Exploring the implications of agribusiness driven agricultural expansion for small-scale tree crop farmers in Limpopo, South Africa.

Malin Olofsson, m.j.olofsson@uva.nl

Problem definition
Against the backdrop of centuries of large-scale dispossession of land and livelihoods of black South Africans, the need to support the development of the ‘missing middle’ of small-scale farmers capable of producing a marketable surplus is critical to reconfiguring the dualistic and unequal agrarian structure. This remains a structural cause of rural poverty (Cousins 2007, Hall 2009). Subtropical tree crops such as macadamia nuts and avocado have been identified by the state as key commodities to promote amongst smallholders based on their expected high growth and labour absorbing potential (NPC 2011). Despite the apparent potential of these commodities to build this ‘missing middle’, empirical studies have illustrated that the incorporation of small-scale farmers into commercial markets and global commodity chains can be linked to exclusionary practices and adverse incorporation due to unfavourable terms and conditions that govern these arrangements.

Research Question
How is the expansion of tree-crop commodification amongst small-scale farmers (re)shaping gendered livelihood pathways, inclusion and accumulation in Limpopo, South Africa and how does this affect food production and provisioning?

Theoretical Framework
This study is broadly situated within a framework of the political economy of rural livelihoods framework. It sets out using a class-based analytic (Bernstein 2010) to explore processes of social differentiation amongst tree-crop farmers. The emerging typology is used to explore differentiated access to key resources (Ribot and Peluso 2003), emerging gender dynamics and the relationship between food production and provisioning and tree-crop commodities viewed from a food sovereignty perspective.

Methodology
This study uses a mixed method approach. Quantitative data in the form of an individual farmer survey (n=80) is followed by qualitative methods in the form of in-depth interviews, focus groups discussion and mapping activities. On-going participant observation and informal conversations provide an overarching ethnographic orientation for this study.

Expected Results
A better understanding of heterogeneity amongst small-scale tree crop farmers. Insights into how this diversity impacts on processes of inclusion, exclusion and adverse inclusion. Knowledge on how tree crops farming and gendered livelihood trajectories relate to local level food production and provisioning.

Expected Graduation
March, 2019