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Analysing the gender equality discourse in Austrian agriculture applying a feminist political ecology lens

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Abstract

Even though gender equality has gained increasing attention in Austrian agricultural politics over the past decades, the agricultural sector remains a male-dominated sphere. Gender disparities are reflected, among other aspects, in underrepresentation of women in agricultural organisations, low levels of female farm ownership as well as unequal division of unpaid care work. Language is a powerful tool for communicating ideologies, beliefs and values. To examine how language is used to address or maintain power structures, this study applies critical discourse analysis and uses a feminist political ecology lens. In particular it examines how the discourse on gender equality influences, and is influenced by, unequal gendered power relations in the Austrian agricultural sector.

For the critical discourse analysis, documents of two Austrian farmer organisations were examined that actively promote women in agriculture: ARGE Österreichische Bäuerinnen and ÖBV Österreichische Berg- und Kleinbäuer_innen Vereinigung. Texts analysed include press statements, chartas, manifestos, position papers and letters to political representatives. These public documents were chosen based on their outward orientation to communicate the organisations' political viewpoints and demands. The timeframe of analysis is 2016 to 2024. This critical discourse analysis serves to explore how the two organisations conceptualise gender equality and how they seek to support the transition to a more gender-equal agricultural sector in Austria. Preliminary findings indicate that the ÖBV understands gender equality as a wider and more inclusive concept by also integrating an intersectionality perspective, taking into account other social categories besides gender, and queer ecologies. Furthermore, ÖBV makes use of gender-sensitive language in all their internal and public documents. The ARGE, on the other hand, has a more conservative conceptualisation of gender equality. This is revealed, for example, by their focus on the gender binary of male and female.

If gender equality is taken seriously at all levels – the political level, public discourse, farmers' associations, farm and household level - and grounded in a feminist political ecology approach, this can help to address and overcome gender inequalities in the agricultural sector in Austria in the future.

Keywords: Agricultural politics, critical discourse analysis