negotiating land allocation through a process of consultation with local community members has been largely superseded by the unilateral decisions made by the headman and chiefs. Current practices involve going directly to the headman, who identifies a parcel of land (sometimes in consultation with the chief), and then the traditional council officiates the allocation by way of a letter (Interview with a farmer, 28 April 2016). In some cases, especially when outsiders are looking for land, prospective landowners usually go directly to the chief, who consults with the headman. Consultation with the local community and immediate neighbours over land allocation, as was previously the case seems to have largely disappeared (Interview with a farmer, 14 July 2019). With the implementation of SPLUMA (Section 5.3) and related local bylaws, in addition to letters of authorisation from both the headman and chief, it is required that an official from the local Department of Agriculture assesses the suitability of the site for agricultural purposes. In addition, a surveyor's report is needed with area coordinates to confirm that the area being allocated matches the area stated in the recommendation letter from the traditional council. This is usually done by a surveyor from the municipality in collaboration with the local headman or, in a few

cases, by private surveyors. Based on these documents and a registration fee paid to the municipality (R564 for a business site in Thulamela Municipality; R1,200 for a business site in Makhado municipality), the municipal planning tribunal issues the “permission to use” (formerly referred to as permission to occupy). In the case of change of ownership either through inheritance or sale of land, a similar process is followed, and an affidavit is required from the seller and buyer, or a death certificate and affidavit from family members stating their agreement with the transfer of rights to a specific individual (Interviews with two municipal spatial planning officials, 7 & 13 March 2019)

What has changed significantly in the process of land access is the overt and covert payments that have become mandatory in the process of gaining access to land. Giving royalties (*nduvho*) in the form of cash or a portion of the harvest to the headman and chief in exchange for use rights to land is not new. However, this formerly discretionary customary practice has recently become institutionalised with predefined land prices set by the traditional council (Table 5.3) in addition to non-recorded ‘negotiated’ payments. The term ‘price’ is used here as distinct from an administrative fee; it refers to the amount of money charged for access to a piece of land. The pre-set price per hectare varies greatly between tribal authorities, largely contingent on land scarcity, proximity to markets and basic infrastructure.

Payments for use rights are clearly defined, usually displayed in the traditional council’s office, representing a degree of formality and transparency. However, it was found that behind these ‘official’ figures, coercion and extortion by traditional leaders were taking place in many instances. Covert payments are regularly required to secure land access, and these are often substantially higher and reported based on the unscrupulous and opportunistic practices of traditional leaders:

These people [the chief and his council] identify if a person has money. It’s all about money. They know my dad [a wealthy man], and they asked if I could give them R200,000, and when I said yes, even though I didn’t have the money, they said ok, come tomorrow, and I will show you the land. (...) The chief just makes up prices initially, the chief wanted R180,000, but I negotiated down to R120,000...The chief is the boss, the one who calls the shots when it comes to land. (...) Everything is done through the chief (application for water, electricity, roads, etcetera). If you start asking questions, they are not going to help you; you [are] going to have a big mess. Whatever he says goes (Interview with a farmer, 28 April 2016).

**Table 5.3** Land prices across traditional authorities as of 2018/2019

Traditional council	No. of orchards	Average orchard size (ha)	'Purchase' fee for use rights (ZAR/ha or plot)	Transfer of land access rights (ZAR/ha)	Ground rent (ZAR/ha)
TC 1	35	5	600 p/ha	*	20
TC2	183	7	7,000 (1-5ha) 10,000 (6-10ha)	*	20
TC3	511	12	1,000	500	20
TC4	324	5	7,000	1,000	200
TC5	21	5	50,000	12,000	5,000
TC6	180	5	1,000	500	30
TC7	12	3.5	7,500	*	40
TC8	755	7	5,000	5,000 (non-family) 1,000 (family)	100
TC9	57	7	5,000 (any size)	5,000	30

\*Data not available.

Source: Author's own calculation based on interviews with traditional council administrators.

Such practices of taking direct payments for land usually occur at the level of the local headman. It is raised as an issue of great concern by citizens but also by traditional authorities. As one traditional council secretary commented,

The royalties charged by the Vamusanda [headman] are difficult to control, we instruct them that they must charge less than the predefined land price, but they won't be controlled (*Interview with traditional council administrator, 12 March 2019*).

These direct payments to traditional leaders are cited as posing a significant challenge for municipalities, who feel they are unable to challenge land-allocation decisions made by the chief as money has already been paid (Ibid). In an interview with an official in the planning division of the Makhado municipality, he conferred how citizens go directly to the chief in an attempt to avoid paying the 'unofficial fees' to the headman, paying the set land prices and then submit their land-use application directly to the municipality with only an official letter from the chief. The official lamented how in such cases, they could

not proceed with the application as it is a requirement that the headman also submits a letter of approval, so as this official described it, the municipality effectively has to force the applicant to succumb to the unlawful practices of the local headman (Interview with planning officer 13 March 2019).

In addition to acquiring land via traditional leaders, the emergence of land transactions between individuals has become increasingly commonplace, most often in cases where the orchard owner is deceased and the family needs money or does not have the capacity or inclination to continue farming. These transactions bypass the traditional council and break the customary norms prohibiting monetary land transactions. Negotiation occurs between buyer and seller, with the traditional council only involved in registering the transaction by reissuing the PTO certificate in the new owner's name at a predefined price (Table 5.3). These transactions are covert since custom does not openly permit the sale of access rights to land between individuals. Hence, these land transactions occur under the guise of compensation for land-based investments that have been made, primarily based on the cost of establishing the orchards and thus condoned by customary authorities. In most cases where land transactions have taken place, the orchards were old and had been neglected, resulting in the new owners removing the ageing indigenous tree varieties and planting the new cultivars desired by the market. Hence, it can be argued that financial transactions are essentially based on the access rights to the land being transacted and less so on the land-based investment, as is commonly articulated by the traditional authorities who use this as a justification for condoning the transactions of customary land.

### 5.5.3 The geographical scope and changes in land use

There is a growing demand for land across all areas with favourable agroecological conditions for tree-crop farming. Just over half of the respondents surveyed reported that there was limited land available in their area for establishing orchards, but this was becoming increasingly difficult to access. The rest reported that there was no more land available. Land scarcity is most prominent in areas close to the fast-expanding urban centres such as Thohoyandou and Elim (Figure 3.3) and villages with rapid residential expansion. This has meant that those looking to acquire land often need to go beyond the boundaries of the traditional council where they reside or have their family lineage. Navigating land access in neighbouring territories is not always straightforward. While local traditional leaders are reported as having become increasingly amenable to facilitating access due to the individual returns that they stand to receive in the form of unofficial payments, still some form of local legitimacy is sought.

An example is the case of a young man who works in Johannesburg but originally comes from a village in Vhembe. His brother is a successful avocado farmer, and having

watched his brother's success, he decided in 2015 to purchase land. He recalls the difficulty he had in accessing land: "People don't easily sell land. Even if they are not using it, they want to keep it for their children" (Interview with a farmer, 24 April 2019). He relied on his brothers' networks with the local farmers, and in this way, they identified an old widow in a neighbouring village who needed money and was willing to sell her late husband's orchards which had been abandoned for some years. He related some of the challenges they faced in purchasing her land, not least because "according to custom, the land is vested in all family members; hence it is difficult to transact" (Interview with a farmer, 24 April 2019). After extensive consultation with all family members, the purchase was agreed upon and a price negotiated. Two different fees apply depending on whether you are a 'local' from another traditional council. In another case where land was sought in a neighbouring territory, the young applicant went directly to the chief and told how other people would not have received the same access. It was only because his father was a wealthy man, and the chief knew him. After some negotiation, he managed to acquire 30 ha for R120,000. The land was previously used as grazing land, but the traditional leaders argue that "a few farmers grazing cattle can't compete with 40 jobs" (Interview with a farmer, 7 March 2019). The residents condoned the transfer of common land into private access rights based on the potential job opportunities expected to accompany the establishment of orchards.

These new means of accessing land via market-based transactions both via individuals and customary authorities imply that local knowledge and social networks are central to land transactions. In most cases, it was not the seller who actively sought out a buyer but rather the buyers who identified opportunities for acquiring land based on 'insider' knowledge of adverse economic or social conditions of a household. Most common in this context was the death of the household head who had established and maintained the orchard, and no immediate offspring was willing or able to take over the orchard. In other cases, illness was identified as an 'adverse shock' and an opportunity to acquire land, especially if the owner needed cash for medical treatment. This insider knowledge can be seen as a means through which people navigate vulnerability to acquire land. This differs from what has been referred to as 'distress sales', whereby farmers are compelled to alienate their land to survive (Sjaastad, 2003). Distress sales of this kind are considered one of the main reasons for customary land sales (Platteau, 1996).

#### 5.5.4 Perceived tenure security

Cases across sub-Saharan Africa have illustrated that "the key to acquisition of rights over natural resources is the labour expended on its transformation or extraction; through the mixing of labour with land, rights emerge" (Sjaastad, 2003, p. 15). This is especially evident in cases where land-based investments such as planting trees have taken place



(Berry, 2013; Mathieu et al., 2003). The process of planting trees and making other land-based investments are thus considered as potentially powerful appropriation mechanisms in the context of customary land tenure (Sjaastad & Bromley, 1997).

Despite the ‘informal’ nature of the customary tenure regime, the expansion of orchards and growing demand for land for orchards on customary land in Venda illustrates a high degree of perceived tenure security by those engaging in these capital-intensive activities. This confirms what others have termed the “Africa effect” (Lawry et al., 2017, p. 9), referring to the relatively high pre-existing levels of tenure security experienced under African customary tenure regimes. This enables farmers to pursue the significant land-based investments required to establish an orchard, in turn driving the emergence of informal customary land markets. Villagers and traditional leaders commonly cite the normative ideals of customary law as not condoning the sale of customary land, but in the case of orchards, land sales are justified based on the significant land-based investments that have taken place. In practice, most of the orchards being transacted are old orchards with indigenous tree varieties, and the first thing those investing in land do is clear the land and plant new varieties desired by the market. Even though traditional authorities are well aware of this, they stand by the fact that land itself is not being transacted but only the investment on the land.

#### 5.5.5 Reactions from traditional authorities

The responses from traditional authorities to the increasing demand for customary land for orchards and the emergence of customary land markets have been varied. The most pronounced actions that deviate from traditional norms and practices of land allocation come from traditional leaders in areas where land is either very scarce or available but in high demand. The selling of land parcels at increasingly higher prices as land has become more scarce is now commonplace across traditional authorities, with prices per ha as much as R50,000 in some places (Table 5.3). New measures have also been implemented to ensure that land is used ‘productively’. For example, the time given to people to develop the land allocated to them has decreased from 2 to 1 year in some locations, after which time the land can be repossessed if one has not managed to plant trees or made other visible signs of investment on the land. Land-acquiring farmers often present this as a significant challenge given the long waiting time for seedlings at plant nurseries and the related capital required. The area of land being allocated is also becoming increasingly varied. In Njhakanjhaka, the traditional authorities, for example, initially allocate only 1 ha of land, and only once the applicant has managed to develop this land entirely are they eligible to apply for more. This, too, is a significant challenge for tree-crop farmers, considering the long maturation time required for orchards and the delay in being able to purchase seedlings where bulk orders are processed more speedily. On the other hand,

in territories where sizeable areas of uncultivated land exist, parcels as large as 40 ha have been allocated based on the ability to pay. In one of the traditional authorities where land is scarce and in high demand, commercial notions of viability and profitability, demonstrated by a feasible business plan, have become a requirement when applying for land. Lastly, one traditional council started implementing an inheritance tax. They propose that if an orchard owner dies, his widow may inherit the land without any costs. However, if the orchard is passed on within the line of descent, a fee is due of R5,000 for 1-5 ha or R8,000 for >6 ha. These amounts double if the land is transferred to a non-relative, in other words, in the case of the orchard being sold (Interview with a farmer, 21 July 2018).

## 5.6 Discussion

The shift away from land titling as the panacea for securing land tenure rights towards promoting forms of customary tenure as a more pro-poor approach to land governance has been celebrated as a move towards a more pro-poor and socially legitimate means of customary land governance. However, the dangers of uncritically endorsing practices of customary land governance are becoming increasingly evident in the exploitative and contentious politics that characterise contemporary forms of customary tenure (Collins & Mitchell, 2018; Peters, 2013). The emergence of customary land markets is one example of how customary norms and rules adapt to the fast-changing agrarian context, illustrating their dynamics as living law. This chapter has demonstrated how smallholders' growing demand for land to produce high-value tree crops in Venda is transforming the process through which people gain access and rights to land. In particular, the materiality of tree crops, i.e. the relatively large land area required, the high capital investment required, and their relative permanence in the landscape, make these commodities a particularly pertinent crop through which to analyse changing land relations.

In contrast to the apartheid era, when tree-crop orchards were first established in Venda to ensure local food security, the post-apartheid era opened up new and highly lucrative market opportunities for smallholders. Smallholders are attempting to exploit these new opportunities, supported by proactive measures taken by the state and private sector. This process drives the increasing demand for land and the subsequent adaptations in customary governance mechanisms. As the demand rises, coupled with widespread land scarcity, land has increasingly become a commodity, with access rights now primarily determined by financial means. On the one hand, control over land allocation and access has become more concentrated at the level of the local headman and chief, who are exploiting these opportunities through illicit rent appropriation. On the other hand, land transactions between individuals increase, resulting in poorer households

losing access to land and better-off households accumulating, essentially driving rural social differentiation.

The findings presented here challenge the notion of customary land rights as characterised by their embedding within social relations and group membership, with access rights mediated through negotiation processes and thereby considered flexible and contingent (Berry, 1993, 2018). Furthermore, these findings expand on the argument that key principles of customary land governance remain pervasive across African land tenure regimes and that despite colonial and apartheid distortions, these have proved resilient and are still prevalent today in varying forms (Cousins, 2007; Okoth-Ogendo, 2002). This chapter demonstrates how in the face of rapid agricultural commodification of tree crops, key principles of custom that have endured centuries of ‘expropriation and subversion’ (Okoth-Ogendo 2002; Cousins 2007; Section 5.2) are being eroded and transformed. In this context, principles of custom appear to be less resilient than is generally acknowledged. This is evident in relation to the customary land rights that have long been characterised as embedded within a range of social relations and are therefore often referred to as ‘nested’ or ‘layered’. Closely related to this is the characterisation of land rights resulting from accepted membership in a group (Cousins, 2007, p. 293). The evidence discussed in the chapter demonstrates how land access is increasingly determined by one’s purchasing power, which supersedes one’s social relationships and social embedding within a group. Resource rights have been widely acknowledged as being comprised along a continuum from individual to family to communal land rights, with governance functions often located within “hierarchies of nested systems of authority”, whereby certain governance functions over land can be highly devolved (Cousins, 2007, p. 293, 2008).

The narrowing of opportunities to access and benefit from land-based resources resulting from monetised land transactions has far-reaching impacts on rural society. As a growing body of literature has demonstrated, the privatisation and enclosure of common land and the emergence of customary land markets are closely linked to social inequalities and opportunities for the few (Bartels et al., 2018; Chitonge et al., 2017b; Flower, 2018; Peters, 2004; Sitko, 2010). With the current focus on tree crops and the commodification of other crops amongst smallholders living under customary forms of land governance in South Africa, the local politics involved in land access and rights must be recognised, and traditional leaders be made more accountable to the people they govern if equitable and just land access and tenure security is to be ensured.

## 5.7 Conclusions

This chapter addressed the question: *how is expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfiguring land access arrangements and tenure security, and how does this affect customary land governance?* It has illustrated how the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops in smallholder orchards are driving the process of land commodification and pushing up the value of land, changing the preference for land allocation and prioritising certain land rights over others. In essence, the commons are gradually being individualised, primarily undermining the rights of those who use the commons for grazing and other means of livelihood. The continuum of resource rights is gradually shifting in the direction of individual rights. Where land allocation for orchards was formerly a function performed by the petty headman, in consultation with neighbours and community members, contemporary practices demonstrate that authority over land allocation has shifted upwards, becoming more centralised in the hand of the traditional leaders, who act unilaterally increasingly without engaging in consultation. Thus, the arguments presented in this chapter add valuable insight to a customary land governance system in transition, where the privatisation of the commons and the partial commodification of land do not signal the end of customary mechanisms but rather significant transformations thereof.

The findings further highlight how laws such as the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act 2 of 2019 (TLGFA) and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) assign far-reaching powers to traditional leaders over communal land and to define custom. Often, these are used for personal gains through rent extraction via land allocation. In the context of increased demand for land, traditional leaders act unilaterally as landowners, selling off land to the highest bidder, and downward accountability to rights holders has largely disappeared. Without greater transparency around land transactions and downward accountability, the current context will continue to facilitate new opportunities for wealth accumulation by traditional leaders and their allies. This will continue to narrow the space for those who benefit from customary resources, rendering many resource-poor farmers vulnerable to loss of land and exclusion from access in the case of common land previously used for grazing. However, for the time being, these processes are taking place largely uncontested by local people, arguably because the value of these transactions is not widely known and because of the expectations of local economic opportunities that may transpire via land transactions.

The cases explored demonstrate signs of an emerging process with possible widespread implications for agricultural policy focusing on commercialisation in customary areas, land reform more generally, and current legislation that assigns far-reaching powers over land to customary authorities.



## Chapter 6

# Rethinking the divide: Exploring the interdependence between global and nested local markets<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> This chapter has been published as: Olofsson, M., Ros-Tonen, M., Gupta, J., de Steenhuijsen Piters, B., & Van Leynseele, Y. (2021). Rethinking the divide: Exploring the interdependence between global and nested local markets. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 83, 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.02.018>. It has been slightly modified to avoid repetition within the thesis and for style and language.



## 6.1 Introduction

Agricultural commodification amongst smallholders has been mainstreamed by both international development agencies and governments, in concert with the private sector, to address rural poverty and achieve development objectives across the global South (NPC, 2013; World Bank, 2007). However, the form this takes in terms of the nature of production, types of markets supplied and sustainability, and its relation to food security and nutrition, remains contested in agricultural and food policy debates (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Neoliberal and reformist approaches generally advocated by the FAO and World Bank argue that agricultural commodification should occur via intensification and diversification into high-value crops that can be transacted via 'modern' supply chains (Section 2.5). This, they argue, can accelerate economic growth and development and increase household income and purchasing power, which in turn may enhance access to food and nutrition security (FAO, 2018; World Bank, 2007). This essentially assumes that (i) rural poverty results from smallholders being marginalised or left out of the globalisation process and (ii) market approaches and trade liberalisation can facilitate smallholders' access to these 'modern' supply chains, link them to niche export markets and that public-private-partnership play a key role in facilitating this.

However, incorporation into these global value chains can result in adverse effects, including perpetuating environmental degradation and poverty (Bolwig et al., 2010; Hickey & du Toit, 2013), increased financial risk, losses and debt dependency (McMichael, 2013). Furthermore, production for distant markets may divert scarce resources away from the production of food crops that could feed and nourish local people and result in a loss of autonomy over production and agricultural diversity, affecting the nutritional value of food produced (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Rosset, 2008). Counter to the mainstream narratives, food sovereignty and food justice movements and critical agrarian scholars (e.g. van der Ploeg, 2014) focus on building resilient and more autonomous local production and consumption systems based on agroecological practices (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Rosset, 2008).

These alternative forms of production, distribution and consumption and their rationalisation have gained prominence recently and been conceptualised as 'alternative food networks' (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006), 'territorial agri-food paradigms', 'territorial markets' (Kay, 2016; Wiskerke, 2009), and 'nested markets' (Van der Ploeg, 2015a; Van der Ploeg et al., 2012) amongst others. They are 'alternatives' to the global agro-food paradigm that may be more attractive to smallholders as they enable greater autonomy over production, pricing and marketing while bringing local and regional social and economic benefits via opportunities for processing, distribution and trade. They thus enable and promote greater access to food and contribute to local economic development. While these alternatives emphasise different aspects, they are all grounded to varying

degrees in notions of ‘quality’, ‘transparency’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘locality’, amongst others. Importantly, they are all constructed mainly in opposition to global industrialised markets, signalling a shift away from these markets towards re-localised and embedded food and agricultural regimes that are constructed as a counter to the global ‘corporate food regime’ (McMichael, 2005). Such analyses foreground the ‘peasant logic’ as capital’s ‘other’ and frame peasants’ intrinsic goals in terms minimising dependency on the commodity relations emanating from ‘food empires’ or ‘corporate food regimes’ (van der Ploeg 2008).

This polarised debate on smallholder commodification trajectories and the related production systems and markets tends to pitch commodity production for global markets against food crops for local or regional markets as an either/or scenario that involves an inevitable trade-off. Such a polarisation obscures the interactions between these different food systems and the production relations within which they are embedded. Some have argued that the coexistence and continuous connections between alternative food networks, nested markets, and broader agri-food markets strengthen these alternatives, making them more robust strategies for rural development (Schneider et al., 2016). In contrast, others see these relations as a competitive ‘battleground’ that undermines re-localisation processes embedded in alternative food systems (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

This chapter explores these smallholder commodification trajectories based on a case study of smallholder production in Venda, South Africa, a context of multiple markets where high-value export-oriented tree-crop commodification is in certain circumstances combined with the commercial production of vegetable crops destined for local markets. Analysing how these markets are combined contributes to a better understanding of the nature of their interconnectedness and, more generally, how these market circuits are integrated differently by different farmer categories. The chapter seeks to go beyond the polemic of global versus alternative re-localised stances by focusing on the production relations that accompany the process of agricultural commodification. In so doing, it contributes to broader debates on smallholder agricultural commoditisation trajectories and, in particular, the nature and role of nested markets (Sections 2.5 and 6.2). In this regard, the concepts of ‘specificity’, ‘connectedness’ and ‘rootedness’ from the literature on nested markets are used as analytical tools to explore their usefulness in light of the peasant bias and normative emphasis on re-peasantisation processes.

The following question is addressed: *how does the commodification of subtropical tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets amongst smallholders?* It is answered by exploring three interrelated sub-questions (i) what is driving agricultural diversification into vegetable crops within orchards, (ii) what is the nature of this diversification and (iii) what features of nested markets characterise the market relations?



The following Section 6.2 elaborates on nested markets as an analytical tool. The dynamics in the South African food system and the broader agrarian structure are then discussed to contextualise the role and position of smallholder and subsistence farmers in food production and provisioning (Section 6.3). The analysis of the findings (Section 6.4) uses the nested markets approach as a heuristic tool, highlighting the key dimensions of nested markets: specificity, connectedness, and rootedness. I then discuss the future trajectories of these changing land-use patterns and social relations (Section 6.5) and conclude the chapter in Section 6.6).

## 6.2 Nested markets as an analytical lens

In recent years, the nested markets concept has gained prominence amongst critical agrarian scholars for distinctive qualities that set them apart from more general agricultural and food markets. As a useful analytical tool, Van der Ploeg et al. (2012, p. 142) use Bernstein's (2010) classical agrarian political economy question – who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what is done with the surplus – to illustrate the main features that differentiate conventional global markets from nested markets. Table 6.1 summarises these differences in terms of scale, ownership, nature of goods traded, farmers' role, relation to consumers, value distribution and appropriation of surplus.

Evidence of the workings of nested markets in the global South has been demonstrated for the local fresh produce markets that have sprung up amongst beneficiaries of Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform programme (Matondi & Chikulo, 2015), fish markets in and around Lake Victoria (Medar et al., 2015), local farmer markets in Brazil (Schneider et al., 2016), and local fresh produce trade in South Africa (Manyelo et al., 2015).

Nested markets are generally conceptualised in a normative, political sense as part of a broader reaction to the hegemony of global market forces and indicative of a growing re-peasantisation movement. The very construction of nested markets is built on the notion that they emerge through the agency of those involved as part of a broader struggle for greater autonomy over production (Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). This is evident in the link between nested markets and Polani's 'double movement' thesis (Hebinck et al., 2015, p. 5). This thesis states that the emergence of dominant and unfettered market forces, which ultimately undermine the social and ecological basis of life, will inevitably stimulate a push back or counter-movement from societal forces to reign in and realign the market in accordance with social and ecological priorities. Nested markets are considered to be a part of such a broader counter movement, essentially seen to represent:

the social struggles, strategies and attempts of local actors (e.g. farmers, traders, consumers, collectives) to actively respond to ‘failures’ of the global markets they are confronted with. While these struggles and strategies are extremely diverse, they share a common feature: they increasingly hinge on the creation or development of nested markets (Hebinck *et al.*, 2015, p. 5).

**Table 6.1** Comparison between conventional agri-food markets and nested markets

Feature	Conventional markets	Nested markets
Scale	Global	Local, but embedded in wider territorial markets
Ownership	Controlled by large industrial or commercial empires	Shorter chains, co-owned by farmers
Goods	Uniform, dislocated from the place of origin	Diverse, adapted to consumers’ needs
Farmers’ role	Suppliers of raw materials for the food industry	Producers and on-farm processors
Relation to consumers	Distant and anonymous	Direct selling
Value distribution	Largest share for the food empires	Higher share for the farmer
Appropriation of surplus	Food empires consolidate their power through mergers and acquisitions and thus appropriate surplus	Farmers can use the income to increase resilience, strengthen agricultural diversification, and improve their livelihoods.

*Source:* Compiled based on van der Ploeg *et al.* (2012) and van der Ploeg (2015).

This view considers nested markets as part of a broader counter-movement that takes into account the multiple and varied forms of agency of social actors, thus representing an alternative view to the idea that smallholders are destined to be squeezed out, and market relations lead to compulsive inclusion or path dependency. Market forces are usually skewed against smallholders (a lack of storage, generally weak organisation such as cooperatives), but nested markets show that these typical market access constraints can be changed and reversed, which is a key aspect of ‘re-peasantisation’ (Hebinck, 2018).

The highly diverse contexts and constructions of nested markets imply that they may look very different from one place to the next. However, three overarching features – specificity, connectedness and rootedness – characterise the distinctive socio-material nature of these markets (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2012). *Specificity* refers to the distinctiveness of both the product and the production process. This is closely linked to unique quality characteristics derived from the socio-cultural and geographical context and the specific

resource base and skills. Specificity could refer to traditional crop varieties that have adapted to specific agroecological conditions and are cultivated according to specific traditions that give them a specific regional identity that is not easily replicable on an industrial scale. *Connectedness* emphasises the socio-material infrastructure or network between producers, traders and consumers, typically non-hierarchical, with power diffused across the different actors. Such networks are also more remunerative to the actors involved as transport and transaction costs are minimised by the short chains and because of the unique qualities such as freshness, which generate higher value per unit. The relations between actors are considered relatively stable and established, yet simultaneously flexible, enabling them to be considerably resilient. This both enables freshness and other quality characteristics. Lastly, *rootedness* emphasises that the network is more than just a social network and is based on shared quality definitions, trust and local embeddedness. These features collectively make up the distinctiveness of nested markets, which are considered common-pool resources (Van der Ploeg, 2015a, pp. 34-36). Unlike the ‘material’ common-pool resources discussed by Ostrom (2002), the distinctiveness of nested markets lies mainly in the combination of both material and social elements. Particular emphasis is placed on the polycentric and horizontal organisation between the multiple actors involved (production, distribution and marketing). Furthermore, these social networks are self-organised and self-governed and operate according to mutually beneficial norms. As such, they are considered resilient to being co-opted and subsumed by global market actors (Van der Ploeg, 2015a). These features differentiate nested markets from global markets and reinforce their dichotomy (Table 6.1).

Starting from this common conceptualisation, nested markets can be differentiated on the one hand by foregrounding the agency of actors involved in the construction of specific markets from a normative political perspective. On the other hand, the concept foregrounds the socio-material nature of these market interactions along the three key dimensions discussed above. Our approach to nested markets distinguishes between the socio-material manifestation of nested markets as an analytical approach and as a normative political project. Analytically, nested markets can be explored through the three overarching features presented above – specificity, connectedness and rootedness. As a normative political project, nested markets set out to counter global hegemony in the food system. Using the concept as an analytical tool, I consider how the conceptualisation of peasant autonomy and the construction of nested markets as distancing from conventional markets can be critiqued. The main critique revolves around two points. First, such conceptualisation does not pay attention to the variable degrees of commoditisation amongst (non-peasant) commercially-oriented smallholders or petty commodity producers. Second, the way they are integrated into markets does not necessarily result in a loss of autonomy (Castellanos-Navarrete & Jansen, 2018; Manley

& Van Leynseele, 2019; Vicol et al., 2018). The peasant bias and incommensurability approach to conventional and alternative markets found in nested market thinking, although very useful for conceptualising farmers' agentic patterning of markets toward self-determination, also throws up analytical blind spots pertaining to processes such as accumulation 'from below' and smallholders' orientation to global markets (see also Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Jansen, 2015). The analysis of market interconnectedness enables us to empirically explore varying degrees of farmer commoditisation and 'degrees of nestedness'.

As such, this chapter deviates from the common use of nested markets as "the outcome of social struggles" (Hebinck et al., 2015, p. 3), "spaces of contestation" (González, 2017) and "competing agri-food geographies" (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006, p. 196) and instead frames them as hybrid spaces of interaction where local markets are embedded in global capitalist markets (Schneider et al., 2016). Thus, the extent to which the features of nested markets are present in the production and marketing systems of tree-crop farmers are explored while interrogating their motivation and rationale to engage in different markets. The chapter aims to unravel to what extent these multiple engagements present a political project. Nested market thinking is thus applied dynamically, exploring the temporal and spatial configurations of production. This chapter foregrounds a farmer-centred rather than a market-centred approach to analysing farmers' agency in agricultural diversification strategies and hence does not focus on the institutional aspects of these market arrangements. This choice is made because these aspects are particularly relevant in the context of tree crops considering that they are capital intensive, slow to mature and, once reaching maturity and having closed canopies, prevent cultivation between the trees. Thus, the typical focus on degrees of commodification, often defined according to 'tight' or 'loose' ties to markets (Cousins, 2015), seems to be too static. By foregrounding the materiality of tree crops in relation to nested markets and thereby centring temporality, the chapter seeks to generate more dynamic insights into how interests and opportunities converge and diverge in relation to nested markets.

### **6.3 The context of nested markets in Venda**

The black farming sector in Vhembe mainly comprises subsistence-oriented farmers who cultivate two or three varieties of fruit trees along with vegetables and maize in homestead gardens. Farming is generally a means of contributing to household consumption needs, with some selling small amounts of surplus in the local community (De Hon, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2018). To a far smaller degree, yet very important for creating livelihoods and provisioning of local food, the production of fresh produce for markets takes place on around 1-ha plots in irrigation schemes. These products are primarily sold

in the informal market via different types of street traders (Manyelo et al., 2015) and in local supermarkets (Louw et al., 2008). The third category of land-based livelihoods involves the cultivation of subtropical fruits and nuts. Smallholders have grown these crops on plots of around 5 ha since the early 1960s, initially primarily for household consumption and sale in local markets. However, since 2000, there has been a rapid growth in the replanting of old orchards and the establishment of new ones by smallholders, introducing macadamia and new avocado varieties (Chapter 5). These new production dynamics are stimulated by opening new market opportunities for smallholders through global value chains via large white-owned commercial companies. Smallholders actively respond to these opportunities, often struggling to gain and maintain access to the production systems and markets for these high-value commodities.

The investigation of smallholder commercialisation is situated within a contemporary rural setting where capitalist relations structure social and economic life. As such agricultural markets play a key role and provide an analytical departure point for exploring exchange relations in which smallholder tree-crop farmers engage. Markets are approached from a sociological perspective as arenas in which exchange occurs, embedded within broader social structures and relations and the cultural context within which they operate (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007). These social relations pattern the movement of goods and services across time and space, and as such, these patterns adjust to and are forged by specific socio-material infrastructure (Van der Ploeg, 2015a). By focusing on the socio-material infrastructure emphasised by the concept of the nested market, this chapter illustrates the nature and relationship between the different types of markets in which smallholder tree-crop farmers engage. It hones in on the relationship between vegetable crop production and tree crops because of its implications for less well-capitalised farmers to gain and maintain access to these high-value commodities. If progress is to be made towards generating agricultural livelihoods, as current rural development policy aims for, this relationship warrants closer scrutiny.

## **6.4 Unpacking farmer diversity through crop diversification and multiple markets**

### **6.4.1 The multiple drivers of diversification from tree crops to vegetable crops**

Smallholder orchards are essential sites for more than just the cultivation of tree crops. It is common to see the alleyways between trees and patches around the orchards cultivated with maize primarily for household consumption and seasonal vegetables cultivated between the young trees or alongside the orchards for sale in local markets during the summer months. It is to the production and market dynamics of these vegetable crops that I now turn. Across our sample, as many as 38 farmers (47.5%) were cultivating vegetable crops in addition to tree crops (Table 6.4).

The analysis uses the typology of tree-crop farmers developed in Chapter 4, which is based on the nature of socio-economic differentiation amongst farmers using a class analytic perspective (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2013). This approach is informed by an agrarian political economy perspective with a structural focus compared to nested markets theory, which foregrounds farmers' agency. However, combining the two approaches sequentially made it possible to situate the dynamics and function of nested markets within a broader context of farmer diversity. Chapter 4 identified four broad categories – welfare dependent (41%) and agricultural petty commodity producers (PCPs) (29%), salaried small-scale capitalists (SSCs) (21%) and full-time SSCs (9%) (see Chapter 4 for the characteristics of these groups). Vegetable production and the engagement with nested markets are particularly important for the group of petty commodity producers as an avenue for accumulation 'from below' (Cousins, 2013).

Across all farmer categories, farmers were identified as producing vegetable crops for sale in local markets (Table 6.2). The highest percentage (64.7%) occurred amongst agricultural petty commodity producers; farmers with little or no additional off-farm income to invest in their orchard. This was followed by welfare-dependent petty commodity producers (45.5%), whose pension grants also offered limited potential to cross-subsidise their orchards. To a lesser degree, yet still important, salaried and agricultural small-scale producers also farm vegetable crops in their orchards (39.1% and 42.9%, respectively). So, far from the mono-crop orchards of the large commercial farmers, most smallholder orchards are sites of diverse production systems, which integrate different tree varieties and vegetable crops.

**Table 6.2** Crop combinations within orchards

Smallholder profile (n=80)	No. of tree crops <sup>b</sup>	Primary tree crop (%)		No. of veg crops <sup>a</sup>		% producing veg crops
		Macadamia	Avocado	Mango		
Welfare-dependent PCPs (n=33)	2.1	63.6	60.6	30.3	3.6	45.5
Agricultural PCPs (n=23)	1.5	41.2	47.1	29.4	4	64.7
Salaried SSCs (n=17)	1.7	69.6	34.8	43.5	4.6	39.1
Agricultural SSCs (n=7)	2.1	71.4	42.9	28.6	5	42.9

<sup>a</sup> N=80 for tree crops and N=38 for vegetable producers.

<sup>b</sup> This is calculated on the weighted average, which means the number of producers from each farmer category multiplied by the number of tree or vegetable crops produced by each producer;  $n/N * (\text{number of vegetable crops})$ .

Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

While vegetable crops are an important part of the production system for many tree-crop farmers, this says little about the relative importance of these crops in relation to tree-crop production. The gross annual income from tree and vegetable crops shows that vegetable crops play the most important role for agricultural petty commodity producers who have little or no additional income but are also relatively important for welfare-dependent petty commodity producers and salaried small-scale capitalists (Table 6.3).

Several drivers explain the diversification into vegetable crops. These are a combination of the materiality of the tree crop (capital intensive, years before they can be harvested), cash flow; orchard management; and farmer profile characteristics. First, diversification needs to be understood in relation to the highly capital-intensive nature of establishing tree-crop orchards and maintaining them for four to six years before the first harvest. This makes tree-crop farming contingent on access to some alternative source of income until the trees mature, and as such, diversification is an economic strategy that enables entry into the tree-crop sector:

To get started, you must focus on cash crops.<sup>52</sup> (...)you can get more money from farming than from working. (...) Since 2010, I was able to plant 3 ha avocado, 1 ha macadamia, and 0.5 ha litchis (*Interview, Lwamondo, 4 July 2018*).

The money I earn from cash crops I reinvest in my farm...I have purchased irrigation pipes for the macadamia and plan to drill a borehole (*Interview, Vondo, 13 May 2016*).

Second, vegetable crops are maintained even after trees reach maturity to complement the annual income from tree crops with a more regular income stream for seasonal crops. From then on, the different crops may cross-subsidise each other:

I grow cash crops because I can collect money in three months' time. Macadamia only gives income once a year. Cash crops are a fast way to get cash. (...) They pick me up in the time I'm waiting for my macadamia harvest. (...) I can use it to get money for mac, and then when I harvest mac, I can use the money to buy seeds for maize and save some money. It's like a hand in a glove; one hand helps the other (*Interview, Radali, 20 May 2020*).

Cash crops combine well with tree crops as they simultaneously irrigate the trees. Tree-crop income I use to buy irrigation equipment for the cash crops (*Interview, Mapate, 24 May 2020*).

<sup>52</sup> The term 'cash crop' is used colloquially to refer to vegetable crops produced for local markets.

**Table 6.3** Relative economic importance of tree crops and vegetable crops

Profile	Gross annual income from tree crops	Gross annual income from vegetable crops	Relative importance of different crops
Welfare-dependent PCPs (n=33)	• IQR <sup>a</sup> R11,737 Median R3,840 •• Min, max R0, R52,840	• IQR R620 Median R0 Min, max R0, R55,000	Tree crops important, with secondary importance given to vegetable cash crops
Agricultural PCPs (n=23)	• IQR R11,250 Median R0 •• Min, max R0, R195,000	••• IQR R67,800 Median R4.650 Min, max R0, R350,000	Vegetable cash crops important
Salaried SSCs (n=17)	• IQR R11,000 Median R4.000 •• Min, max R0, R56,000	•• IQR R670 Median R0 • Min, max R0, R130,000	Tree crops important, with secondary importance given to cash crops
Agricultural SSCs (n=7)	• IQR R769,000 Median R420,500 • Min, max R0, R812,000	• IQR R90,000 Median R0 • Min, max R0, R100,000	Tree crops important

<sup>a</sup> IQR = the interquartile range or middle 50% between the second and third quartile. This measure was preferred above the average for better indicating the spread where the standard deviation is high. R = South African Rand; R1 equalled 0.06338 USD at the time of data collection.

Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

Complementing tree-crop income with that of vegetables is characteristic of the welfare-dependent petty commodity producers, whose retirement presents a transition to becoming full-time farmers for those who have slowly been investing in their orchards during their working years. In this case, diversification happens as a result of retirement freeing up their own labour, enabling the pursuit of labour-intensive crops such as vegetable crops.

Third, there are agroecological benefits and pragmatic considerations that motivate this type of diversification:

As I water my cash crops every day, it also gives me a chance to irrigate my tree crops. (...) If it were not for my cash crops, I would not be working in the orchards every day, and my tree crops would not be in a very good condition” (Interview, Mapate, 24 May 2020).



Intercropping between the trees clearly has benefits for both the tree and orchard management. However, intercropping is only a temporary arrangement until the trees mature, as farmers use areas that are unsuitable for trees or the land that they cannot afford to cultivate with trees:

I'm doing veg only for intercropping before the mac gets too big. I will always use the lower portion for veg as it's too cold for mac (*Interview, Mukula, 22 April 2016*).

I think by 2021, half of the orchard will be full of trees as they are growing very big, so I will not be able to grow cash crops. (...) But I have already started clearing another 12-ha piece of land and already started planting cabbages and onions there (*Interview, Tshixwadza, 31 May 2020*).

This third driver is characteristic of many petty commodity producers. Growing vegetable crops is often a result of the lack of alternative off-farm employment. In such cases, multiple family members, usually across generations, combine their labour, thus enabling the more labour-intensive activities involved in growing seasonal vegetables, hence diversification. In these cases, the orchards are primarily the responsibility of the male household head, while spouses or children are engaged in the farming of vegetable crops.

Fourth, there are specific farmer characteristics that drive the process. One of these largely characterises the agricultural petty commodity producers and is driven by inheritance dynamics. Most tree-crop farmers (62.6%) are nearing or have already reached retirement age.<sup>53</sup> This implies that farm succession is an important means through which younger people acquire orchards. Often the child without formal tertiary qualification or opportunities for formal employment ends up taking over the farm, which means there is often little or no alternative income stream available. The inherited orchards are often old and underproductive due to the cultivars and years of neglect. In the absence of alternative livelihood sources, diversification into vegetable crops enables access to income to support the regeneration of these orchards:

I'm only doing this so I can get money to do macadamia. I maintain the macadamia, buy chemicals and fertilisers and buy electricity with the money from the cash crops (*Interview, Mukula, 22 April 2016*).

<sup>53</sup> Farmers are categorised into the following groups 18-35 (8.8%), 36-55 (28.7%), 56-65 (23.8%) and 66+ (38.7%).

Having outlined these drivers of diversification, we stress that this process critically hinges on access to water. We found different systems through which farmers gained access to water, the most common being gravity-fed irrigation systems and alternatively pumping water from a local dam or stream. It must be noted that in many cases, people were unable to access water via either of these methods, in which case they were unable to engage in the production of food crops.

#### 6.4.2 Vegetable crop combinations and nested markets

Vegetable crop production within orchards varies. Usually, crop choice evolves through a combination of market opportunities (market demand, farmers' market networks) and experimentation with what best fits the agro-ecological conditions. Green leafy vegetables – a collective term to denote Chinese cabbage, nightshade and pumpkin – were the most commonly grown vegetables on orchard land, followed by white cabbage, green maize, tomato, butternut, onion and chillies (Table 6.4). Besides these, many farmers were experimenting with new crops (e.g. green beans, okra, peas, beetroot, garlic, marrows, strawberries, and rose geranium), responding to new market opportunities. Several crops are combined simultaneously and rotated seasonally, resulting in farmers engaging with multiple market channels at any one time.

The most common market channel is via local traders, also commonly referred to as 'bakkie' traders. These traders operate informal businesses, their key asset being their vehicle ('bakkie'), which enables them to collect and transport the produce to the point of sale. They would purchase produce directly from the farmers at their orchards and sell from busy roadside intersections, at specific locations in the local town centres or pension pay-out points. Farmers usually reported long-standing relationships with the traders they supplied. They communicate ahead about production plans, and the harvesting and collecting of the product are negotiated according to mutual availability. Prices are negotiated with traders according to prevailing conditions in the informal market, but usually, there are relatively standard prices, varying slightly depending on the quality, seasonality and location of the orchard. Traders would oversee the selection to ensure quality, as well as packing of produce. Without any cold storage facilities, traders usually only purchase the quantities they could sell immediately, going directly to their selling points and thus ensuring freshness to consumers. These types of relations between producers and traders can be considered active market interaction (Ncube, 2017) because producers have existing relations with the traders and engage with them prior to planting and usually manage to sell most of their produce this way.

**Table 6.4** Vegetable cash crops and related market channel

Crop	Farmers cultivating the crop % (n=38) <sup>54</sup>	Primary market channel						Total
		local community (%)	local trader (%)	local retailer (%)	processor/exporter (%)	national market (%)	missing/other (%)	
Green leafy veg	52.5	23.8	47.6	23.8			4.8	100
Cabbage	42.1	18.8	18.8	25.0	6.3	6.3	25.0	100
Green maize	36.8	20.0	40.0		20.0		20.0	100
Tomatoes	28.9	18.2	54.5	9.1		9.1	9.1	100
Butternut	26.3	20.0	50.0	10.0		10.0	10.0	100
Onions	21.1	50.0		12.5			37.5	100
Beetroot	18.4	14.3	28.6	42.9			14.3	100
Chillies	15.8	16.7			16.7	66.7		100
Honey	7.9		33.3		33.3		33.3	100

Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

The traditional green leafy vegetables and pumpkin leaves are the most commonly cultivated crops sold primarily to local traders (47.6%). These crops are particularly popular because they are an essential ingredient in traditional diets and a key part of the region's cultural culinary identity. They are also well adapted to the agroecological conditions and relatively resilient. In addition, they are not grown on a large scale by commercial farmers and are not readily available in supermarkets, so the informal market for these crops is relatively lucrative, enabling large margins to be made compared to selling to retail chains or national markets. This is similar to what others have found (Chikazunga & Paradza, 2013). These local trader networks also create economic opportunities for local people in a rural context of high unemployment. As a resident from one of the villages commented, "Orchards are good for us as we buy the mustard<sup>55</sup> and sell it in Thohoyandou" (focus group, Duthuni, 1 August 2017). Sales made directly to local community members were the second most common market channel, providing fresh produce to local people close to home. Such sales usually hinged on social ties and community networks. Information was often relayed via word of mouth, and local villagers would come directly to the orchards. This saved transport costs to the local town, and producers valued such direct sales for being more lucrative. However, direct sale to community members was always complemented by other channels.

<sup>54</sup> From the total sample of n=80, n=38 reported growing vegetable cash crops in addition to tree crops.

<sup>55</sup> Mustard is the colloquial term for Chinese cabbage (*Brassica rapa*).

There are not so many people doing this farming around here, and once you start doing this, people find out, and they come. So many people come here, and they buy directly. Some cars and some wheelbarrows, they come here. We are helping the community. (...) Tomato, mutshaina, and muxe<sup>56</sup> are the best; you don't look for a market; they come. I did cabbages last year, but this year my brother is doing cabbage, so I'm not doing it because if we both do it, there will be too much. My family are the ones growing food here for the village (*Interview, Dopeni, 13 May 2016*).

Supplying local retailers was less common, but in those cases, it was usually done via the local Spar,<sup>57</sup> one of the few supermarket chains enabling direct procurement from smallholders (Louw et al., 2008). Few farmers were able to meet the requirements in terms of quality and quantity, and considering the narrow product range in which these retailers are interested, and the additional transport cost involved in delivery, very few farmers engaged this channel. Farmers also reported that the prices from supermarkets were much lower than what they could get from local traders, so even if the supermarkets were able to purchase large volumes, they are a less promising marketing avenue. Similarly, for the national fresh produce markets, economies of scale and the associated high cost of transportation were cited as the main barriers to accessing these markets. Chillies were the most common product supplied to this market because they are relatively cheap and easy to transport.

These market channels described above starkly contrast to the market for macadamia and avocado, which are destined for international markets. In this case, farmers have little choice of marketing options as there are two main processing plants in the area; one for macadamia and one for avocado. In these cases, farmers have no room to manoeuvre in terms of price, as these are fixed, and payment terms are often staggered across several tranches that can extend over a period of one year. Smallholders contest these payment terms often more than the amount itself. Increasingly, these processing/export companies are setting minimum quality and quantity standards, posing additional challenges to smallholders. The lack of transparency regarding the quality assessment of the produce delivered by smallholders and the related pricing structures are standard issues raised by smallholders, alongside the transport costs due to the distance to the delivery points.

<sup>56</sup> Muxe is Tshivenda for nightshade (*Solanum nigrum* complex) and mutshaina is Tshivenda for non-heading Chinese cabbage (*Brassica rapa* L. subsp. *chinensis*).

<sup>57</sup> The acronym SPAR originates from Dutch and was originally DESPAR: *Door Eendrachtig Samenwerken Profiteren Allen Regelmatig* – All benefit from joint cooperation (<https://spar-international.com/aboutus/history/>).

With this overview of the different types of markets in which farmers engaged simultaneously, I now turn to the three key dimensions of nested markets – specificity, connectedness and rootedness. I thereby draw out the most prominent features from our case study that demonstrate the extent to which they resemble nested markets.

### *Specificity*

A key element of specificity is the historical context, which has resulted in the dual agrarian structure defined by class and race relations. Access to the market for high-value tree crops is controlled by key actors in the large-scale commercial sector. These actors own and control the downstream activities such as processing and exporting, where much of the value is accumulated, with smallholders having little bargaining power or control over the terms of engagement. The product quality delivered by smallholders is considered inferior due to a lack of pesticide use. In contrast, the vegetables produced within orchards and sold through local nested markets are particularly valued because of their quality. The freshness of produce purchased directly from the farm and the quality in terms of size and maturity of the crops as they are harvested on demand are recognised by consumers, which translates into a premium price and durable reputation. While farmers often mentioned these features as a reason why consumers favoured direct purchases, the economic incentives (saving on transport costs) rather than product quality tended to be the main driver behind these transactions:

It is because we do not have supermarkets closer to our area as all the big supermarkets are in town, so people would rather spend nothing or pay less for transport costs to buy the products from the traders rather than paying more to go and buy it in town. (...) They pay less price and get more products than when buying in the supermarket. (...) The product when it is in the supermarket is very, very less in terms of quantity, maybe half of the same size than is sold by traders (*Interview, Muthale, 1 June 2020*).

I used to send my chillies to Levubu for transportation to the Johannesburg fresh produce market, but now I find it better to sell to the Indian traders in town because they come to my farm, so there are no transport costs, and the price is higher (*Interview, Ridali, 6 September 2016*).

In the context of pervasive poverty and the remoteness of many of the villages in Venda, it is not surprising that the specificity of these nested markets is high in terms of the economic benefits they bring.

### *Connectedness*

The notion of connectedness was particularly evident in terms of the short and decentralised circuits, the horizontal patterning of these chains, and the flexibility they accommodated. The relationship between producers and consumers or traders was often a personal one, which had been established over time mostly between people from the same culturally defined community. Traders were usually longstanding customers, and new traders were introduced through word of mouth. Communication about which crops to expect in the coming season and their estimated harvest time was discussed long in advance and enabled traders to plan accordingly. Likewise, traders often shared market information with producers so they could adjust their production accordingly to meet such opportunities. The precise time for harvesting was usually negotiated between producers and traders/consumers to accommodate both parties and ensure collection directly after the harvest, and thereby the freshness and quality. Often traders get directly involved in the sorting and packing of the fresh produce on the farm, providing opportunities for lengthy communication and the deepening of convivial relations. The relations between farmers and traders/consumers often went beyond purely business transactions, as the following quote demonstrates:

I am very close with my customers, to the point that if one of my customers is facing some difficulty such as a bereavement in the family, I contribute to help out (*Interview, Muthale, 1 June 2020*).

Furthermore, relations with local traders were underpinned by a greater degree of trust than those with supermarkets and the national fresh produce market:

I used to sell my chillies to Unidev in Johannesburg, but the agent I was working with was not reliable as I would send a number of products, and sometimes he would tell me he did not receive my products, and at other times he would tell me a different number lower than the one I sent through, so I thought I am being exploited, so I stopped growing chillies as I had no other market (*Interview, Muthale, 1 June 2020*).

These relations with customers contrast with the supermarkets and national markets that have much more rigid delivery schedules and quality requirements. Similarly, the processors and exporters of high-value tree-crop commodities are disconnected from the local context and producer realities. Farmers must comply with rules and regulations that do not meet their needs and realities.

### *Rootedness*

Local embeddedness is particularly clear for what collectively is referred to as 'green leafy vegetables'. This is seen in both regional and individual cultural identity and the coalition of socio-economic interests and opportunities between producers and traders or consumers.

Regarding the cultural aspect, 'green leafy vegetables' (morogo) are part of traditional diets, as illustrated by a Pedi proverb: 'Meat is a visitor, but morogo is a daily food'. Morogo refers to green leafy plant species traditionally harvested in the wild but is increasingly being cultivated. This is particularly the case in Vhembe, which is also known as the centre of origin of Chinese cabbage in South Africa (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2007, p. 321).<sup>58</sup> The variety of plant species that can be used as morogo is broad and varied across the country, depending on ecology, culinary repertoires and changes over time (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2007). Three species are popular in the production systems of tree-crop farmers in Vhembe: nightshade (*Solanum nigrum* complex), known as muxe in Tshivenda; non-heading Chinese cabbage (*Brassica rapa* – L. subsp. *chinensis*), known as *mutshaina* in Tshivenda; and common pumpkin (– *Cucurbita pepo*, *C. Moschata* and *C. maxima*) known as phuri and thanga in Tshivenda (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2007). These crops are not mainstreamed and therefore seldom found in large retail chains, apart from a few local Spars whom some of the farmers interviewed were supplying. These crops are traded through a network of informal relations either directly with consumers or via informal traders who sell at busy roadside intersections or informal markets in town. Because of their popularity and place in the culinary repertoire of the TshiVenda and TshiTsonga, they can be considered to contribute to the regional and individual cultural identity.

In terms of socio-economic interests and opportunities, in particular, the savings on transportation costs when selling directly to the community or through traders who collect the produce from the farm were key factors that enabled a greater share of value to be attained by the farmer. Also, autonomy over pricing and transparency around terms and payments were raised as important factors that made farmers favour direct sales to community and local traders compared to supermarkets and the national fresh produce market:

The local market is much better than selling my crops at places like Spar, Boxer or Johannesburg fresh produce markets. When I sell my produce at Spar, I am selling a bundle of spinach to them for R6, they will tell me they will buy it at R3, and I end up not gaining any profit. Another thing is if they buy

<sup>58</sup> Vhembe is also the region from where Chinese cabbage spreading to other parts of the country through an informal seed multiplication and distribution system (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2007, p. 321).

100 bundles from me, they can say, 'We have only managed to sell 40 bundles, and 60 were damaged', so they will only pay me for the 40 which they say they have sold. Yet there will be no proof of the damaged 60 bundles, which they say they had to throw away. Another thing is they do not pay on time when they take the crops there, but only after they have sold all the crops, so I think this is very unfair. (...) The profit margins are also much better and higher compared to when I take my product to places like Boxer and Spar because it will cost me lots of transport and airtime and they don't call me when I take my products to those supermarkets, so I have to do follow-ups myself and as a result using lots of airtime (*Interview, Mapate, 24 May 2020*).

I used to sell my chillies to the Johannesburg fresh produce market, but the agent I was working with was not reliable as I would send a number of products, and sometimes he would tell me he did not receive them, and at another time he would tell me a different number lower than the one I sent. So, I thought I was being exploited, so I stopped growing chillies (*Interview, Muthale, 1 June 2020*).

Engaging directly with traders and consumers in the local market clearly brings more transparency, lower transaction costs and greater remuneration when it comes to trading local vegetables. Traditional leafy greens meet a local niche market where such culturally specific foods are not readily available in most commercial retailers yet are highly favoured by the local populations. Collectively these aspects demonstrate how the movement of these commodities is deeply rooted in both cultural and social relations that are more favourable to the producers than the alternative, more formal market avenues.

## 6.5 Discussion

This chapter has foregrounded the importance of centring farmer diversity in analysing how and why farmers engage in different markets. The polarised debate over different avenues for agricultural commodification amongst smallholders, and the related risks and merits of supplying global versus localised nested markets, tends to obscure how farmers are differentially positioned and thereby engage in different markets and, in turn, how these different market channels interact and the related outcomes. It is demonstrated here that the process of agricultural commodification aimed at high-value export markets is encouraging petty commodity producers into diversified agrarian livelihoods, relating more broadly to a process of re-agrarianisation and re-activation of agricultural land (Shackleton & Hebinck, 2018). The chapter illustrates the potential synergies and complementariness between the production of vegetable crops for local nested markets



and export-oriented cash crops. This is linked to the nature or materiality of tree crops, coupled with the socio-economic status of those engaged in their cultivation.

High-value commodities such as tree crops are capital intensive, slow to mature and require extensive land areas. Hence, unlike the small-scale capitalist tree-crop farmers who are able to generate sufficient off-farm income to invest in tree crops and thus engage in accumulation, petty commodity producers of tree crops without the means to access off-farm income are turning to vegetable crop production as a primary means to generate an income and to enable reinvestment in or to complement income from tree crops. This is made possible by their access to land, which they have been unable to fully cultivate with trees due to capital constraints and critically also hinges on access to water. Our findings point to the ways in which agricultural commodification of tree crops can, under certain conditions, initiate and stimulate the production of vegetable crops channelled through nested markets.

Using an agrarian political economy framing of farmer diversity such as a class-based analysis may seem incompatible with nested markets that foreground agency. However, sequentially combining them, as done here, is a useful way to situate the dynamics and function of nested markets within a broader context of farmer diversity. The typology provides a broader contextualisation of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers. We can then situate for whom and why nested markets are of particular relevance. Using the differentiation revealed that there are groups who are better and less well situated to do the patterning. This perspective is also an explicit critique of the risk of losing sight of farmer diversity in market-centred thinking and illustrates the need to differentiate the degrees of agency and foreground a notion of autonomy as relational rather than intrinsic. This diversified approach engages with the problematic assumption that market patterning has to be analysed through the notion of the 'peasant position', thereby narrowly conceiving the field of farmers' social construction of markets and missing the critical aspects of their agentive combining of local and global markets in relation to their socio-economic position. This is also in accordance with the farmer-centred perspective proposed here and shows our effort to unpack the dialectical relationship between wider commoditization processes and the agentive combining of markets in local contexts.

The findings illustrate how market channels for food crops produced in orchards and the relations in which they are embedded demonstrate some of the overarching socio-material characteristics of nested markets that are defined by specificity, connectedness and rootedness (Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). This is particularly the case for the cultivation of traditional green leafy vegetables, which illustrates the distinctiveness and socio-cultural significance to which the notion of rootedness refers. The principles of connectedness were identified in the nature of the relationships between producers and

traders or consumers, which are largely non-hierarchical and generate shared value for both parties due to the shortness of the chain, which enables it to be more remunerative. In particular, the markets for traditional leafy green vegetables may well resemble many of the features of nested markets, as others have also claimed (Manyelo et al., 2015).

However, this case has demonstrated that these markets need to be contextualised within a broader portfolio of products. By interrogating the nature of the relationship between vegetables and tree crops and their related markets, this chapter found that the political dimension of nested markets – engaging in them as a conscious reaction to the global industrialised food system (Hebinck et al., 2015) – was not evident. In this context, it becomes visible that farmers’ engagement in nested markets is actually a result of the opportunity to engage in global markets. It is a means to leverage, sustain or complement access to global markets for tree crops instead of reacting to it. Thus, this relationship might be considered mutually reinforcing rather than oppositional. This echoes findings in the literature on smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa who actively engage in both local and global markets (Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Vorley et al., 2012). This links to a general critique about the transferability of notions of alternative food networks that embody aspirations of food-system change in developing countries, where it is argued that “engagement in the food system is less about engagement for change but rather engagement for access” (Haysom, 2016, p. 8). Indeed, the findings show that accessing markets for vegetables resembles more opportunity-seeking behaviour to find the most profitable avenues than an act of resistance to a national and international market dominated by large food and supermarket empires. These findings point to the need to decouple the socio-material dimension of nested markets from the political dimension.

Nested markets, by way of their locally embedded socio-material networks, enable greater value to be derived from specific crops, in this case, notably traditional green leafy vegetables, and as such act as an enabler to accessing global markets for tree crops. These findings call for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between nested and global markets. It calls for expanding the spatial scale of the ‘nested’ element of nested markets from the local to the global. This case illustrates how the dichotomy between global versus local should not be perceived as inherently incompatible or competitive, as some authors have claimed (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006), but rather can be mutually reinforcing. This offers smallholders a way to straddle multiple markets through a ‘patterning’ strategy (Manley & Van Leynseele, 2019; Van der Ploeg, 2010b) as a way to enable, sustain and complement access to more lucrative global markets. Critically, access to these new opportunities hinges on access to livelihood sources, especially during the establishment phase. Nested markets have proved to be one such avenue, particularly for those who do not have access to alternative non-agrarian livelihoods.

## 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to apply the theoretical framework of nested markets as an analytical tool to explore the question: *How does the commodification of subtropical tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets amongst smallholders?* In this way, the chapter attempted to expand the discussion of smallholder commercialisation beyond the dichotomy between formal/informal and global/local markets towards a more relational and dynamic understanding of how these market systems interact.

This case study illustrated that emerging new market opportunities for smallholders to access high-value tree-crop commodity chains such as macadamia and avocado are driving farmers without alternative off-farm income sources and pensioners to diversify their production. They diversify from tree crops into food cash crops, both for household food provisioning and for sale in local markets. The cultivation of tree crops is capital intensive. Moreover, it takes several years before any returns can be realised. This makes it imperative that, in the absence of alternative off-farm employment, farmers are able to sustain themselves and generate some income that can cross-subsidise their orchards. Cultivating food crops on land allocated for orchards with access to water provides a means through which tree-crop farmers do this. Hence, the cultivation of commercial food crops inside orchards acts as a bridging livelihood strategy and cross-subsidisation of orchards for tree-crop farmers without alternative livelihoods. Essentially, agricultural diversification enables access to the production of these high-value tree crops, which would otherwise be dominated by relatively well-off farmers who have access to non-agricultural sources of capital.

It was found that different market channels demonstrate degrees of nestedness. This was particularly the case for the locally valued and highly perishable goods such as traditional leafy green vegetables, pumpkin leaves and flowers, and tomatoes. While these exchanges resembled many of the socio-material features of nested markets (specificity, connectedness and rootedness), these markets were engaged for purely pragmatic reasons, such as being the most accessible and remunerative outlets for these products, and not a conscious resistance to other types of markets. Farmers tended to cultivate a wide range of products to enable them to simultaneously engage in multiple different markets, including local retailers and national fresh produce markets. Ultimately, they used these different markets to leverage access to global markets and not to disengage from them, as is often put forward in the literature on nested markets. As such, it is argued that the markets navigated by smallholders are not isolated circuits but articulated systems that function as 'hybrid spaces of interaction' (c.f. Schneider et al., 2016) that enable them to gain and sustain access to global commodity markets.

This case study illustrates how growing vegetable crops provides a key entry point for the less well-resourced farmers, enabling access to more lucrative crops such as tree crops, as they have no access to alternative non-agricultural income. Agricultural diversification into commercial food crops is one important avenue that can enable this and should be supported and encouraged through public and private extension. Such extension needs to move beyond the usual single commodity focus towards a more integrated approach that responds to the diverse production systems already practised. This can be done by supporting low-tech water access and harvesting solutions and strengthening and expanding growth opportunities in the informal fresh produce trade. Supporting this type of agricultural diversification also generates much-needed economic opportunities in the local community. These dynamics, however, need to be considered in their temporal context. However, the long-term implication for such diversified production systems and the current market configurations is questionable. Farmers are reinvesting in their farms primarily by expanding their orchards, meaning that as orchards expand and the canopy closes, vegetable production could become impossible. Additionally, developments in the global market for high-value tree crops – particularly the rapid increase of macadamia production in places like China – pose risks for the South African industry, particularly smallholders. The global market could become saturated, and prices could fall (c.f. Cowen, 1986).

## Chapter 7

# Production relations in the shadow of tree crops: Exploring land-sharing arrangements as a form of land-based social reproduction<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> This chapter is currently under review with the Journal of Peasant Studies.



## 7.1 Introduction

From a Marxist agrarian political economy perspective, agricultural commodification amongst smallholders has often been theorised in terms of accumulation processes (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2013). These processes have focused on the means through which accumulation happens, most commonly conceptualised as from ‘above’ via state resources, from ‘below’ through the use of one’s own capital and labour, or a combination of both (Neocosmos, 1993). Far less attention has been given to how expanding commodity relations amongst smallholders relate to and impact social reproduction.<sup>60</sup> A recent revival in Marxist-feminist scholarship has re-centred social reproduction as an important analytical concept (e.g. Ferguson et al., 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017a; see also Section 2.6). This scholarship has moved beyond the ‘dualist’ conceptualisation of social reproduction, which separated commoditised and non-commoditised labour and the public and private spheres. Instead, it adopted a ‘unitary’ approach that highlights the interdependence between relations of production and reproduction within capitalism and how these intersect not only class and gender but various other categories of social difference. Such an approach views commodity and non-commodity relations and the public and private spheres as inseparable components of the capitalist system (Bhattacharya, 2017a; Ferguson et al., 2016).

Land is central in both the accumulation and social reproduction processes. Land is a commodity and a factor of production in an accumulation process, subject to dominant market forces and the driving force behind Marx’s theory of ‘primitive accumulation’ and Harvey’s ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2005). In a reproduction process, land plays a critical role in sustaining daily and generational social reproduction in rural areas in its non-commoditised form, mainly through the commons (Ferguson, 2013; Shackleton et al., 2001). This includes providing the material basis for social reproduction in the form of a place to live cheaply, growing food and raising livestock to contribute to subsistence, harvesting products from the wild such as medicinal and edible plants and firewood, and cultural and distributive functions (Ferguson, 2013). Viewing land in terms of its social reproductive function brings to the fore “gender as a key signifier of power and a constitutive element in shaping people’s relations to and experiences on the land” (Chung, 2017, p. 104). “Given the particular importance in the Global South of land and natural resources, and thus property rights, a key aspect of social reproduction is how access to and control over these resources are structured and governed. This involves socially and culturally defined identities and relations and finds ideological expression in notions of ‘community’ and ‘tradition’” (Cousins et al., 2018, p. 1065).

<sup>60</sup> Social reproduction is understood as “the social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed” Katz, 2001, p. 709).

This chapter is theoretically positioned in the Marxist-feminist debate of land-based reproduction and empirically situated in a context of expanding smallholder tree-crop orchards and the related enclosure of common land (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006; Woodhouse, 2003; Chapter 5). Over the past two decades, new market opportunities for smallholders engaged in high-value tree-crop production in South Africa, particularly macadamia and avocado, have rapidly expanded (Section 1.4.4). These have been actively facilitated by both state and private sector actors and have seen the replanting of old orchards and the establishment of new orchards with modern cultivars that meet the new market demand. This process has mostly taken place on common land allocated to individuals during the apartheid era and has stimulated new interest in acquiring access to communal land – effectively bringing the commons under private control through the establishment of orchards (Chapter 5). This process of the enclosure of the commons through tree planting is by no means new and has been widely linked to conflict and competition over land, resulting in exclusion and dispossession across sub-Saharan Africa (Amanor, 2012; Berry, 2009). It has also been linked to a reduction in access to land for food provisioning and harvesting of natural resources (Asubonteng et al., 2018; Bofoa & Lyons, 2019; Evans et al., 2015; Fonjong & Gyapong, 2021) as well as mounting resistance and contestation from below (Amanor, 2010; Peters, 2004).

Counter to these largely adverse outcomes of the enclosure of the commons, a growing body of literature demonstrates how land enclosure, coupled with labour shortages, have prompted a wide variety of land-sharing arrangements, which enable access to productive land for the landless (Amanor, 2010; Colin, 2005, 2017a; Ruf, 2010). This chapter focuses on the emerging debate on “situated landed practices that are not necessarily characterised by open conflict, but rather mundane everyday negotiations” (Gribat & Pizzo, 2020: 237). In doing so, it seeks to analyse how the enclosure of the commons for smallholder commercial orchards interacts with the social reproduction function of land via land-sharing arrangements and subsistence food cultivation. Using a Marxist-feminist lens that foregrounds the relations between gender oppression and class exploitation and the social reproduction concept as a situated landed practice, I highlight the gendered dynamics of changing land access and use. The chapter hones in on the production practices and relations in the shadow of tree crops, which are often overlooked in studies focusing on smallholder commodity production and accumulation trajectories. It does this by exploring the social, labour and land relations between commercial tree-crop orchards and their social reproductive function. Hence, this chapter asks: How and under what conditions does the enclosure of the commons for orchards present a space that sustains land-based social reproductive functions? More specifically, it explores how land enclosure led to new land-sharing arrangements and gendered access to land, the nature of these arrangements and the conditions that motivate and situate them, and



how they have affected social reproduction and the relationship between commodity and subsistence production.

The following section (7.2) conceptualises tenancy and land-sharing arrangements and sketches their variety in tree-crop cultivation. The chapter then reviews the recent literature on social reproduction from a Marxist-feminist perspective (Section 7.3). In doing so, it highlights key insights that have shaped the current debates and gives the Marxist-feminist approach to social reproduction traction as an analytical lens for understanding the relations between commodity and non-commodity land-based practices. Next, the context of social reproduction in rural South Africa is outlined (Section 7.4), demonstrating its historical roots and contemporary nature. The subsequent analysis of the empirical material collected through the methods outlined in Chapter 3 first focuses on land enclosure and the consequent gendered land access due to the mounting pressure on land (Section 7.5.1). Second, it highlights the nature of land-sharing arrangements and the conditions that motivate and situate them (Section 7.5.2). Third, the production dynamics and the interdependence between orchards and subsistence food production are analysed (Section 7.5.3). In the discussion, I reflect on how these emerging land-use and production practices in the context of tree-crop commodification differ from existing land-sharing arrangements (Section 7.6). The conclusion integrates the finding to answer the overarching research question (Section 7.7).

## **7.2 Conceptualising tenancy and land-sharing arrangements**

Land-sharing arrangements have a long history in tree-crop cultivation and have been well documented in the literature, particularly in the case of cocoa in West Africa (Amanor, 2010; Colin, 2017b; Ruf, 2010). The focus has primarily been on the incentives and rationales that drive them (e.g. Takane, 2000; Colin, 2005); the outcomes they generate (e.g. De Zeeuw, 1997); and the broader contextual, social and political dynamics within which they are situated (e.g. Amanor, 2010a). Takane (2000) classed the literature on land-sharing arrangements in three broad approaches. Firstly, the neoclassical view focuses primarily on productive efficiency outcomes. This perspective considers the landowners' engagement in such share arrangements as driven by purely economic and calculated motives, factoring in the related risks and transaction costs within imperfect markets (e.g. Braverman & Stiglitz, 1982). The second, Marxist economist, approach is also concerned with wealth accumulation, but not through productive efficiency as in the neoclassic approach, but rather through a focus on accumulation based on the exploitation of the unequal power relations between two distinct classes of landowners and tenant farmers. These class relations are seen as creating the foundation for relations of exploitation whereby surplus is extracted from the tenant farmer and appropriated by

the landowner (e.g. Byers, 1983). Where the Marxist economists see these class relations as an efficient means to extract surplus, the neoclassical argument sees the various ways in which the landowner coerces the tenant to work harder to increase production efficiency and surplus exploitation. The third approach is an anthropological-sociological one and focuses on the lived and embedded experience of individuals engaged in these land-sharing arrangements. Land-sharing contracts, from this perspective, have been described as “flexible and adaptable institutions evolving over many decades, reflecting a complex and long-term relationship among local people” (Takane, 2000, p. 377). Here the emphasis is more on the relational aspect between individuals situated in specific localities and histories. Within this approach, the analysis of individuals’ lifeworlds combines the dynamics of class relations and the strategic calculations to maximise efficiency as emphasised by the Marxist economists with local norms and rules defined by custom. This latter approach predominates in the literature that explores these land-sharing arrangements (Colin, 2005, 2017a; De Zeeuw, 1997; Ruf, 2010; Takane, 2000). The Marxist-feminist lens (Section 7.1) used in this chapter combines aspects of both the Marxist and anthropological-sociological approaches described above and centres on gender relations and social reproduction.

As land becomes scarcer, acquiring access to productive land through various land-sharing arrangements has become increasingly common. It has replaced inheritance and has become the dominant mode of land transactions between individuals in, for example, Ghana (Amanor, 2010). Based on a survey of 20 villages in Ghana, an estimated 80% of land under cocoa production was acquired through share arrangements between 2000-2010 (Ruf, 2010, p. 2). These arrangements are considered a less contested and exploitative means of transferring land compared to land sales, instead demonstrating cooperative arrangements, whereby actors overcome constraints by combining complementary resources (Colin, 2017a, p. 162). While the nature of these land-sharing arrangements is highly varied, they can broadly be categorised into two main types. One type involves tenants gaining use rights to land in exchange for a share of the produce; the other enables use rights to establish an orchard over which the tenant acquires tenure rights to a share of the land bought into cultivation upon maturation (Asamoah & Owusu-Ansah, 2017). The landowner’s contribution to establishment costs, how the share ratio of land or produce is negotiated between the two parties, and the nature of the land tenure security are all critical aspects that vary across the cases. Despite these variations, by and large, these share arrangements represent a means through which landless farmers gain access to land. This chapter focuses on the role of land sharing in social reproduction, as conceptualised in the following section.

### 7.3 Social reproduction from a Marxist-feminist perspective

Marx centred the analysis of social reproduction in relation to labour and wages. He assumed that social reproduction is mediated through commodity exchange (Foley, 1986, p. 38). Wages are key to enabling the purchase of commodities necessary to ensure the social reproduction of the workforce and thereby the reproduction of capital and the capitalist system as a whole. As such, the labour required to produce the commodities that workers consume is necessary to ensure the reproduction of society. The capitalist class appropriates the additional labour and related surplus and drives the accumulation and expansion of the system. Ensuring the daily and generational reproduction of the worker by ensuring wages cover the ‘necessary’ costs of social reproduction is a vital element of the capitalist system. From this perspective, commodity exchange and the price of commodities are central to social reproduction and wage levels.

While Marx focused on commodity relations in social reproduction, Marxist feminists (e.g. Ferguson et al., 2016; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017b) highlight the importance of non-commodity relations in social reproduction. They particularly foreground the role assigned to women in these non-commodity relations, such as raising children, caring for the elderly, housework etc. Up until the 1980s, the approach of Marxist feminists was broadly one of dualism, focusing on the production of commodities and related processes of accumulation and exploitation on the one hand, and the production of labour-power and the private, non-commoditised sphere of labour, on the other. This dualist approach has recently been replaced with a ‘unitary account’, which seeks to combine production and reproduction within the same framework (Vogel, 2017). Social reproduction theory has shifted the focus of analysis beyond the dominant view that privileges commoditised labour as the only form of legitimate work and the driving force of the capitalist mode of production. Instead, it centres on non-commoditised forms of labour, which Bhattacharya (2017a, p. 2) aptly describes as having been “naturalised into nonexistence” by the predominant focus on productive labour for the market. Social reproduction theory privileges the ‘process’ through which social reproduction is enabled by focusing on both the daily and generation means through which life itself is sustained (Bhattacharya, 2017a).

Expanding the Marxist-feminist approach, Fraser (2016) highlights the inherent contradictions of capital and care, with care referring to all aspects of social reproduction, such as raising children, caring for families and friends, and maintaining households. She situates this contradiction as part of the broader crisis tendency of capitalism, arguing that the crisis of social reproduction has been largely neglected or overshadowed by a focus on the financial and ecological crises generated by the capitalist system. Fraser (2016, p. 100) elaborates on this crisis tendency in relation to social reproduction, stating that “every form of capitalist society harbours a deep-seated social reproduction ‘crisis

tendency’ or contradiction”. This means that social reproduction is necessary to enable capital accumulation, while perpetual accumulation undermines the very processes of social reproduction that are fundamental to the systems’ functioning. She elaborates that such contradiction is neither located inside the capitalist system nor outside of it, but rather “at the border that simultaneously separates and connects production and reproduction (...); it is a contradiction between those two constitutive elements of capitalist society” (Fraser, 2016, p. 103).

From this perspective, social reproduction has broadly been defined as encompassing “the activities associated with the maintenance and reproduction of peoples’ lives daily and intergenerational. By centring these activities as the foundation on which markets, production and exchange rest, the social-reproduction perspective conceptualises the material foundation of social relations as an integrated and unified process” (Ferguson et al., 2016, p. 28). Scholars have also conceptualised social reproduction in terms of the broader political economy, focusing on how contemporary forms of globalised capitalism structure the nature and form of social reproduction (Bakker & Silvey, 2008; Katz, 2001). As such, social reproduction is “a set of structured practices that unfold in a dialectic relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension” (Katz, 2001, p. 711). It is also argued that social reproduction needs to be linked to specific contexts of power and production, emphasising how social reproduction is situated within a wider socio-economic and political order (Bakker & Silvey, 2008, p. 3). This entails focusing on the institutions, processes and social relations within which social reproduction is situated (Bakker & Silvey, 2008). Building on this Marxist-feminist conceptualisation of social reproduction, I now turn to the specific context of rural South Africa. The following section briefly outlines the historical development of capitalism to situate the current dynamics of production and reproduction.

#### **7.4 Social reproduction in rural South Africa**

Rural livelihoods and the nature of social reproduction need to be viewed in the context of the ongoing decline in the significance of agriculture (de la Hey & Beinart, 2017; C. Shackleton et al., 2019). The de-agrarianisation trend has meant that rural livelihoods are increasingly constituted by diverse activities intertwined with urban opportunities and located in migratory networks (Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Livelihoods activities are broadly characterised by four domains, namely (i) land-based agrarian activities, (ii) small-scale informal economic activities, both farm and non-farm, (iii) relatively well-developed systems of cash transfers, (iv) and culturally inscribed patterns of mutuality and social reciprocity (Neves, 2017b; Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Social reproduction in rural areas primarily occurs outside market relations while still being deeply conditioned by the broader capitalist economy (Cousins et al., 2018). Cousins et al. (2018) describe

the distinctive feature through which social reproduction is enabled as forms of marriage, kinship systems, community membership and property relations that are not characterised by private ownership.

Subsistence farmers make up the majority of those engaged in agriculture. Limpopo Province has the highest concentration of subsistence farmers in the country, with 37% of households reporting being involved in agriculture and 88% of those doing so as an 'extra source of food' (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Women are disproportionately represented in the latter category (Aliber & Hart, 2009, p. 440). Based on observations, most subsistence production in the Vhembe District takes place in home gardens by women. The sheer number of subsistence producers, estimated at a national level to be around 4 million, highlights this group as warranting significantly more attention from policymakers to improve food and nutrition security and reduce the dependency on purchased food (Aliber & Hart, 2009; Baiphethi & Jacobs, 2009). Commercially oriented orchards and subsistence production are generally viewed as operating in separate geographical locations. The empirical material presented in this chapter explores how commodity and non-commodity relations have become increasingly interconnected. Although social reproduction is constituted by a wide range of activities not limited to land-based agricultural activities alone, this chapter focuses only on activities and relations connected to land. This is in keeping with our focus on 'situated landed practice' and the interest in understanding how the expansion of commercial tree crops amongst smallholders relates to land-based social reproduction.

It is particularly relevant to acknowledge the class character of the smallholder tree-crop sector (Chapter 4) as this relates to land use within orchards and the subsequent social reproduction relations discussed in this chapter. As described in Chapter 4, most tree-crop farmers are pensioners with minimal capital to invest in their orchards. They rely primarily on their family labour. Their primary income source is from cash transfers in the form of pensions and, in some instances, from petty agricultural trade in fresh produce or other informal activities to sustain themselves and cross-subsidise their orchards. Many of these farmers acquired their orchard land before new market opportunities opened up for tree-crop commodities. These farmers can be characterised as petty-commodity producers with low yields and severely limited prospects for accumulation. This group has the most diversified production within their orchards and is most likely to engage in the various land-sharing arrangements discussed below.

In contrast, a small but rapidly expanding group of small-scale capitalist tree-crop farmers invests off-farm income, often stepping into agriculture specifically to benefit from the perceived opportunities that have opened up to smallholder tree-crop farmers. Relying on hired labour and with significantly more capital to invest than those engaged in petty commodity production, this group is on a gradual but incremental accumulation

trajectory (Chapter 4). On average, farmers in this group cultivate a larger share of their land. In some instances, they expand and purchase old orchards from the aforementioned capital-constrained pensioners (Chapter 5).

Building on the conceptual and contextual background presented so far, the rest of this chapter provides empirical substance to land-sharing practices in Vhembe District as a social reproduction strategy after specifying the research methods employed.

## **7.5 Land sharing and social reproduction in Vhembe**

### **7.5.1 Mounting pressure on communal land, enclosure and consequences for gendered land access**

Like the other former homelands, land in Vhembe is scarce and congested. The expanding rural population and associated competing demands for land are driving peri-urban expansion across rural spaces. Specific to Vhembe District, there is a growing demand for agricultural land to establish orchards due to the favourable agroecological conditions and the opening up of the market for high-value subtropical tree crops produced by smallholders (Chapter 5). Consequently, traditional land-use practices to meet household consumption needs, particularly cultivating the staple crop maize, are under increasing pressure.

Access to land in Vhembe is governed by customary tenure. Over the past few decades, the competing demands for land have seen traditional leaders taking a central role in land-allocation decisions, prioritising certain land uses over others. In villages closer to urban centres, it was commonly reported that residents had lost access to their fields for cultivating maize because of the prioritisation of expanding residential areas and, to a lesser extent, the establishment of orchards. Traditional leaders in more densely populated areas are increasingly faced with trade-offs between different and competing demands for land. Such trade-offs have overwhelmingly favoured land allocation for residential purposes and orchards over subsistence production. As a local headman explained:

Land that had been used for maize was reallocated for residential stands. The maize story died and turned into homesteads (*Interview with Headman, 31 July 2017*).

Referring to the area relatively close to Thohoyandou, the regional capital, another headman explained,

Here, there is no more space for planting maize. The only area that was made available was for orchards. We realised if we talk of a place where people can plant maize, they will start fighting. Everyone will like a portion, so it won't be possible; the land is full. We decided let's forget about maize, and people can plant maize at their residential site (*Interview with Headman, 31 July 2017*).

However, cultivating sufficient maize in a homestead garden to meet household needs is becoming increasingly difficult as the growing demand for land also implies the allocation of ever-smaller plots. As one resident recalls:

Before, the stands were much bigger, 100 x 100 m. There was enough space for ploughing mielies<sup>61</sup> at home. Now it's 25 x 30 m, so too small to plant. Now those large stands have been cut in half since the early 1990s. In the 1980s, the stands were big (*Interview with a farmer, August 2017*).

Traditional leaders motivate their current land-allocation decisions based on assumptions about the potential economic and development opportunities. In conversation with a headman from an area where land is in high demand, he explained the key criteria that informed land allocations:

When we look at applications, we look for the job creation potential and development opportunities it will bring (*Interview with Headman, 7 August 2017*).

This inevitably prioritises those with capital to invest and commercial ambitions over those wanting access to land for subsistence purposes. Farmers also commonly justify the conversion of land use from subsistence to commercial production based on normative ideas of what constitutes 'good' land-use practices. These involve land being used to generate profits and create jobs. A farmer who acquired access to a 5-ha plot to establish an orchard explained that such acquisition inevitably dispossesses people of land access for subsistence purposes:

Back then [2012], this farm was used for mielie-meal [maize], but that was not using the farm profitably or not putting employees on the land. (...) Now, if you need land, they [traditional leaders] consult those currently using the land for maize. If those people reject it, they must register the land and pay to register.

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<sup>61</sup> South African for maize.

Most people don't want to register. Some people who farmed here were not happy to move, but they could not do anything; they moved" (*Interview with a farmer, 12 September 2016*).

Traditionally, land used to cultivate subsistence crops was not formally registered. Access to land for subsistence farming was verbally agreed upon, and access rights were usually transferred through group membership and kinship ties. This contrasts with the procedure for establishing orchards for which a permission to occupy (PTO) document is required. The costs of securing a PTO (referred to in the quote above as 'registering') are prohibitive for most subsistence producers (Chapter 5). As this quote demonstrates, subsistence producers were effectively coerced through economic pressure to give up their access rights to the commons.

These emerging land-access and -use processes exhibit the deeply gendered land relations that have long characterised rural areas. Land for dryland cropping, as is the practice for the cultivation of maize, was traditionally allocated to women close to the homesteads. This contrasted the allocation of large portions of land to men to establish commercial orchards in areas further away, mainly on the bushy lower slopes of the mountainside. With population pressure driving urban expansion, these subsistence croplands closer to the homesteads have been the first to be repurposed into residential areas, directly affecting women's access to land. This mainly affects aged women, who are predominantly engaged in maize cultivation. These dynamics drive many of them to seek alternative cultivation options in orchards, which are predominantly owned by men, except when wives or daughters have inherited orchards.

When there are orchards, we have access to go and plant maize. Orchards bring access to land for producing food. (...) Most of us cultivate both at home and in the orchards of our husbands. Sometimes we also cultivate in the orchards of others. The orchards are the most important for cultivating maize because there is more space. We can harvest 22 x 80 kg bags from the orchard; at home, only six bags (*Focus group Vuvha, 3 August 2017*).

While orchards have become increasingly important for cultivating maize and other crops, this has come at the expense of access to woodland resources on which rural households have depended for many of their basic living requirements (Shackleton et al., 2001). These landscape changes bring trade-offs of which rural women are acutely aware:



The forest is being removed for the orchard; they are cutting shrubs. These shrubs are fruit trees for people and animals. (...) They have been removed, and they were once food for animals and people. There are many different ones. (...) Our food depended on these things; today, young children don't know these trees. Animals no longer have food. Birds no longer find food. Tree medicine you no longer find it. Amarula tree is gone, and macadamia is in its place (*Focus group Duthuni, 1 August 2018*).

Despite orchards having reduced access to foods and other natural products from the wild, women generally perceive them as bringing welcomed new opportunities, particularly access to land for the cultivation of food crops and the potential for part-time and seasonal employment:

This issue of orchards is two ways. When someone gets allocated land for orchards, the disadvantage is he will cut down the indigenous trees and plant these new orchard trees. The advantage is the orchards bring food and create jobs. Orchards destroy nature but assist local communities, it gives us access to go and grow food, and we can sell them. All these trees in the orchards give us jobs, and we also get jobs selling these fruits in the market. It assists the orchard owners and creates jobs (*Focus group Duthuni, 1 August 2018*).

A male participant articulated a similar sentiment during a focus group discussion:

I removed all those trees to make space for my orchard. (...) I see the value of orchards, but orchards finish nature; we no longer have landscape. But orchards assist in getting money, and nowadays, we need money. Even when we plant maize, you need to pay the grinding mill, so having an orchard allows you to have money for this. People of the past used to grind maize themselves, but today life needs money. The white people bought the machine for grinding, and we need money for that (*Focus group Duthuni, 1 August 2018*).

It is evident that with the increasing commodification of tree crops, land-use practices are changing within the broader context of land scarcity, and non-commodity or subsistence production has become increasingly integrated with commodity production. This is illustrated by the land-sharing arrangements and diversified production systems emerging in the shadow of tree crops to which I turn now.

### 7.5.2 The nature and drivers of land-sharing arrangements

On average, the women cultivating maize within orchards used 1.5 ha, a slightly higher average than individual plots allocated on communal land that were usually around 1 ha. In both cases, yields were generally reported as sufficient for meeting annual household needs, while for a minority of those cultivating within orchards, a marketable surplus was produced and sold within the community. Maize was the staple crop being cultivated, but in a few cases, those cultivating within orchards reported growing a wider variety of crops than those cultivating on communal land, including pumpkins and beans and, where water was available, traditional leafy green vegetables.

In most instances, orchards were not the first choice for cultivating subsistence crops but rather driven by necessity caused by the loss of access to alternatives, as described above. Orchards are situated further away from the homestead, so people spend more time walking to these sites than those with access to communal land. This was reported as one of the main disadvantages. However, there were several advantages that people reported about cultivating in orchards. First, orchards are often fenced, and the bush has been cleared, thereby protecting crops better from cattle and wild monkeys. Second, they provide a larger cultivation area than the communal area plots. Third, soil fertility in orchards was an important reason for cultivating maize in orchards instead of communal lands. Lastly, family ties to orchard owners were a common feature of these arrangements, although generally not considered a necessary condition.

The orchard owners who enter into these sharing arrangements are generally elderly pensioners, who rely on their own and family labour, and with limited access to capital, they are generally not able to fully cultivate the land area to which they have access. They mentioned pragmatic reasons as their primary motivation for these land-sharing arrangements. On average, they only cultivated 60% of their land, leaving sizable areas uncultivated. Giving subsistence producers access to this land has clear labour-saving benefits for orchard owners. Subsistence farmers can provide free labour who clean the orchards by removing weeds and shrubs between and alongside the orchards to cultivate their maize. This also reduces the risk of fire within orchards and keeps wild pests such as monkeys and thieves at bay, thus providing a security function.

These share arrangements are not only driven by subsistence growers seeking access to land; in some cases, subsistence farmers reported having been actively recruited by orchard owners to cultivate maize in their orchards for these reasons. Orchard owners also alluded to a moral obligation to those without adequate access to land for subsistence cultivation, linking to normative ideas emanating from traditional customary practices. These include the premise that every household should have land to cultivate for subsistence purposes and that if land designated for cultivation is not being used

productively, traditional leaders, after consultation, can reallocate the land for productive use.

Those who do not have access to land for cultivation have access to plant maize inside the orchards. There is no land available anymore; that is why the people who have orchards give access to those who want to cultivate maize (*Focus group Duthuni, 1 August 2017*).

In their current form, these arrangements represent a symbiotic relationship from which landowners and subsistence farmers mutually benefit. However, despite being a common practice, land-sharing and tenancy arrangements were not admitted in orchards owned by wealthier individuals. These wealthier owners generally had access to off-farm income that allowed them to fully cultivate their orchards or even expand by purchasing orchards from less well-resourced farmers (Chapter 5).

### **7.5.3 Production and reproduction dynamics and the relations between orchard and subsistence food production**

Besides orchards enabling access to land for subsistence cultivators through a land-sharing arrangement, orchards are also important sites for food production by orchard owners and their families. As many as 67.5% of tree-crop farmers surveyed reported cultivating food crops for household consumption in home gardens alongside their commercial production. This was almost exclusively the case for the ageing farmers who relied primarily on their pensions or those with no additional off-farm income. However, despite the importance of home gardens for the farmers in this research, orchards were more important for this purpose than home gardens. This was particularly the case for maize and fresh vegetables (Table 7.1). However, these crops contribute less than 25% to the household's overall food needs (Table 7.2). All the farmers surveyed reported relying primarily on supermarkets for food, with fresh produce purchased from local informal traders contributing only a small share of the total food basket. Only a minority of 2.5% of households reported producing enough for their own needs (Table 7.2). Access to water in the orchards was one of the key factors preventing vegetable cultivation in orchards.

**Table 7.1** Production for household consumption by orchard owners and their families

	Engaged in food production (N=80)		Location of production		Household needs for these crops satisfied by their own production %
	N	%	% in home garden	% on orchard plot	
Maize	62	77.5	23.3	76.7	57.5
Green veg <sup>a</sup>	53	66.3	50.0	50.0	59.6
Other veg <sup>b</sup>	51	63.8	45.8	54.2	53.1

<sup>a</sup> Green veg refers to a variety of traditional green leafy vegetables, which include chard (*Beta vulgaris*), muxe or nightshade (*Solanum retroflexum* Dun), and Chinese cabbage (*Brassica rapa* L. subsp. *chinensis*).

<sup>b</sup> Other veg refers to more commonly known vegetables such as onions, beetroots, cabbage, tomatoes, etcetera.

Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

**Table 7.2** Contribution of tree-crop farmers' food production to household food consumption

Contribution to household consumption needs	Frequency (N=80)	%
0-25%	54	67.5
26-50%	12	15
51-75%	12	15
76-100%	2	2.5

Source: Farmer survey 2015-2016.

While current patterns demonstrate how orchards enable and even encourage food production, the long-term sustainability of these arrangements is questionable. As trees mature and accumulation gradually proceeds, orchards are expanded, and available land for growing maize and other crops between trees is reduced. Eventually, subsistence production within orchards is likely impossible, and producers using orchards for these purposes will eventually lose access. This points to the temporary nature of these arrangements, which is already becoming evident. As explained by this farmer, the impacts of maturing trees and increasing shade cover make intercropping impossible:

It has already started that there is no more space for maize. Now the trees make too much shade. We used to have maize that would last the whole year, now I have planted these fruit trees at the homestead, and we cannot plant any maize, but these trees are creating money (*Focus group Duthuni, 1 August 2017*).

Another farmer explained the changing land-access dynamics within orchards for maize cultivation as he anticipates reinvesting the profits of coming years from his existing orchards in their further expansion:

In my farm, I have about 18-20 ladies ploughing maize. (...) They plough there just to meet the needs of their household. Maize doesn't have money because it's so cheap in the shop. But some people will buy a bag for R400 because they want the traditional seed. I will give them another two years, and then they will need to find another farm. Soon they will run out of space (*Interview with a farmer, 9 July 2018*).

As this farmer alludes to, trajectories of accumulation and orchard expansion are part of a broader trend that points to the temporariness of these land-sharing arrangements that simultaneously represent production and reproduction relations.

## 7.6 Discussion

Customary land governance has long been associated with acting in the interest of men (Rangan & Gilmartin, 2002), while women's rights to access and benefit from land have precariously hinged on their relation to men as wives and daughters (Batisai, 2018; Lambrecht, 2016). These uneven gendered land relations are highlighted through the parallel processes described in this chapter of expanding urbanisation in rural areas and land allocations for orchards that favour smallholder commercial farming. Both undermine women's ability to produce food crops and harvest from the wild. These processes are not new (c.f. Razavi, 2003; Daley, 2011; Levien, 2017), and in South Africa, the centrality of traditional authorities in this process has been highlighted in relation to tree crops due to the more remunerative outcomes of such allocation for traditional authorities and leaders (Chapter 5). Concerning land-use change from subsistence to residential, traditional leaders in post-apartheid South Africa have used their powers over land-use allocation to re-establish their authority through what has been referred to as the Chief-Land-People nexus (Van Leynseele, 2013, p. 155).

The contribution of this chapter to the broader theoretical debates is threefold. First, it emphasises situated landed practices, whereby commodity and non-commodity production are temporarily integrated within orchards in the context of enclosures. These findings contrast the literature linking large-scale land acquisitions to land dispossession, decreased food security, and conflicts amongst rural communities (Amanor, 2012; Fonjong & Gyapong, 2021) and studies linking smallholder tree-crop commercialisation to decreased access to land for food provisioning (Asubonteng et al., 2018; Boafa & Lyons, 2019; Evans et al., 2015). Instead, the chapter highlights the particular circumstances

where cooperation and flexibility characterise the land-sharing arrangement currently taking place within orchards. This mainly occurs where farmers lack access to capital and are primarily involved in petty commodity production with limited ability to work all the available land at their disposal and where subsistence production is under increasing pressure as access to communal land is shrinking.

Second, it reveals that the share arrangements demonstrate very different features compared to those discussed in the broader literature on agrarian contracts and land-sharing arrangements. In the South African context, smallholder farmers have limited investment capital, and their accumulation trajectories are slow and often severely limited (Chapter 4) – conditions that are broadly comparable to those of the tree-crop farmers engaged in land-sharing arrangements across West Africa and elsewhere (see, e.g. Amanor, 2010; Asaaga & Hiron, 2019). However, the nature of the arrangement between landowners and the parties engaged in the share arrangement differ from those analysed for West Africa. Most significantly, they are less formal, with no fixed conditions around labour provision, inputs, sharecropping and land transfer as is characteristic of land sharing in other places (c.f. Ruf, 2010; Colin, 2017a). Instead, the share arrangements in Vhembe are taking place in the ‘shadow of tree crops’ under loosely defined conditions that evolve over time in the landowner’s interest. In addition, these arrangements do not explicitly evolve around deals in which the tenant shares a portion of the yields or acquires tenure rights to a share of the land bought into production (Amanor, 2010). Instead, the arrangements hinge on implicit and temporary opportunistic social relations that are temporarily symbiotic in that the capital and labour-constrained landowner effectively benefits from the labour of the tenant, while the tenants benefit from land access, fencing, and soil fertility, amongst others – a relationship to which I refer as ‘temporary accommodation’. This essentially differs from the economic rationale explained by the neoclassic view or the extraction of surplus value from the tenant, as a Marxist economist would stress. Counter to many of the share arrangements described in the literature, which are mostly between natives and newcomers, the parties, in this case, share a common history and culture. As such, these arrangements also need to be understood as motivated by notions of custom and tradition whereby rights are grounded in group membership (Cousins, 2008). The mounting pressure on land and increasingly top-down land governance by traditional authorities are stripping women of access to land rights. The land-owning men who enter into these share arrangements with women can also be seen as acting out of a sense of customary norms and values that ensures access rights for subsistence purposes.

Third, the chapter demonstrates the inherent contradiction of capitalist accumulation and care through smallholder orchard expansion, which is part of the broader crisis tendency of capitalism that Marxist-feminist scholars such as Fraser (2016)

have highlighted. The current 'lived experiences' demonstrate cooperation and flexibility. However, these arrangements are highly contingent and will likely give way to reduced access to land in the near future as accumulation proceeds and orchards are expanded, reducing the space available for subsistence production and thereby an important part of daily and generational social reproduction (albeit a small one). This is already evident amongst the more capitalised farmers in the region who no longer permit such share arrangements. This will probably apply to both subsistence producers in the tree-crop owners' households and those from other households. Hence, the temporary nature of these share arrangements makes the long-term sustainability of women's access to land for subsistence production highly questionable.

The implications of these enclosures stand to be experienced unevenly due to the divided class character of the tree-crop producers (Chapter 4). For wives and female family members of orchard owners able to accumulate, the income earned from the orchards will eclipse the contributions of food gardens. However, this may not be true for less successful tree-crop producers or those from households who do not own orchards. Food crops may fade in significance as a social reproduction strategy for some women but remain highly significant for others. As Marxist-feminist scholars note, class and gender are inherent in capitalist relations in complex and often contradictory ways.

While government and the private sector in South Africa prioritise the commodification of high-value tree crops, this narrow commodity focus obscures the related changes in land-use practices within which tree-crop commodification needs to be situated. This particularly applies to the emerging land-based practices and the gendered land relations that this process affects. Therefore, using a Marxist-feminist lens is critical as it foregrounds the interconnectedness between commodity and non-commodity production as intrinsically related.

An important limitation of this chapter is the narrow focus on production relations within orchards. As highlighted in the literature review, the social reproduction concept encompasses various activities, including forms of labour, social relation, and affective concerns. However, the scope of this chapter only focused on food production for domestic consumption.

## 7.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the implications of the enclosure of the commons for the establishment of smallholder commercial orchards for the social reproductive functions of land, mainly focusing on the effects of orchard expansion for food production and gendered land relations. It revealed that in a context of male-dominated smallholder commercial production, such enclosures lead to the exclusion of women from land for food cropping while providing such land through temporary land-sharing arrangements.

This was the case for both female family members of orchard owners and women without land access within the broader community.

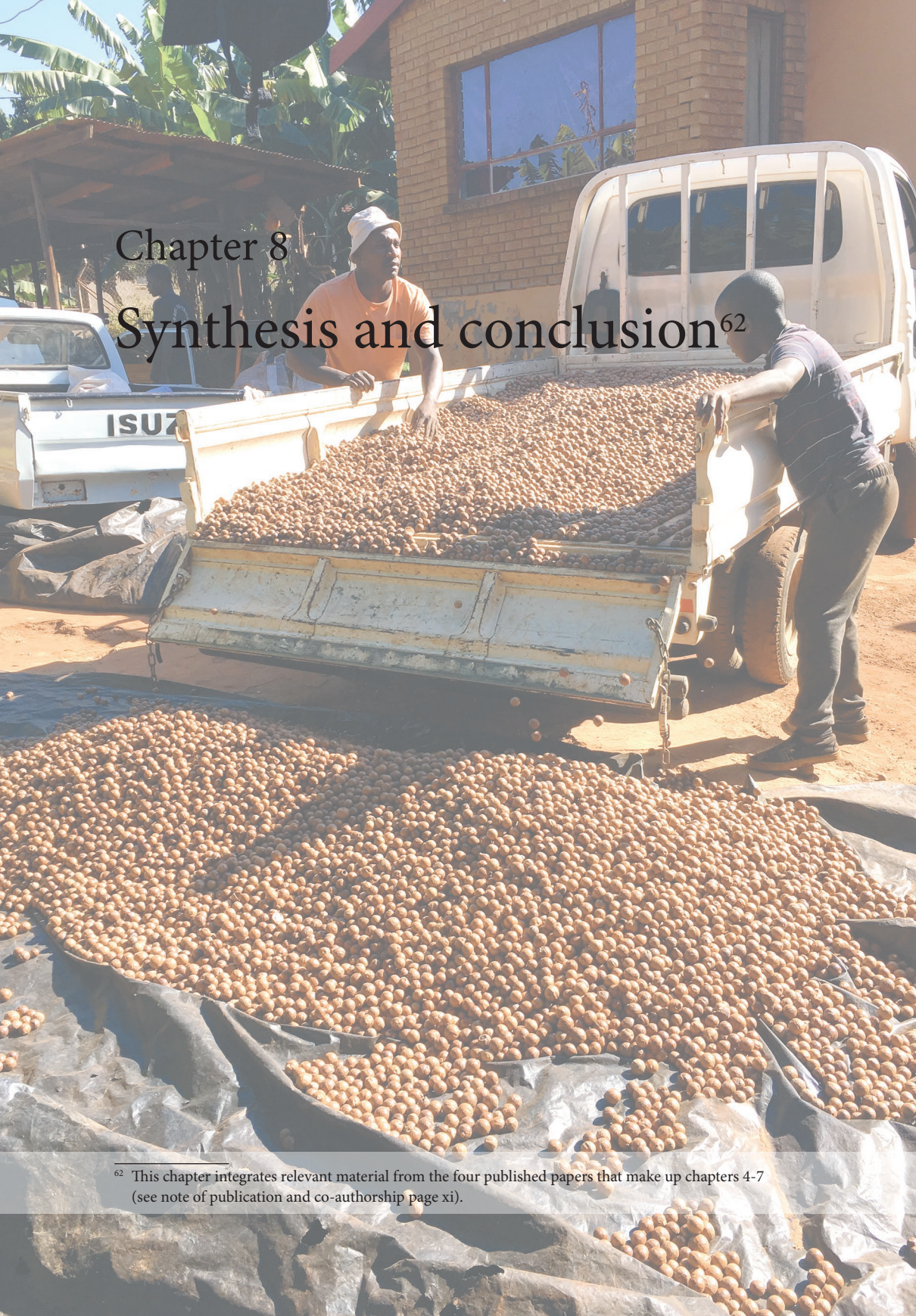
The implications of these enclosures stand to be experienced unevenly due to the divided class character of the tree-crop producers (Chapter 4). For wives and female family members of orchard owners able to accumulate, the income earned from the orchards will eclipse the contributions of food gardens. However, this may not be true for less successful tree-crop producers or those from households who do not own orchards. Food crops may fade in significance as a social reproduction strategy for some women but remain highly significant for others. As Marxist-feminist scholars note, class and gender are inherent in capitalist relations in complex and often contradictory ways.

This trajectory towards enclosure and exclusion is not entirely surprising given South Africa's political economy, where subsistence production has been significantly undermined over the past two centuries, while the food system has become highly centralised and industrialised. Hence, smallholder maize production is no longer a profitable crop and subsistence production, and where it takes place, it only constitutes a small share of the household's food supply. Therefore, it is unsurprising that income from wages and trade is considered important for most subsistence producers. Over time, the expansion of potentially lucrative subtropical tree crops in communal areas at the expense of subsistence food producers is consonant with capitalist development trajectories and demonstrates their contradictory nature. However, given the pervasive levels of rural poverty and unemployment rates, subsistence production as an additional food source remains important to many households despite the highly industrialised corporate food system that prevails. Therefore, the relation between commodity and non-commodity subsistence production must not be overlooked.



## Chapter 8

# Synthesis and conclusion<sup>62</sup>



<sup>62</sup> This chapter integrates relevant material from the four published papers that make up chapters 4-7 (see note of publication and co-authorship page xi).



## 8.1 Introduction

Integrating smallholders into global commodity chains is commonly seen as a means to address rural development and poverty. However, this is not a straightforward process, and the outcomes of this type of inclusion are highly uneven and often adversely affect the very smallholders they seek to benefit. This thesis analysed and documented the emerging production and accumulation dynamics amongst smallholders at an expanding tree-crop commodity frontier in a former homeland in South Africa. This involved an inquiry into the relations and dynamics between tree crops, land and livelihoods and, more generally, how the interactions between these elements are (re)shaping smallholder trajectories and social relations. This study uses a critical agrarian political economy analytical framework to investigate the dynamics that shape and are shaped by smallholders' integration into high-value tree-crop production in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa. This involved engaging with various conceptual debates, including differentiation and diversity amongst smallholders, the commodification of customary land, agricultural markets and their relations across scales, and the relation between commodity and non-commodity production.

This concluding chapter brings together the insights from the respective empirical chapters to answer the overarching research question: *How is the commodification of tree crops among smallholders (re)shaping smallholder accumulation trajectories and agrarian social relations, and what does this imply for the current debates on land and agrarian reform in South Africa and the commodity-focused approach towards smallholders?* In doing so, I move beyond the specific and concrete reality of tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders in the Vhembe District and clarify what and how the research findings contribute to the conceptual and theoretical strands that have guided this research: namely, smallholder accumulation trajectories, commodification of customary land, local and global market relations, and feminist social reproduction theory. Furthermore, I address how the findings contribute to broader debates within South Africa about the potential role and contribution of the smallholder sector to job creation and livelihood generation using a commodity-focused approach. Thus, I contribute to the current debates around land and agrarian reform in South Africa.

This chapter proceeds by revisiting each research sub-question and reflecting on the key findings (Section 8.2). These are then integrated to answer the overarching research question and discuss the more generalised implications of the findings for South Africa's agrarian land reform and smallholder policies (Section 8.3). Next, I reflect on the theoretical implications of this research in terms of the four strands mentioned above (Section 8.4). I deliberate on the methodological choices and the research limitations (Section 8.5), and finally, I end by providing suggestions for future research (Section 8.6).

## 8.2 Revisiting the research questions

The overarching question was broken down into four sub-themes. These comprise the nature and degree of socio-economic differentiation amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers, the dynamics in customary land access, production diversity and agricultural markets, and the relations between commodity and non-commodity production. Each sub-theme has been explored sequentially in the four empirical chapters of this thesis and will be discussed below. These are then combined and integrated to answer the overarching research question.

### 8.2.1 Socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers

The analysis began by unpacking the ‘smallholder’ and, more specifically, ‘smallholder tree-crop farmers’ (Chapter 4). I started by analysing the heterogeneity amongst smallholder tree-crop farmers by asking: *What is the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers, and which dynamics shape this?*

Categorisations of smallholders are often data-driven, meaning they are based on large national datasets that focus on key variables such as land size, type of labour and markets supplied, and how they are combined. This generally results in relatively static categories, as shown by categorisations developed by World Bank (2003), UNCTAD (2015), DAFF (2010, 2013) and NPC (2013). Smallholder typologies can benefit from adding a class-analytic approach that foregrounds the relational component between production and reproduction, property, and power within agrarian societies, dynamically analysing these by situating them within broader processes of change (Bernstein, 2010). I use the latter approach and the related concept of accumulation in the analysis of smallholder diversity as it foregrounds the relational inequalities that are commonly overlooked. This approach is especially relevant in relation to smallholders in former Bantustans (‘homelands’), who tend to be viewed as a relatively homogeneous group as a result of apartheid’s racialised class relations.

My findings show that smallholder tree-crop farmers are highly differentiated, primarily through their varied livelihood diversification patterns, and these both reflect and reinforce the material inequalities between the farmers. This livelihood diversification falls within three broad livelihood domains: state welfare grants, agricultural production (both for formal and informal markets), and non-agrarian activities (both waged work and small business ownership). The relative importance of each reflects the broader socio-economic context in post-apartheid South Africa of structural unemployment and poverty, which are particularly evident in the former homelands.

In categorising the smallholder tree-crop farmers, I build on and refine the categorisation by Dorward et al. (2009) and integrate these with a class analytic perspective. Dorward et al. distinguish between ‘hanging in’, ‘stepping up’ and ‘stepping

out’ as the three key strategies and livelihood aspirations of the poor. In my typology (Table 8.1), I add the ‘inching up’ cluster to nuance the ‘stepping up’ cluster. I demonstrate their very different pace and scope for accumulation, which hinges on the class character, which in this case is largely defined by the key livelihood source – agriculture alone or non-agricultural salaried work. I also substitute the ‘stepping out’ cluster with ‘stepping in’, which signifies a movement into agriculture by well-positioned individuals. This conceptualisation runs counter to the notion of agriculture as a stepping stone out of poverty into more lucrative activities, as demonstrated in the typologies of Dorward et al. (2009), the World Bank (2007) and IFAD (2021).

The class-analytic typology of tree-crop farmers in South Africa comprises four categories:

*Category 1: ‘Hanging in’; welfare-dependent petty commodity producers*

Most tree-crop farmers fall within this category and rely on state pensions that constitute their primary livelihood source. This severely limits their prospects for accumulation through tree-crop farming, which is land, capital and labour intensive. These farmers mainly acquired access to land during the apartheid era, have few means to invest, and primarily rely on their own labour. Hence, their trajectories can best be described as ‘hanging in’, with limited and precarious prospects for accumulation.

*Category 2: ‘Inching up’; agricultural petty commodity producers*

A much smaller share of tree-crop farmers fall within category 2 and rely primarily on agricultural diversification as their primary livelihood strategy, mainly due to the absence of alternative income sources. Most of them are young or middle-aged, having acquired access to land via inheritance. They diversify into seasonal vegetables and other staple food crops within orchards, sold in both formal and informal markets. This is mainly considered a short-term livelihood strategy until tree-crop yields increase and ultimately become their primary livelihood source. Like the ‘hanging in’ category, farmers in this group are essentially petty commodity producers, limited in their ability to accumulate and primarily reliant on their own or family labour. However, their accumulation ability holds more potential than those who solely rely on grants, and their trajectory can be considered one of ‘inching up’.

*Category 3: ‘Stepping in’; Salaried small-scale capitalists*

This category comprises individuals who rely primarily on non-agricultural incomes from professional waged work or small businesses and diversify into agriculture. They are positioned on a trajectory towards accumulation by ‘stepping in’ with capital to hire

labour and significantly invest in agriculture labour. Farmers in this category mostly inherited land or acquired access via the purchase of customary land.

***Category 4: Stepping up; Agricultural small-scale capitalists***

Lastly, a tiny minority of full-time farmers fall within category 4. Most of these have moved from the previous category and are now generating significant income from their farming enterprise, enabling them to focus on commodity farming as a primary livelihood. These farms are more capitalised than the other categories, enabling accumulation and reinvestment, leading to intensification and expansion and thereby 'stepping up'. These latter two groups are essentially small-scale capitalists, as they rely primarily on hired labour and are engaged in accumulation.

These findings point to three overarching conclusions. First, accumulation 'from below' in the context of high-value tree-crop commodities is severely limited but not impossible. Income from agriculture alone severely limits the scope for accumulation from within agriculture, while non-agricultural livelihood sources are critical to facilitating accumulation within tree-crop farming. The related constraints reflect both the historical and contemporary political economy of access to livelihood opportunities and land. This is linked to the second conclusion that the dynamics of tree-crop farming cannot be understood through a commodity-focused lens alone but instead needs to be embedded within wider circuits of livelihood diversification and employment that span both the urban and rural worlds. Third, a class-analytic lens is useful as it illuminates the class structure inherent in the material differences within contemporary agrarian settings. It points to the growing inequality in the accumulation process, which, as demonstrated here, is uneven and contingent.

**8.2.2 Tree-crop commodification, customary land access and governance**

Building on the finding that most small-scale capitalist farmers are 'stepping in' to agriculture or 'stepping up' via reinvestment and expansion with non-agricultural capital, Chapter 5 shifted attention to the processes through which access to customary land occurs. This involved exploring how individuals navigate land access to establish tree crops and, in turn, how land governance processes adapt to these changing circumstances. In exploring these dynamics, specific attention was paid to the implications for tenure security. The specific question addressed was: *How is the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfiguring land access arrangements and tenure security, and how is this affecting customary land governance?*

Since 2000, growing importance has been placed on customary land governance systems as a more appropriate means to secure the tenure rights and land access of those

living in customary territories as a push back against the ongoing formalisation of these rights, most notably via titling. Yet, at the same time, with deepening capitalist relations, in particular through commodity production, growing competition and conflict have brought into question the negotiable and adaptive nature of customary tenure systems (Peters, 2004).

I have used the notion of living law to explore how customary tenure systems are being adapted in the context of tree-crop expansion. In so doing, I unpacked how land access for orchard expansion is transforming land access and land governance arrangements and identified four key mechanisms in this regard. First, land access increasingly hinges on contractual arrangements based primarily on financial transactions. These transactions are illicit and divert significantly from customary norms of access traditionally embedded in social relations and group membership. The value ascribed to land in these transactions is highly varied both within and across traditional local authorities and depends on the degree of land scarcity but was also found to be largely opportunistic and based on the needs of the seller and perceived capacity of the buyer. While custom does not permit the sale of customary land in South Africa (du Plessis & Frantz, 2014), it is condoned in practice between individuals on the pretext that the financial transactions compensate for the land-based investments made. There is little justification for land being sold by traditional leaders. Land transactions mainly were opportunistic and hinged on the vulnerabilities amongst the existing landowners if the land was purchased from individuals or were exploiting opportunities through rent appropriating if the land was acquired from traditional leaders.

Second, changes in the governance of land allocation are underway. The authority and control over land allocation are shifting away from the lower level of authority and becoming increasingly concentrated at the level of the headman and chief with little downward accountability to residents. Similarly, as land is increasingly transacted between individuals, authority primarily sits with the seller, and the traditional leader authorises the change of ownership. This is closely linked to the third dynamic, which links to the changes in the geographic scope of land access. As land becomes increasingly scarce, people seek access to land outside the traditional authority area where they are from. The geographic expansion of land acquisition again breaks with customary practices where land access was determined by rights embedded in social relations and group membership. Fourth, particularly in places where land is scarce, the process of land acquisition is becoming increasingly bureaucratic. Access is mediated by business and market-oriented conditionalities such as business plans, proof of funds, purchase agreements, etc. In such instances, the parcels of land being allocated have become increasingly small, and the viability of the orchards needs to be proved before additional land can be acquired.

The growing demand for customary land for orchards has significant implications for land access and tenure security of the less well-resourced individuals. Furthermore, the covert nature of these transactions results in opportunistic behaviour by senior traditional leaders and the exploitation of vulnerabilities amongst existing landowners in the case of individual transactions. The findings demonstrate a tenure system in transition: the privatisation and partial commodification of land under customary rule do not signal the end of customary land governance per se but rather a transformation thereof which has serious implications for equitable and transparent land governance.

### 8.2.3 The relation between export-oriented tree crops and local food production

Honing in on the petty commodity producers ‘inching up’ through agricultural diversification, Chapter 6 explored the nature of agricultural diversification within orchards, how farmers combine different markets, and what this market patterning implies for their accumulation trajectories. The following question was addressed: *How does the commodification of subtropical tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets amongst smallholders in Venda?*

I addressed this question by unpacking the relationship between global and local markets, which are often dichotomised in the alternative food systems literature. I thereby used the theoretical concept of nested markets (Van der Ploeg, 2015a) as an analytical tool to explore the nature of local markets, as this presents a counter to market-centred thinking that tends to focus on specific commodities and related barriers to markets. Instead, nested markets emphasise the agentive practices of farmers and their local embedding within specific socio-material infrastructures. This enables a better understanding of how and why farmers simultaneously engage in multiple markets across scales and, theoretically, reveals the usefulness of the concept of nested markets to make sense of the local embedded processes that situate farmers’ market engagement.

My analysis demonstrated that, particularly for tree-crop farmers without alternative off-farm income, diversifying into vegetable crops for sale at local and regional markets was a key strategy that enabled them to sustain and gradually expand their tree-crop orchards. As such, it can be considered an important means to enable comparatively marginalised farmers to gain and maintain access to otherwise relatively inaccessible value chains, which would remain the purview of better-off farmers with access to non-agricultural sources of income. This has important implications for current efforts to create inclusive opportunities for rural livelihood generation through high-value and capital-intensive commodities. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of situating farmer diversity in an analysis of market engagement, acknowledging that farmers are differently positioned vis-à-vis their ability to engage in markets, as demonstrated by their agentive patterning of multiple markets.



A key characteristic of nested markets is their embeddedness in socio-material infrastructure, defined according to the three dimensions of *connectedness, rootedness and specificity* (Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). These dimensions were found to be particularly evident in the case of the production of traditional green leafy vegetables, making them more remunerative and better suited to smallholder's local context and enabling farmers to have greater autonomy over market relations. Thanks to a broad product portfolio, most farmers simultaneously engage in multiple market channels, strategically combining local nested, regional, and international markets. Vegetable cash crops are thereby seen as a means to sustain a more regular income until the tree crops reach maturity, thus providing a means to cross-subsidise orchards. This combination of multiple markets across scales demonstrates the opportunity-seeking behaviour of farmers who seek out the most profitable markets that match their current circumstances and tie in with their longer-term agricultural strategies. These findings contrast the market dichotomy based on scale inherent in nested market thinking. Instead, I introduced the concept of *'degrees of nestedness'* to better demonstrate the temporal and situated nature of engagement in nested markets.

These findings also challenge the more political notion of nested markets, which considers farmers' engagement in these markets as part of a broader counter-movement to actively distance from global markets based on their perceived 'failure' (Hebinck et al., 2015, p. 5). Many critical agrarian scholars (e.g. Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Rosset, 2008; Van der Ploeg, 2010b) criticise conventional global markets, amongst others, for reducing smallholder autonomy over the terms of engagement and providing less remuneration than their local counterparts. However, foregrounding farmers' agency and socio-economic position, the findings emphasise the synergies and complementariness between markets across different scales. Counter to farmers distancing themselves from global markets, these different markets mutually reinforce each other instead of being oppositional. Cultivating tree crops stimulates vegetable production for local nested and regional markets as part of broader struggles for access to lucrative global markets.

#### **8.2.4 Tree-crop commodification and social reproduction**

The commodification of tree crops is linked to changes in land-use practices, explored in Chapter 7. In this chapter, I used a Marxist-feminist lens (Bhattacharya, 2017b; Fraser, 2016) to explore the 'situated landed practice' (Gribat & Pizzo, 2020) taking place in the shadow of tree crops. In particular, I examined how these changes affect the social reproductive function of land, thereby foregrounding the contradictory relation between commodity and non-commodity production and how this articulates with class and gender relations. The chapter addressed the following research question: *How and under*

*what conditions does the enclosure of the commons for orchards present a space that sustains land-based social reproductive functions?*

My findings show that the parallel processes of expanding urbanisation in rural areas and an allocation bias in customary land governance towards high-value commercial production undermine women's ability to access customary land for cultivating food crops and wild harvesting. This bias in land allocation to commodity production expands the area of customary land enclosed to establish high-value tree-crop orchards at the expense of subsistence food crops in communal areas. Under these circumstances, women turned to subsistence production on land allocated for orchards, both between and around the orchards. These emerging land-sharing arrangements demonstrate a shift in production practices whereby commodity and non-commodity production are temporarily integrated geographically and socially.

A key factor enabling these temporary land-sharing arrangements is the class character of tree-crop producers. Land-sharing primarily occurs on the land of male petty commodity producers who can be characterised as 'hanging in' and 'inching up' (Table 8.1). These farmers face constraints regarding access to capital to expand their orchards and fully cultivate their land. Accommodating subsistence production on the unused or newly developed land where the trees have not yet reached maturity presents an opportunity as their land is cleared and maintained in the process, essentially providing a service that an employed labourer would otherwise provide. The *de facto* male landowners often actively seek out these arrangements. The subsistence producers are usually women who have lost access to customary land or find these new arrangements more favourable as the land is large, fenced, and fertile. This contrasts with small-scale capitalist farmers characterised as 'stepping in' and 'stepping up' (Table 8.1). The small-scale capitalist farmers do not permit these land-share arrangements because they are in the process of expanding their orchards or have already established mature orchards with a closed canopy where it is impossible to cultivate in-between the trees.

The land-sharing arrangements explored differ substantially from those documented in the literature in which the harvest, trees or the land is divided after the tenant's work (e.g. Amanor & Diderutuah, 2001; Colin, 2013; Lambrecht & Asare, 2016). The share arrangement explored here is less formalised, loosely defined, and evolves in the landowner's interest. As such, it is a temporary accommodation that ultimately undermines women's land access. The arrangements are also informed by customary norms and rules that are evident in the motivation behind land-sharing, implying that access to land for subsistence production is enabled via group membership. These arrangements are likely to erode over time as production becomes more intensive and extensive and increasingly tied into capitalist modes of production.

As Marxist-feminist scholars note, class and gender articulate in complex and often contradictory ways within capitalist relations. The expansion of highly lucrative subtropical tree crops in communal areas, ultimately at the expense of subsistence food crops, is consonant with capitalist development trajectories over time and demonstrates their contradictory nature. The long-term impacts of these enclosures are differentiated, whereby for most orchard owners and their wives, the income earned from selling tree crops like macadamia and avocado may well eclipse the contributions of food gardens. However, this may not be true for unsuccessful tree-crop producers or households that do not own orchards. As a social reproduction strategy, food crops may fade in significance for women who benefit from jobs and opportunities to engage in the petty trade in tree crops. In contrast, food crops may remain highly significant for those who become progressively worse off with the proceeding enclosures for tree-crop commodification.

### **8.3 Returning to the overarching research question**

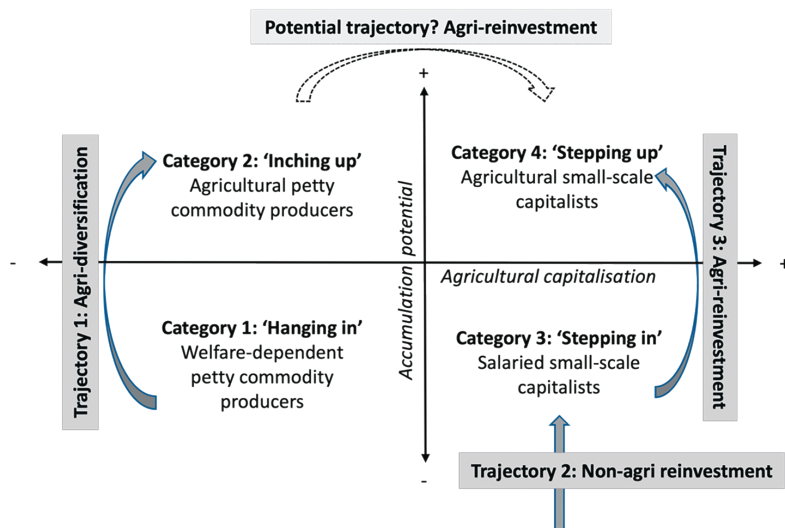
The synthesis above enables answering the overarching research question guiding this study, namely: How is the commodification of tree crops among smallholders (re) shaping smallholder accumulation trajectories and agrarian social relations, and what does this imply for the current debates on land and agrarian reform in South Africa and the commodity-focused approach towards smallholders? This overall question consists of two parts discussed separately in the following sub-sections.

#### **8.3.1 Tree-crop commodification and the reshaping of accumulation trajectories and agrarian relations.**

This study concludes that tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders and the related prospects for accumulation are deeply situated and contingent on farmers' socio-economic context and position and their related access to alternative livelihood activities (both agricultural and non-agricultural). These factors largely shape the divided class character of the smallholder tree-crop sector (Chapter 4), which determines the scope and nature of accumulation (Chapters 5-7). Three broad trajectories of accumulation were identified (Figure 8.1).

The first trajectory is accumulation via agricultural diversification. Diversifying into food crops for local markets allows petty commodity producers to cross-subsidise tree-crop intensification, resulting in small yet incremental steps towards expansion and accumulation. This was how petty commodity producers in the 'hanging in' category were able to engage in limited accumulation and move into and up within the 'inching up' category.

Figure 8.1 Accumulation trajectories<sup>63</sup>



Source: Author’s construct, based on the analysis in Chapter 4 and Dorward et al., 2009.

The second trajectory is accumulation via non-agricultural investment. This trajectory is mainly driven by a class of professionals moving into tree-crop production – investing non-agricultural incomes to either capitalise on inherited orchards or purchase customary land or ageing orchards to establish new orchards. Relying heavily on hired labour and comparatively more mechanised production systems than petty commodity producers, these small-scale capitalists are in a position to accumulate more rapidly than those engaged in agricultural diversification. This trajectory is closely linked to the third trajectory, ‘reinvesting agricultural income’, whereby the primary investment source comes from tree crops enabling expanded production and accumulation. The trajectory whereby agricultural petty commodity producers reinvest agricultural income to become small-scale capitalists is theoretically possible but was not observed in the analysis, hence the blurred arrow.

These trajectories demonstrate the limited upward class mobility through tree-crop production. For most tree-crop farmers (Category 1: Hanging in), accumulation through tree-cropping alone remains elusive, and where accumulation does occur, it remains highly contingent on water, labour and local fresh produce markets (Category 2: ‘Inching up’). On the other hand, accumulation by a relative elite rural class of professionals

<sup>63</sup> The trajectory whereby agricultural petty commodity producers reinvest agricultural income to become small-scale capitalists is theoretically possible, but was not observed in the analysis, hence the blurred arrow.

entering into agriculture is the more dynamic force driving changes in agrarian social relations. This is most evident in the accelerating rural social differentiation and changes in gender and land relations. The potential for significant accumulation to take place through agricultural investment alone and thus upward class mobility (Category 2: 'Inching up' to Category 4: 'Stepping up') is theoretically possible over a longer period, but no evidence of this was found during this research.

Existing patterns of social difference, particularly the divided class character of smallholders, are being accelerated and entrenched through the growing opportunities opening up for smallholder tree-crop commodification. As well-positioned small-scale capitalist farmers acquire and expand their access to land for tree-crop cultivation, this often occurs at the expense of subsistence food producers and vulnerable landowners. These are mostly widowers unable to engage in accumulation, often driven into 'distress sales'. This has resulted in a small yet rapidly growing class of relatively 'elite' tree-crop farmers who starkly contrast most petty commodity producers.

Tree-crop commodification is also driving shifts in gendered land access. Orchard expansion has resulted in a convergence in gendered land use, with subsistence production moving into orchards. These arrangements enable a 'temporary accommodation' of subsistence production within orchards. However, over time, these arrangements stand to give way as capitalist 'development' trajectories proceed by expanding tree-crop commodity production at the expense of subsistence production.

Arguably the most profound and potentially far-reaching implication of smallholder tree-crop commodification for rural social relations is in the area of customary land access and governance. This study has shown how processes of commodification of customary land are no longer driven from above, for instance, by foreign investment for mineral extraction. Instead, it now occurs on a much smaller scale, driven from below. Customary land governance institutions – embodied in the chiefs – exploit this for personal gains. This means that customary land is *de facto* privatised to establish tree-crop orchards – either directly or via cultivating food crops providing the necessary capital. These implications are strongly related to the materiality of tree crops (notably the time needed to mature and produce).

### 8.3.2 Implications for South African land and agrarian reform

The findings of this research have important implications for redistributive land reform policies, smallholder support strategies and customary land governance. Each of which is discussed below, accompanied by policy recommendations.

***Redistributive land reform needs to target smallholder tree-crop farmers***

Contemporary land politics revolves around the highly politicised notion of land expropriation without compensation (du Toit, 2019; Mtero, 2021), which obscures more fundamental questions related to land reform, like: Who should be getting land? For what purpose? And how should they be supported? This research provides some insights regarding these pertinent questions, highlighting that smallholder tree-crop farmers (both petty-commodity producers and small-scale capitalists) should be potential beneficiaries of redistributive land reform. Providing that this land is well located, with access to electricity and water infrastructure or potential water harvesting opportunities close to the communal areas, there is potential for accumulation ‘from below’. Around 10 ha is deemed sufficient to establish an orchard and engage in accumulation ‘from below’. As others have argued (Cousins, 2016), subdividing and redistributing large commercial farms could be a more viable option than the current restitution model, whereby large commercial farms are transferred to communities to farm collectively under the legal entity of a Communal Property Associations (CPA). The disappointing outcomes of these projects are well documented (Manenzhe & Lahiff, 2007). Smallholder tree-crop farmers should be amongst those targeted for the subdivision of large commercial tree-crop farms. Providing well-located and serviced land to farmers from communal areas who seek to enter tree-crop production or aspire to expand their scale of operation would also relieve pressure on the enclosure of the commons and potentially expand employment opportunities in the sector, as others have also argued (Bunce, 2020; GTAC CBPEP EU, 2020).

***Different support strategies are required based on the divided class character of the sector***

The divided class character of the tree-crop sector (Chapter 4) highlights the very different contexts within which farmers engage in accumulation, and these differences require distinct support strategies. Policymakers promoting agricultural development strategies focused on tree crops as high-value niche commodities should consider that tree-crop farming is primarily a part-time activity with strong linkages to wage work and other economic activities. Second, it is important to consider the generational cycle in support strategies, considering that most tree-crop farmers are pensioners whose possibilities for succession need to be ensured. Third, and related to the foregoing, the materiality of tree crops – capital intensive and slow to mature – poses particular challenges for young farmers to gain entry and sustain themselves. The class-based typology developed in this research helps tailor appropriate support strategies.

Individuals with off-farm income to invest and those with established and capitalised orchards (small-scale capitalist farmers) can achieve small but highly productive orchards, provided they receive relevant support. At a minimum, these

farmers should receive long-term mentorship from commercial growers until trees come into full production after 10 years. Extension officers should be closely involved in this process to build their capacity and enable scaling up and sharing this knowledge with other small-scale capitalist farmers.

Supporting petty-commodity producers engaged in tree-cropping is vital to ensure inclusive and broad-based accumulation opportunities. Targeting this group presents a far greater opportunity for generating livelihoods at scale. In this regard, it is critical to understand the diversified production systems that integrate annual cash crops and tree crops (Chapter 6). Agroecological approaches could be better placed to support potential synergies between these cropping systems and their respective markets in the early years of orchard establishment (albeit that cash crops may give way over time to tree crops). Non-profit organisations and NGOs with expertise in permaculture and agroecological approaches could provide training and support in this area. As with the mentorship model proposed above, extension officers should be closely involved here, too, to ensure capacity building and enable scaling up. Commodity-specific expertise from commercial growers remains vital, but this alone is inadequate. In addition, providing greater support to strengthen and expand growth opportunities in the informal fresh produce trade, such as better infrastructure and opportunities for local informal traders both in local towns and villages.

*Customary land governance, particularly in relation to land transactions, needs to be made more transparent and downwardly accountable*

Current legislation<sup>64</sup> assigns far-reaching powers to traditional leaders over communal land and to define custom. In the context of land scarcity and the growing demand for land to establish and extend orchards, these powers are often used to allocate land and enable land transactions that benefit a few. This potentially undermines women's access to land for subsistence and prevents less well-resourced farmers from gaining access to establish orchards. Furthermore, these powers are sometimes exploited and used for personal gains through rent extraction via land allocation. This calls for amendments to current legislation to ensure downward accountability of traditional leaders, particularly regarding land allocations, to avoid traditional leaders and a minority of farmers with capital and social networks being the sole beneficiaries of these transactions.

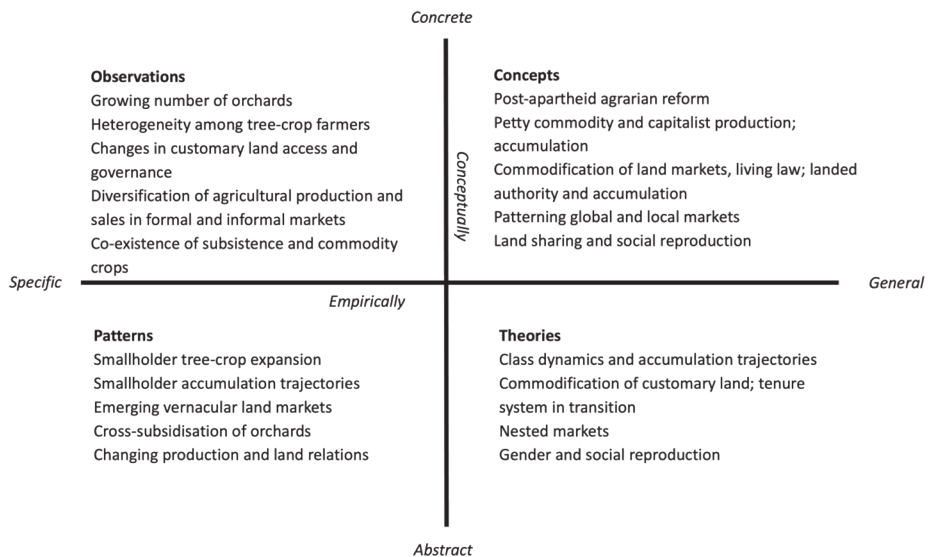
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<sup>64</sup> See Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act 2 of 2019 (TLGFA) and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) amongst others.

### 8.4 Theoretical implications and contributions to existing debates

As with most case study research, this thesis has been concerned with localised dynamics occurring in a particular geographical location at a particular moment in history. But trying to extrapolate a more generalised meaning and application from this specific study, one might ask: “Of what is this a case?” As Lund (2014) aptly points out, “Case studies are often presented as self-evident. However, of what the material is a case is actually less evident” (Lund, 2014, p. 224). In this section, I move beyond the specificities of the case itself and make inferences to broader patterns and processes that resonate beyond the case study itself. Thus, an analytical movement towards generalisation, abstraction and theorisation is required. In this regard, Lund (2014) puts forward a useful analytical matrix consisting of two open-ended continua that stretch between the concrete and the general and the specific and the abstract. In the iterative movement between these dimensions, one can come closer to answering the question of ‘Of what is this a case?’. This helps to shift from the specific and concrete, addressed above towards a more general reflection on the contribution to the theoretical stands used in this study (Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2 Analytical matrix and movement towards generalisation and abstraction



Source: Based on Lund (2014).

Across the empirical chapters, this thesis combines in varying degrees a class-analytic approach inspired by the agrarian Marxist tradition (Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2013) with rural sociology and anthropological research traditions. Whereas the first emphasises



the uneven and differentiated outcome of capitalist development trajectories, the latter foreground the rural people's lived experience and agency as they navigate this dynamic context (Scoones, 2015; Van der Ploeg, 2015b). In this way, the analytical category of 'class' is used to understand the nature of differentiation, while the drivers of differentiation and the dynamic social relations that stem from it are explored 'from below'. Consequently, this thesis contributes primarily to agrarian political economy debates by grounding the uneven processes that both enable and result from the commodification of tree crops. As such, my theoretical contributions relate to four key areas that situate the accumulation trajectories.

First, this thesis has foregrounded the importance of centring class dynamics and accumulation trajectories as an analytical lens when exploring diversity amongst smallholders and the forces that constitute this. Using a class analytic enables moving beyond taxonomic categorisations that tend to see the farming enterprise as a closed system, defined by internal processes and empirically discrete attributes alone. Instead, a class analytic illustrates the intrinsically social and relational nature of smallholder farming systems. This study highlighted how closely bound tree-crop production is to processes beyond the farm and the trees. This is in concert with the concept of 'fragmented classes of labour' (Bernstein, 2010), which emphasises how class determines how capital and labour are combined within a farming unit (be it the individual or household). This study highlights the particular relevance of this concept in the context of high-value commodities such as macadamia and avocado, which require extensive land access and significant capital. As such, non-tree-crop income largely determined how, by whom, to what extent, and to what end tree-crop production is pursued, highlighting how the materiality of crops is an important signifier of the relative degree and importance of this fragmentation.

A class analytic perspective grounds the analysis of social differentiation by emphasising the social relations that situate and inform these differences. However, class formation and differentiation are dynamic processes that taxonomic divisions in themselves can obscure. Therefore, identifying the categories of petty-commodity producer and small-scale capitalist, while useful to demonstrate material differences between producers, only demonstrate the uneven access to the means of production and reproduction without revealing the broader processes within which they are situated. Here, the concept of accumulation trajectories is critical to bringing the dynamics of the process to the fore. This involved approaching agrarian social relations as co-constituted and reshaped through state and private sector authority while also embedded in local norms and customs. In this respect, this study contributes to the conceptualisation of accumulation trajectories as shaped from above or below. Where accumulation 'from below' is highly uneven, there are potentially wide-reaching consequences for

development. Identifying the divided class character (Chapter 4) is key to situating the modes of accumulation (or absence thereof).

Secondly, access to land, planting trees, and transferring orchards are driving important changes in land access and governance arrangements. One of the key modes of accumulation for small-scale capitalists is investing in land and orchard expansion. This process relates to debates about the nature of customary tenure systems and how they evolve in the context of expanding commodity relations. This thesis thereby counters the interpretation of customary law as inclusive of local land rights holders because norms and rules of this living law adapt to changing circumstances in a flexible and contingent way (Berry, 2013; Okoth-Ogendo, 2002; Cousins, 2007). In contrast, this study illustrates a shift towards increasing individualisation and enclosure of the commons and more centralised land governance. Increasingly, financial means determine access instead of group membership and socially sanctioned norms that previously determined access. The materiality of high-value tree-crop commodities are accelerating capitalist land relations, making land access more exclusive. However, this is not leading to a push for titling and the gradual departure from customary forms of land governance as the evolutionary theory of land rights would have it, but rather signals a transition in customary land governance, whereby traditional and commoditised forms of access reshape norms and modes of land access as vernacular land markets emerge. This study contributes to a better understanding of these evolving practices of customary land governance in the context of tenure systems in transition.

Thirdly, market relations across scales are important avenues towards limited accumulation. Local agricultural markets (both formal and informal) are essential means through which petty-commodity producers without access to non-agrarian capital are able to maintain and very gradually expand their tree-crop orchards. As such, agricultural diversification within orchards signals a crucial means for limited accumulation 'from below'. These local markets resemble many of the features of 'nested markets' (Van der Ploeg, 2015a) and, more generally, can be considered to fall within the ambit of alternative food movements (Wiskerke, 2009). As part of the broader livelihood portfolio of petty-commodity tree-crop producers, these local markets enable access to high-value commodity supply chains. Read as such, petty commodity producers straddling multiple markets across scales represent a strategic means to gain and maintain access to global markets. This finding contrasts the interpretation of nested markets literature that generally lauds selling at local markets as an alternative or even a 'counter movement' to global agricultural supply chains (Hebinck et al., 2015). Therefore, looking beyond the local versus global markets dichotomy is critical to understanding the relational dynamics between markets. As this thesis demonstrates, smallholders' simultaneous engagement in

multiple markets across scales is a means to enable slow but gradual accumulation ‘from below’ in the absence of alternative income sources to finance tree-crop production.

Finally, this thesis speaks to the inherent contradictions between private accumulation and social reproduction. Petty commodity producers, unable to cultivate the full extent of their land with trees or other crops, are turning to seemingly open-ended land-sharing arrangements with subsistence producers. As access to land for subsistence production is becoming increasingly scarce, these share arrangements ultimately give way as orchards mature and expand, thereby undermining subsistence production while potentially offering opportunities in labour and petty trade. This demonstrates the inherent contradiction between capitalist expansion and social reproduction that Marxist feminists have long emphasised. In contrast, under conditions where land-based social reproduction is generally declining, this temporary accommodation needs to be seen as a transition period, ultimately divorcing subsistence producers from the land. For some, expanding orchards bring potential employment and petty-trade opportunities while stripping others of their land-based social reproduction without generating alternative opportunities.

### **8.5 Methodological reflections and limitations of the study**

This section reflects on the methodological choices made and discusses the potential methodological contributions of this research. This particularly relates to the methods used for the analysis of survey data.

The use of two-step clustering as an exploratory analytical tool to identify diversity among smallholders was relatively innovative when I started this study in 2015, although increasingly, many other methods of cluster analysis are used in similar studies (e.g. Jelsma, Schoneveld, Zoomers, & van Westen, 2017; Kuivanen et al., 2016; Pacini et al., 2014; Pienaar & Traub, 2015). Therefore, it deserves some reflection on its utility. It proved particularly useful as a first step to explore the nature and extent of diversity within the group of smallholders – both to identify the relative importance of different variables explaining differences and subsequently for comparison to create clusters. This was also particularly useful as it enabled combining multiple variables (both scale and nominal) in the analysis. Using this tool as a heuristic device can avoid the discursive erasure of intergroup variations and, as such, provides a valuable means for future studies that seek to explore diversity in agrarian societies.

The mixed-method design enabled an iterative research process that allowed the integration of the quantitative and more ethnographic elements. This was enabled by the regular fieldwork trips that spanned several years due to the nature of the design of the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration project within which this PhD study took place (Section 3.2.1). In this way, emerging elements could be addressed and explored.

However, this posed challenges as the datasets were not always well aligned. This was particularly the case with land access and land sharing, which were not addressed in the initial survey, leading to challenges in integrating the different datasets. In retrospect, a preliminary qualitative scoping study would have enabled the initial survey to be better aligned with the realities on the ground. In this way, more precise data on land access, transactions and sharing arrangements, and relations between formal and informal markets could have been included in the survey.

There are also limitations to this study which relate to the discipline (agronomic lines of investigation being beyond my means), the context (orchards in varying stages of maturity with implications for the quality of financial data), and the scope (the single case study and specific focus).

An inevitable shortcoming in a study that focuses on emergent processes, particularly of slowly maturing crops such as trees, is the quality of the financial data collected. Considering that the investment in orchards is incremental for smallholders, most orchards are in varying stages of maturity, making it challenging to acquire accurate data on investment and returns on yields. This was coupled with the fact that most petty commodity producers did not keep financial records. Hence, I relied primarily on farmers' memories and estimates. In contrast, small-scale capitalists who were generally quite good at record-keeping were wary of disclosing these figures, leading to either exaggerated or downplayed estimates. These issues posed challenges for the analysis, making it difficult to rely too heavily on financial data, especially income data. The sequential design mentioned above helped to correct this to some extent. The iterative nature of the data collection sequence allowed for the tentative nature of the financial data to be corroborated through qualitative methods. This challenge must be coupled with my own disciplinary shortcomings, which meant that agronomic lines of investigations were beyond my means.

The nature of a single case study raises the question of how generalisable these findings are to other locations. The geographical focus on the Vhembe District made sense for an in-depth study as smallholder orchards are most prolific in this area. Hence, a study that focuses on depth rather than breadth made sense. However, the specific nature of customary land tenure arrangements and the proximity to commercial processors and exports may be pretty specific to this location. The anthropological depth, the detail of the data collection and subsequent analysis, and 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the context and processes enable some analytical generalisation, but further research in other locations across the region is needed (see next section).

Another limitation of this study relates to aspects of land and labour left out of this study but closely linked to the processes explored here. Regarding land, this study documented the emergence of customary land markets from the perspective of tree-

crop farmers, and this was triangulated with data from traditional authorities and local municipalities. The apparent absence of the voices of land sellers and those losing access to land due to orchard expansion is a glaring gap that needs to be addressed in future studies (see next section). Concerning labour, this study revealed a growing number of professionals entering agriculture while maintaining their non-agricultural jobs, and hence a growing reliance on hired labour. Labour relations in this context are defined by a high degree of autonomy for labourers, which stands in contrast to conventional labour relations on the commercial white farms in the area with very hierarchical labour regimes, which fell beyond the scope of this study.

### 8.6 Avenues for future research

Considering the limitations outlined in the previous section, I make the following suggestions for further research:

- As the tree-crop sector matures, studies that focus on the economics of small-holder orchards, considering the sector's class-divided character, should complement their approach with a more social perspective like the one presented in this study.
- Further research is needed on the rapidly developing market for customary land in Venda and other former homelands where orchards are being established. Notably, the mechanism through which this process evolves and the popular response and resistance (or the lack thereof) from local community members require further attention. Focusing on changes in customary land tenure from the perspective of land sellers and those losing access to land due to orchard expansion would complement the findings of this research which focused on the buyers or those acquiring land and the related governance arrangements.
- Given the potentially important role of nested markets for tree-crop farmers' accumulation 'from below', further research should focus on how the patterning of production in relation to different market circuits is constructed over time and on the nested markets from the perspective of consumers and traders to complement the narrow focus on producers take in this study.
- Further research is needed on the implications of non-agricultural investment for labour relations. Labour relations on farms of professionals working in other sectors (education, non-farm businesses, etcetera) are different (assumedly more autonomous) than the hierarchical relations on commercial white farms. Further research on these labour relations would inform thinking about the nature and scope of job creation in this sector.

- Considering the context specificity of a single case study, further research is needed in other regions in Southern Africa where tree crops are rapidly expanding amongst smallholders (such as Mozambique and Malawi). This would allow further insights into the generalisability of processes analysed in this study related to diverging accumulation strategies among smallholders, land relations on customary land, nested markets, and land-sharing.
- Finally, this study indicated access to water as a critical factor determining the nature and scope of smallholder commodity production in the future. What the highly uncertain and variable climatic conditions of agriculture – particularly when practised in drylands – mean for smallholder tree-crop farmers in this region and elsewhere is a critical area that needs to be mapped to understand the implications for the accumulation trajectories outlined in this study.

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## English summary

Integrating small-scale farmers into global value chains via agricultural commercialisation has become a prominent approach promoted by international development institutions and national governments to address rural poverty and unemployment. This approach assumes that poverty results from small-scale farmers' 'lagging behind' development processes and that poverty reduction outcomes can be achieved by integrating them into markets. This typically involves a range of interventions geared towards 'modernising' agricultural production and addressing the barriers that prevent smallholders from gaining entry, participating and benefitting from international markets. This approach to poverty reduction via market integration has resulted in highly differentiated and uneven outcomes for farmers, environmental degradation, and new forms of vulnerability and risk. Despite the growing evidence of the mixed results of inclusion into agricultural value chains, these narratives of incorporation still dominate rural development strategies worldwide, and South Africa is no exception. This study is positioned broadly within these debates and challenges the dominant discourse by exploring the politics and processes of agrarian change in the context of smallholder tree-crop farmers in a former homeland in South Africa.

In South Africa, supporting smallholders is a political, social and economic imperative, driven by the need to deracialise the agricultural sector and address pervasive levels of unemployment and poverty. To this end, high-value export-oriented tree crops such as macadamia and avocado are prioritised on the grounds of having high growth and employment-generating potential and hence assumed poverty reduction outcomes. Following a commodity-focused approach, the broader objective is to create a class of 'black' commercially oriented smallholders linked to global supply chains. State and private sector actors, incentivised mainly through the national broad-based black economic empowerment agenda that seeks to deracialise the economy, have converged in their efforts to support and actively facilitate farmers' access to these markets.

Against this background, this thesis addresses four knowledge gaps related to tree-crop commodification amongst smallholders outlined in Chapter 1. Firstly, how agricultural commercialisation amongst independent smallholders impacts the agrarian structure and class dynamics more widely is not well understood. This is particularly important in South Africa, where the dual agrarian structure has led to smallholders being viewed as a relatively homogeneous category through their relation to large-scale commercial farmers on the one side and subsistence farming on the other. Scrutiny of the nature and processes of differentiation within and between groups of smallholders historically marginalised in South Africa is also rare. This requires a better understanding

of the heterogeneity and accompanying differentiation and accumulation processes amongst farmers. Different approaches to typology construction broadly focus on physical characteristics captured in national datasets; the relational class character that foregrounds socio-economic relations and the structuring context; or are based on actor-oriented approaches that centre on subjectivities by highlighting farmers' attitudes, goals and aspirations. Combining a class-analytic approach with aspects of an actor-oriented approach is rare and contributes to a better understanding of the nature and process of differentiation.

Secondly, agricultural commodification amongst smallholders in regimes governed by customary land tenure systems has been at the centre of debates around how best to secure informal or customary land rights. This debate has been polarised between those favouring formalised property relations and those in favour of protecting forms of customary land tenure. Both assume that customary tenure systems operate outside of market principles. However, vernacular land markets are emerging across the subcontinent, especially in cases where agricultural commodification is increasing. However, little is known about how customary institutions and land governance evolve, adapt and respond to this process. Transformation in customary land governance systems in the context of agricultural commodification has received little attention.

Thirdly, debates around smallholder commodification and relations to markets tend to pit integration into global value chains against local and regional markets. This dichotomy between locally embedded versus globally integrated markets largely obscures the interactions and relations between these different markets and the related food systems they sustain. How different markets interact and under what conditions they present more robust strategies for rural development needs to be better understood, particularly by centring on the class-differentiated character of the smallholder sector and the materiality of tree crops.

Lastly, agrarian political economy scholars tend to analyse agricultural commodification processes in terms of accumulation trajectories with little attention to how these processes relate to social reproduction. On the other hand, Marxist-feminist theorists have highlighted the interdependence between relations of production and reproduction, gender and class within capitalism, and the importance of centring social reproduction within this context. Land is central to both production and reproduction processes, and the enclosure of the commons for tree-cropping has led to various configurations of land-sharing arrangements. While these have been well documented in West Africa, little is known about how they unfold in Southern Africa. Furthermore, the analysis of land enclosures for orchards has not been explicitly addressed in relation to social reproduction and how class and gender intersect with processes of production and accumulation.



To address these gaps in knowledge, this research addresses the question: How is the commodification of tree crops amongst smallholders (re)shaping smallholder accumulation trajectories and agrarian social relations, and what does this imply for the current debates on land and agrarian reform in South Africa and the commodity-focused approach towards smallholders? Four interrelated sub-questions are used to unpack the socio-economic and relational aspects of tree-crop expansion and accumulation amongst smallholders in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province of South Africa:

What is the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers, and which dynamics are shaping this?

- i. How does the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfigure land access arrangements and tenure security, and how does this affect customary land governance?
- ii. How does the commodification of subtropical tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets amongst smallholders?
- iii. How and under what conditions does the enclosure of the commons for orchards present a space that sustains land-based social reproductive functions?

This thesis is grounded in the Marxist tradition of agrarian political economy, which centres on power relations through the analytical category of class and class relations (Chapter 2). This approach foregrounds the uneven trajectories of capital accumulation and socio-economic differentiation to understand contemporary processes of agrarian transformation within capitalism. This theoretical orientation is particularly relevant in the context of high-value tree-crop commodities, which require substantial amounts of capital and extensive land areas. Recently, smallholders in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa, have been actively supported to engage in this sector. This fast-expanding tree-crop commodity frontier in Vhembe, where agricultural production and accumulation were severely constrained under the apartheid regime, now presents opportunities for smallholder accumulation. This approach will reveal how this is realised, by whom, and with what wider social consequences.

A class-analytic approach is used to explore the nature and degree of socio-economic differentiation amongst farmers. Building on this, the uneven accumulation trajectories are explored by focusing on land, markets, and social reproduction relations. Three key concepts are drawn from related debates in each of these areas. Firstly, by foregrounding changing land access and transfer arrangements, this thesis engages with debates on vernacular land markets and the related governance arrangements. Secondly, this thesis draws on actor-oriented approaches to explore farmers' strategic engagement with markets by engaging with debates on alternative food networks and, particularly, nested

markets theory. Lastly, this thesis draws on Marxist-feminist theories to foreground the relations between land-based commodity production and social reproduction. Here the analysis is situated within debates on land-sharing arrangements and how these relate to social reproduction.

This study employed a mixed-method design, approached from an ethnographic orientation (Chapter 3). The data collection followed an explanatory sequential mixed method design that enabled an iterative research process that spanned 10.5 months of fieldwork divided into seven separate fieldwork trips spread over five years. The explanatory sequence employed a survey, followed by semi-structured interviews to explain the nature and degree of differential amongst tree-crop farmers. The subsequent phases examined specific themes that emerged from the previous phase more in-depth, including land and market relations and commodity and non-commodity production relations as crucial areas relating to accumulation trajectories. It employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data collection from municipal archives. Throughout the process, participant observations were made and recorded in field notes.

Chapter 4 explores the nature and extent of socio-economic differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers and the dynamics shaping this differentiation. Mainstream and class-analytic perspectives are contrasted, and the class-analytic approach informs the subsequent analysis. The diversity amongst farmers was determined by their primary livelihood source. The majority exhibited characteristics of petty commodity producers, low levels of farm capitalisation and generally limited ability to engage in accumulation of any significance. These farmers, in most cases, relied on cash transfers or agricultural diversifications into annual cash crops. A minority of farmers demonstrated characteristics of small-scale capitalist farmers, with highly capitalised farms, either set to or already successfully accumulating 'from below' and expanding their orchards. Off-farm employment, mostly in education, enabled this capitalisation and expansion. These findings challenge the simple notion of an undifferentiated class of smallholders, illustrating how even within a subgrouping of smallholders with similar land access and a shared commodity focus, socio-economic differentiation is demonstrated by the varied patterns of livelihood diversification. The socio-economic differentiation identified reflects and reinforces material differences between farmers. In the context of highly capital-intensive crops such as macadamia and avocado, possibilities for accumulation are contingent on the interdependence between livelihood domains. Livelihoods that relied primarily on cash transfers were found to occupy the most precarious position regarding possibilities for accumulation, while wages and agricultural diversification were the most promising strategies for accumulation. Farmers' ability to engage in accumulation and upward class mobility is severely restrained by limited access to capital

and, to a lesser degree, by gender and generation dimensions. Livelihood diversification into non-agricultural wage work and diversified agricultural production offer tree-crop farmers opportunities to engage in slow but incremental accumulation. The following three chapters explore different aspects that situate their accumulation trajectories.

Chapter 5 addresses the question: how does the expansion and commercialisation of tree crops amongst smallholders reconfigure land access arrangements and tenure security, and how does this affect customary land governance? This particularly relates to the importance of land access in the process of accumulation underway amongst small-scale capitalist farmers. It is situated within contemporary debates about customary land tenure in Africa, particularly in South Africa, which has emphasised the socially embedded and flexible nature of customary land rights, recognising these as inherently more 'pro-poor' than individual titling. The chapter found that tree-crop expansion is driving the enclosure and de-facto privatisation of communal land, increasing its scarcity and value as access and use rights are increasingly linked to financial transactions. This breaks with customary norms of access being embedded within social relations and group membership, with control over access being located along a hierarchy of nested systems of authority. Instead, land access has become contingent on production performance, business imperatives and financial means. This signals a shift in customary norms and rules around land tenure towards market-based principles as a vibrant informal land market emerges. Traditional authorities are using this as a new opportunity for rent appropriation. As a result, poor and less educated farmers are excluded, and a growing class of commercially oriented small-scale capitalist farmers are accumulating and consolidating land. The chapter argues that tree-crop commodification drives the de facto privatisation of land within communal areas. Traditional leaders and the rural elite benefit from this at the expense of poorer, less well-resourced individuals. Hence, the powers given to traditional leaders over land allocation need to be curtailed by adapting the legislative framework.

Chapter 6 asks: how does the commodification of tree crops for global markets interact with the production of vegetable crops for local markets, and what does this mean for accumulation trajectories amongst the petty commodity producers? It begins by situating the debate on smallholder commercialisation trajectories, which tends to be polarised between mainstream and alternative approaches. Mainstream approaches advocate tighter integration of smallholders into global value chains. Alternative approaches, in contrast, favour localised markets because these provide greater autonomy over production and marketing and allow a greater share of value to be realised for producers and the wider community. Such approaches draw on the nested market concept as a localised alternative to the globalised agri-food systems. The chapter concludes that diversification is primarily a strategy used to enable, sustain or complement access to

global commodity markets and is particularly important for petty-commodity producers without any alternative off-farm income. This challenges the dichotomy between local and global conceptualisations of markets as mutually exclusive, arguing that these different markets can be interconnected and mutually supportive. Thus, supporting informal and formal fresh-produce markets supplied by smallholders will ensure tree-crop farming not only benefits a minority of the well-positioned rural elite but will become more inclusive of young and less well-resourced farmers, thus enabling broad-based accumulation from below.

Chapter 7 addresses the question, how and under what conditions does the enclosure of the commons for orchards present a space that sustains land-based social reproductive functions? It discusses the land-sharing arrangement between orchard owners and predominantly female subsistence producers. It concludes that these arrangements have led to diversified land-use practices that currently integrate commodity and non-commodity production along gendered lines. Situating the analysis within the broader political economy of the former homelands, the chapter concludes that commodity and non-commodity production relations within orchards are more closely linked than often thought. They not only enable the social reproduction of landless women in the short term but are also beneficial to labour-constrained male orchard owners. However, despite the seemingly mutually supportive social relations that have emerged in the shadow of tree crops, these are not immune from the inherent contradictions of capitalism. The gradual enclosure of the commons for orchards undermines social reproduction over time as orchards become increasingly capitalised and expand. The findings imply that rural women's land rights need to be better protected in the context of rapid tree-crop expansion, albeit that tree-crop expansion may provide more favourable alternative economic opportunities than subsistence production for some.

Chapter 8 provides a synthesis and conclusion of the main findings concerning the overarching research question of how the commodification of tree crops among smallholders is (re)shaping smallholder's accumulation trajectories and agrarian social relations and what this implies for the current debates on land and agrarian reform in South Africa and the commodity-focused approach towards smallholders. This thesis shows that the commodification of tree crops is accelerating socio-economic differentiation along already existing class lines. Accumulation trajectories proceed at very different paces depending on the farmers' class. Small-scale capitalists are on a more rapid accumulation path through expansion and reinvestment, driving important changes in customary land governance and access to land for social reproduction. Land is becoming increasingly commodified as traditional leaders incorporate market-based principles and new conditionalities to land access due to the expanding tree-crop commodity frontier. This is problematic as it undermines the ability of less well-resourced

and aspirant farmers to access land and women's access to land for social reproduction purposes. On the other hand, petty commodity producers' accumulation trajectories are severely limited by a lack of access to capital. However, agricultural diversification presents a slow but incremental trajectory for accumulation, which importantly hinges on access to water and local markets.

These findings imply that agrarian reform policies need to acknowledge the class-divided character of this subgrouping of smallholders by targeting small-scale capitalist farmers for redistributive land reform. This needs to be well-located and resourced land near the former homeland of Venda, where farmers reside. Individual parcels of land around 10 ha are viable for farmers to accumulate 'from below', which also generates employment opportunities. This would both relieve the pressure on enclosing the commons and its detrimental effect on women engaged in land-based food provisioning and distress sales. Petty commodity producers need to be better supported in diversifying their orchards and moving beyond a single commodity focus approach. Low-cost water harvesting techniques and informal market access channels must be the key focus of such support. In addition, the lack of transparency and downward accountability in customary land allocation by traditional leaders needs to be addressed to prevent rent extraction by undemocratic traditional leaders and ensure the rights of women and other informal land users are protected.

These findings contribute to broader debates on agricultural commodification beyond this specific case. Firstly, concerning the smallholder diversity classification, this study highlighted how closely bound tree-crop production is to processes beyond the farm and the trees. This is in concert with the concept of 'fragmented classes of labour' (Bernstein, 2010), which emphasises how class determines how capital and labour are combined within a farming unit. This study highlights the relevance of this concept in the context of high-value commodities such as macadamia and avocado, which require extensive land access and significant capital. As such, non-tree-crop income largely determined how, by whom, to what extent, and to what end tree-crop production is pursued, highlighting how the materiality of crops is an important signifier of the relative degree and importance of this fragmentation. Secondly, this study contributes to debates on the nature of customary tenure systems and how they evolve in the context of expanding commodity relations. It demonstrates how the materiality of high-value tree-crop commodities is accelerating capitalist land relations, demonstrating a shift towards increasing individualisation and enclosure of the commons and more centralised land governance. This signals a transition in customary land governance whereby traditional and commoditised forms of access reshape norms and modes of land access as vernacular land markets emerge. Thirdly, this study contributes to debates on the relative merits of smallholders' engagement in local versus global markets. It demonstrates the need to

look beyond the dichotomy of local versus global markets to understand the relational dynamics between markets and how straddling multiple markets across scales can represent a strategic means to gain and maintain access to global markets. This calls for a more situated understanding of 'degrees of nestedness'. Lastly, this case demonstrates the inherent contradiction between capitalist expansion and social reproduction that Marxist feminists have long emphasised. The materiality of tree crops that enable temporary land-sharing arrangements gives way over time and ultimately divorces subsistence producers from the land. This transition period reduces resistance to these enclosures and stands to have contradictory outcomes as orchards bring potential employment and petty-trade opportunities for some while stripping others of their land-based social reproduction without generating alternative opportunities.

## Nederlandse samenvatting

De integratie van kleinschalige boeren in mondiale waardeketens via de commercialisering van de landbouw is een prominente aanpak geworden die door internationale ontwikkelingsinstellingen en nationale regeringen wordt gepropageerd om de armoede en werkloosheid op het platteland aan te pakken. Bij deze aanpak wordt ervan uitgegaan dat armoede het gevolg is van het feit dat kleinschalige boeren ‘achterblijven’ bij ontwikkelingsprocessen en dat resultaten op het gebied van armoedebestrijding kunnen worden bereikt door hen in de markten te integreren. Dit impliceert doorgaans een reeks maatregelen die gericht zijn op de ‘modernisering’ van de landbouwproductie en op het wegnemen van de belemmeringen die kleine boeren ervan weerhouden toegang te krijgen tot, deel te nemen aan, en voordeel te halen uit internationale markten. Deze aanpak van armoedebestrijding via marktintegratie heeft geleid tot zeer gedifferentieerde en ongelijke resultaten voor de boeren, tot aantasting van het milieu, en tot nieuwe vormen van kwetsbaarheid en risico. Ondanks het groeiende bewijs van de gemengde resultaten van integratie in agrarische waardeketens, domineren deze opvattingen over integratie nog steeds de strategieën voor plattelandontwikkeling wereldwijd, en Zuid-Afrika vormt daarop geen uitzondering. Deze studie neemt een brede positie in binnen deze debatten en daagt het dominante discours uit door de politiek en de processen van agrarische verandering te onderzoeken in de context van kleine boeren met boomgewassen in een voormalig thuisland in Zuid-Afrika.

In Zuid-Afrika is de ondersteuning van kleine boeren een politieke, sociale en economische noodzaak, ingegeven door de noodzaak om de landbouwsector te ‘deracialiseren’ en de alomtegenwoordige werkloosheid en armoede aan te pakken. Daartoe wordt voorrang gegeven aan hoogwaardige, exportgerichte boomgewassen zoals macadamia en avocado, omdat deze een hoog groei- en werkgelegenheidspotentieel hebben en dus naar verwachting de armoede kunnen terugdringen. Het bredere doel van deze op handelsgewassen gerichte aanpak is het creëren van een klasse van ‘zwarte’ commercieel georiënteerde kleine boeren die verbonden zijn met mondiale toeleveringsketens. Actoren in de staats- en private sector, voornamelijk gestimuleerd door de nationale brede agenda voor ‘*black economic empowerment*’ die de economie wil deracialiseren, leveren gezamenlijke inspanningen om de toegang van kleine boeren tot deze markten te ondersteunen en actief te faciliteren.

Tegen deze achtergrond vult deze dissertatie vier hiaten in de kennis over de commercialisering van boomgewassen onder kleine boeren, welke uiteen zijn gezet in hoofdstuk 1. Ten eerste, is er nog onvoldoende inzicht in hoe agrarische commercialisering onder onafhankelijke kleine boeren de landbouwstructuur en de klassendynamiek in

het algemeen beïnvloedt. Dit is met name van belang in Zuid-Afrika, waar de duale agrarische structuur ertoe heeft geleid dat kleine boeren worden gezien als een relatief homogene categorie door hun relatie met grootschalige commerciële boeren enerzijds en zelfvoorzienende landbouw anderzijds. Er is nog weinig onderzoek naar de aard en de processen van differentiatie binnen en tussen groepen kleine boeren die in Zuid-Afrika historisch gemarginaliseerd zijn. Dit vereist een beter begrip van de heterogeniteit en de daarmee gepaard gaande differentiatie- en accumulatieprocessen onder boeren. Bestaande typologieën richten zich op fysieke kenmerken die zijn vastgelegd in nationale datasets; op het relationele klassenkenmerk dat de nadruk legt op sociaaleconomische relaties en de structurerende context; of gaan uit van actorgerichte benaderingen die zich richten op subjectieve aspecten zoals de attitudes, doelen en aspiraties van boeren. De combinatie van een klasse-analytische benadering met aspecten van een actorgerichte benadering is uniek en draagt bij tot een beter begrip van de aard en van het differentiatieproces.

Ten tweede is er een hiaat in de kennis over de gevolgen van agrarische commercialisering onder kleine boeren in regimes met op gewoonterecht gebaseerde systemen van landeigendom en -gebruik. Dit heeft geleid tot debatten over de beste manier om informele of op gewoonterecht gebaseerde landrechten veilig te stellen. Dit debat is gepolariseerd tussen voorstanders van geformaliseerde eigendomsverhoudingen en voorstanders van bescherming van op gewoonterecht gebaseerd grondbezit. Beiden gaan ervan uit dat gewoonterechtelijke eigendoms- of gebruikssystemen buiten de markt om functioneren. Overal op het Afrikaanse continent zijn echter lokale grondmarkten in opkomst, vooral waar de landbouw steeds meer op de markt wordt gericht. Er is echter weinig bekend over de wijze waarop gewoonterechtelijk bestuur en instituties zich ontwikkelen, aanpassen en reageren op dit proces van verdergaande commercialisering. Er is tot nu toe weinig aandacht besteed aan de transformatie van systemen van gewoonterechtelijk bestuur in een context van commodificatie van de landbouw.

Ten derde wordt in debatten over de commodificatie van kleine boeren en hun marktrelaties hun integratie in mondiale waardeketens vaak tegenover lokale en regionale markten geplaatst. Deze dichotomie tussen lokaal ingebedde markten versus mondiaal geïntegreerde markten verhult grotendeels de interacties en relaties tussen deze verschillende markten en de gerelateerde voedselsystemen die zij in stand houden. Er is behoefte aan een beter inzicht in de wisselwerking tussen de verschillende markten en de voorwaarden waaronder zij robuustere strategieën voor plattelandontwikkeling kunnen bieden, met name door de nadruk te leggen op de klassendifferentiatie van kleine boeren en de materialiteit van boomgewassen.

Ten slotte hebben wetenschappers op het gebied van de agrarische politieke economie de neiging om de processen van agrarische commodificatie te analyseren in termen van accumulatie-trajecten, waarbij weinig aandacht wordt besteed aan de vraag



hoe deze processen zich verhouden tot de sociale reproductie. Marxistisch-feministische theoretici hebben daarentegen gewezen op de onderlinge afhankelijkheid van productie- en reproductieverhoudingen; gender en klasse binnen het kapitalisme; en op het belang om de sociale reproductie binnen deze context te voorop te stellen. Land speelt een centrale rol in zowel het productie- als het reproductieproces, en de *enclosure* van gemeenschappelijke grond voor de teelt van boomgewassen heeft geleid tot verschillende configuraties van arrangementen voor het delen van land. Hoewel deze arrangementen in West-Afrika goed zijn gedocumenteerd, is er weinig bekend over hoe zij zich in zuidelijk Afrika ontwikkelen. Bovendien is er in analyses van *enclosures* van land voor boomgaarden niet expliciet geanalyseerd in relatie tot sociale reproductie en hoe klasse en gender samenhangen met productie- en accumulatieprocessen.

Om deze hiaten in de kennis op te vullen, stelt dit onderzoek de vraag: Hoe geeft de commercialisering van boomgewassen (opnieuw) vorm aan de accumulatietrajecten van kleine boeren en de agrarische sociale verhoudingen, en wat betekent dit voor de huidige debatten over land- en landbouwhervormingen in Zuid-Afrika en de op handel gerichte benadering ten aanzien van kleine boeren? Vier onderling samenhangende subvragen helpen de sociaaleconomische en relationele aspecten van de uitbreiding en accumulatie van boomgewassen onder kleine boeren in het Vhembe district in de Limpopo provincie van Zuid-Afrika te onderzoeken:

Wat is de aard en omvang van de sociaaleconomische differentiatie onder boeren die boomgewassen verbouwen, en welke dynamiek geeft hieraan vorm?

- i. Hoe wijzigt de uitbreiding en commercialisering van boomgewassen onder kleine boeren de regelingen voor de toegang tot land en de zekerheid van grondbezit, en hoe beïnvloedt dit het bestuur van gewoonterechtelijk land?
- ii. Hoe werken de commercialisering van subtropische boomgewassen voor de wereldmarkt en de productie van groentegewassen voor de lokale markt door kleine boeren op elkaar in?
- iii. Hoe en onder welke voorwaarden creëert de enclosure van gemeenschapsgrond voor boomgaarden een ruimte die op landbouwgrond gebaseerde sociaal-reproductieve functies in stand houdt?

Deze dissertatie is geworteld in de marxistische traditie van agrarische politieke economie, waarin machtsverhoudingen centraal staan via de analytische categorieën van klasse en klassenverhoudingen (hoofdstuk 2). Deze benadering benadrukt de ongelijke trajecten van kapitaalaccumulatie en sociaaleconomische differentiatie om hedendaagse processen van agrarische transformatie binnen het kapitalisme te begrijpen. Deze theoretische oriëntatie is bijzonder relevant in de context van hoogwaardige boomgewassen, waarvoor aanzienlijke hoeveelheden kapitaal en uitgestrekte landoppervlakten nodig zijn.

Onlangs zijn kleine boeren in het Vhembe district in de provincie Limpopo, Zuid-Afrika, actief gesteund om in deze sector actief te worden. Deze zich snel uitbreidende teelt van boomgewassen in Vhembe, waar de landbouwproductie en -accumulatie onder het apartheidsregime ernstig werden beperkt, biedt nu mogelijkheden voor accumulatie door kleine boeren. Deze benadering zal aan het licht brengen hoe dit wordt gerealiseerd, door wie, en met welke sociale gevolgen.

Deze dissertatie gebruikt een klasse-analytische benadering om de aard en de mate van sociaaleconomische differentiatie onder boeren te onderzoeken. Op basis hiervan worden de ongelijke accumulatie-trajecten onderzocht door te focussen op land, markten en sociale reproductieverhoudingen. Drie sleutelconcepten worden ontleend aan verwante debatten op elk van deze gebieden. Ten eerste, door de nadruk te leggen op veranderende arrangementen voor toegang tot en overdracht van land, sluit deze dissertatie aan bij debatten over lokale landmarkten en de bijbehorende governance arrangementen. Ten tweede is deze dissertatie gebaseerd op een actorgerichte benadering om te onderzoeken hoe kleine boeren strategisch opereren op verschillende markten en haakt daarbij aan bij debatten over alternatieve voedselnetwerken en, in het bijzonder, de theorie van *'nested markets'*. Ten slotte put deze dissertatie uit marxistisch-feministische theorieën om de relaties tussen grondgebonden productie van goederen en sociale reproductie te belichten. Hier is de analyse gepositioneerd in debatten over landdeling en hoe deze zich verhoudt tot sociale reproductie.

Deze studie maakte gebruik van een *mixed-method* design vanuit een etnografische oriëntatie (hoofdstuk 3). De dataverzameling volgde een sequentieel *mixed-method* design dat begon met een verklarende fase, gevolgd door een verkennende fase die een iteratief onderzoeksproces mogelijk maakte dat 10,5 maanden veldwerk omvatte, verdeeld over zeven afzonderlijke veldwerkreizen verspreid over vijf jaar. In de verklarende fase werd gebruik gemaakt van een survey, gevolgd door semigestructureerde interviews om de aard en de mate van differentiatie onder boeren met boomgewassen te verklaren. De daaropvolgende verkennende fase ging dieper in op specifieke thema's die uit de vorige fase naar voren kwamen, waaronder land- en marktrelaties en grondstof- en niet-grondstofproductierelaties als cruciale gebieden met betrekking tot accumulatie-trajecten. Daarbij werd gebruik gemaakt van semigestructureerde interviews, focus groep discussies en secundaire gegevensverzameling uit gemeentelijke archieven. Gedurende het hele proces werd gebruik gemaakt van participerende observatie en werden waarnemingen vastgelegd in veldwerknootities.

Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt de aard en omvang van de sociaaleconomische differentiatie onder boeren die boomgewassen verbouwen en de dynamiek die aan deze differentiatie ten grondslag ligt. Het conventionele en het klasse-analytische perspectief worden tegen elkaar afgezet en de klasse-analytische benadering vormt de

basis voor de verdere analyse. De diversiteit onder de boeren werd bepaald door hun voornaamste bron van levensonderhoud. De meerderheid vertoonde kenmerken van kleine producenten, of *petty commodity producers*. Deze worden gekenmerkt door een laag kapitalisatieniveau van de boerderij en over het algemeen beperkte mogelijkheden om zich bezig te houden met accumulatie van enige betekenis. Deze landbouwers waren in de meeste gevallen afhankelijk van geldoverdrachten (bijvoorbeeld pensioen of overboekingen van elders werkende familieleden) en diversificatie van de landbouw naar eenjarige handelsgewassen. Een minderheid van de landbouwers vertoonde kenmerken van kleinschalige kapitalistische landbouwers, met sterk gekapitaliseerde boerderijen, die ‘van onderaf’ wilden accumuleren of daar al in waren geslaagd en hun boomgaarden uitbreidden. Deze kapitalisatie en uitbreiding werden mogelijk gemaakt door werkgelegenheid buiten het landbouwbedrijf, meestal in het onderwijs. Deze bevindingen stellen het idee van een ongedifferentieerde klasse van kleine boeren ter discussie, en illustreren hoe zelfs binnen een subgroep van kleine boeren met grotendeels gelijke toegang tot land en een gedeelde focus op handelsgewassen, sociaaleconomische differentiatie kan worden aangetoond door de gevarieerde patronen van diversificatie van middelen van bestaan. De geconstateerde sociaaleconomische differentiatie weerspiegelt en versterkt de materiële verschillen tussen boeren. In de context van zeer kapitaalintensieve gewassen zoals macadamia en avocado zijn de mogelijkheden voor accumulatie afhankelijk van de onderlinge afhankelijkheid tussen de verschillende domeinen van bestaansmiddelen. Boeren die voor hun levensonderhoud hoofdzakelijk afhankelijk zijn van geldoverdrachten blijken de meest precare positie in te nemen wat accumulatiemogelijkheden betreft, terwijl lonen en landbouwdiversificatie de meest veelbelovende accumulatie strategieën zijn. Het vermogen van boeren tot accumulatie en opwaartse klassenmobiliteit wordt ernstig beperkt door de beperkte toegang tot kapitaal en, in mindere mate, door gender- en generatiefactoren. Diversificatie van het levensonderhoud in de vorm van loonarbeid buiten de landbouw en gediversifieerde landbouwproductie bieden boeren met boomgewassen de mogelijkheid om zich bezig te houden met geleidelijke maar stapsgewijze accumulatie. De volgende drie hoofdstukken belichten verschillende aspecten van hun accumulatie-trajecten. Hoofdstuk 5 gaat in op de vraag hoe de uitbreiding en commercialisering van boomgewassen onder kleine boeren de regelingen rond de toegang tot land en de zekerheid van grondgebruik en -bezit herdefiniëren, en welke gevolgen dit heeft voor het bestuur van gewoonterechtelijk land. Dit heeft in het bijzonder betrekking op het belang van toegang tot land voor het accumulatieproces dat onder kleinschalige kapitalistische boeren gaande is. Deze analyse is gesitueerd binnen de hedendaagse debatten over gewoonterecht in Afrika, en Zuid-Afrika in het bijzonder, waarin de nadruk wordt gelegd op de sociaal ingebedde en flexibele aard van gewoonterecht, en waarin wordt erkend dat dit inherent meer ‘ten gunste van de

armen' is dan individuele eigendomsrechten. In het hoofdstuk wordt geconstateerd dat de uitbreiding van de teelt van boomgewassen de *enclosure* en feitelijke privatisering van gemeenschappelijke grond in de hand werkt, waardoor de schaarste en de waarde van grond toenemen naarmate de toegangs- en gebruiksrechten meer en meer gekoppeld worden aan financiële transacties. Dit breekt met de gewoonterechtelijke normen waarbij toegang tot land is ingebed in sociale relaties en groepslidmaatschap, waarbij de controle over de toegang is gesitueerd in een hiërarchie van geneste machtssystemen. In plaats daarvan is de toegang tot land afhankelijk geworden van productieprestaties, zakelijke vereisten en financiële middelen. Dit wijst op een verschuiving van de gewoonterechtelijke normen en regels inzake grondbezit naar marktgerichte beginselen naarmate een levendige informele grondmarkt ontstaat. Traditionele autoriteiten gebruiken dit als een nieuwe kans om zich pacht toe te eigenen. Het gevolg is dat arme en minder goed opgeleide boeren worden uitgesloten en dat een groeiende klasse van commercieel georiënteerde kleinschalige kapitalistische boeren land vergaart en consolideert. In het hoofdstuk wordt betoogd dat de commercialisering van boomgewassen de drijvende kracht is achter de feitelijke privatisering van gemeenschapsgrond in communale gebieden. Traditionele leiders en de elite van het platteland profiteren hiervan ten koste van armere, minder draagkrachtige individuen. Daarom moeten de bevoegdheden van de traditionele leiders over de toewijzing van land worden ingeperkt door aanpassing van het wetgevend kader.

Hoofdstuk 6 stelt de vraag: hoe werken de commercialisering van subtropische boomgewassen voor de wereldmarkt en de productie van groentegewassen voor de lokale markt door kleine boeren op elkaar in? Het begint met het situeren van het debat over commercialiseringstrajecten voor kleine boeren, dat de neiging heeft gepolariseerd te worden tussen mainstream en alternatieve benaderingen. De mainstream benaderingen pleiten voor een sterkere integratie van kleine boeren in mondiale waardeketens. Alternatieve benaderingen daarentegen geven de voorkeur aan lokale markten, omdat deze een grotere autonomie bieden ten aanzien van productie en afzet en het mogelijk maken dat een groter deel van de waarde wordt gerealiseerd voor producenten en de bredere gemeenschap. Dergelijke benaderingen zijn gebaseerd op het concept van geneste markten als een gelokaliseerd alternatief voor de geglobaliseerde agrovoedselsystemen. Het hoofdstuk concludeert dat diversificatie in de eerste plaats een strategie is die wordt gebruikt om toegang tot de wereldmarkt mogelijk te maken, te ondersteunen of aan te vullen, en dat diversificatie met name belangrijk is voor kleine producenten van handelsgewassen die geen alternatief inkomen buiten de landbouw hebben. De dichotomie tussen conceptualisaties van lokale en mondiale markten als wederzijds exclusief wordt hiermee in twijfel getrokken, omdat deze verschillende markten onderling verbonden kunnen zijn en elkaar wederzijds kunnen ondersteunen. Zo zal de ondersteuning van lokale informele en formele markten voor verse producten

die door kleine boeren worden geleverd, ervoor zorgen dat de teelt van boomgewassen niet alleen ten goede komt aan een minderheid van goed gepositioneerde plattelandselite, maar inclusiever wordt voor jonge boeren en boeren met minder middelen, waardoor accumulatie van onderaf op brede basis mogelijk wordt.

In hoofdstuk 7 wordt ingegaan op de vraag hoe en onder welke voorwaarden de *enclosure* van gemeenschapsgrond voor boomgaarden een ruimte creëert die op landbouwgrond gebaseerde sociaal- reproductieve functies in stand houdt. Het bespreekt deelarrangementen tussen eigenaars van boomgaarden en voornamelijk vrouwelijke zelfvoorzienende producenten. Het hoofdstuk concludeert dat deze regelingen hebben geleid tot gediversifieerde praktijken van landgebruik die momenteel de productie van gewassen voor de markt en eigen gebruik integreren langs gender gebonden lijnen. Het hoofdstuk plaatst de analyse in de bredere politieke economie van de voormalige thuislanden en concludeert dat de productieverhoudingen binnen de boomgaarden nauwer met elkaar verbonden zijn dan vaak wordt gedacht. Zij maken niet alleen op korte termijn de sociale reproductie voor landloze vrouwen mogelijk, maar zijn ook gunstig voor de mannelijke eigenaars van boomgaarden die met arbeidstekort kampen. Maar ondanks de schijnbaar wederzijds ondersteunende sociale verhoudingen die in de 'schaduw van de boomgaarden' zijn ontstaan, zijn deze niet immuun voor de inherente tegenstrijdigheden van het kapitalisme. De geleidelijke *enclosure* van communaal land voor boomgaarden dreigt de sociale reproductie in de loop van de tijd te ondermijnen, naarmate de boomgaarden steeds meer worden gekapitaliseerd en zich uitbreiden. De bevindingen impliceren dat de landrechten van plattelandsvrouwen beter moeten worden beschermd in de context van de snelle uitbreiding van boomgewassen, ook al kan de uitbreiding van boomgewassen voor sommigen gunstiger alternatieve economische mogelijkheden bieden dan zelfvoorzieningsproductie.

Hoofdstuk 8 geeft een samenvatting en conclusie van de belangrijkste bevindingen met betrekking tot de overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag hoe de commodificatie van boomgewassen onder kleine boeren hun accumulatie-trajecten en agrarische sociale verhoudingen (opnieuw) vormgeeft en wat dit betekent voor de huidige debatten over land- en landbouwhervormingen in Zuid-Afrika en de op commodificatie gerichte benadering van kleine boeren. Deze dissertatie toont aan dat de commercialisering van boomgewassen de sociaaleconomische differentiatie langs reeds bestaande klassenlijnen versnelt. Accumulatie-trajecten verlopen in een heel verschillend tempo, afhankelijk van de klasse van de boeren. Kleinschalige kapitalisten volgen een sneller accumulatie-traject door middel van uitbreiding en herinvestering, waardoor belangrijke veranderingen optreden in gewoonterechtelijk bestuur en toegang tot land voor sociale reproductie. Land wordt steeds meer tot handelswaar gemaakt naarmate de traditionele leiders marktbeginzelen en nieuwe voorwaarden voor de toegang tot land invoeren als gevolg

van de zich uitbreidende teelt van commerciële boomgewassen. Dit is problematisch omdat het de toegang tot land ondermijnt van boeren met minder middelen en aspirant-landbouwers en de toegang van vrouwen tot land voor sociale reproductiedoelstellingen. Anderzijds worden de accumulatie-trajecten van *petty commodity producers* ernstig beperkt door een gebrek aan toegang tot kapitaal. Landbouwdiversificatie biedt echter een langzaam maar geleidelijk accumulatie-traject, dat in belangrijke mate afhangt van de toegang tot water en lokale markten.

Deze bevindingen impliceren dat het agrarische landhervormingsbeleid het klassegedifferentieerde karakter van deze subgroep van kleine boeren moet erkennen door zich te richten op kleinschalige kapitalistische boeren bij de herverdeling van land. Wat deze groep nodig heeft is gunstig gelegen en van de nodige middelen voorzien land in de buurt van het vroegere thuisland Venda, waar deze boeren wonen. Afzonderlijke percelen van ongeveer 10 ha zijn voor de boeren levensvatbaar om 'van onderaf' kapitaal op te bouwen, hetgeen ook werkgelegenheid oplevert. Dit zou zowel de druk verlichten op de *enclosure* van communaal land als de nadelige gevolgen daarvan voor vrouwen die zich bezighouden met voedselvoorziening op het land, en gedwongen verkoop van land. *Petty commodity producers* moeten beter worden gesteund bij het diversifiëren van hun boomgaarden en het overstappen op een aanpak die niet op één product voor de markt is gericht. Goedkope technieken voor wateropvang en stimuleren van toegang tot informele marktkanalen moeten de belangrijkste aandachtspunten voor steun aan deze groep zijn. Bovendien moet het gebrek aan transparantie en neerwaartse verantwoordingsplicht bij de toewijzing van gewoonterechtelijk land door traditionele leiders worden aangepakt om te voorkomen dat ondemocratische traditionele leiders pacht opstrijken en de rechten van vrouwen en andere informele grondgebruikers worden ondermijnd.

Deze bevindingen dragen bij aan bredere debatten over de commodificatie van de landbouw die verder reiken dan deze specifieke case. Ten eerste, ten aanzien van de classificatie en diversiteit van kleine boeren heeft deze studie aangetoond hoe nauw de productie van boomgewassen is verbonden met processen buiten de boerderij en de bomen. Dit komt overeen met het concept van 'gefragmenteerde arbeidsklassen' (Bernstein, 2010), dat benadrukt hoe klasse bepaalt hoe kapitaal en arbeid worden gecombineerd binnen een landbouweenheid. Deze studie benadrukt de relevantie van dit concept in de context van hoogwaardige boomgewassen zoals macadamia en avocado, die uitgebreide toegang tot land en aanzienlijk kapitaal vereisen. Het inkomen uit niet-boomgewassen bepaalt in grote mate hoe, door wie, in welke mate en met welk doel de productie van boomgewassen wordt nagestreefd, waarbij duidelijk wordt dat de materialiteit van gewassen een belangrijke indicator is voor de relatieve mate en het belang van deze klassenfragmentatie. Ten tweede levert deze studie een bijdrage aan debatten over de aard van gewoonterechtelijke pacht- en grondbezitssystemen en hoe

deze zich ontwikkelen in de context van zich uitbreidende commerciële marktrelaties. De studie toont aan hoe de materialiteit van hoogwaardige boomgewassen de kapitalistische landrelaties versnelt en een verschuiving laat zien naar toenemende individualisering en *enclosure* van gemeenschapsgronden en meer gecentraliseerd bestuur van communale gronden. Dit wijst op een overgang in het gewoonterechtelijk beheer van communale gronden waarbij traditionele en commerciële vormen van toegang tot land opnieuw vormgeven aan normen en vormen van toegang tot land naarmate lokale landmarkten opkomen. Ten derde levert deze studie een bijdrage aan debatten over de relatieve voordelen van het opereren van kleine boeren op lokale en mondiale markten. Het toont aan dat we verder moeten kijken dan de dichotomie van lokale versus mondiale markten om de relationele dynamiek tussen markten te begrijpen en te zien hoe het spreiden over meerdere markten op verschillende schaalniveaus een strategisch middel kan zijn om toegang te krijgen en te houden tot de wereldmarkt. Dit vraagt om een meer doordacht begrip van 'gradaties van genesteldheid'. Ten slotte toont deze case de inherente tegenstelling aan tussen kapitalistische expansie en sociale reproductie, waarop marxistische feministen al langer de nadruk leggen. De materialiteit van boomgewassen, die tijdelijke afspraken over landdeling mogelijk maakt, verliest na verloop van tijd haar betekenis en zal uiteindelijk de zelfvoorzienende producenten van het land verdrijven. De huidige overgangperiode vermindert de tegenstand tegen deze enclosures en dreigt tot tegenstrijdige uitkomsten te leiden, aangezien boomgaarden voor sommigen potentiële werkgelegenheid en mogelijkheden voor kleine handel bieden, terwijl anderen van hun op land gebaseerde sociale reproductie worden beroofd zonder dat er alternatieve mogelijkheden worden gecreëerd.





# Appendices



## Appendix 1. Fieldwork schedule

	When	What	Content	Time
1	1 Feb 2015 – 1 March 2015	Baseline and scoping study	Orientation	1 month
2	1 August 2015 – 31 October 2015	Survey and Learning Platform 1	Farmer profiles	3 months
3	15 March 2016 – 31 May 2016	Survey, farmer interviews	Farmer profiles	2.5 months
4	15 August 2016 – 25 September 2016	Farmer interviews and Learning Platform 2		1.5 months
5	14 July 2017 – 9 August 2017	Focus groups, interviews and Learning Platform 3	Land governance and access, orchards and food production	3 weeks
6	26 June 2018 – 24 July 2018	Support structures, land access arrangements and Learning Platform 4	Institutional support Land access Food production	1 month
7	1 March 2019 – 20 March 2019	Interviews and collection of secondary data	Land transactions Food production	3 weeks
				10.5 months

## Appendix 2. Tree-crop farmer survey

..... Unique Q# \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Details

Interview Date: dd \_\_\_\_\_ mm \_\_\_\_\_ yyyy \_\_\_\_\_

Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Respondents home 2=Respondents farm 3=Other (specify)

Interview completed by (name and signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Interview checked by, and date: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up required on questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Data entry by, and date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1 Interviewee details

1.1 Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Cell number: \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 Sex (circle one): 1=MALE 2=FEMALE

1.4 Age: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=18-35yrs 2=36-45yrs 3=46-55yrs 4=56-65 yrs 5=66-80yrs 6=no response

1.5 Highest educational level: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Primary (Grd 7) 2=Secondary(Grd 10) 3=Matric (Grd 12) 4=Diploma

5=Degree 6=Post graduate qualification

If post matric qualifications please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=teacher 2=BA 3=BSc 4=BTech 5=business 6=agric 7=other

1.6 Position of interviewee in the household: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=household head hh 2=spouse of hh 3=son of hh 4=daughter of hh 5=other

specify

1.7 Total number of people who eat and sleep in your household most days: \_\_\_\_\_

1.8 How many of these are children under 18 years? \_\_\_\_\_

1.9 How many are pensioners: \_\_\_\_\_

1.10 Place of residence: Village name: \_\_\_\_\_ Municipality: \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Makhado 2=Thulamela 3=Muthale

1.11 Location of farm, village name and municipality (specify if multiple locations):

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1.12 Is your farming operation registered as a coop? (circle one) 1=YES 2=NO

1.12.1 If yes, which year did you register? \_\_\_\_\_

1.12.2 Who is part of the coop? \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Natural resource access (land and water)**

2.1 How much land do you own?

	Total Size (ha) For residential: 1=standard 2=double 3=other	Area currently under cultivation (ha)	Distance from home-stead (km)	Year acquired (if inherited state year of inheritance)	How did you acquire it? CODES: 1=Inheritance 2=Application 3=Purchase 4=Other (specify)	Ownership type CODES: 1=PTO 2=Title deed 3=Other (specify)
Residential stand			NA			
Plot 1						
Plot 2						
Plot 3						

2.2 From where do you access water for residential stand? \_\_\_\_\_

2.3 From where do you access water for irrigating for Plot 1? \_\_\_\_\_

2.4 From where do you access water for irrigating for Plot 2? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Borehole 2=River 3=Municipal water 4=Rain fed 5=Dam 6=Other (specify)

2.5 Is there land that has been allocated for use in your community that could potentially be used for farming? Circle one: 1=YES 2=NO

**3 Diversified livelihoods**

3.1 What kind of farmer are you? \_\_\_\_\_

3.2 Do you have additional income avenues besides farming? (specify in addition to code) \_\_\_\_

3.3 Do you have additional income avenues besides farming? (specify in addition to code) \_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Teacher 2=Other type of civil servant 3=business owner (specify)

4=livestock 5=poultry 6=remittances 7=pension 8=none 9=other (specify)

3.4 If so, how much do you earn in this capacity? (After deductions, Rand per month or years)

R \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_ (specify period)

3.5 Who provides the most important source of help for farming? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Hired labour 2=Spouse 3=Children 4=Other (specify) 5=No help

3.6 What percentage of your total income comes from farming? \_\_\_\_\_ %

**4 Production for markets**

4.1 Which are your most important crops produced for sale?

List crops in order of importance			Size of land cultivated (ha, rows, beds, trees)	Year/season this crop was planted	Volumes sold per year	Income per year (Rand)	Where is this crop grown 1=home garden 2=Plot 1 3=Plot 2	Where do you sell this product? 1=local community 2=Local traders 3=Processors/exporter 4=National fresh produce mark 5=Retailer 6=Other (specify)	Do you get any support from the government or other party? 1= Ploughing 2= Inputs 3= Training 4= None
1=Mac. 2=Avocado 3=Litchi 4=Mango 5=Banana 6=Honey 7=Banana	8=Beetroot 9=Butternut 10=Cabbage 11=Carrots 12=Delele 13=Peanut 14=Guava 15=Maize	16=Mutshaina 17=Muxe 18=Onions 19=Pawpaw 20=Pumpkin 21=Spinach 22=Tomatoes 23=Other							
1.									
2.									
3.									
4.									
5.									
6.									
7.									

4.2 How much do you earn in total from the cash crops from your plots?

(Rand per month or years) R \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_ (specify period)

4.3 How much do you earn in total from the cash crops in your home garden

(Rand per month or years) R \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_ (specify period)

4.4 How much do you earn in total from your cash crops?

(Rand per month or years) R \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_ (specify period)

4.5 What are your biggest costs of production?

List costs in order of importance 1=labour 2=chemical inputs 3=equipment 4=transport 5=communication 6=fule 7=other	Approximate amounts spent per year (Rand)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

4.6 What are your approximate total expenses for farming per year? \_\_\_\_\_

5 Assets and Finance

5.1 What are the most valuable pieces of agricultural equipment that you own?

Equipment	Cost (Rand)	Year Purchased
1.		
2.		
3.		

5.2 How did you acquire finance to establish and develop your farm? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Personal savings 2=State grants 3=Family 4=Stokvel 5=State support  
6=Inheritance 7= bank loan 8=Other (specify)

5.3 Where do you go if you need credit for running costs? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Bank 2=Family member 3=Stokvel 4=Loan sharks 5=Other (specify)  
6=nowhere to go 7=choose not to get credit

5.4 Do you own a car? 1=YES 2=NO

5.5 Do you have electricity in your home? 1=YES 2=NO

5.6 Do you have tap water in your home? 1=YES 2=NO

5.7 How many rooms do you have in your house? \_\_\_\_\_

5.8 Do you submit annual tax returns? 1=YES 2=NO

**6 Production for household consumption**

6.1 Which are the most important crops/products grown for household consumption:

List crops/product in order of importance	Source 1. Farm plot 2. Home garden	Who is mainly responsible for growing this crop? 1=Male hh, 2=Female hh, 3=Spouse of hh, 4=Hired labour 5=Other (specify)	Do you grow enough for household needs? 1=Yes 2=No 3=other (specify)	Do you get any support from the government or other party? Circle: YeMNo If yes specify from where and type (codes) 1=Ploughing 2=Inputs 3=Training 4=Other (specify) 5=none
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

6.2 What % of what your household consumes is from your farm/garden? \_\_\_\_\_ %

6.3 What % of your total monthly income do you spend on buying food? \_\_\_\_\_ %

6.4 Who decides which crops to grow for household consumption? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Male hh 2=Female hh 3=Both 4=Other (specify)

6.5 Where do you source the food that you do not produce yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Supermarket 2=Market stalls 3=Neighbours 4=Commercial farms 5=Other (specify)

6.6 How do you rate the quality of the food you eat? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Poor 2=Reasonable 3=Average 4=Good 5=Very Good

6.7 How do you rate the quantity of the food you eat? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Poor 2=Reasonable 3=Average 4=Good 5=Very Good

6.8 How do you rate the diversity of the food you eat? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Poor 2=Reasonable 3=Average 4=Good 5=Very Good

6.9 Have you ever experienced a food shortage in the household? 1=YES 2=NO

6.10 If so when and how did you deal with it? (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7 Labour**

7.1 Do you use hired labour? (Circle correct one) 1=YES 2=NO

	How many Male	What jobs do they perform	Where do they come from	How many Female	What jobs do they perform	Where do they come from
		1=clearing/ cleaning 2=ploughing 3=pruning 4=spraying 5=harvesting 6=dehusking 7=other (specify) 8=everything	1=Local village 2=Neighbouring village 3=Another province 4=Foreigner		1=clearing/ cleaning 2=ploughing 3=pruning 4= spraying 5=harvesting 6=dehusking 7=other (specify) 8=everything	1=Local village 2=Neighbouring village 3=Another province 4=Foreigner
1. Entire year, full time						
2. Seasonal, full time						

**8 Gender**

8.1 Is there specific work that women do in the production of cash crops? Yes No

If yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

CODES 1=clearing/cleaning 2=ploughing 3=pruning 4= spraying 5=harvesting  
6=dehusking 7=packing/sorting 8=other

8.2 Is there specific work that women do in the production of food crops? Yes No

If yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

CODES 1=clearing/cleaning 2=ploughing 3=pruning 4=spraying 5=harvesting  
6=Other (specify)

8.3 Who makes decision about growing cash crops? \_\_\_\_\_

8.4 Who makes decision about marketing of crops? \_\_\_\_\_

8.5 Who makes decisions about growing food crops? \_\_\_\_\_

8.6 Who makes decisions about selling food crops? \_\_\_\_\_

8.7 Who makes decisions about what food to purchase for the household? \_\_\_\_\_

8.8 Who makes decisions about the distribution of food within the household? \_\_\_\_\_

8.9 Who gets access to training and support for crop production? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES for 7.5-7.11: 1=Male hh 2=Female hh 3=Both 4=Neither 5=Other (specify)



**9 Changes over time**

9.1 When did you start farming? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=Always been farming 2=Within the last 25 years 3=Within the last 10 years  
4=Within the last 5 years 5=other (specify)

9.2 If you have not always been farming, what were you doing before you started farming?  
\_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=have always been farming 2=Civil servant 3=Trade 4=other (specify)

9.3 Have your yields changed over the passed 10 years? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=no change 2=Increased a little 3=increased a lot 4=Decreased a little  
5=decreased a lot 6=other (specify)

9.4 How has your variety of crops/produce changed over the past 10 years? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=has not changed 2= introduced tree crops 3=introducer new vegetable crops  
4=other (specify)

9.5 If you are currently selling crops/products how has this changed over the past 10 years? \_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=has not changed 2=increased a little 3=increased a lot 4=decreased a little  
5=decreased a lot 6=other (specify)

9.6 How has your agricultural income changed over the past 10 years? \_\_\_\_\_

CODES: 1=has not changed 2= increased a little 3=increased a lot 4=decreased a little  
5=decreased a lot 6=other (specify)

**10 General questions**

10.1 How would you rank your household compared with the rest of the village?

Status	Very poor	Poor	Average	Better off	Well off	Rich
Circle Code	1	2	3	4	5	6

10.2 Compared to five years ago, how would you assess the current situation of the household?

Status	Better	Worse	The same
Circle Code	1	2	3

**11 Thinking about the future**

11.1 What are your main concerns regarding agriculture?

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11.2 What are your main concerns now regarding food?

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11.3 What are your main concerns regarding land?

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11.4 What are your main concerns regarding water?

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11.5 What do you think are the main barrier to women becoming more involved in farming?

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11.6 Are you a member of any organisation? If so, why are you a member?

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

## Appendix 3. Interview guide for farmers

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (identity/livelihood/LT)
2. When and why did you become a farmer? (agrarian objectives/livelihood /access) (For full-time farmers only)
3. What were you doing before you started farming? (identity)
4. What promoted your choice of crops? (agrarian objectives/access)
5. How did you get the land you have for farming? (access)
6. How have you gained your knowledge of farming? (access)
7. How important is farming for your livelihood? What other activities are you involved in to generate a living? (livelihood/accumulation)
8. How do these activities support/relate to each other? (livelihoods/accumulation)
9. Who else in your family contributes to the household income? And how? (gendered livelihoods)
10. What are the biggest changes that have taken place in this area since you were a child? (agrarian change/accumulation)
11. What is your vision for yourself in the future? (identity/LT)
12. What is your vision for your farm in the future? (agrarian objectives/LT)
13. How would you like to see agricultural practices changing in this area in the future? (agrarian objectives/agrarian structures)
14. What changes would need to take place to help this happen? (agrarian structures/accumulation)
15. What have been your biggest problems/challenges since you started farming? (agrarian structures)
16. What do you think makes a “good” farmer? (agrarian values)
17. Is there anything you do differently to other farmers around here? (agrarian practises/differentiation)

## Appendix 4. Interview guide for chiefs and headman

1. What are the different uses of land in this area?
2. How is land use for different purposes decided? (who is involved in this process)
3. Where is the biggest demand for land coming from?
4. Is there any land that is currently not being used?
5. How has land use changed over the past years?
6. How do people go about getting access to land?
7. How does one get access to land for homesteads?
8. How does someone get access to land for cash crops and maize?
9. Have you noticed an increasing demand for land for orchards?
10. What kind of land is being allocated for orchards?
11. How does someone get access to land for orchards?
12. What is the price of land per ha?
13. Can someone sell an orchard? What process must they follow?
14. Is there any way in which indigenous vegetation is being protected?
15. Have there been any disputes over land in this area?
16. How have these been dealt with?

## Appendix 5. Guide for focus group discussions

1. What are the most significant changes you have witnessed in the landscape?
2. What do you see as the main causes of these changes?
3. How do you see the expansion of orchards relating to food production?
4. What do you think about how orchard expansion affects indigenous vegetation, and how does this affect people?
5. Who are the different actors who are responsible for the governance of land?

## **Appendix 6. Interview guide for farmers on land transactions**

1. How did you acquire this land/orchard?
2. From whom and when?
3. Did you need to pay anything and if so how was this decided and how much did you pay?
4. Is it still possible to get access to land for orchards around here?
5. Can someone from 'outside' get land/orchard?
6. How easy is it to sell land?/orchard
7. Who owns the land around here?
8. When you gain access to land what rights are transferred?
9. Do you feel your land rights are secure?
10. Have there been any disputes around land rights in this area?
11. How were they dealt with?
12. Do you think the current system where the chief is custodian of land works for everyone?
13. Would you prefer another form of land governance?

## Appendix 7. Interview guide for chiefs on land transactions

1. Who owns this land?
2. How can someone get access to land for orchards?
3. Who identifies the available land? Can land be allocated by two different people?
4. What role does the municipality play, since when did they get involved in land registrations and are they necessary in this process?
5. How much do they have to pay? (is this set or differs according the location of land)
6. What is payment for? What rights are transferred?
7. When was a set price per ha for land introduced?
8. Where does the money paid for land go? trust or traditional authority (TA)
9. What is this money used for?
10. Does the community have access to this information?
11. Are people allowed to sell their land/orchards?
12. Can land down in the valley where maize is grown be transformed into PTO and used to plant orchards?
13. Are you concerned that more and more people are selling land?
14. What will happen in the future once all the available land has been allocated and only access will be via private transactions?
15. Can someone from outside of Traditional authority buy orchards here?
16. Is there any inheritance fee?
17. Who does the demarcation? How does the TA keep track of the land allocated?
18. Are there any elected members on the TC? Are there any women members?

## Appendix 8. Structured Interview guide: Orchards used for ploughing maize<sup>65</sup>

### 1 Demographics

Date of interview:

- 1.1 Name:
- 1.2 Date of birth (age):
- 1.3 Gender:
- 1.4 Location of farming activity (village, and nearby town or landmark):
- 1.5 Main occupation/livelihood:

### 2 Land access

- 2.1 Why do you use this orchard for ploughing maize and not another piece of land?
- 2.2 How far is this orchard from your homestead?
- 2.3 Who did you need to get permission from to use this land?
- 2.4 What kind of arrangement did you make?
- 2.5 Are there any conditions/rules attached to using this land?
- 2.6 Do you think there will come a time when you will no longer be able to use this land for ploughing maize? Y/N  
*If yes, why do you think that will be the case and where do you think you can grow food crops after that?*

### 3 Production details

- 3.1 Are you cultivating anything else besides maize in the orchard? Y/N  
*If yes, what else are you cultivating in the orchard?*
- 3.2 How much land are you using for ploughing in the orchard? (estimate square meters or portion of a hectare)
- 3.3 Is it only for home consumption or do you sell some of what you grow?
- 3.4 Do you grow enough maize to feed your household for the whole year? Y/N  
*If not, for how many months of the year can your household eat from that maize?*
- 3.5 Do you also grow maize in another place besides this orchard? Y/N  
*If yes, where do you also grow maize?*
- 3.6 Do you grow other food crops in another place besides this orchard? Y/N  
*If yes, what other food crops do you cultivate?*  
*Where do you grow these food crops?*

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<sup>65</sup> A very similar guide was used for farmers ploughing on communal land, only key terms were changed.



#### 4 Changes in land access

- 4.1 For how long have you been growing maize in this orchard? (number of years)
- 4.2 In the past, before using this orchard, where did you grow maize?
- 4.3 Why did you decide you plough in the orchards and not on communal land?
- 4.4 Do you think there will come a time when you will no longer be able to use this orchard for growing maize? Y/N  
*If yes, why do you think that will be the case and where do you think you can grow food crops after that?*
- 4.5 Do most orchard owners allow other people to use their orchard for growing maize? Y/N  
*If yes, why? If no, why not?*
- 4.6 In which cases do orchard owners not allow other people to use their orchards for growing maize?

#### 5 Expansion of orchards, food production and availability

- 5.1 Do you think that the expansion of orchards has affected food production in this area? Y/N  
*If yes, how? (probe: less or more land available for food cropping? Did farmers shift from food crops to cash crops? Elaborate/explain)*
- 5.2 Do you think that the expansion of orchards has affected food availability in this area? Y/N  
*If yes, how? (probe: more or less food available? More or less diversity of food crops? Elaborate/explain)*
- 5.3 Do you think that the expansion of orchards has affected food prices in this area? Y/N



## About the author

Malin Olofsson is a researcher in the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development at the University of Amsterdam. Prior to this, she worked as a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science at the same institution (2019-2020). Before returning to academia, she worked for 12 years in the development sector in various countries across Southern Africa and Ghana, primarily in the areas of workers' rights, smallholder farmers' development, certification, and small business development. She has an MA in Development Studies with a specialisation in Agrarian and Environmental Studies from the International Institute of Social Studies (The Netherlands) and an Honours degree in Development Studies from the University of South Africa.