



Governance challenges and unequal access in the commercialization of honeybush

A case study of the Zoar community in South Africa's Western Cape province

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Governance challenges and unequal access in the commercialization of honeybush: a case study of the Zoar community in South Africa's Western Cape province

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Abstract

This thesis explores the governance structures surrounding honeybush (*Cyclopia spp.*) and their impact on local access to this resource within a community of honeybush wild harvesters and traditional knowledge holders in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Native to South Africa, honeybush has gained international commercial significance over the last three decades for its health benefits. Through interviews with local leaders, traditional knowledge holders, and other stakeholders involved in the honeybush supply chain, and drawing from Ribot and Peluso's (2003) 'Theory of Access', the study analyses the mechanisms shaping the community's ability to benefit from the commercialization of the resource. The findings reveal the community's marginal inclusion in the honeybush supply chain and shed light on the unequal access to and distribution of resources in post-apartheid South Africa. Current tensions and competition between the local traditional authority and democratic institutions, as well as within the traditional authority, generate unclear governance arrangements, further hindering community members' participation in the commercial use of the resource. A comparison with other cases of biotrade in South Africa reveals that such tensions are a common issue for natural resource governance in the country. In light of these findings, the thesis discusses the potential of the measures proposed in the South African National Biodiversity Economy Strategy to address these challenges and effectively incorporate marginalized communities into the development of a biodiversity economy, based on equitable access and benefit sharing within the sector.

Keywords: natural resource governance, honeybush, access, traditional knowledge, traditional authorities, biotrade, ABS agreements

Table of contents

Table of contents.....	4
Abbreviations	6
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Research objectives and questions	8
2. Background	9
2.1 The Honeybush tea industry: history and actors	9
2.1.1 From <i>Cyclopia spp.</i> to Honeybush tea	9
2.1.2 A growing industry	10
2.1.3 Local communities of wild harvesters.....	11
2.2 Traditional authorities in South Africa	12
2.3 The biodiversity economy: a path towards rural development and poverty reduction?	13
3. Theoretical Background	16
3.1 A Theory of Access	16
3.1.1 Power.....	19
4. Methodology.....	21
4.1 Philosophical worldview and approach to research.....	21
4.2 Qualitative methods of data collection	22
4.2.1 The case study and the study area	22
4.3 Ethical considerations	23
4.4 Data collection.....	23
4.4.1 Access to the field and recruitment of participants	23
4.4.2 Semi-structured face-to-face interviews	24
4.4.3 Focus group and non-participant observation	25
4.4.4 Participants	26
4.4.5 Gathering of relevant documents	27
4.5 Data analysis.....	27
4.5.1 Analysis of interviews	28
4.5.2 Analysis of documents.....	28
5. Findings	30
5.1 Land and permits	32

5.2	Authority, power and legitimacy	34
5.3	Benefits distribution in the supply chain.....	38
5.3.1	Wild harvesters and their perspectives.....	38
5.3.2	The side of the industry	39
5.4	The biodiversity-based economy	40
6.	Discussion	43
6.1	Limitations and suggestions for future research	46
	References	48
	Popular science summary.....	52
	Acknowledgements.....	53

Abbreviations

ABS	Access and Benefit-sharing
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CPA	Communal Property Association
DEA	Department of Environmental Affairs
DEDEAT	Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
NBES	National Biodiversity Economy Strategy
NEMBA	National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act
SAHTA	South African Honeybush Tea Association
TKLA	Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act
TRANCRAA	Transformation of Certain Rural Areas Act

1. Introduction

Commercialization of wild harvested species represents an important source of livelihood for rural and peri-urban communities in resource-rich regions. In South Africa, among these are the plant species of the genus *Cyclopia*, part of the Fynbos biome (Malgas 2022). These plants, commonly known as honeybush, are primarily used to produce tea, both for local consumption and international trade. Honeybush has gained international recognition as an export commodity for its wide-ranging health benefits, with demand on international markets growing in the past decades (Polak & Snowball 2017). Consequently, at the national level, a rise in interest in the honeybush industry, and honeybush commercialization, has occurred, mainly fuelled by its potential to contribute to local economic development (Joubert et al. 2011; Ndwandwe 2023). Hence, plans have been made to enhance honeybush production and meet international demand (Polak & Snowball 2017; McGregor 2017a).

Published studies on honeybush are concerned with its genetic diversity, chemical properties, medicinal benefits, ecological profile, and economic importance (Joubert et al. 2011; Polak & Snowball 2017; Malgas 2022). Nevertheless, studies on honeybush governance remain limited (Malgas 2022; Ndwandwe 2023), highlighting a significant knowledge gap. The need for research on honeybush governance is particularly pressing given the unequal involvement of local communities of traditional knowledge holders related to honeybush (Ndwandwe 2023). The traditional knowledge associated with honeybush is linked to the Khoi and San ancestry of the communities where these plants naturally grow across the Western and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa (DEA 2014). For these communities, who were historically marginalized through colonialism and apartheid, honeybush has long represented a source of livelihood in times of need (Ndwandwe 2023). Despite being the rightful holders of traditional knowledge related to honeybush, their inclusion in the industry's growth has been lagging behind (DEA 2014), highlighting the impact of colonial legacies and power dynamics inherent in the post-apartheid South Africa. On the one hand, where commercial cultivation is taking place, local community members, who were originally producers of the tea, are being turned into laborers in the industry (Ndwandwe 2023). On the other hand, the rising demand for honeybush, together with pressures from land-use change, is leading to what are being regarded as

unsustainable and illegal harvesting practices of the wild resource (Joubert et al. 2011; Polak & Snowball 2017; Malgas 2022). In the Eastern Cape, a permit system for harvesting honeybush was put in place in 2011 to address conservation concerns (Polak & Snowball 2017). In the Western Cape – which is the focus of this study – a permit system is still not in place as none of the *Cyclopia* species are listed as protected in this province (DFFE 2022). Nonetheless, in the Biodiversity Management Plans for Aloe and Honeybush species (DFFE 2022) it is anticipated that a standardized permitting system for both provinces will soon be implemented to ensure the sustainable harvesting of the wild resource – potentially constraining access to honeybush for communities of wild harvesters. Additionally, most areas where honeybush grows are privately owned (DEA 2014) and communities of wild harvesters require the permission of landowners to harvest in these areas (McGregor 2017a). The situation poses several challenges as the current trajectory of the honeybush industry disadvantages local communities that hold traditional knowledge related to honeybush and rely on this resource for their livelihoods.

1.1 Research objectives and questions

The present research focuses on a community of wild harvesters located in the village of Zoar, in the Kannaland Municipality of the Western Cape province of South Africa. The research aims to explore the governance structures and practices surrounding honeybush harvesting and commercialization at the local level. The objectives of the study are: to understand the challenges that the community is facing in the access to and commercialization of honeybush; and to analyze how communities of traditional knowledge holders are included in the development of a biodiversity economy in South Africa.

The research is thus guided by the following research questions:

- What mechanisms shape the community's access to honeybush – thus enabling or constraining its ability to benefit from the resource?
- How do the proposed measures for developing a biodiversity economy in South Africa address issues of inclusion in the trade of biological resources, and what are their prospects for effectively incorporating marginalized communities in the sector?

2. Background

2.1 The Honeybush tea industry: history and actors

2.1.1 From *Cyclopia spp.* to Honeybush tea

In biodiversity-rich regions like South Africa, the use of wild species for local consumption and trade is a common practice among rural and peri-urban communities (Mograbi et al. 2023). This is the case of *Cyclopia spp.*, commonly known as honeybush and mainly used to produce tea. The genus *Cyclopia* is part of the Fynbos biome, endemic to the Cape Floristic Region of South Africa, which is a biodiversity hotspot whose vegetation represents around 20% of Africa's flora diversity on less than 0.5% of Africa's land (Meyer & Naicker 2023).

The name 'honeybush' is derived from the honey resembling scent of the plant in bloom (Joubert et al. 2011). Among the 23 species of *Cyclopia*, seven are used for honeybush tea production (Polak & Snowball 2017; Malgas 2022) and are sourced through both wild harvesting and commercial cultivation. According to a survey commissioned by the South African Honeybush Tea Association (SAHTA) in 2016, five *Cyclopia* species are being commercially cultivated, *C. subternata*, *C. genistoides*, *C. longifolia*, *C. intermedia*, *C. maculate* (McGregor 2017b). With regard to wild harvesting, 85% of the harvest is constituted by *C. intermedia*, 10% by *C. subternata*, and the rest is made up of *C. maculata* and *C. plicata* (ibid.). Notably, 85% of produced honeybush is used for export, with around 70% of the honeybush supply being sourced from the wild (DFFE 2022; Malgas 2022; Ndwandwe 2023; McGregor 2017b).

Wild honeybush grows in the Western and Eastern Cape provinces of the country, on the slopes of the Kouga, Tsitsikamma, Outeniqua, Elandsberg, Grootwinterhoek, Kammanassie, and Langkloof mountains (McGregor 2017a). Most of the land on which honeybush is harvested is privately owned. As explained by McGregor (2017a), traditionally, teams of predominantly male harvesters, often with a family history in the practice, are the ones harvesting the honeybush. The responsibility for monitoring and controlling wild honeybush harvesting lies within provincial biodiversity conservation authorities, which are CapeNature for the Western Cape, and the Department of Economic Development, Environmental

Affairs and Tourism for the Eastern Cape (DEDEAT) (De Villiers & McGregor 2017). To harvest, individuals and teams usually need to obtain a permit, but harvesting regulations differ in the two provinces. In 2011, the Eastern Cape proclaimed *C. intermedia* and *C. subternata* as protected species. From that moment, to harvest these two species, landowners or farm managers, and harvest team managers need to obtain a permit from the designated authority (McGregor 2017a). Additionally, processors must monitor and document all crops delivered to their facility. With regards to the Western Cape, no permit is needed to harvest honeybush since none of the *Cyclopia* species are listed as protected in the province (DFFE 2022). For both provinces, if harvesting happens on privately owned lands, individuals or teams need the permission of landowners to proceed. Once harvested, the honeybush is transported and sold in bulk to processors. Indeed, nowadays, the processing of honeybush takes place in processing facilities, where the plant is cut, chopped, fermented, and left to dry (McGregor 2017b). There are nine processing facilities among the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces (SAHTA n.d.).

2.1.2 A growing industry

Honeybush has been used for centuries by local communities not only to be prepared as a beverage but also, and especially, for its medicinal attributes (Ndwandwe 2023). Despite its popularity among rural communities, the honeybush industry historically remained confined, with its commercialization centered in the Langkloof area (Joubert et al. 2011). However, since the mid-1990s, a rise in interest in the honeybush industry from the perspective of local economic development has occurred, mainly fuelled by an increasing international market demand for honeybush tea as a health beverage (Joubert et al. 2011; Ndwandwe 2023). Honeybush has in fact garnered attention for its wide-ranging health benefits, coming from its polyphenolic compounds which have anti-carcinogenic, anti-ageing, anti-diabetic, anti-asthmatic, and anti-viral effects (Polak & Snowball 2017).

At the national level, the agenda of enhancing honeybush production has been moved forward by studies conducted by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the South African Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) (Polak & Snowball 2017). More specifically, in the past two decades, there has been a focus on domesticating the wild honeybush and enhancing its commercial cultivation. Cultivation has also been identified as a solution to conservation needs¹ since the demand for honeybush

¹ Of relevance here is the listing of threatened species or species in need of national protection – TOPS – according to the National Environmental Biodiversity: Management Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA) (De Villiers & McGregor 2017). The last draft list of TOPS was published in 2023 (DFFE 2023) and lists *Cyclopia longifolia* as a critically endangered species, *Cyclopia plicata* as an endangered species, and *Cyclopia genistoides*, *Cyclopia intermedia*, *Cyclopia maculata*, and *Cyclopia subternata* as protected species.

is exceeding the yielding capacity of the wild resource (Ndwandwe 2023; McGregor 2017a).

2.1.3 Local communities of wild harvesters

Local ecological knowledge in rural villages of the Cape Floristic Region is related to the history of indigenous peoples as hunter-gatherers and nomadic pastoralists and their dependency on the local ecosystem (Malgas 2022). During colonial times, the descendants of these populations were grouped in areas designated as reserves under Mission Stations which were linked to European churches. With regard to the Khoi², which is the focus of this thesis, the missions were aimed at converting these nomadic groups to Christianity and encouraging agriculture; nevertheless, the harvesting and use of wild resources continued to be practiced by the Khoi (Malgas 2022). Some of the villages – including Zoar which is the focus of this study – that are now ex-mission stations are governed by the Transformation of Certain Rural Areas Act 94 of 1998 (TRANCRAA) (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 1998). More specifically, the TRANCRAA was enacted over 23 rural areas which were referred to as ‘Coloured Reserves’³ during the apartheid era. These areas are now characterized by a communal governance system with weak institutions and constrained resources, a legacy of colonialism and apartheid (Malgas 2022).

Nowadays, in the former ‘Coloured Reserves’ and Mission Stations areas, wild harvesting of Fynbos species is widely practiced as a complementary livelihood strategy (Malgas 2022). Therefore, the wild harvesting sector holds crucial importance not only for its large contribution to the market but also because it provides livelihoods for harvesters in small communities in the areas where honeybush grows (McGregor 2017a). The growth of the honeybush industry has transformed the involvement of these communities in the sector. Until the 1990s, harvesters would work in groups of families and/or friends, process the tea themselves, and use it for household consumption and/or sell it to shops and locals. Since the 1990s, harvesters have begun to self-organize into cooperatives or teams to harvest and sell raw honeybush either to a processing facility or a Middleman (Ndwandwe 2023). Nowadays, honeybush wild harvesters only receive a small portion of the final retail price of the tea since they sell the resource in bulk without

² Khoi and San people are the indigenous peoples of southern Africa who were living in the area before Bantu-speaking agropastoralists arrived 2000 years ago. (Adhikari 2009).

³ In South Africa, the term ‘coloured’ is used to refer to a diverse social group of different social and geographical origins – composed of descendants from Cape slaves, KhoiSan people, individuals of African and Asia descent, and partly European settlers. The marginalization and oppression of coloured people began under colonial rule and intensified under apartheid when the group held an intermediate status in the South African social hierarchy (Adhikari 2005). The term ‘coloured’ is still used today in the administrative system to refer to people of mixed ethnicity, including descendants of the Khoi and San (Malgas 2022).

participating in its processing or any subsequent stage(s) of the value chain. This is further confirmed by Joubert et al. (2011), who note that community involvement in the industry has significantly lagged behind mainstream production, processing, and marketing. This limited participation in the value chain further hinders local communities' ability to acquire benefits from honeybush harvesting and commercialization.

2.2 Traditional authorities in South Africa

In South Africa, traditional authorities have a complex history, rooted in the country's pre-colonial past and shaped by colonial and apartheid policies. During apartheid, the regime enforced a system of racial segregation and created homelands, which were regions designated as self-governed territories for different ethnic groups. There, traditional leaders were often co-opted by the regime as a way to exercise control over these areas and the populations living there. Nowadays, in many former homelands of post-apartheid South Africa, traditional leaders function as intermediaries, even decision-makers, between state and society (Koelble & Li Puma 2011). They play a key governance role within their communities and thus exist and operate alongside democratic institutions, with the relationships between these two governance systems still representing a debated topic.

The specific topic of traditional Khoi and San authorities is particularly complex. The Khoi and San people, who are among the earliest inhabitants of southern Africa, experienced severe displacement, fragmentation, and the erosion of their cultures and identities during colonial times (Adhikari 2009). In post-apartheid South Africa, efforts are being made by communities who identify as indigenous Khoi and San to restore their traditional systems of authority and get them recognized. However, the process is challenging since Khoi and San communities still often lack formal recognition and institutional support. The village of Zoar – the focus of this study – is one of these communities, with a Khoi traditional system of authority in place. Specifically, they form part of the Attaqua traditional authority, a subgroup of the Koranna, one of the five main groupings under the National Khoi-San Council (San, Griqua, Nama, Cape Khoi, Koranna). The Council advocates for the statutory recognition and inclusion of Khoi and San people in formal government structures.

2.3 The biodiversity economy: a path towards rural development and poverty reduction?

In the context of the development of a green economy, based on the sustainable exploitation of natural resources, the South African government has identified several pathways to achieve economic growth and reduce poverty through the use of the country's rich biodiversity – with South Africa being one of the only seventeen megadiverse countries in the world (DEA 2016). Among the various sectors targeted for development, the commercialization of biological resources – or biotrade – plays a significant role. Within this sector, the honeybush industry emerges as a promising area to create local employment and alleviate poverty (Malgas 2022).

Several frameworks and related policies on biodiversity influence the way honeybush is governed within the development of a biodiversity economy. At the international level, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) holds relevance in guiding the conservation and use of biological resources, with South Africa ratifying it in 1995 (De Villiers & McGregor 2017). The core principles of the CBD are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of biological resources, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from this use (DEA 2016). At the national level, the CBD has been translated into law through the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) of 2004 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2004) and operationalized through the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES) of 2016 (DEA 2016), which are crucial in the context of the development of a biodiversity economy. In the definition provided by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) in the NBES (DEA 2016), the biodiversity economy “encompasses the businesses and economic activities that either directly depend on biodiversity for their core business or that contribute to conservation of biodiversity through their activities” (DEA 2016:1). Of specific interest here is the bioprospecting sub-sector of the biodiversity economy, which “encompasses organisations and people that are searching for, collecting, harvesting and extracting living or dead indigenous species, or derivatives and genetic material thereof for commercial or industrial purposes” (DEA 2016:1).

The DEA sees the NBES as an opportunity to both develop the South African economy and equitably redistribute South Africa's indigenous biological and genetic resources, based on principles that include their sustainable use, fair and equitable beneficiation, and socio-economic sustainability (De Villiers & McGregor 2017). In this context, the DEA addresses the crucial role of biological resources for the life-support systems of many people across the country, especially marginalized communities, and recognizes how benefits coming from the

biodiversity economy are still very limited for this category (DEA 2016). Nevertheless, according to the DEA, the bioprospecting sector has the potential to contribute to the national economy and at the same time realize rural development and conservation objectives while creating new jobs.

Following the definition put forward by the DEA (2016), and as highlighted by De Villiers & McGregor (2017), the commercial use of honeybush falls under biotrade, which is considered a bioprospecting activity. What is important here is that knowledge of the use and benefits of biological resources – which serves as the base for the development of commercial products within the biodiversity sector – is usually connected to traditional knowledge holders (Wynberg 2023). Local communities of wild harvesters with Khoi and San ancestry have been identified as rightful holders of traditional knowledge related to honeybush (DEA 2014). Notwithstanding the importance of traditional knowledge in the development of a biodiversity economy, the indigenous people who discovered and developed knowledge on bioresources have historically been deprived of the benefits resulting from their commercialization and have faced the misappropriation of their knowledge by powerful actors (De Villiers & McGregor 2017; Wynberg 2023). This misappropriation usually takes the form of corporations or researchers from the Global North benefitting from the resources and traditional knowledge of countries and people of the Global South (Wynberg 2023).

To remedy this unequal use of indigenous biological resources and related knowledge, Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) regulations and agreements have been developed, both at the international and national level, with the aim of delivering a more equitable share of the benefits resulting from bioprospecting activities, with particular reference to traditional knowledge holders and resource users (De Villiers & McGregor 2017). Within this framework, to use a country's biological resources or associated traditional knowledge, companies and researchers are required to obtain the prior informed consent of the communities that own the resources, or knowledge associated with them, and establish a mutually agreed benefit-sharing agreement (Wynberg 2018). Originally, the CBD and ABS agreements were only linked to the activity of biodiscovery – which comprises the collection and research on samples of biological resources to discover valuable genetic information or biochemicals (Wynberg 2023). With the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol in 2010, ABS agreements started to also be used for biotrade activities. Specifically, in South Africa, the ongoing implementation of these mechanisms is leading to the establishment of a permit system for all activities related to the use and development of biodiversity (Wynberg 2023). Nevertheless, these apparent win-win solutions are by some considered not to be what social, environmental, and economic justice in the biodiversity economy sector should be about (Ndwandwe 2023; Wynberg 2023).

While the honeybush sector still has not been the target of ABS agreements, there is much to learn from other cases of bioprospecting, and biopiracy – the misappropriation of biological resources and indigenous knowledge – in South Africa, such as those of rooibos (*Aspalathus linearis*), *Hoodia*, and *Pelargonium sidoides* (Wynberg & Chennells 2009; Van Niekerk & Wynberg 2012; Wynberg 2023). These cases are rooted in the histories of oppression and marginalization of local people through colonial rule and apartheid, leading to ongoing inequalities in access to and use of natural resources. Bioprospecting often replicates these colonial relations of exploitation, with wealthy countries and companies from the Global North profiting from the biological resources and indigenous knowledge of countries and people of the Global South. In this context, ABS agreements represent more of a remedy rather than a delivery of a more socially just biodiversity economy sector (Wynberg 2023). Indeed, one must question whether these instruments can compensate for the history of dispossession of indigenous groups and whether the sharing of a small percentage of benefits is sufficient when inequalities in land concentration and tenure persist (Meyer & Naicker 2023). Of relevance for the present research is that different studies (Bester 2013; Malgas 2022) point to the fact that the honeybush industry might follow the same path as the rooibos industry – which has been regarded as a case of biopiracy and where an ABS agreement was signed in 2019. Furthermore, what should be considered as worrying is that the DEA regards the rooibos example as one of the “success stories to guide future bioprospecting efforts” (DEA 2016:37). In this context, Ndwandwe (2023) highlights how marginalization in the biodiversity-based sector is still a pressing issue in the South African context, with the government failing to deliver social reforms and the growing threat of liberal policies on local livelihoods and resources. More specifically, reforms have been lacking to address the legacies of apartheid, and injustices of land and resource rights still shape who participates in the honeybush sector.

Both Malgas (2022) and Ndwandwe (2023) highlight the need for research coming from the margins as “the voices and practices of wild-harvesters and small-scale producers who rely on wild species’ survival for their livelihoods are not well-represented in the literature” (Malgas 2022:5). In line with this reasoning, the present study focuses on the experiences of a team of honeybush harvesters located in the village of Zoar in the Kannaland Municipality, in the Western Cape of South Africa. The analysis focuses on how power differentials shape access patterns and, as will be explored in the following chapter, is grounded in an understanding of ‘access’ to a resource as ‘ability to benefit’ from it (Ribot & Peluso 2003).

3. Theoretical Background

To explore governance structures, it is essential to first understand what governance is. A common understanding is that governance involves interactions among a wide range of actors with varying interests, aimed at addressing and solving societal issues (Sowman & Wynberg 2014). Diverse definitions of the concept can be offered, each emphasizing different practices and actors involved in the governance process. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides a definition of natural resource governance as “the norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens (...) participate in and benefit from the management of natural resources” (Springer et al. 2021:3). This ability to benefit from natural resources is central to the present study, which draws from Ribot & Peluso’s (2003) access theory, in which access is defined as “the ability to benefit from things” (153), namely resources.

3.1 A Theory of Access

In the development of their theory of access, Ribot and Peluso (2003) depart from acknowledging the lack of a clear definition of the term ‘access’ in scholarly work on natural resources, despite its frequent use in social theory. Their primary objective, thus, is to provide a more precise definition of the concept – to guide grounded analysis of how people benefit from resources – and to distinguish it from that of property. Drawing from MacPherson’s (1978) work on property as rights-based claims aiming at using or benefiting from something, Ribot and Peluso (2003) shed light on how both access and property comprise relations between people in regard to benefits or values. What distinguishes access from property is that while the latter focuses on ‘rights’, the former focuses on ‘ability’. By moving away from the focus on *rights*, which has characterized property work, to that of *ability*, the authors delineate a wider and more diversified set of relationships that influence actors in accessing and using resources. In this context, property is re-located as one of the diverse means that can facilitate access, thus representing just one of the many mechanisms shaping actors’ ability to benefit from resources.

Ribot’s and Peluso’s (2003) focus on ‘ability’ is influenced by Amartya Sen’s work on endowments, entitlements, and capabilities. As noted by Myers & Hansen

(2020), there are clear parallels between a theory of access and the entitlements framework elaborated by Sen. In his seminal work, *Poverty and Famines* (1981), Sen explores the complex causal chains that determine famines and investigates how individuals gain access to and control over food. His analysis emphasizes that not only the availability of food is important for food security, but also people's ability to access it. In Sen's work, endowments refer to the resources that individuals possess, such as land, skills, and knowledge, and entitlements to the various ways individuals can access goods and services using their endowments, such as legal rights, social relationships, and economic opportunities. Capabilities refer to the real opportunities individuals have to achieve well-being, that is what individuals can do with the resources and opportunities available to them. Both Sen's and Ribot's and Peluso's frameworks thus emphasize the critical role of socio-political and economic structures in shaping access to and benefits from resources.

'A theory of access', elaborated by Ribot and Peluso (2003), frames access as a set of relationships through which individuals and institutions realize benefits from resources. The ability to benefit from resources is shaped by mechanisms of access which are understood as "relations of power" (Peluso & Ribot 2020:300). Power – which I further conceptualize in section 3.1.1 – is here understood as manifesting and being exercised through different means, processes, and relations, which are the "material, cultural and political-economic strands" (Ribot & Peluso 2003:154) constituting the 'bundles' and 'webs' of powers that shape resource access. A bundle of power is a collection of relationships that enable and/or constrain actors in deriving benefits from things (Peluso & Ribot 2020). These bundles can be, on the one hand, aggregated in larger webs, and, on the other, disaggregated in the strands that constitute them. Based on their positioning in these webs of power, actors can draw on different bundles of power. The configuration of the 'bundles' and 'webs' of powers changes over time with shifts in the legal, social, political, and economic contexts in which they are embedded. This in turn changes relations of power and access to resources, which are thus understood as dynamic.

In the context of how social relationships shape access patterns, social action involves three processes: gaining, controlling, and maintaining access (Ribot & Peluso 2003). The action of gaining access is the initial process through which access to a resource is established. Controlling access refers to the ability of some actors to allocate access to a resource, and thus consists of the exercise of power in determining who is included or excluded in the access to it (Milgroom & Ribot 2020). Finally, the action of maintaining access requires deploying resources to keep access to a resource open through those who control it. Typically, the division of benefits coming from a resource occurs between these two sets of actors, with those needing to maintain access often having to transfer some benefits to those who control it. The concepts of access control and maintenance share some aspects of Marx's conceptualization of the relations between actors who own capital, or the

means of production, and actors who labor with it (Ribot & Peluso 2003; Milgroom & Ribot 2020). In this context, Marx's class structure is reimagined as an access hierarchy, where some actors maintain their access through others who control it, and those in control may also need to maintain their access control through relations with higher or parallel authorities (Milgroom & Ribot 2020)

The mechanisms – that is the means, processes, and relations – through which access is gained, maintained, and controlled, and which constitute the strands in the 'bundles' and 'webs of power', can be divided into two broad categories: rights-based mechanisms, and structural and relational mechanisms. The former encompasses both legal and illegal mechanisms, which respectively include "rights attributed by law, custom, or convention" (Ribot & Peluso 2003:162) – such as property rights – and forms "of direct access defined against those based on the sanctions of custom, convention, or law" (Ribot & Peluso 2003:164). The second category refers to the specific political-economic and cultural frameworks within which access to a resource is negotiated and includes the various ways in which technology, capital, markets, knowledge, authority, social identities, and social relations shape access.

In my analysis, I have focused on the following mechanisms: technology, capital, authorities, markets, and social identity. Understanding how they work and intertwine is crucial for exploring how access to honeybush is shaped. Access to technology is a critical determinant of resource access, as it directly impacts various stages of resource utilization. Technology enables the extraction, transportation, and processing of resources, thus benefiting those who have access to it. Capital is another fundamental mechanism influencing resource access. The availability of financial resources can determine an actor's ability to acquire property rights, invest in technology, and cover production costs – thus influencing legal access, access to technology, and access to markets. Furthermore, capital can amplify access by conferring a privileged status within societal structures, which, for example, facilitates access to realms of authority. Authorities are crucial nodes of access control where multiple access mechanisms converge. For example, authorities exert control through regulatory frameworks, permit issuance, and enforcement of access rights. Access to markets is integral to the commercialization of resources, such as that of honeybush, and refers to the ability of actors to enter and participate in exchange relations. Furthermore, it is intertwined with the ability to access technology and capital and process resources to create commercial products. Social identity encompasses attributes such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, which all mediate resource access. In my study, social identity is linked to the Khoi ancestry of the case study community. This identity influences resource access through the enduring effects of exclusionary politics during colonialism and apartheid. During these periods, racial identity was a critical determinant of individuals' societal opportunities, dictating for example their access to land,

resources, and economic opportunities. These politics of exclusion and oppression still affect resource access and distribution in contemporary South Africa. Finally, as demonstrated by these examples, access mechanisms are not completely distinct, but rather intersect and influence each other, shaping complex patterns of access distribution.

The use of access analysis as proposed by Ribot & Peluso (2003) can help “understand *why* some people or institutions benefit from resources, *whether or not* they have institutionally recognized rights to them” (Ribot & Peluso 2003:154) by shedding light on the complex interplay of legal, social, political, and economic factors shaping access to resources. Access analysis also facilitates the identification of ambiguities within laws, customs, and conventions. Indeed, where overlapping systems of legitimacy exist – as in South Africa with state authorities and traditional authorities existing alongside each other – a plurality of legal and customary notions of rights can be used to make claims (Ribot & Peluso 2003; Sowman & Wynberg 2014; Sekonya 2021). By guiding the identification and mapping of the mechanisms by which access is gained, maintained, and controlled, ‘A theory of access’ provides the conceptual tools to direct and structure empirical analysis (Myers & Hansen 2020).

3.1.1 Power

In a paper dedicated to the analysis of power theories in political ecology, Svarstad et al. (2018) recognize Ribot & Peluso’s (2003) theorization of power as one of the few explicit ones in the field that provides a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of power which focuses on both agency, political economic structures, and discursive formations. Their conceptualization of ‘bundles’ and ‘webs’ of powers offers a perspective on power that is both actor- and structure-oriented. They define power “*in two senses – first, as the capacity of some actors to affect the practices and ideas of others and second, (...) as emergent from, though not always attached to, people. Power is inherent in certain kinds of relationships and can emerge from or flow through the intended and unintended consequences or effects of social relationships. Disciplining institutions and practices can cause people to act in certain ways without any apparent coercion*” (155-156). While I do embrace the authors' definition of power, I distance myself from their understanding of it as inherent in only certain kinds of relationships. In my view, power is inherent in all relationships, it is ubiquitous as Gaventa (2003) explains drawing from Foucault. This is because power is not something that is held by a particular group or individual but it operates and is exercised through every social interaction. Power is embedded in social practices, norms, and discourses and thus constitutes the very fabric of society. From the first sentence of Ribot’s and Peluso’s definition, it is clear that their conceptualization of power draws from a Weberian focus on human agency, while the rest of the definition sheds light on the integration

of Marxist and Foucauldian structure-oriented perspectives (Svarstad et al. 2018). Indeed, social structures are here understood as both materially rooted and discursively constructed. In this context, agency, through which power is exercised, is constrained as well as enabled by these structures – highlighting the productive nature of this understanding of power. The reproduction of power is intertwined with the reproduction of social order (Haugaard 2003). Social order creates power by ensuring predictability in interactions, achieved through people structuring their actions according to shared meanings. These shared meanings construct a system of thought that actors use to interpret the social world. Different social orders generate specific types of power related to particular issues, leading to empowerment and disempowerment based on structural constraints. The maintenance of power relations is possible because actors treat structures as more than mere social constructs, often perceiving them as natural – making the reproduction of power relations a partially unconscious process (Haugaard 2003). Therefore, through socialization, people reproduce existing structural relations and, consequently, power relations. Social order is viewed as both constraining and enabling for actors, as it provides the framework within which power is exercised and reproduced – with power being a productive force, which can be turned into an oppressive one.

4. Methodology

The present research is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in South Africa between April and May 2024. I lived in South Africa for four months, from the beginning of February until the beginning of June 2024, based at Nelson Mandela University George Campus in George, in the Western Cape Province. There, I had the privilege to build relationships with local researchers and students and to exchange ideas on my study with people who, through their knowledge and perspectives, gave me great insights into the complexities of South African history and social realities.

4.1 Philosophical worldview and approach to research

The study is informed by a constructivist approach. Constructivism is a perspective that emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, and historical contexts in shaping knowledge and realities. It suggests that individuals and groups actively construct their understanding of the world, and give meaning to it, based on their experiences, interactions, and interpretations. For this reason, when studying social phenomena, one must look at the interactions between individuals as well as the historical and cultural context in which these interactions take place (Gillham 2000; Creswell & Creswell 2018). This explains the choice of qualitative methods, which is further explored in section 4.2.

As a product of constructing practices and processes, knowledge is always situated. This has consequences for research as our position in the social world “has effects on what we see, how it is seen and with what consequences” (Flick 2014:111). Therefore, interpretation plays a crucial role in qualitative inquiry as the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Flick 2014). For this reason, I need to be reflexive about how my positionality as a white European student, who has been educated in Italy and Sweden and has had the privilege of being granted a scholarship to conduct research in South Africa, might shape the research process, including how I am perceived by the people I meet and how I make sense of the data I collect and analyze. The practice of reflexivity helps build transparency in the research process and makes the researcher, her choices, and interpretations visible to the readers.

4.2 Qualitative methods of data collection

Since the objective of the study is to understand honeybush governance from the perspective of local resource users, and how they make sense of it, qualitative methods were chosen to collect and analyze data since they enable the exploration of a problem through the lens of the meaning that certain individuals or groups ascribe to it (Creswell & Creswell 2018). This choice is also explained by the fact that the governance of honeybush is a relatively unknown field and qualitative methods are well suited for exploring unknown contexts and the reality of what happens on the ground (Gillham 2000). Additionally, qualitative methods were chosen for their flexibility and adaptability (Flick 2009; Creswell & Creswell 2018). Indeed, as the context was relatively unknown, the research design needed to be flexible enough to be adapted to unexpected findings emerging from the empirical investigation. The flexibility also showed in the interdependent nature of the stages that characterized the research process, with a need to continuously move between data collection, data analysis, and literature review.

The main forms of data that were collected and analyzed are open-ended forms of data (Creswell & Creswell 2018). This was done through semi-structured interviews and observations in the study community and at other sites with other actors involved in the honeybush value chain, and through the analysis of South Africa's National Biodiversity Economy Strategy. The use of different forms and sources of data helped me triangulate information and build a more holistic understanding of the research problem and the context being studied (Creswell & Creswell 2018)

Additionally, I used memo writing as a strategy to organize thoughts and reflections in the process of data collection, coding, and analysis, and to stimulate reflection and theorizing (Flick 2014).

4.2.1 The case study and the study area

By employing a case study design, the strategy for investigation was rooted in studying the phenomenon in its real-life setting and gathering multiple sources of empirical material on the case (Gillham 2000; Robson & McCartan 2016). Indeed, considering the highly specific features of the case, I learned much about it by being in the context, which meant that literature review and fieldwork activities were conducted alongside each other based on the findings emerging from each data collection activity (Gillham 2000). Considering that my study is informed by a constructivist worldview, it is important to underscore the analytical nature of identifying and isolating a research field, which is a constructive research activity (Flick et al. 2014).

The study was conducted in the village of Zoar, which has a population size of about 4,500 and is located in the Kannaland Municipality of the Western Cape

province of South Africa. The village was chosen based on literature studies and research contacts provided by my local co-supervisor. In the early nineteenth century, a Missionary Society project was established in the town and was run by the Berlin Mission Society. During the apartheid era, the area was referred to as a 'Coloured Reserve' under the Persons and Communal Reserves Act (1961) and was subsequently governed by the Rural Areas Act 9 of 1987. Since 1998, the area has been governed by the TRANCRAA, as seen in the background of this study. Nowadays, around 95% of the population is comprised of 'coloured people', which is a racial categorization of the apartheid era still used today in the administrative system to refer to people of mixed ethnicity, including descendants of the Khoi and San (Malgas 2022). Some of its inhabitants are from the Attaqua traditional authority and still conserve their traditional system of authority. The town is characterized by a high level of unemployment, with most of the people working as laborers on nearby farms.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Before beginning data collection, the project underwent an ethical review process at Nelson Mandela University, resulting in the necessary ethical clearance to conduct research in South Africa. With this approval, data collection was commenced. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement – either in written or oral form, depending on their preference. Before obtaining consent, I presented my project and its objectives to the participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation, which meant they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also explained that the information they shared would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Anonymity was assured through the use of pseudonyms. Finally, as all interviews were recorded, explicit consent to record was obtained before each interview.

4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Access to the field and recruitment of participants

To recruit participants, I used snowball sampling, which consists of the identification of one or more individuals who work as initial informants to identify other individuals, who are then also used as informants (Robson & McCartan 2016).

Recruiting participants and accessing the field has been challenging and an opportunity to reflect on the complexities of entering a social context. The first participant I interviewed and developed a relationship with, and who was going to work as a first key informant, turned out to not be willing to help me recruit

participants within the community. This experience underscored the unpredictability of fieldwork and the complexity of the task of gaining access to the field, which is an ongoing process (Flick et al. 2014). As I will explain in the analysis, this false trail became a ‘critical event’ which enabled valuable discoveries on issues of authority in the context. After this, I came across another local person, a headwoman of the community, who provided me with information on the community’s traditional leadership roles and referred me to the community’s future paramount chief and to one of the community’s headmen, who worked as further key informants. The fact that my local connections were within the traditional authority created barriers to engaging with other community members. Indeed, community members were typically at work during my visits, which consisted of daily field trips from morning until afternoon, both on weekdays and weekends. My key informants, all part of the traditional authority, were sometimes surprised by my interest in discussing honeybush with the broader community, suggesting that they believed these individuals lacked relevant knowledge of the local governance of honeybush. When I asked to speak with other community members, I was frequently told they were unavailable due to work commitments, even on weekends. This led me to suspect, though without concrete evidence, that traditional leaders may have been reluctant for me to engage with other members of the community. Another significant challenge was the difficulty in obtaining an interview with CapeNature, the conservation agency for the Western Cape province. Despite contacting various departments, I encountered delays and was repeatedly redirected to different individuals within the agency, ultimately preventing me from securing an interview. However, I was able to receive information regarding the permit system for the harvesting of wild species within the province, a topic discussed in the findings chapter of this study. Furthermore, in the later stages of this project, my co-supervisor was able to speak with a representative from CapeNature who provided a more detailed account of the community’s involvement in honeybush harvesting. This individual explained that the community harvests on both communal and privately owned lands. The management of harvesting on privately owned lands involves different local actors than those involved in communal land harvesting, which is overseen by the traditional authority. Since participants in this study were part of the traditional authority, the study focuses exclusively on harvesting on communal lands.

4.4.2 Semi-structured face-to-face interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were the primary data collection method. They were chosen for the flexibility they offer while at the same time ensuring that key research questions are addressed (Cavestro 2013; Robson & McCartan 2016). I designed an interview guide outlining key topics to be discussed during the interview. Each topic was then developed into a set of open questions, which would

allow interviewees to express their opinions and perspectives. Indeed, the questions under each topic functioned as examples that were then adapted to how the discussion developed during the interview, meaning that new questions also arose. In designing the interview guide, I elaborated key topics based on my tentative research questions and on Ribot & Peluso's (2003) access mechanisms, which were used as guiding categories, or sensitizing concepts (Bowen 2006), for navigating the complexity of the relations constituting governance.

All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews were carried out either in Afrikaans or in English, based on what participants preferred and felt most comfortable with. For the interviews in Afrikaans, I collaborated with a local resident who acted as a research assistant and translator, Monica. I was referred to her by one of the participants since she lives in the community where fieldwork was conducted. Monica is a university law student and she became a valuable discussion partner and cultural broker. She was of great help in navigating the social context, building relationships, and facilitating fieldwork organization. We met twice before starting to interview participants. In these meetings, I shared my research aims and objectives and we went through the interview guide together. We also discussed how to conduct the interviews and what to focus the translation on. Additionally, I asked her to communicate with me if, during interviews, she perceived that questions were structured in a too complicated manner and that participants were uncertain about their meaning, or if any questions were sensitive or culturally inappropriate, to keep participants comfortable and secure in their interview situation. I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews on the same day they were conducted and took detailed notes about them with the help of the research assistant who translated when necessary. The interviews were not transcribed word for word. When relevant points were coming up, verbatim transcriptions were created.

4.4.3 Focus group and non-participant observation

A focus group was conducted with most of the community leaders, which included nine headmen, two headwomen, and the future paramount chief of the community, waiting to be appointed after his father's death. The focus group proved valuable for exploring shared experiences and explanations and triangulate information gathered in individual interviews. Additionally, it provided a useful opportunity to introduce myself to all the village leaders and present my research project to them. However, the discussion did not reach the same depth as in one-on-one interviews. In my perspective, several elements contributed to this. Indeed, the focus group was conducted spontaneously. I was on one of my field visits to present my research and myself to the future paramount chief of the community. That morning, most of the community leaders were meeting at his place and, after presenting myself and explaining why I was there, I was warmly welcomed into his house, together with

the translator, Monica, and with my co-supervisor, George Sekonya. After I had described who I was and what I aimed to study, I was invited to ask questions in the group. I was quite surprised by this turn of events, especially since until that moment accessing the field and getting to know participants had been difficult. Since this focus group came quite unexpectedly, and as it was my first time facilitating such a discussion, I would like to share some of the challenges I have encountered. The first one was language. Since not everybody in the group felt comfortable using English, Monica translated everything I was asking. However, some people were still answering in English and this resulted in the exclusion of some individuals who participated in the discussion only marginally. Trying to include everybody was difficult both because of power dynamics dictated by cultural norms – with the paramount chief leading the discussion – and of a time constraint. Indeed, the village leaders were waiting for the visit of a Khoi paramount chief coming from another community in the Western Cape Province, who was visiting to preside over a ceremonial handover meeting. Because of this, the focus group needed to be short, which did not allow for an in-depth exploration of the discussed topics. Nevertheless, this event also turned into something positive as I was invited to join the following meeting as an observer. To maintain privacy, and as it was not directly related to my research topic, I have decided not to share the content of the meeting. However, I would like to recognize the crucial insights it gave me into the complexities of South Africa's traditional authorities and questions of indigeneity, providing me with a perspective coming from within groups with indigenous roots. Furthermore, this discussion sparked an interest in me for the topic of the (re)definition of identities in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa (Adhikari 2009). The exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this research, but some crucial aspects of it and its implications for honeybush governance will be discussed in the analysis.

4.4.4 Participants

Throughout chapters 5 and 6, dedicated to the findings of the research and their discussion, the study participants will be referred to with either pseudonymized names or as follows.

P1: Headman of Zoar, who has been harvesting honeybush for ten years.

P2: Headman of Zoar, who has been harvesting honeybush for fifteen years.

P3: Honeybush harvester from a nearby village – also part of the Kannaland Municipality – who only harvests for home consumption.

P4: Honeybush harvester from a nearby village – also part of the Kannaland Municipality – who has worked in a processing facility for seventeen years.

P5: Future paramount chief of Zoar, responsible for granting access to honeybush on communal lands within the community.

P6: Co-owner of a company that cultivates and processes honeybush and rooibos.

P7: Headwoman and secretary of the traditional council of Zoar, involved in decision-making about honeybush but not directly involved in honeybush harvesting.

P8: Headwoman and treasurer of the traditional council of Zoar, involved in decision-making about honeybush but not directly involved in honeybush harvesting.

P9: Headman of Zoar, involved in decision-making about honeybush but not directly involved in honeybush harvesting.

4.4.5 Gathering of relevant documents

One strategic policy was used in the analysis, with reference to the development of a biodiversity economy in South Africa and the position of marginalized communities and individuals in bioprospecting activities. The document in question is the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES) (DEA 2016). The choice of this strategic document was guided by the literature review on studies on honeybush governance (Malgas 2022; Ndwandwe 2023) and the commercialization of biological resources in South Africa (Wynberg 2017, 2018, 2023; Meyer & Naicker 2023).

4.5 Data analysis

Grounded theory and thematic analysis were both used to approach and guide data analysis. Grounded theory, as a research approach, is characterized by a constant interplay between data collection and analysis throughout the research process, and by the elaboration of a theory emerging from the empirical material (Bowen 2006; Flick 2014). Hence, it is guided by inductive analysis, which refers to the production of codes, themes, and categories emerging from the data – rather than imposing a certain theory on the empirical material (Flick 2014). More specifically, I chose to follow a constructivist version of grounded theory as elaborated by Charmaz (2017). This version, while conserving some of the aspects of traditional grounded theory as described above, moves away from its positivist approach and embraces a relativist epistemology, in which reality is viewed as social, processual, fluid, and thus somewhat indeterminate (Charmaz 2017). Data collection and analysis are understood as a co-construction process between the researcher and participants (Flick 2014). While induction still plays a crucial part in the research process, constructivist grounded theory is also characterized by the use of abduction to construct and select the most suited hypothesis for explaining a particular empirical case (Flick 2014) – literature is thus used as a possible lens to interpret the material. Indeed, a constructivist version of grounded theory recognizes that “neither data nor theories are discovered, but researchers construct them as a result

of their interactions with their participants and emerging analyses” (Flick 2014:154). Throughout the process of data analysis, I used memo writing to capture my thoughts and insights on the data, which helped me to construct codes and subsequent themes (Flick 2014). Finally, I used a free open-source text tagging tool to code my interviews.

4.5.1 Analysis of interviews

After conducting the first round of interviews I started coding them. In this initial process, regarded as initial or open coding, I developed short and straightforward codes that helped me organize the data in manageable segments relevant to my study objectives (Flick 2014). In this first step, I was open to changing and adapting the codes as the analysis progressed. Since I was still collecting data, I anticipated that new and unexpected information might emerge, which indeed happened. This first confrontation with the data also worked as an opportunity to revise my interview guide, and to identify gaps and inconsistencies in the data collected from different participants. Once data collection was over, I started a second stage of coding, regarded as focused coding (Flick 2014), by identifying the most used and significant codes and organizing them into broader categories. I then explored the relationships between these categories. By analyzing their relationships I was able to draw four different themes into which I organized the presentation of my findings. All the codes I have used emerged from the data itself – meaning that I developed them throughout the process of data analysis. Nevertheless, my analysis was also theoretically informed by Ribot & Peluso’s (2003) theorization of access mechanisms, which served as guiding concepts during the designing stages of my study. Given the highly detailed account of my data and my decision to prioritize the empirical material over theoretical considerations, I chose to focus on the descriptive and thematic aspects of my data rather than on their theoretical relevance.

4.5.2 Analysis of documents

In reviewing the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy, my analysis concentrated on key references that emerged from the literature review and that were shared by interviewees during data collection activities. Within the Strategy, I specifically focused on the chapters addressing the bioprospecting sector, leaving aside those related to the wildlife sector as they were not relevant to my study. I conducted an initial review of the Strategy during the early phase of designing this research project, prior to initiating interviews and after completing a preliminary literature review. Following the interviews, I revisited the relevant sections of the Strategy, conducting a thorough re-read and taking detailed notes. At this stage, my analysis was guided by my research question, aiming to understand how

marginalized communities are addressed in the strategy. The findings were then compared with data obtained from interviews and the literature review on the topic of marginalization within the biodiversity economy in South Africa. In this way, I was able to narrow down my focus and engage in the discussion of the themes emerging from this analysis – as it is explored in the chapters dedicated to the explanation and discussion of findings.

5. Findings

The present chapter explores findings related to the research questions guiding this study:

- What mechanisms shape the community's access to honeybush – thus enabling or constraining its ability to benefit from the resource?
- How do the proposed measures for developing a biodiversity economy in South Africa address issues of inclusion in the trade of biological resources, and what are their prospects for effectively incorporating marginalized communities in the sector?

By doing this, the chapter focuses on four main themes which emerged as the most relevant ones from the empirical data. The themes were selected based on their repetition among the data, the emphasis put on their relevance by interviewees, and the literature review done by me, and are:

1. Land ownership and the permit system;
2. Issues of power and legitimacy over land and resources among local institutions;
3. Benefits distribution within the honeybush supply chain; and
4. Marginalized communities in the development of a biodiversity economy.

As seen in previous chapters, this work only focuses on the wild harvesting of honeybush. Cultivation of honeybush is also happening in both the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa. Nevertheless, the focus on wild harvesting is explained by the fact that the case study community is only involved in this activity. Being endemic to South Africa's Cape Floristic Region, honeybush – specifically the species *Intermedia* – is naturally found in the mountainous areas that surround the community's town and that form part of its communal lands. After harvesting, the species *Intermedia* needs around three to four years to regrow and be ready for a new harvest. At the moment of data collection (April – May 2024), five years had passed since the community's last harvest. The reasons for this delay are connected to issues of succession within the traditional authority and power struggles between local institutions, which are explored in section 5.2.

Before delving into the findings of the study, it is important to shed light on the community's historical involvement in honeybush harvesting and tea production, and on how the community is organized in terms of customary authority and with regard to honeybush harvesting.

Concerning the first point, what emerged from all interviews is that, as far as people can remember, the community has always been involved in the wild harvesting of the plant. Through their Khoi ancestry, indeed, members possess traditional knowledge connected to the use of the plant and its medicinal benefits. All interviewed participants – except for the co-owner of the processing facility – have learned what they know about the plant and its use through their ancestors. The knowledge of harvesting, processing, and brewing the plant has been passed down through generations. Traditionally, the plant was processed at home and used for household consumption. This started to change in the late 1990s, when commercialization of the tea started to take off. Nowadays, participants express a strong desire to engage more in honeybush tea production and commercialization, driven by both a need for income and a desire to create a product that reflects their heritage and emotional connection to the plant.

Regarding the second point, there exists a customary authority at the community level. The highest position within this authority is the paramount chief, followed by seniors, and then headmen and headwomen. During the data collection period (April – May 2024), a new paramount chief was awaiting his official appointment. At that time, the traditional authority consisted of nine headmen and two headwomen, with no seniors in place. Traditional authorities are appointed according to customary law, with the paramount chief role being inherited by the oldest in the bloodline, while other members are appointed by the paramount chief. In addition to the customary authority, at the community level, there is a Communal Property Association (CPA). In South Africa, CPAs are legal entities that can be established by communities undergoing land restitution. Their purpose is to acquire, hold, and manage property based on a constitution agreed upon by community members, as specified by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD 2023). CPAs are democratically elected, with members chosen from within the community. As will be explored in section 5.2, the coexistence of customary authorities and CPAs often leads to power struggles and issues of legitimacy regarding land and resource management in many rural communities in South Africa.

With regard to honeybush, the traditional authority is the one responsible for honeybush governance at the community level, controlling decision-making processes related to the use of the resource on communal lands. Furthermore, it retains profits coming from the activity of selling the wild-harvested honeybush to processors. To harvest the plant, a team of harvesters is needed, which comprises pickers – selected by the traditional authority within the broader community – and one or more headmen, who are responsible for supervising the pickers' work and making sure the plant is properly cut to ensure a healthy re-growth. For the activity, a pick-up van is needed to collect and transport the plant. Since nobody in the community owns one, they usually rent it from CapeNature. After harvesting, the

plant is transported to a processing facility, where it is sold by the person responsible for transportation – usually a headman. Indeed, nowadays, commercial honeybush is only processed in certain facilities – nine among the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces – where it is cut, fermented, dried, packaged, and sold, either in tea bags or bulk bags, to overseas clients. Within the community, the resulting profits are used, on the one hand, to pay pickers for their labor and the rental fee for the truck, on the other, they go into a fund controlled by the traditional authority. With regard to the latter point, two headwomen and a headman (P7, P8, P9) argued that the communal fund supports activities aimed at benefiting the entire community in Zoar, highlighting the perceived role of the traditional authority in working for communal benefit. However, I did not speak to community members outside the traditional authority who may offer a different perspective on the topic. Indeed, it is important to notice that interviewed community members are all part of the traditional Khoi authority. This means that just one local perspective is brought into the analysis. Through a literature review and an analysis of the legislations related to traditional authorities and land management in rural communities, it was possible to uncover contradictions and issues that shed light on power struggles at the local level, which influence the whole of the community, especially in relation to communal land management – and which will be explored throughout the chapter.

In what follows, the terms ‘traditional authority’ and ‘traditional leaders’ will be used to refer to the Khoi people who are involved in the decision-making processes of the traditional authority. The term ‘community’ will be used to refer to the broader Zoar community as a whole.

5.1 Land and permits

An important point that was raised in all interviews is how changes in land ownership have been affecting governance practices surrounding the harvesting of honeybush. As seen above, the land in Zoar is communal and honeybush naturally grows on lands that fall under communal property. More precisely, it grows on the mountain area adjacent to the community’s town, which can only be reached through a road that crosses some privately owned lands. The crossing of private lands requires permission from landowners. Traditional leaders share how the lands surrounding the community did not have any fences in the past. The community had free access to the whole mountain and it was possible for them to harvest honeybush without constraints. Nowadays, instead, permission is needed to access those same lands to practice the same activity. Traditional leaders shared how these mechanisms– needing permission from landowners to cross privately owned lands and reach their communal lands – have not always been in place and they complained about this change and what this has determined for their activities, like

harvesting honeybush. As one headman shared: *“you see now, the thing is that we can harvest it, but the land is not practically ours. You must get like a permission, or a permit, from the landowners to go and harvest it”* (P9). From participants’ recollections, until now, there have been no cases in which private landowners have denied the community’s access to these lands. Nevertheless, questions arise regarding the weakness of land tenure and the looming threat of possibly being denied access to their lands in the future. This situation highlights a significant issue: the community’s reliance on private landowners for permission to access communal lands perpetuates existing inequalities and power dynamics. This problem becomes even more pressing considering the potential growth of the honeybush market. If demand increases, the stakes for land access and control could heighten, exacerbating tensions and inequalities between private landowners and the community.

Additionally, participants shared the need to obtain a permit from CapeNature, through the traditional authority, to harvest honeybush. Research on this topic has revealed several contradictions, both among participants’ accounts and in the information received from CapeNature. Indeed, CapeNature stated that the community does not need any permit from them, as current permits on protected flora do not apply to honeybush. Furthermore, they clarified that no permit issued by them exists to cross private lands – this is a matter to be resolved between the landowners and the community. This contradicts participants’ claims, with some of them (P1, P7, P8, P9) explaining how a permit is needed both for picking honeybush and crossing private lands, while others (P5, P2) stating that the permit is not specific for picking, but just for crossing privately owned lands. These contradictions highlight a lack of clarity regarding the permit system and a significant gap in understanding and communication about the governance mechanisms in place. This situation can worsen inequalities, allowing more powerful actors to dictate the terms of resource access and creating opportunities for elite capture.

Notwithstanding the described contradictions, it remains relevant that participants described the permit application process as a responsibility of the traditional authority. According to participants, permits can only be applied for through the paramount chief. The traditional community decides who is going to apply for a permit, and the paramount chief must give a letter with a stamp to this person. As explained by Aidan, the future paramount chief, *“we as Khoi-San decide who is going to ask for a permit. And if I am going to be the chief, I must give my stamp, you can’t go out without the stamp”*. This process indicates that the traditional community is deeply involved in and responsible for honeybush harvesting at the local level. Moreover, during interviews, the permit topic seemed to be an important one as participants shared how delays in succession – explored in section 5.2 - have been affecting their activity surrounding honeybush. Indeed,

as will be further explored below, it has been almost two years that the community has been without an official paramount chief. For this reason, they have not been able to harvest honeybush as they cannot apply for a permit without a new paramount chief to grant permission.

5.2 Authority, power and legitimacy

The following section focuses on issues of authority at the local level, which include issues of succession within the traditional authority and power struggles between local institutions. Their impact on honeybush governance is explored at the end of the section.

Around two years before data collection was conducted (April-May 2024), the paramount chief in Zoar passed away. Since then, there have been struggles for succession, which have been delaying the appointment of a new paramount chief. As seen above, in Zoar, the paramount chief is the highest traditional position at the community level. In this context, it is important to highlight how, since succession has still not been realized, arrangements within the traditional authority are still uncertain, as shared by the secretary of the traditional council: *“we didn’t start collecting all of the people now, because we first want Aidan to be the chief. The meetings that we have is the amount that you can have a meeting with at the moment (...) When he is going to be the chief, we are going to get all the people”* (P7).

The recognition of traditional Khoi-San authorities, and the legal requirements for their activity, is sanctioned by the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act (TKLA) (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2019). The recent date of the Act already points to possible difficulties in its effective implementation. Furthermore, and most importantly, at the end of March 2023, this Act was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court as the Parliament failed to facilitate public participation in the legislative process. Indeed, *“Parliament had a duty to listen to rural communities, and not only traditional leaders, because the TKLA would directly impact the land rights and livelihoods of millions of rural residents”* (Dullah Omar Institute 2023). Nevertheless, at the moment, the Act is still in place as *“the Court has suspended the invalidity of the Act for 24 months to afford Parliament the time to facilitate a constitutionally compliant process”* (Legal Resources Centre 2023).

This new, and uncertain, legal landscape has had the effect of exacerbating already existing challenges within the traditional authority, which as a consequence has been extremely delayed in the realization of the paramount chief’s succession. As shared by the secretary of the traditional council, *“you must have the papers to do everything here. You can’t just go and tell the municipality ‘we want this done’ because we don’t have the certificates to show them”* (P7). Indeed, during these two years without a paramount chief, the traditional authority’s activities have been

on hold, waiting for the appointment of a new paramount chief to start again. The consequences for honeybush governance are explored at the end of the section. First, it is essential to consider the context of succession within the community. Specifically, the family issues that delayed the appointment of the new paramount chief. An explanation of the situation was provided by the secretary of the traditional council, who is the daughter of the former paramount chief, who also had another daughter and son. According to the secretary and daughter of the former paramount chief, customary law dictates that succession happens through the oldest person in the bloodline – in this case, the former chief’s son, Aidan. However, she explained further that when the paramount chief passed away, her sister sought to take over the position instead of Aidan, claiming it was their father’s will. Nevertheless, high uncertainty remained regarding the former paramount chief’s will as it lacked a lawyer’s signature or any testimonial evidence, leading to succession disputes – the interviewed daughter did not feel comfortable with sharing more detailed information on the problems related to her father’s will since she felt it was private information. Further problems started to arise when the ‘self-appointed’ sister did not engage with the necessary procedures for succession. Indeed, as outlined in the TKLA (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2019), when a successor to a principal traditional leader position needs to be filled, the traditional community must, within 90 days, identify a person that, according to customary law, qualifies for the position, and apply for its recognition. Nevertheless, there is no provision in the Act of what must be done when these processes are not concluded within the time frame sanctioned by it, which is what happened in Zoar. Additionally, the sister who was seeking to take over, instead of dealing with the processes needed to realize succession, decided to go work in the local CPA. In the words of the interviewed daughter, “*at the end of the day, this Attaqua went down the drain because she went to the CPA*” (P7). Having to face this situation, she shared: “*one day I just told myself ‘I can’t leave my father’s inheritance and legacy go like that, so I must get up, stand up, and do something’*” (P7). That is when she decided to find a solution to the situation with her brother Aidan, who decided to take over the role of paramount chief and is currently undergoing the processes to receive the documents needed for his recognition and activity. To face the legal complexities of obtaining these documents, the traditional authority is being helped by another paramount chief – the one who I met after the focus group and who invited me to join their meeting as an observer – who seemed to have more extensive experience of the legal landscape and to be more accustomed to the processes needed to obtain the necessary documentation.

Adding to these complexities, further struggles for legitimacy are taking place within the community. On the one hand, another person from the community is also claiming the role of paramount chief, opposing the formation of the new traditional

council. On the other hand, the ongoing competition between the local CPA and the traditional authority is being exacerbated.

With regard to the first point, I already mentioned – in chapter 3 of this study – how the first person I developed a relationship with led to discoveries on issues of competition and tension around authority at the local level. This person, which I refer to here as Marcus, is a former headman of the traditional authority. His father, who recently passed away, was also a headman and part of the former traditional council when the former paramount chief was still alive. At the present moment, amidst the confusion and delays created by the issues with succession, he has been claiming the role of paramount chief – even if, as explained by several participants, customary law does not envision such a possibility. Marcus’s actions turned out to be problematic not only in relation to the claims to authority but also because of his activity surrounding honeybush. Participants shared an episode in which Marcus went to harvest honeybush without discussing it with the other traditional leaders. He hired some community members to harvest the plant – as it usually happens during harvesting season – he then sold it to a processor and reportedly kept the profit for himself, without even paying the pickers who did the work. After this, which happened when the former paramount chief was still in charge, the traditional leaders decided to cut Marcus and his father out of the traditional authority. According to two headwomen and a headman (P7, P8, P9), Marcus and his father managed to obtain a permit, claimed to be necessary for harvesting honeybush, by tricking the former chief into signing the papers needed to obtain it. More specifically, according to what they shared, Marcus and his father visited the former chief while he was busy in a meeting and asked him to sign several documents without specifying their content, one of which was the permit. Nevertheless, after I conducted some research on the already mentioned topic of CPAs, and on the permit system by CapeNature, some uncertainties and questions arose with regard to legitimate local resource management. Before coming to the questions, these findings need to be explored.

As mentioned above, CPAs are democratically elected juristic bodies that manage communal land on behalf of communities that are undergoing land restitution. The problem is that the fact that land restitution is happening through CPAs goes against the expectation of traditional authorities that it should be their job to manage land (DALRRD 2023). This explains the headwomen and headman perception of the local CPA running things in their place: *“we could have given people work at this moment. The CPA has the land now, not for themselves, but for the community, but they are running stuff now (...) At the moment we are sitting aside and waiting”* (P7). The headwoman’s interpretation of the situation is explained by the ongoing competition between the traditional authority and the CPA over legitimacy and authority at the local level. Interestingly, this applies not only to Zoar. Indeed, as noted in the Communal Property Associations Annual

Report of 2022-2023 (DALRRD 2023:22), “*the establishment of CPAs within the traditional communities is perceived as creating two competing institutions both responsible for land administration and allocation. The existence of two centers of power has created a permanent power struggle*”. This power struggle is clear in a headman’s recollection of a recent event, when the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) visited Zoar to officially hand the title deed to the community through the CPA: “*two or three weeks ago (...), when they were transferring the land to the community, they were supposed to come to the chief first*” (P9). A review of the legislation related to both the creation of CPAs (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 1996, 1998) and the recognition of traditional and Khoi-San authorities (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2019), makes clear that indeed there is an overlap of these authorities’ roles and responsibilities, which inevitably leads to competition and struggles over legitimacy when the two are not working collaboratively. From a legal perspective, it appears that both authorities are legitimate in their claims. On the one hand, through the Communal Property Associations Act and the TRANCRAA (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 1996, 1998), the state recognizes the possibility of creating CPAs for managing land at the community level; on the other hand, through the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2019), it legitimizes the functions of traditional authorities according to customary law and traditions. Even if the Act does not explicitly mention that land administration is one of the functions to be performed by traditional authorities, it opens a blind spot by leaving this matter to be decided by customary law. Considering that traditional authorities often oversee the administration and allocation of communal lands in rural communities across South Africa, this leads to an overlap between the role of CPAs and the one of traditional authorities.

Coming to honeybush, uncertainties regarding legitimacy in local land management translate into uncertainties in the local governance of honeybush. Participants shared how it is the traditional authority’s responsibility to decide on matters connected to this resource. However, questions arise about why permit applications must go through the traditional authority, especially since honeybush is harvested on communal lands, which are held in trust by the CPA and not the traditional authority. Customary law dictates the need to go through the chief – with the traditional authority thus exercising a form of *access control* to honeybush. However, uncertain governance arrangements risk opening spaces for more powerful actors to decide on resource access. Additionally, traditional leaders (P7, P8, P9) shared that Marcus’s father, a former headman, was also chairperson of the CPA. This raises questions about participants’ recollections of Marcus and his father tricking the former chief into signing a permit for honeybush harvesting, and who has legitimate access to and control over local resources. Indeed, if going

through the traditional authority is a custom, Marcus's independent activity could be viewed as an attempt to undermine the traditional authority's control over access to the resource – shedding further light on the uncertainties about legitimate resource management at the local level.

5.3 Benefits distribution in the supply chain

The present section is dedicated to the discussion of aspects related to access and benefits distribution within the honeybush supply chain, as highlighted by participants. Two main perspectives are brought into this analysis: the one of the wild harvesters, which includes their assessment of constraints in the supply chain and how benefits are shared within the industry; and the one of the co-owner of an important company cultivating and processing honeybush in the same province of the case study community.

5.3.1 Wild harvesters and their perspectives

As described above, commercial honeybush is only processed in certain facilities, where communities of wild harvesters sell the harvested plant to processors. All wild harvesters highlighted how one of the major constraints in their ability to benefit from honeybush commercialization is their *lack of access to capital and technology*, which makes processing impossible for them. This affects their ability to *access markets* since, as also underscored by the co-owner of one of the facilities, *“without processing, you can't go to the market”* (P6). This puts the community in a position of dependency on processors to realize any benefit from the plant, with profits being captured further up in the supply chain. In this context, processors can be seen as exercising a form of *access control* in the way the community must engage with them to *maintain* their ability to realize benefit from honeybush – even if this benefit is extremely marginal. This situation leaves the community in a vulnerable position, as their ability to benefit from the plant is dependent on the processors' willingness to continue sourcing from the wild. Indeed, as will be explained in section 5.3.2, it should not be assumed that processors will always remain open to wild harvesting.

With regard to their position in the supply chain, one of the wild harvesters complained: *“they (processors) are buying the honeybush for next to nothing and they are selling it for a lot more”* (P1). The lack of involvement of wild harvesters in any further step of the supply chain affects the profits they can realize within this landscape – which are marginal. This situation comes with great dissatisfaction on the wild harvesters' part, with all of them complaining about the lack of recognition in the industry for their work with and knowledge of the plant. They feel undervalued because other people are selling a resource they first discovered and

used. In the words of a headwoman: “*we do the actual work and they get the credit*” (P8) – which is also only partially true since the physical work is done by the pickers who are engaged as laborers for harvesting. In the words of another wild harvester, “*while other people profit on the resource, local people are suffering*” (P3). This man further explained why the lack of recognition of communities of traditional knowledge holders is a “*sore point*” for him: his people have all the knowledge, history, and background of honeybush harvesting, but they are not the ones benefitting from its commercialization. Another participant, laborer in a processing facility, shared why this topic is, in her words, “*a tragic one*” (P4). She, like the other participants, recalls her profound ties with the plant. She remembers being a child and being taught by her father how to harvest the plant in the wild, and process and brew it at home. She explains that she has worked with honeybush her whole life. In her young life, she was harvesting and processing the plant for household consumption. Later, she became a worker in one of the processing facilities in the Western Cape Province. She spent eighteen years working there, sharing her expertise on the plant and its use. During the interview, she expressed her profound frustration with the lack of recognition from the company owners for the help she provided through her knowledge of harvesting and processing honeybush.

5.3.2 The side of the industry

On the side of the industry, one interview was conducted with the co-owner of an important company that cultivates and processes honeybush in the Western Cape Province. He shared the story of how he got involved in the commercialization of honeybush. From the beginning of the project, he and his partners decided that they could not rely on the wild-harvested resource. Still today, he would rather stop sourcing from the wild. He explained that between 2017 and 2019, when the demand for honeybush was high, was the only time he worked more intensively with wild harvesters – to meet market demand. He described sourcing the plant from wild harvesters as a “*shot in the dark*” (P6). This is because, from a factory perspective, a certain degree of production planning is necessary. Nevertheless, at the moment, this is not possible when sourcing from wild harvesters since there is uncertainty about how much honeybush they harvest and when. Hence, the problem appears to be connected to the inconsistency in the supply of the wild-harvested resource. Despite this, the participant shared that he is still sourcing from the wild for one main reason, which is that customers prefer the species *Intermedia*, which grows in the wild. Indeed, when the tea’s popularity began to rise, a lot of supply was coming from the wild and customers got used to this species, which, in the participant’s words, “*is the best species for a cup of tea*” (P6). Nowadays, customers are still requesting to have as much of it as possible in their tea blends, pointing to the market potential of the wild-harvested plant. Nevertheless, as seen

above, the people directly involved with wild harvesting and working with the *Intermedia* species are not the ones mainly benefitting from it.

5.4 The biodiversity-based economy

As explored in the background chapter of this thesis, in South Africa, the utilization of biological resources for commercial purposes is regulated by the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2004) and by the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (DEA 2016). In line with the CBD, the Act and the related Strategy aim at the sustainable use of biological resources, their conservation, and an equitable share of the profits coming from these activities.

Within the NBES (DEA 2016), two main subsectors of the biodiversity economy are recognized to have great potential for economic and rural development, local job creation, and conservation objectives: the wildlife sector and the bioprospecting one. The bioprospecting sector – which includes the commercial use of biological resources, called biotrade – includes the commercial use of *Cyclopia spp.* According to the DEA (2016), within the NBES, the enhancement of biotrade has great potential in helping achieve rural development and poverty reduction objectives, and including marginalized communities in the commercial use of biological resources. Nevertheless, within the NBES itself, it is recognized how “*while many biodiversity businesses are well established and profitable in South Africa, marginalized individuals and communities which are currently benefitting from the biodiversity economy are limited*” (DEA 2016:3). This is further confirmed by the findings of this study, with wild harvesters complaining about the unequal distribution of benefits within the honeybush industry. To remedy this unequal participation, two main measures are proposed in the strategy: public-private partnerships as a way of boosting local engagement in the biodiversity economy, and ABS agreements as a way of addressing the important role of traditional knowledge in the development of the sector, based on a principle of equitable benefit sharing.

With regard to the first point, the strategy emphasizes partnerships between the state, private sector, and communities, as a way of realizing the potential of the bioprospecting sector, aiming to contribute to local job creation and rural development (DEA 2016). This concept was echoed during interviews with Zoar’s traditional leaders, who discussed the possibility of designing and presenting a plan to the government and private actors to secure funding to implement projects locally – like building a processing facility. While details about this plan were scarce, the leaders emphasized that it must outline a comprehensive strategy for utilizing the funding. They also indicated that government assistance hinges on the submission of such a plan. When the former paramount chief was still alive and in charge, the

process of drawing up a plan was initiated, but his death halted progress. Indeed, according to what traditional leaders shared, the paramount chief is the only one with the authority to present a plan to the government. Delays in succession have thus caused delays in the development and presentation of the plan. This has resulted in frustration within the traditional authority, as a headwoman expressed: *“That’s a good plan, a very good plan. But for how long must we wait now?”* (P8). Traditional leaders have high hopes for this plan as they envision this as a significant opportunity for them to enhance their involvement in honeybush tea production, potentially leading to better profits and the creation of much-needed local employment. Some headwomen and headmen (P2, P7, P8, P9) also mentioned a meeting with government representatives and private actors which some of them attended to seek funding. They shared how the meeting did not deliver any results as they lacked a concrete plan to present – relating this delay to the problems experienced with succession. With regard to this meeting, the secretary and former paramount chief’s daughter (P7) explained: *“it was last year. It was for the plan we must submit. But you see, my sister (the one who went to the CPA) stopped everything. She didn’t even want us to go to that meeting. So we went out ourselves with our own transport (...) She was supposed to get somebody to draw up the plan but she stopped it”*. This situation underscores once more the complexities and uncertainties surrounding local resource management. If, as traditional leaders claim, only the paramount chief can present the plan, it appears that the government endorses and legitimizes the traditional authority’s control over local resources and activities – as demonstrated by its willingness to help it secure funding for the realization of local projects. This is confirmed by what has been noticed in an article by the Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance, and Human Rights (Dullah Omar Institute 2023) with regard to the issues arising from the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act of 2019: *“traditional leaders and Khoisan leaders were excited when the TKLA came into force in 2019. They were elated because the Act empowered them as custodians (not owners) of the land to enter into partnerships and agreements on land management matters with municipalities, government departments and the private sector”*. This sheds light, once more, on the uncertainty of local governance structures and the role of traditional authorities vis-à-vis democratic institutions in rural villages.

With regard to the second point, referring to ABS agreements, and as a consequence of the recognition of Khoi and San communities’ traditional knowledge of rooibos and honeybush (DEA 2014), the DEA suggests that individuals or organizations engaged in bioprospecting or biotrade in the rooibos and honeybush sectors should negotiate benefit-sharing agreements with the Khoi or San communities or people (DEA 2014 in Wynberg 2016:42). While in the rooibos industry a benefit and sharing agreement has been signed in 2019, the same has still not happened in the honeybush sector. Nevertheless, prospects of starting

benefit-sharing agreements are being discussed within the honeybush industry. The willingness to negotiate such agreements was shared by the co-owner of a processing facility (P5) and is also addressed in the SAHTA's website, which shares how *"uncertainty around and slow progress with regard to Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) negotiations hinder growth in the industry"* (SAHTA n.d.). Nevertheless, questions arise regarding the role of ABS agreements in addressing social justice and representation issues within the biodiversity economy. Indeed, in the words of a wild harvester (P1), with reference to the rooibos case – which shares a similar history of local use to that of honeybush – *"in the last five years, rooibos has gained royalties, but one must remember how much local people have been exploited. Now, after many years of marketing rooibos, they give a small share of the market to the Khoisan Council, which then shares this between the different tribes. This is unfair because it is the Council that gets the money, they want to make themselves rich first, and they will want to give this money to their own tribes first"* (P1). As it is discussed in the following chapter, problems persist with regard to the representativeness and inclusiveness of local groups and people within these negotiations.

6. Discussion

The present chapter discusses the findings of the research in light of the research questions guiding the study and other literature on the topic.

Addressing the first research question – *what mechanisms shape the community's access to honeybush – thus enabling or constraining its ability to benefit from the resource?* – it became evident after data collection that referring to the community as a homogeneous entity does not mirror the reality of things on the ground, where honeybush-related activities on communal lands are controlled by the traditional authority. In what follows, the term ‘community members’ is used to refer to residents of Zoar who are not part of the traditional authority. The findings reveal that community members are involved in honeybush-related activities only as laborers and become excluded from the local governance of the resource due to how the traditional system is organized, which is not a democratic one. Traditional authorities in South Africa are usually based on consensus, but, as is explained in section 6.1, the lack of participation of community members in data collection hindered the possibility of assessing the existence and extent of such a consensus. Furthermore, findings reveal that community members are also excluded from the benefits resulting from the sale of the harvested plant to processors, with these profits going into a fund used for the activities of the traditional authority. Therefore, the only marginal benefit that community members realize is through selling their labor for the activity of picking the honeybush plant during harvesting season. At this level, the traditional authority plays a form of *access control*, with community members needing to *maintain access* to the resource through the traditional leadership. Furthermore, in this context, access to the resource is mediated by both *authority* and *social identity*, which in turn are intertwined. Here, access through social identity refers to how membership in a community or a group can shape access patterns (Ribot & Peluso 2003). Indeed, membership in the traditional authority is based on Khoi ancestry – only people who are regarded as Khoi form part of the traditional authority – and influences both participation in decision-making regarding honeybush, as well as the type and extent of benefits individuals can realize from its commercialization.

Coming to the second conclusion concerning the first research question, for analytical needs, notwithstanding the differences and inequalities within the community, I will still refer to the community as a whole since I will be discussing

its position vis-à-vis other external actors. The community's access to honeybush and its ability to benefit from it is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Traditional leaders indicated that the community harvests honeybush from their communal lands, making communal *property rights* one of the mechanisms enabling access to this resource. However, as elaborated in the analysis chapter of this work, these rights are weakened by the need to ask neighboring landowners the permission to traverse their private lands to reach the communal areas where honeybush grows- placing the community in a subordinate position to private landowners. The community's ability to benefit from honeybush is further shaped by *access to technology and capital*. Indeed, traditional leaders highlighted that the primary constraint in benefiting from honeybush is the lack of access to these resources – the lack of capital and technology determines the community's impossibility to process the honeybush plant and realize a product, the tea, with it. Furthermore, access to capital and technology is intertwined with *market access*. More specifically, the community only has indirect access to markets, maintained through their relationship with processors. In turn, processors, who are only nine across the Western and Eastern Cape provinces, hold direct access to them. From this perspective, processors can be seen as exercising a form of *access control* to markets. In this context, the traditional authority, which plays a central role in honeybush commercialization, must *maintain its access to markets* through those who control it, that is processors. This results in benefits being distributed further up the supply chain, with wild harvesters realizing only marginal profits from the commercialization of the resource. This scenario underscores the unequal distribution of access to capital, technology, and markets in South Africa and how access to these resources is interconnected with the community's *social identity* – in this case, their coloured identity. Indeed, inequalities in resource access in the country are still shaped by racial identity through the lasting effects of policies and practices of exclusion of colonial and apartheid eras.

Coming to the second research question, - *how do the proposed measures for developing a biodiversity economy in South Africa address issues of inclusion in the trade of biological resources, and what are their prospects for effectively incorporating marginalized communities in the sector?* – as seen in the background chapter of the present study, within the NBES, the DEA (2016) recognizes the development of the rooibos industry as a positive example of how biodiversity-based businesses could be developed in South Africa. With reference to the analysis of findings, where the possibility of developing benefit-sharing agreements within the honeybush industry is discussed, the example of rooibos can be used to assess problems arising from such mechanisms. Indeed, rooibos works as a perfect example of the development of a natural product industry in South Africa – used in cosmetics, slimming preparations, foods, extracts, and flavourants – where accusations of biopiracy have become an important issue in the industry (Wynberg

2023). Together with honeybush, traditional knowledge associated with rooibos has been recognized as connected to the Khoi and San communities of the areas where these species are naturally found (DEA 2014). In 2019, based on such claims to traditional knowledge, a benefit-sharing agreement was negotiated and signed between the South African San Council, the National Khoisan Council, and the rooibos industry. The process of developing such an agreement has been contested for its lack of inclusiveness, especially with regard to people who do not readily identify as indigenous or are not easily identifiable as knowledge holders (Wynberg 2023). Another notable South African case in which biopiracy accusations have taken central stage is the one of *Pelargonium sidoides*, a plant used as a remedy for respiratory tract infections, with its use being connected to the traditional knowledge of rural communities (Van Niekerk & Wynberg 2012). In this case, an ABS agreement was signed in 2010 between two pharmaceutical companies – the German Schwabe and the South African Parceval – and two traditional councils. This is an example of how ABS has enabled a partnership between big pharmaceutical companies and traditional leaders, who might use it as a mode of accumulation (Wynberg 2023). The problem with these agreements is that the difficulty of identifying knowledge holders has brought the industry to negotiate with traditional authorities, who are not democratically elected and might not be widely accepted or representative of all knowledge holders in communities. Additionally, problems persist with regard to the representativeness of local groups and people within these negotiations – with the main problem being that to enter such agreements, communities need to organize into legal entities. As highlighted by Wynberg (2023), this situation assumes that communities are sufficiently organized and capable of developing a legal standing and that those being represented are the rightful claimants. As also demonstrated by the findings of this study, this does not seem to address the complex realities of rural communities, where power struggles and the uncertain role of local authorities persist. This risks further marginalizing those traditional knowledge holders who lack organization and benefiting groups that are more organized than others, leading to potential elite capture (Wynberg 2023). Furthermore, there is also a risk of exacerbating already existing problems under the TKLA with regard to the role of traditional leaders in deciding on local resource management. The result could be the exclusion of knowledge holders who are not easily identifiable or legally organized and do not have close relationships with traditional authorities.

Furthermore, questions arise around the very nature of ABS agreements. Indeed, this kind of approach leaves power relations unchanged and does not enable the development of community-based or -owned businesses in the sector (Wynberg 2023). Indeed, nowadays land and market share are still predominantly in the hands of a few large-scale white agricultural producers (Malgas 2022). Mechanisms like the ABS do not address wider problems that are affecting local communities and

people who hold traditional knowledge of indigenous resources. These issues include a lack of access to capital, technology, and markets, as explored in the findings of this study, as well as inequalities in access to land, education, and employment opportunities (Malgas 2022). Moreover, histories of the use of biological resources in South Africa, as in many other places of the Global South, are characterized by exploitation, oppression, and marginalization (Wynberg 2023). In this context, ABS agreements represent more of a remedy than a way of actively including marginalized groups in the commercial use of biodiversity. As opposed to rooibos, the honeybush industry is still in a development phase, and there might be a chance to address these injustices in different ways. Mechanisms of benefit-sharing can still be valid for the history of dispossession these groups have faced, but they cannot be regarded as a solution to the call for their equitable inclusion in the industry (Wynberg 2017). True inclusion should facilitate active participation in the market, rather than confining these groups to the margins of it with minimal profit shares.

In conclusion, on the one hand, local resource control by traditional authorities and the need for legal organization in negotiations for ABS agreements risk excluding already marginalized groups or individuals from the commercialization of biological resources. On the other hand, mechanisms such as the ABS fail to address systemic inequalities in the access to and distribution of resources and opportunities.

6.1 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The study provided valuable insights into the governance of honeybush harvesting, but several limitations must be acknowledged, which point to areas for further research.

Firstly, the lack of inclusion of community members outside of the traditional authority in data collection represents a significant limitation. By focusing solely on traditional leaders, the study misses out on the perspectives and experiences of those who are not involved in local decision-making processes related to honeybush governance. These voices are key for understanding how local governance arrangements are perceived and how they affect people who lack influence over decisions regarding access to and use of the resource. Future research should include a broader range of community members to capture these diverse viewpoints, particularly those who may be more directly affected by the governance decisions but do not have a say in them.

Secondly, the absence of interviews with CapeNature, a key player in natural resource governance in the Western Cape, is another notable limitation. As mentioned in the methodology of this study, difficulties in communication with the agency during data collection made it impossible to secure an interview. However,

in the later stages of this research, a representative from CapeNature revealed that the community also harvests honeybush on privately owned lands, with a specific individual inside the community, Marcus, overseeing the activity. While the study's findings regarding subordination to private landowners and the position of wild harvesters in the supply chain remain valid for harvesting on privately owned lands, this new information uncovers further complexities in local governance that were not analyzed in this thesis. Indeed, this dynamic might explain the competition for succession between the figures of Aidan and Marcus and suggest a dual system of governance that merits closer examination. Future research should investigate the implications of these two different governance arrangements for resource access within the community and legitimacy within local governance structures. Furthermore, the lack of involvement of CapeNature in data collection resulted in uncertainties regarding their role and relationship with local actors concerning the issuance of permits – a topic that needs further investigation in future research.

Thirdly, the lack of existing research on the governance structures of Khoi and San communities presented a significant challenge in this study. Understanding the traditional governance systems of these communities and how they intersect with state authorities is crucial for a thorough analysis of local resource governance. However, the absence of comprehensive studies on this topic hindered a deeper exploration of how these traditional systems operate and their role in the broader natural resource governance landscape. Future research should focus on the traditional governance systems of the Khoi and San people – highlighting differences and similarities with other traditional systems in South Africa – and their interaction with state institutions, with a focus on their role in local resource management. This is particularly important in the context of resource governance in rural villages across South Africa, where the coexistence of traditional authorities and democratic institutions can lead to complex and sometimes conflicting governance arrangements, as seen in the findings of this study.

In conclusion, addressing these limitations in future research will be essential for gaining a more holistic understanding of how honeybush governance ties into broader issues related to the role of traditional authorities vis-à-vis democratic ones in natural resource governance in South Africa.

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Popular science summary

Honeybush, a plant native to South Africa, has gained international popularity in the past decades for its health benefits, especially as a tea. However, the commercialization of honeybush has brought significant challenges for the local communities traditionally involved in its wild harvesting and use as a tea.

This study focuses on one such community, located in the Western Cape province of the country, and explores how the local governance of honeybush affects the people who rely on it. In this area, traditional leaders – who exist alongside state authorities in many rural villages of South Africa – control access to and benefits from honeybush harvesting. This results in most community members only realizing marginal benefits from the plant's commercialization, through their work as laborers during harvesting season. The study also highlights broader issues, such as the community's limited access to the resources needed to fully participate in and benefit from the commercialization of the tea. These challenges are rooted in the legacies of the country's colonial and apartheid past, and their effects on unequal access to resources. Furthermore, within the community, competition between the traditional authority and democratic institutions has highlighted the uncertain role and legitimacy of traditional leaders in the local governance of natural resources.

Through a commitment to developing a biodiversity economy based on the principles of equitable access to biological resources and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their commercial use, the government aims to include these communities through the realization of access and benefit-sharing agreements. However, these mechanisms fail to address deeply rooted inequalities and have been doubted for their lack of inclusivity and representativeness. One challenge lies in the way these agreements are negotiated and implemented. Indeed, the process often favors more organized groups, such as traditional authorities, while communities or individuals who lack the resources and recognition remain excluded. Additionally, these agreements fail to address systemic issues affecting these communities, such as lack of land ownership and lack of access to technology and capital.

To create an inclusive and equitable biodiversity economy, historical injustices must be addressed and the empowerment of local communities should be realized through equitable access to resources and decision-making arenas.

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