TÍTULO

"I STAND HERE. I WILL NOT MOVE." QUEER FARMERS' LIVES IN AUSTRIA. A FIRST EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS

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Queer farmers' lives in Austria
A first exploratory analysis

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** We are queer, we are here, get used to it!*

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Máster en Agroecología: un Enfoque para la Sustentabilidad Rural
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ABSTRACT

Queer individuals have always lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture, despite their historical invisibility. The state of international research indicates that the situation of queer people in agriculture is especially challenging, as they work in a particularly heteronormative and patriarchal field and live in predominantly rural areas, where traditional and conservative values prevail more strongly. In Austria, there has not yet been any research on queer farmers or queer people in rural areas in general. This master thesis contributes to closing this research gap by examining the realities of life for queer farmers in Austria, focussing in particular on the rural environment. The aim of the research is to find out how queer people perceive their role as farmers and agricultural practices, what specific challenges they have to overcome and whether they are involved in communities and networks. To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with queer farmers and analysed using qualitative content analysis.

The results of this explorative, empirical research show that queer farmers develop counter-hegemonic farming models that focus on innovative and sustainable practices. Those practices often go beyond organic farming and tend to reflect agroecological approaches. It is striking that the female* participants experience everyday sexism more frequently than queerphobia, which is why feminist issues come to the fore, while discrimination based on queerness and queer feminism play a subordinate role in their rural context. In addition, queer farmers surveyed in Austria live out their identity in spatially separate communities: they experience themselves either as queer or as farmers, but not at the same time.

This work provides a first comprehensive insight into the diverse realities of queer farmers in Austria and makes it clear that these are by no means monolithic, but rather multi-layered. Future research could investigate what concrete opportunities arise from the perspectives and practices of queer farmers for Austrian agriculture and rural areas and which framework conditions are needed to promote these developments. Queer farmers could contribute to sustainable solutions in both areas.

Keywords: queer farmers, LGBTQ+ farming, queer agroecology, identity split, rural diversity

RESUMEN

Las personas queer siempre han vivido en zonas rurales y han trabajado en la agricultura, a pesar de su invisibilidad histórica. El estado de la investigación internacional indica que la situación de las personas queer en la agricultura es especialmente difícil, ya que trabajan en un ámbito particularmente heteronormativo y patriarcal y viven en zonas predominantemente rurales, donde los valores tradicionales y conservadores prevalecen con más fuerza. En Austria aún no se ha realizado ninguna investigación sobre los campesinos queer o las personas queer en las zonas rurales en general. Esta tesis de máster contribuye a colmar esta laguna investigadora al examinar las realidades de los campesinos queer en Austria, centrándose en particular en el mundo rural. El objetivo de la investigación es averiguar cómo perciben las personas queer su papel como agricultores y las prácticas agrícolas, qué retos específicos tienen que superar y si participan en comunidades y redes. Para responder a estas preguntas, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con campesinos queer que se analizaron mediante análisis de contenido cualitativo.

Los resultados de esta investigación exploratoria y empírica muestran que los campesinos queer desarrollan modelos agrícolas contrahegemónicos que se centran en prácticas innovadoras y sostenibles. Estas prácticas a menudo van más allá de la agricultura ecológica y tienden a reflejar enfoques agroecológicos. Resulta sorprendente que las mujeres* participantes experimenten el sexismo cotidiano con más frecuencia que la queerfobia, por lo que las cuestiones feministas pasan a un primer plano, mientras que la discriminación basada en la queerness y el feminismo queer desempeñan un papel subordinado en su contexto rural. Además, los campesinos queer encuestados en Austria viven su identidad en comunidades separadas espacialmente: se experimentan a sí mismos como queer o como campesinos, pero no al mismo tiempo.

Este trabajo ofrece una primera visión global de las diversas realidades de los campesinos queer en Austria y deja claro que no son en absoluto monolíticas, sino que tienen múltiples facetas. En futuras investigaciones se podría estudiar qué oportunidades concretas surgen de las perspectivas y prácticas de los campesinos queer para la agricultura y las zonas rurales austriacas y qué condiciones marco son necesarias para promover estos avances. Los campesinos queer podrían contribuir a soluciones sostenibles en ambos ámbitos.

Palabras clave: campesinos queer, agricultura LGBT+, agroecología queer, escisión identitaria, diversidad rural

Cover Photo: Rural Pride 2024 in Bad Ischl, Austria.
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Declaration of Originality

I, Irene Fink, hereby declare that this thesis, titled "I stand here, I will not move. Queer farmers' lives in Austria. A first exploratory analysis." is my own original work. All sources of information and data utilized in this thesis are properly cited, and due credit has been given to all previous research and publications referenced herein.

I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted elsewhere in any form for the award of any other degree or qualification. I also affirm that this work has been produced in accordance with the academic and ethical guidelines of Universidad Internacional de Andalucía.

Any assistance or external resources that have contributed to this work are clearly acknowledged.

AI Disclaimer

For the purpose of improving language accuracy and ensuring the clarity of translations from non-English sources, I utilized DeepL, an AI-powered language tool. This software was used to assist in translating specific sections of text and refining the grammatical correctness of the thesis. Despite this assistance, the intellectual content, research, and analysis presented are entirely my own work.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSA	Community-Supported Agriculture
ELAN	Emanzipatorisches Landwirtschaftsnetzwerk (Emancipatory Agriculture Network)
LWK	Landwirtschaftskammer (Chamber of Agriculture)
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and other non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities
NEL	Netzwerk Existenzgründung in der Landwirtschaft (Network for Starting a Livelihood in Agriculture)
ÖPUL	Österreichisches Programm für umweltgerechte Landwirtschaft (Austrian Programme for Environmentally Just Agriculture)
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party)
WOOF	Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms

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1 INTRODUCTION

Agricultural and food systems worldwide, including in Austria, face multiple crises: reliance on volatile world market prices, the decline of small farms, the rise of industrial agriculture, and the ongoing climate emergency exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions from farming. These challenges demand a transformation towards an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable agricultural system. (Bürgi Bonanomi, 2014; Gliessman, 2018; Groier et al., 2018; Forster, 2019).

Agriculture in Austria, as in most countries in the Western world, is dominated by a heteronormative, masculine view (Peter et al., 2000; Park et al., 2015; Sachs et al., 2021). Research on masculinity in sustainable agriculture has shown that traditional views of masculinity, which rely on strict gender roles, often obstruct the openness to change required for the sustainable transformation of the agricultural system (Peter et al., 2000). Food production is closely connected to 'nature' and what are considered 'natural conditions'. This connection often reinforces a societal division based on a binary gender model (woman and man), where tasks and roles are pre-determined according to an individual's biological sex. Even progressive feminist perspectives within the food sovereignty movement tend to essentialize gender roles in agriculture, frequently reinforcing a binary understanding of gender (Gioia, 2019). Patriarchal and capitalist power dynamics, combined with the existing sexual division of labour and 'gender-blind' agricultural policies, are key factors driving gender inequalities, discrimination, and the marginalization of women and queer individuals. This thesis uses the term 'queer' to describe a deviation from heterosexual and cisgender norms. It is used to describe individuals or groups whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity differs from heterosexuality or cisgender identities.

Further, even sustainable agriculture movements still focus on the need for heterosexual relationships and consider marriages as fundamental prerequisite (Leslie, 2017; Von Redecker & Gioia, 2018). Heteronormativity and the image of the 'family farm' impede queer farmers' visibility (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b; Leslie, 2017). The international food sovereignty movement La Vía Campesina only recently began to address the issue (LVC, 2017). Even there, a queer perspective on agriculture nevertheless remains a niche topic (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018). It cannot be assumed across the board that queer farmers are always innovating in new ways, yet some studies have been able to confirm this phenomenon (Dentzman et al., 2021; Straus, 2022). Historically, it has also been shown that - due to marginalization - the queer community has often organized collectively and revitalized urban spaces. Similar developments are true in agriculture (Straus, 2022).

Queer life has existed in rural areas and in agriculture for as long as there have been people (Hoffelmeyer, 2021a; Saxena, 2021). Discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation is a

persistent issue in rural areas, particularly within agriculture. The absence of data on queer people in Austria's rural areas indicates that this group, particularly queer female farmers, is not acknowledged in either research or political discourse. Their invisibility is also likely to restrict their capacity to engage with policy-making processes towards the goal of a non-discriminatory and equal society. A pan-European study on discrimination against the LGBTQ+[1] community (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2020) indicates that significant progress is still required to achieve a society free from such prejudice. In order to address the situation of these individuals, it is necessary to have a sound knowledge base. Consequently, this absence has resulted in the marginal formal agricultural support for queer individuals in the sector (Hoffelmeyer, 2021a). If a society wants to impede rural and agricultural exodus it is indispensable to foster open and diverse rural communities. Conversely, social diversity is an essential driver of innovation and positive development processes (Oedl-Wieser, 2009). However, for these processes to occur, regions must also be prepared (Fidlschuster et al., 2016).

Agriculture in Austria needs new perspectives: Practical examples, initiatives, and academic literature from the United States show that the queer movement is capable of breaking down dominant heteronormative narratives in rural areas and agriculture and is bringing innovative practices and thinking to agriculture. A queer, intersectional perspective on agriculture may therefore be able to tear down and challenge the current, rigid system based on heteronormative and hegemonic values (Barrington, 2011; Hoffelmeyer, 2021a; Hoffelmeyer, 2021b; Leslie, 2017; Leslie et al., 2019; Saxena, 2021; Straus, 2022). Building upon that body of recent international literature that can be subsumed under a 'queer agroecological approach' (Mejía-Duwan & Hoffelmeyer, 2024), the aim of this research is to contribute to closing the research gap by providing first insights into the lives of queer farmers in Austria.

This thesis explores the lives and experiences of queer farmers in Austria, a group that remains largely invisible in both agricultural and queer studies. By examining their perspectives, challenges, and community involvement, this research aims to address a significant visibility gap and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of sustainable agriculture.

To address this research gap, the following research questions will guide the study:

What is the current situation of queer people in agriculture in Austria?

(1) What is their perspective on farming and their role as farmers?
(2) What specific challenges do queer farmers in Austria encounter?
(3) To what extent do queer Austrian farmers feel part of communities or networks?

[1] LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and other non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities.

This thesis aims to provide an initial exploration of the experiences of queer farmers in Austria, highlighting their perspectives, challenges, and community involvement. By addressing this research gap, the study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of sustainable agricultural practices and foster diversity within rural areas. Given the ongoing crises in agriculture—including climate change, economic challenges, and social inequalities—this thesis argues that incorporating diverse perspectives, such as those of queer farmers, is essential for developing alternative and sustainable 'eco-queer movements' in agriculture (e.g. agroecology) and liveable rural communities for all (Sbicca, 2012). Understanding the experiences of queer farmers in Austria is crucial not only for expanding the academic discourse in both agricultural studies and Queer Theory but also for informing more inclusive policy-making that ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities within the agricultural sector.

In order to adequately address the research question, the thesis is structured as follows:
In the chapter on the research context, I provide an overview of agriculture in Austria in general and the role of organic farming in particular. Powerful actors in the field, such as the ÖVP party and its agricultural sub-organisations, are placed in context. The following sections provide an insight into gender research in rural areas, highlighting feminist research on women on the one hand and the role of masculinity in the rural environment on the other. I further discuss the lack of data on queer people in Austria and present the international state of research on the topic, which is so far mainly located in the USA and deals mainly with queer farmers in alternative, sustainable types of agriculture.

The third chapter deals with the theoretical background of this thesis and explains concepts and lenses such as 'Queer Theory', 'queer (agro-) ecology' and 'intersectionality', which are used in the discussion. An introduction to agroecology is also provided. In the context of sustainable agriculture in Austria, organic farming and certification play a predominant role (BML, 2023), but there is a limited understanding of holistically sustainable and counter-hegemonic approaches to the transformation of agri-food systems, such as agroecology (Brumer et al., 2023). This embedding is therefore particularly relevant for discussing the possible roles of queer women farmers in the debate on sustainable agriculture of the future, and how 'eco-queer movements' (Sbicca, 2012) must be inclusive in order to fully realise their potential for post-capitalist transformation (von Redecker and Gioia, 2018).

With regard to the empirical focus of the thesis, the methodological approach is explained in detail in a further chapter and the researcher's personal position in the research process is reflected upon. Finally, in the fifth chapter of the thesis, I present the results of the qualitative interview study, which was analysed using qualitative content analysis (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

The wide range of exploratory findings is reduced in the discussion to three particularly striking areas. Firstly, the thinking and practice of the interviewees with regard to sustainable agriculture and the extent to which parallels with agroecology can be drawn, despite the Austrian context. Secondly, the conspicuous accumulation of everyday sexism experienced by participants read as female. And finally, the 'identity split' they go through, that they are either 'queer' or 'a farmer' depending on the community, but not both facets of their identity in the same space. This will also be discussed in the context of sustainable agriculture, using agroecology as an example, and how this can be successfully organized as an inclusive 'eco-queer movement' (Sbicca, 2012). The discussion will take place against the backdrop of the theoretical concepts mentioned above, but in particular will contrast and engage with international research contributions in the field of 'queer agroecologies' (Mejia-Duwan & Hoffelmeyer, 2024). Finally, this thesis looks at research perspectives and discusses possible new topics, such as the contributions of queer farmers to the sustainable transformation of agri-food systems or to diversity and the promotion of innovation in rural areas.

Growing up on the countryside, I developed a deep passion for food and its production. Later, as I confronted my own queer identity, I began to question what it meant to be both queer and a farmer in rural Austria—a topic that seemed invisible in both academic and public discourse. Until then these people and their farms had been invisible to me, and I started to question why that was. I was convinced that they existed, and I set out to find them. My goal was to learn from them what moves them, why they do what they do and how they do it. By shedding light on the experiences of queer farmers in Austria, this thesis aims to foster a more inclusive dialogue in sustainable agriculture movements, challenge existing heterosexist narratives, and promote the need for queer eco-feminist perspectives.

2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This chapter presents the context of the research and provides an overview of agriculture in Austria and highlights the particularly strong role of organic farming in the country. Furthermore, it introduces influential actors such as the ÖVP and its affiliated organisations. It then situates research on gender in rural studies within a broader historical and theoretical context. Finally, this chapter examines queer experiences in rural contexts, critiques the lack of research in Austria on this topic, and reviews international literature on queer famers and of heteronormativity in family farming.

2.1 An Overview of Austria's Agricultural Landscape

Austrian agriculture is characterised by a large number of small and medium-sized farms, which are often run as family businesses. As reported by the BML (2023), 86% of agricultural holdings in Austria are small-scale family farms, with only 18% of the agricultural land managed by farms with more than 100 hectares. The middle range is comprised of farms between 20 and 100 hectares, which collectively manage approximately 57% of the land. This structure has developed historically and is still a characteristic of the Austrian agricultural landscape today.

In terms of land use, forestry dominates with 49% of the area, while agricultural land accounts for 38%. Agriculture in Austria has a small-scale structure, but there is a trend towards larger farms: The average agricultural area increased from 18.8 hectares in 2010 to 23.6 hectares in 2020 (BML, 2023). According to the 2020 agricultural structure survey, there were 154,953 agricultural and forestry holdings in Austria, a decrease of 11% compared to the previous decade. While the size of farms has grown steadily, there has been a downward trend since 1960, with an overall reduction in the number of farms of more than 60% (*Grüner Bericht 2023*, 2023). The results of the "grow or die" developments are recognisable here and it is evident that Austria is struggling structurally with the exodus of farms and a general rural exodus.

In comparison to other European countries, Austria exhibits one of the highest proportions of female farm managers, particularly in conjunction with some southern European countries, which lies at 35% (BML, 2023). The prevalence of part-time farms (57 %) in Austria often results in only one person working on the farm during the day, typically the woman, while the man pursues a non-agricultural occupation. In contrast, in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, it is mainly women who engage in off-farm activities to contribute to the household income. These differences reflect the ongoing transformation of family farms (Oedl-Wieser & Wiesinger, 2010).

In 2020 95% of the holdings were family-run (*Agriculture statistics*, 2023), with 4 out of 5 employees

being family members (BML, 2023). In the past, the farmer was typically responsible for the management and external representation of the farm, while the farmer's wife was in charge of the family and internal economy. However, she was also frequently involved in all productive areas of the farm when necessary. In recent decades, economic and social changes have led to a diversification of working and living arrangements on family farms, with other family members increasingly providing support to the farming couple (Oedl-Wieser & Wiesinger, 2010).

2.2 Naturally Organic?

Organic farming in Austria has a long and rich history, with its roots in the 1920s when Rudolf Steiner established biodynamic agriculture and anthroposophy in Germany and Austria (Groier & Gleirscher, 2005). As early as 1925 there were already a few biodynamic farms in Carinthia in the south of the country (Steinwidder & Walter, 2016). At the same time, Mina Hofstetter was doing pioneering ecofeminist work in organic farming in Switzerland that had gone unnoticed for a long time (Moser, 2024).

In the following decades, the work of Hans Peter Rusch and Hans Müller in Switzerland further contributed to the development of organic-biological agriculture, focusing on a scientific approach and the protection of homelands and farmers. During the pioneering phase until the 1960s, a small network of organic farmers laid the foundations for the future growth and establishment of organic farming. This was followed by a phase of qualitative growth in the 1970s and 1980s, where important associations were formed, media coverage increased, and research into organic farming intensified. This phase was crucial for the professionalization and widespread adoption of organic farming practices (Groier & Gleirscher, 2005).

The 1990s witnessed the first boom phase in organic farming in Austria, driven by the introduction of state subsidies that made the transition to organic methods financially attractive for many farmers. Consequently, there was a significant increase in the number of organic farms during this period. The mid-1990s marked the second boom phase, with Austria joining the European Union and implementing the Austrian agri-environmental programme ÖPUL. This phase also saw the entry of supermarket chains into the organic market, leading to higher sales and increased awareness of organic products. Towards the end of the 1990s, organic farming entered a phase of stagnation and consolidation. This phase was characterized by a decrease in the number of organic farms due to market imbalances and a shift towards less ideological approaches among farmers and consumers. However, it also witnessed institutional professionalization, the implementation of organic action programs, and the functionalization and conventionalization of the organic market (Groier & Gleirscher, 2005).

Since 2000, the proportion of organic land had risen by a third and was expected to be 27% in 2022, accounting for 23% of farms. In comparison, 9.9% of agricultural land across the EU is farmed organically (Ladinig et al., 2023). In an international comparison, Austrian farms are relatively small, which can be attributed to the prevailing topographical conditions in Austria, characterized by a significant proportion of mountainous terrain. In principle, the choice of farming method—whether organic or non-organic—is not contingent on the scale of production. Both organic and non-organic food can be produced on a small or large scale. The mean size of a conventional farm in Austria is 20.5 hectares, while organic farms are, on average, 23.6 hectares in size (Ladinig et al., 2023). In 2022, almost 40% of orchards, about one third of permanent grassland and more than one fifth of arable land in Austria were already organically farmed. The share of organic vineyards is almost 22%. The average share of organic cattle is 23%, but more than 42% of suckler cows and only 23% of dairy cows are organic. The proportion of organic sheep is 30% and 53% of goats. For broilers, 28% are organic, 56% for ducks and 27% for geese (*Grüner Bericht 2023*, 2023).

The combination of traditional farming structures, early environmental commitment, economic incentives, political support and a high level of environmental awareness has led to the widespread adoption of organic farming in Austria. These factors have created a favourable framework in which organic farming has been able to develop and become firmly established (Schermer, 2006; Groier, 2013). However, this growth and its positive aspects (increased demand, falling consumer prices, greening of agriculture) also led to conventionalization of the sector and the associated potential dangers, which Groier (2007) warned of early on. Groier (2007) understands conventionalization to mean an adaptation of the value chain and process quality to conventional production. This affects all levels such as behavior, practices, structures and mechanisms, which can have both positive and negative effects (Groier, 2007). This ongoing development is known as the transformation phase. Its causes are seen in current economic and social conditions on the one hand, and in the dominant position of the food retail sector and shortcomings in the organic guidelines on the other (Groier, 2013).

The risks associated with these conventionalization trends affect all levels of the sector. In production, for example, this means rationalization (intensification of cultivation, specialization in fewer branches of farming, narrowing of crop rotations, changes in production technology with regard to ecology and quality, etc.), institutionalization at the political level and market integration at the economic level. This results in conflicting goals that dilute the values of organic farming and thus drive the risks of conventionalization (Groier, 2013). Schermer (2006) goes even further and concludes:

> *Over time, the shift in agricultural policy from production to protection, and of the market from public to private regulation, have led to a growing instrumentalization of the Austrian organic movement and that has weakened the influence of producers both on marketing*

> *and farm management. The organic movement set out to create an alternative food system, to that of corporate production and mass consumption, but ultimately those same market structures have enveloped the organic sector.* (Schermer, 2006, p. 231)

In order to ensure the long-term safeguarding and further development of organic farming, it is important to develop an awareness of the problem and actively manage this transformation process. Long-term planning and implementation concepts are required that are supported by all stakeholders in the organic sector. Without these measures and a proactive approach, organic farming could come under pressure from ecological initiatives in conventional agriculture (Groier, 2013).

It is critical to consider that organic farming can have a great variety of meanings, in a sense of different standards in certification. The EU-organic label only covers common basic requirements regarding management practices (Migliorini & Wezel, 2017), whereas in Austria other country-wide labels are frequent and their standards are more compelling, for example *Bio Austria* (Groier, 2013). Almost two thirds of organic farms are voluntarily part of an organic label association in addition to the EU-organic certification. This implies that they must fulfil additional requirements, such as biodiversity services, and that additional controls take place. At the same time the above introduced conventionalization is omnipresent in the sector.

Regarding the orientation of the farms, Groier (2013) divides them into three groups: industrial, traditional, and alternative. 'Organic mass market', 'traditional organic market' and 'alternative marketing models' represent the corresponding differentiations in marketing. This range already shows that organic farming can be interpreted broadly and can be practiced from hegemony to counter-hegemony. However, it is widely recognised that organic farming has evolved from agroecology and that both the principles and practices of organic farming are based on agroecology (Migliorini & Wezel, 2017).

2.3 Fields of Political Power: ÖVP and Bauernbund

The Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) is one of the leading political parties in Austria and stands for Christian-conservative values and pro-business and pro-industry policies. Paradoxically, the ÖVP has a majority of voters in both (agricultural) industry and the farming community, where it is historically anchored. It traditionally has a strong base in rural areas and enjoys the trust of many farmers. Its agricultural policies and programmes are often geared to the needs of this constituency, and identity politics is at the forefront. The aforementioned policies are presented as being in favour of small farmers and organic farming. However, a more detailed examination reveals that they are, in fact, aligned with the interests of large-scale farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole. The ÖVP emphasises the preservation of traditional values and cultural identity. This includes the promotion of customs, regional culture and rural development. For example, supporting and

strengthening the heteronormative nuclear family as the central social unit is an important pillar of ÖVP policy (Kontrast Redaktion, 2024a).

The Farmers' Association - the most powerful interest group - is an important sub-organisation of the ÖVP and represents the interests of farmers within the party and in political discourse. It plays a central role in the formulation and implementation of agricultural policy positions in the interest of the ÖVP (Graber, 2018; Kontrast Redaktion, 2024b). The Landjugend, which represents the largest youth organisation in Austria's rural areas, is also demonstrably close to the ÖVP (Schmid & Graber, 2022). Knowing the positioning and interconnectedness of these organisations is indispensable for the further understanding of the research results.[2]

2.4 Rural Studies: From Women Towards Gender

The realisation that gender is a socially constructed and changeable concept provides the foundation for a critical examination of existing gender relations. By emphasising the constructed nature of gender, the attributions that lead to discrimination against women, for example, can be subjected to critical scrutiny. The concepts of the social construction of gender recognise the reality of the gender binary belief system as the result of historical processes and an ongoing social practice that reproduces these gender relations (Butler, 1990).

For an extended period, the significance of the category 'gender' was overlooked in rural social research. It proved challenging for rural research to adopt gender-theoretical perspectives. However, apart from a few pioneering studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in the fields of rural and agricultural sociology and folklore studies, this has changed significantly, particularly due to the influence of anglophone rural studies (Bryant & Pini, 2011). In recent times, the study of women and later gender issues has become a significant area of focus within rural research. This is evidenced by an increase in the number of research papers published on the topic, a diversification of research topics, and the growing institutionalisation of rural gender studies, particularly within German-speaking research (Oltmanns, 2019).

Oedl-Wieser (2009) outlines the development of rural gender research in Austria, noting a transition from early quantitative studies of farm women's working hours to more critical sociological investigations of gender roles and power dynamics in rural areas. In 1995, research began to shift towards the study of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in regional and rural development, leading to new research topics and a broader focus. Since then, Austrian rural gender research has evolved from a focus on women to a broader gender perspective. This includes regional studies that

[2] In the context of agricultural policy in Austria, it should be mentioned that left-wing farmers‘ organisations, such as ÖBV - La Vía Campesina Austria, are marginal. Accordingly, the political influence of the opponents of the Bauernbund is considered to be low and will therefore not be discussed further in this chapter.

use gender-sensitive databases and interpret results in relation to men. However, the focus on men in research remains limited, similar to the situation in Austria, where specific studies on masculinity in rural contexts are still relatively rare (Oedl-Wieser, 2008).

2.4.1 Women in Focus

In the 1980s and 1990s, rural studies were less radical and hardly concerned with feminist theories, although research on the role of women in agriculture had existed since the 1970s. However, these early works did not have a conscious feminist approach (Little, 2017). Until that decade women were largely invisible in rural research. The focus on the agricultural labour process ignored many social dimensions, especially women's domestic work, which was crucial to the maintenance of farm households. Family structures were often seen as organic and represented by the male head of the family, while social inequalities within the family were overlooked. The women's movement of the 1970s attempted to make visible the importance of women in farm productivity (Oltmanns, 2019).

Early rural gender research focused heavily on the disadvantages faced by women farmers and the impact of modernisation on their lives (Oltmanns, 2019). Analysis increasingly shifted from the individual to the societal level. The integration of feminist perspectives into rural studies has facilitated a more nuanced understanding of unequal gender roles, particularly in domains such as employment, resource access and political participation. A key area of focus has been the examination of the role of women on farms, where their contributions have often been undervalued (Little, 2015). Early women's studies were instrumental in making women visible in rural labour and economic activity, and in introducing a gender perspective into rural studies (Oltmanns, 2019).

Whatmore (1991) highlights the contribution of feminist theory and research to the analysis of gender relations in the political economy of agriculture. She formulates three central points of analysis: First, she sees patriarchy as a specific form of gender relations and as an autonomous social structure that establishes the subordination of women to men through social practices and institutions. Secondly, Whatmore (1991) emphasises the close link between reproduction and production in the subsistence process, with reproduction being a multifaceted process. Third, it describes the family as an ideologically charged structure of kinship and household relations that takes on different forms historically and culturally.

The concept of the conjugal household, based on the monogamous heterosexual couple, is used to characterise kinship and household relations on family farms. Whatmore (1991) argues for a theoretical reconceptualization of the labour process on family farms from a gender perspective. This should make women's subsistence production, as well as household and family reproduction, more visible and valued in the process of agricultural commodity production (Whatmore, 1991).

Since the 1990s, rural gender research has become increasingly theoretical, moving away from traditional approaches to gender roles and the division of labour. This shift in perspective has led to a rejection of the notion that these are objective facts. A pivotal moment in this evolution was the 1994 anthology *Gender and Rurality*, edited by Whatmore et al. This text sought to redefine foundational concepts in order to describe rural ways of life in a manner that recognized women's perspectives as an integral component. However, this work also perpetuated the binary categories of women and men and did not provide space for other gender identities.

A conceptual shift can be identified in the field of rural gender studies. This shift has moved away from theories that regard the categories of 'women' and 'men' as fixed and immutable, towards approaches that understand these categories as constructed through meanings and practices. The practices of gender differentiation and their materialisation in bodies and the environment are of particular importance in this context (Oltmanns, 2019). Little's (2017) research has demonstrated that rural spaces often serve to reinforce traditional and conservative gender roles, thereby supporting patriarchal structures. Subsequent studies concentrated on the heterogeneity of women's and men's experiences in rural settings, encompassing variations based on age, ethnicity, and sexuality. Their research underscored the significance of contextual factors and the necessity of accounting for the complex intertwining of identities.

The 2011 anthology *Gender and Rurality* by Bryant and Pini represents a significant contribution to the field, offering a comprehensive analysis of the coexistence of diverse forms of inequality in rural contexts (Oltmanns, 2019). The authors challenge the conventional categories of 'rural man' and 'rural woman' and examine the interconnections between gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality (Bryant & Pini, 2011).

Furthermore, feminist researchers examined the political engagement of rural women, which was frequently disregarded due to its occurrence outside the conventional political structures. These studies demonstrated that despite their significant contributions to the community and to political activity in rural areas, women often remained invisible (Little, 2015).

2.4.2 Rural Masculinities

Rural areas are seen as male-dominated spheres in which women are marginalised (Bryant & Pini, 2011). Theoretical research on rural gender identity has been influenced by Judith Butler's concept of performativity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) argues that gender is not predetermined but produced through repeated actions, gender is done. This led to a more dynamic understanding of gender and changed the idea that rural gender roles were fixed and known.

Masculinity refers to the collection of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man. The term ‘masculinities’ is used in recognition of the diverse ways in which manhood is expressed and represented, varying across different historical and cultural contexts, as well as among different groups of men within a single society (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2011).

Feminist critiques have long viewed masculinity as the standard against which women are defined as ‘the Other’ (de Beauvoir, 2018). However, scholarly interest in the topic of masculinities has expanded significantly since the 1980s (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2011). More recently, the focus of research has shifted from binary gender in general to masculinity and femininity as performed practices, emphasising the social construction of these categories (Little, 2015).

Connell (2008) proposes a typology of masculinities comprising four categories: ‘hegemonic masculinity’, ‘subordinated masculinities’, ‘complicit masculinities’, and ‘marginalised masculinities’. Connell posits that these masculinities constitute a hierarchical system, wherein ‘hegemonic masculinity’ occupies a dominant position. ‘Subordinated masculinities’ are situated at a lower level on the gender axis, while ‘marginalised masculinities’ are disadvantaged due to intersecting factors related to identity and power. ‘Complicit masculinities’, on the other hand, exist without challenging the patriarchal hierarchy. This framework allows scholars to examine the ways in which diverse masculine practices and identities perpetuate patriarchy and male privilege, as well as to analyse the interactions between various forms of masculinity (Connel, 2008).

The field of rural masculinity studies, like other areas of masculinity-focused research, has its roots in feminist scholarship. In 1995, Brandth was instrumental in integrating emerging theories on men and masculinities into rural studies (Brandth, 1995). Her earlier work (Brandth, 1994) had already demonstrated how the tractor became a powerful symbol of masculinity, effectively marginalising women in farming. Building on these findings, Brandth (1995) conducted an analysis of farming advertisements spanning a decade. She found that rural masculinities were not static. The traditional portrayal of the farmer as a robust, manual labourer was increasingly accompanied by, or evolving into, a more business-oriented masculinity in line with new agricultural technologies. These machines may have freed farmers from physical labour, but they reinforced rather than challenged traditional masculine images of strength and power (Oltmanns, 2019). Brandth (1995) concludes that this shift could signal a redefinition of hegemonic masculinity in response to feminist challenges to dominant farming identities.

Research has shown that rural masculinity is often associated with extreme landscapes and 'heroic masculinity'. Studies have highlighted the link between masculinity and harsh, dangerous nature, with masculinity defined by physical strength and control over nature. This rural masculinity is often seen in opposition to feminine, 'tamed' nature (Little, 2015). Physical strength and the image of the

male body are central to the construction of agrarian masculinity, which simultaneously questions and marginalises the physical suitability of women in agriculture (Oltmanns, 2019).

In recent years, however, research has also looked at non-hegemonic forms of masculinity, including 'gay masculinity'. These studies show that constructions of rural masculinity are more diverse than originally thought. Research recognises that changes in the world of work and social expectations have also led to changes in rural masculinity (Little, 2015).

Butler (1990) notes that gender roles function like laws: They acquire their power only through the unquestioned belief in their identity. These norms should be challenged and broken down for the benefit of all genders.

2.5 Queering the Rural Spheres

In rural and agrarian research, it is essential to capture people's understanding of being queer and rural simultaneously. Queer Theory should not be regarded as peripheral to the comprehension of rural life. On the contrary, it is also the responsibility of queer research to transcend the urban-rural dichotomy and to acknowledge rural areas not merely as a marginal aspect of queer life, but as an equal yet understudied domain.

Although research is increasingly being conducted on marginalised rural lifestyles and alternative forms of gender in rural areas (Kazyak, 2011), the focus of gender research remains predominantly on urban contexts when it comes to non-heteronormative gender constructions (Oltmanns, 2019). However, exceptions such as the work of Bell and Valentine (1995) and Kazyak (2011, 2012) show that rural lifestyles are often still strongly associated with the nuclear family and patriarchal gender roles. Philo (1992) made a significant contribution to the development of *Neglected Rural Geographies* by critiquing the one-sided representation of rural life, which mainly depicts the White, male middle class and thus perpetuates the classic image of rurality. He criticises this for giving the impression that all rural people are *"men in work, earning enough to live on, white and probably English, heterosexual and somehow without sexuality, able in body"* (Philo, 1992, p. 200).

In Just Queer Folks Johnson (2013) challenges the common assumption that sexual non-conformity and rurality are incompatible. He shows that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not *"indigenous to rural areas"* (Johnson, 2013, p. 18), and that homosexuality and gender non-conformity were widespread in rural America in the early 20th century.

Kazyak (2011) examines the reciprocal relationships between place, gender and sexuality, showing that gay couples are more likely to live in cities, while lesbian couples are more likely to remain in

rural areas. Her findings suggest that 'femininity' is more symbolically associated with 'gay sexuality' than with 'rurality'. In contrast, 'masculinity' is associated with both 'rurality' and 'lesbianism' (Kazyak 2011, 2012). This illustrates that rural areas have traditionally been considered a male domain and that the meaning of gender representations varies depending on the geographical context (Oltmanns, 2019).

The following chapters provide an overview and an approximation of queer people in Austria, with a particular focus on rural areas and their lack of data. It also examines existing research on queer farmers internationally, up to the present day. Furthermore, this chapter will introduce the concept of heteronormativity and its intertwining with the family farm, as well as the challenges this poses for queer farmers.

2.5.1 Queerness in Austria and the Countryside

It is evident that queer people exist in all societal spheres, hence in rural areas. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they also exist in agriculture. However, there is currently no quantitative or qualitative data available on queer farmers or queer rural life in Austria.

The general data situation is also scarce, so only a thematic approximation is possible. Estimates in studies assume that 2-10% of the Austrian population is homosexual, around 50% bisexual (WKO, 2023). In the professional sphere, which often coincides with the private sphere in agriculture, a study found that around 20% of queer employees are not out (Schönherr et al., 2019). The results of a study from Germany (Vries et al., 2020) show that particularly few people are out in agriculture and forestry. The relatively low number of queer employees in these sectors also indicates this and suggests that coming out is particularly difficult in certain sectors, making access to these professions more difficult or that they are deliberately avoided (Vries et al., 2020).

A study on queer life in Bavaria (Oldemeier & Wagner, 2021) provides valuable data and insights and also allows conclusions to be drawn about Austria due to structural similarities of the neighbouring area. In terms of living space, it shows that two thirds of queer respondents grew up on the countryside, but half of them later moved to the city. 39% did so for professional reasons, while 37% cited queer offers, community and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity as reasons for moving. Conversely, 14% of participants moved from urban to rural areas. Overall, 38% of the 876 queer respondents live in rural areas. It should also be stressed that in rural areas there is either complete or no coming out, but rarely partial coming out. Another finding is that queer people experience less discrimination in the countryside than in the city. This is due to the fact that fewer respondents are out. When queerness is visible to the outside world, people tend to experience more discrimination in rural areas (Oldemeier & Wagner, 2021). Another aspect worth mentioning is the positive

experiences associated with queerness: acceptance from other queers, an authentic self-image and freedom from social constraints. Oldemeier and Wagner (2021) conclude from their findings that measures for greater acceptance need to be taken in both urban and rural areas, with particular attention to the vulnerability of genderqueer and lesbian people.

The EU-wide study, entitled *A Long Way to Go for LGBTI Equality* (FRA, 2020), also provides results for Austria at the national level. While 55% of respondents are open about their queerness, 39% avoid holding hands with their same-sex partner and a fifth avoid certain places for fear of verbal abuse (FRA, 2020). Those who are trans or intersex result to be particularly vulnerable, with one in five reporting that they have been physically or sexually assaulted, compared to an average of just 10% of respondents. Despite Austria's above-average performance in the study compared to other EU countries, it is evident that significant progress is still needed to achieve an equal society.

The only references to the existence of queer farmers in Austria are to be found outside the academic context. The rare newspaper articles provide examples of gay couples (Steinwender, 2022), more diverse representations of queer ruralness (e.g. of family, living arrangements, farming) and the visibility of other queer identities are missing. However, they also demonstrate the absence of any references to the visibility of queer identities in rural areas. A more recent phenomenon is the increased visibility of Pride parades in rural areas. This was exemplified by the inaugural Pride parade in Bad Ischl, which formed part of the *European Capital of Culture 2024* celebrations and was well received. In an article in a newspaper a gay farmer revealed that he had established the *Gay Farmer Austria* network, citing his awareness of at least 200 gay farmers in Austria (Heute Redaktion, 2021). Currently, there is no inclusive platform for all queer farmers. A relatively new development is that, for the first time in 2024, the Landjugend – closely associated with ÖVP and Bauernbund structures – officially participated in the Vienna Pride (Landjugend, 2024).

2.5.2 Queer Farmers Around the Globe

While more research on queer rural life has gradually developed out of feminist studies in rural studies (Gilley et al., 2016), work on queer farmers worldwide is scarce. Queer studies still entail a focus on urban realities, which is labelled as ‘metronormativity’ (Halberstam, 2005) reproducing a dichotomy of the rural and the urban. Thus, such ‘metronormativity’ entails an understanding of the rural as hostile, backwards and heterosexist whereas the urban is conceived as open and accepting (Halberstam, 2005; Hoffelmeyer, 2021b).

Historically, there is evidence that queer people already existed in agriculture in the early twentieth century (Fellows, 1998; Shah, 2011). There is also evidence of lesbian communities in rural areas of the USA in the 1970s and gay communities in the 1980s (Anahita, 2009). Some were active in local

food production (Anahita, 2009), demonstrating that these groups also had non-urban, rural and agrarian lifestyles.

Locally, recent queer agricultural scholarship is mainly concentrated in the Northwest of the USA and Australia and tends to be predominantly occidental and White (Cramer, 2020; Hoffelmeyer, 2021a, 2021b; Leslie, 2017, 2019; Leslie et al., 2019; Wypler, 2019). In addition, respective research focuses primarily on alternative types of agriculture and largely ignores conventional farming (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b) and queer perspectives on farming from the Global South. Spurlin (2001) traces this back to Queer Theory as being routed in the urban and the Global North, whereas postcolonial studies are a heteronormative discourse. Hence, experiences from the Global South are made invisible until today.

Aguilar Aguilar's (2024) research recently brings along such lacking positionality and focuses on the perspectives and relations of queer people in Mexico regarding agroecology, aiming to create a framework that incorporates queer issues into the agroecological agenda. The study shows that queer people connect with agroecology through aspects such as identity, territory, community, well-being, self-care and the struggle for social justice. Four key themes were identified: empowerment, recognition, freedom and social transformation. In addition, the research highlights four key findings: agroecology is not inherently inclusive, queer people are not a homogeneous group, agroecology can serve as a space for resistance and transformation, and there is a need to move towards a more inclusive agroecology (Aguilar Aguilar, 2024).

The topic has also recently been the subject of discussion within the global peasants' movement *La Vía Campesina*, as evidenced by the publication of a brochure at the European level which presents queer farming personalities and their stories (*Embracing Rural Diversity*, 2021). In Brazil, a group has emerged within the landless workers' movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)* dedicated to addressing the specific concerns of queer individuals within the movement and recognizing that they are out there (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018). The MST is part of La Vía Campesina and considers that this struggle goes hand in hand with the class struggle and against capitalism and seeks to imagine the countryside a diverse and non-violent territory (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018). In Germany, there is the *Emanzipatorisches Landwirtschaftsnetzwerk (ELAN)*, which is open to women and all queer identities except cis men. It fights from a queer-feminist perspective and is used for networking, mutual support, political work and making women and diverse farmers and their struggles visible.

Whereas Duran Gurnsey (2015) focuses on lesbian experiences in agroecological projects in Spain, Cramer (2020) explores the gendered relationships with nature and its emancipatory potential among lesbian farmers in Missouri, USA. Cramer's (2020) results suggest that for lesbian queer

farmers sustainable agriculture can be a welcoming space, supportive in both professional and personal matters. In contrast, Duran Gurnsey (2015) explores how the intersection of female gender and homosexuality hindered the interviewees of being accepted in a rural and agricultural environment.

There is a general lack of research to bring in a more diverse range of queer individuals in the farming sector (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b). There is one single work that engages with the situation of sexually diverse farmworkers in the US (Lizarazo et al., 2017), other research centres on farmers more narrowly. Wypler's (2019) findings suggest that working on non-queer farms as a queer employee might expose them to heterosexism. On the other hand, queer farm owners support having queer employees on their farm.

Research shows that the queerness of the respondents has an impact on access to land and its location (Leslie, 2019). According to Leslie (2019), marriage facilitates access to agricultural land and capital. However, this has only been legal for all couples in the US since 2015 and therefore has a long-term impact on creditworthiness or land tenure (Leslie, 2019). In Austria, marriage for all has been in place only since 2019 and is also associated with privileges. Furthermore, it is argued that for political reasons might not support the idea of inheritance through marriage as it is a concept that continues to discriminate other, non-heteronormative ways of life (Leslie, 2019). Thinking beyond those cases, the question arises on the situation of queer farmers in territories where being queer is an illegality.

Queer participation in agriculture can be discouraged by rural heterosexism, but was specifically experienced within sustainable farming (Leslie, 2017). Leslie (2017) argues that heteronormativity and sexuality are inherent in critical aspects of agriculture (e.g. land acquisition, retention, recruitment) that are needed for a transition towards sustainable food systems. Wypler (2019) examines queer and lesbian farmer networks and finds that they must build their own networks, because traditional farmer support does not algin with their agricultural practices and identities since it is generally by patriarchal and heterosexist structures. Furthermore, to be sustainable those networks have to be constructed outside of conventional farming contexts.

Hoffelmeyer et al. (2023) surveyed US queer farmers and found that discrimination is evident in interpersonal areas such as anticipated prejudice, social isolation, limited training opportunities, and family dynamics. These challenges reflect broader systemic heteropatriarchal oppression in key aspects like farm profitability, land access, health insurance, and affordable housing. Despite these obstacles, queer farmers find support within their own community, with queer farm mentors or peers being especially valuable for their success (Hoffelmeyer et al., 2023). Furthermore, Hoffelmeyer (2021b) who investigated how queer farmers engage in agriculture, points out that is suspected that intra-queer differences at exist, like cisgender privilege for gay men and lesbian women or racial

privilege of White farmers might leverage the pressures of heterosexism.

In Switzerland, Pfammater (2021) conducted a study examining the role of queer farming practices. The research focused on the ways in which these farms engage with and respond to the issue of gender normativity and sought to identify the reasons why queer farmers choose to leave this livelihood. In addition, the research developed a set of policy implications aimed at fostering a more diverse and inclusive rurality. The findings demonstrate that the invisibility of these individuals and practices within institutions and academia limits the discourse on the issue (Pfammater & Jongerden, 2023). The practice of farming can engender the existence of more than two genders, and the enactment of gender roles within the agricultural domain can be queered (Pfammater & Jongerden, 2023).

That farming also can be a safer space – the insides of a farming structure – for queer individuals show the respective example from Switzerland (Pfammater & Jongerden, 2023) and a CSA farm in Portugal (Raj, 2024). Raj's findings (2024) indicate that the CSA supports various forms of empowerment and active participation among its queer members. This is particularly evident due to the influence of queer leadership among producers and the regular gatherings held on queer-owned farmland (Raj, 2024). The analysis identifies three key insights into queer empowerment which contribute to ongoing discussions about recognition politics, queer community involvement, and visibility in rural areas: Firstly, the expression of queerness might be limited to a select rural community. Secondly, collaboration between producers and co-producers can foster mutual queer empowerment. Thirdly, queer leadership in agri-food community initiatives may quietly promote gender and sexual diversity in rural contexts (Raj, 2024).

Since heteronormativity, its resulting heterosexism and the invisibility they cause shape a red thread through recent research (Leslie, 2017, 2019; Leslie et al., 2019; Pfammater, 2021; Wypler, 2019) the following chapter is dedicated to introducing respective terms and their findings. This entails a critical review of the definition of 'family farming', which plays a particular role in (sustainable) agriculture.

2.5.3 Heteronormativity: Family Farms Under the Lens

Mechanisms of Power

Heteronormativity is an important concept in Queer Theory that questions the natural and privileged position of heterosexuality and bisexuality. It serves the systematic reflection of resistance practices against the hegemonic order of sexuality and gender (Wagenknecht, 2007). This concept criticises the common assumption that there are only two opposing genders that are sexually related to each other, as well as the privileges and marginalisation associated with this (Kleiner, 2016). Furthermore, heteronormativity serves to analyse the intertwining of heterosexuality and gender norms

that shape power relations and inequalities in society. It emphasises how heterosexuality appears as a timeless, unchangeable institution and sheds light on the social and cultural mechanisms through which heterosexuality is integrated into concepts such as gender, body, family and nation without being visible as such as part of the social fabric (Kleiner, 2016).

Heteronormativity forces individuals to understand themselves in terms of a gendered and sexually defined identity, with the diversity of identities arranged hierarchically, with heterosexual men and women at the centre of the norm. It influences the production of knowledge, structures discourse, guides political action and determines the distribution of resources. Further, heteronormativity functions as a criterion in the division of labour and is embedded in all social relations. Racism and class relations are also shaped by heteronormative ideas and in turn influence the cultural images and practical manifestations of the heteronormative gender binary (Wagenknecht, 2007).

Under the assumption of heteronormativity, it is assumed that all people are heterosexually orientated and strive for corresponding lifestyles, Bock and Shortall (2017) conclude. Nevertheless, heteronormativity is not defined uniformly; rather, historically characterised norms exist in every society, which are subject to change over time and can adapt to the respective social conditions.

Heterosexism is the discrimination against people with non-heterosexual orientations and is based on the idea that heterosexuality is ‚naturally' superior. The term originated in the 1970s within the Anglo-American lesbian and gay movement to highlight the oppression of homosexual people and the homophobia prevalent in heterocentric societies. Heterosexism is an ideological system that rejects all non-heterosexual identities and defines and promotes heterosexuality as the only ‚normal' form of sexuality (Kroll, 2002). Since the 1990s, Butler's (1990) theories of heterosexual standardisation have dominated the debate. Today, heterosexism is understood as the regulation of all sexualities and identities that deviate from heteronormativity and is attacked by queer politics and theories. The term highlights the systematic oppression of non-heteronormative sexualities (Kroll, 2002).

Who and What is That Family on the Farm?

The family farm can be seen a stencil for heteronormative, binary structures, which becomes clearer when critically reviewing its definitions. In Austria, 93% of farms are family farms, which is just above the EU average of 91% (*Agriculture statistics*, 2023). Eurostat refers to a definition of the *Food and Agriculture Organisation* (FAO): *"[A]ny farm under family management where 50% or more of the agricultural labour force was provided by family workers. In other words, a family farm is operated by a household, where the labour supplied is largely from that household"* (*Agriculture Statistics*, 2023, para. 3). This raises a number of questions, as the relationship between the people is not discussed further. Apparently, there does not have to be a romantic or blood relationship between people. Consequently, does the FAO see interns or apprentices who also live on the farm as

family members? Or can it be assumed that no such consideration was given and that the nature of relationships within the household was considered implicit and therefore not further defined?

A search for an official FAO definition yields the following:

> *Family Farming is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour, both women's and men's. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions.* (FAO, 2014, p. 4)

This paints a binary, heterosexual picture of the family. Moreover, this definition suggests that there are only two genders and renders all other identities invisible. The aforementioned aspect of reproduction raises the question of whether this is meant in a biologistic sense. However, several sources (FOA, 2014; Garner & De La O Campus, 2014; Vogel & Wiesinger, 2003) also point out that family farms cannot be defined uniformly and that there are countless definitions, depending on the respective local and cultural context, authors and political motivation.

Their Interwoven Nature

Family farms and heterosexuality are deeply intertwined in cultural, economic, and social ways. In agriculture, the professional and private spheres usually coincide: the family farm. The identity of family farms is often tied to cultural narratives that valorise heterosexuality and traditional family values. These narratives uphold the farm as a bastion of these values, linking the success and sustainability of the farm to the maintenance of heterosexual family structures (Leslie, 2017). Stories, media representations, and folklore about farming frequently emphasize the role of the heterosexual family, reinforcing the connection between family farms and heterosexuality. The family farm is also the favoured model as it is intended to ensure population growth in rural areas (Hoffelmeyer, 2021a).

Hoffelmeyer (2021b) criticises the fact that the image of the family farm is automatically equated with sustainability, pretending that the heteronormative nuclear family would take better care of its land and nature. The method of production or the size of the farm are completely disregarded. The family farm is often equated with *"wholesome, pure, sustainable production"* (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b, p. 352), without any comparison with reality. *"The term is very often used as a positive buzzword based on unreflected everyday knowledge and is often instrumentalised for political measures,"* Wiesinger and Vogel (2003, p. 1) resemble. Another example of the link between supposed sustainability and family farming is provided by an FAO publication:

> *It is often stated that smallholders are considered the backbone of agricultural development because of the great number of such farms; however, the concept of family farming involving linkages to broader rural socio-economic aspects, could more meaningfully be considered the backbone of rural development and environmental sustainability*. (Garner & De La O Campos, 2014, p. 11)

The concept of the family farm continues to exert a powerful influence on social discourse, notwithstanding the considerable challenges facing modern agriculture. This is primarily due to the fact that it is deeply embedded in a number of key institutions, including the legal system, scientific research, the education sector, the family unit and religion (Brandth, 2002). Such institutions shape social meanings that are frequently perceived as self-evident or natural, thereby legitimising hierarchies and oppression.

Leslie et al. (2019) argue that agriculture has always been shaped by interpersonal and professional relationships, but these have long been embedded in dominant heterosexual and patriarchal ideologies. It is only recently that these relational dynamics have come to light. To fully understand farming as fundamentally relational, a queer and feminist perspective is needed to challenge and deconstruct the social norms of what is deemed ‘natural’.

It is important to note that in the context of this research, the term 'family farm' is used to refer to a specific Western, predominantly White image of farms located in industrialised countries or countries of the Global North. These are also the contexts that are being critiqued here. However, it must be acknowledged that the socio-cultural context in the Global South is different, where family farms may play a different role, which is not addressed here.

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following chapter introduces some theoretical concepts that are essential for a deeper understanding of the embedding of this thesis. By providing an insight into the roots and definitions of key concepts and terms, a common perspective is created that allows further discussion and development of the findings presented and interpreted in the remainder of the thesis.

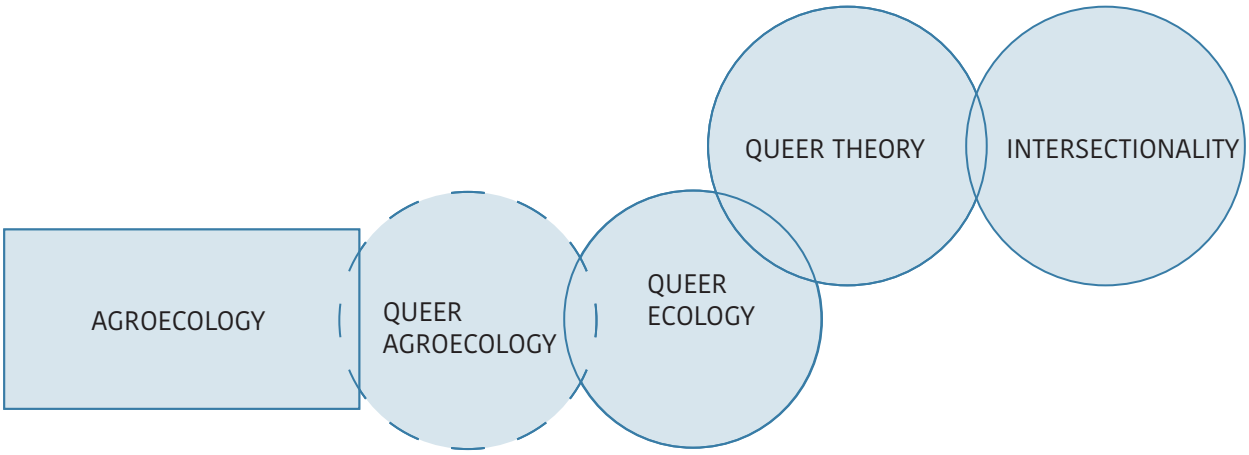


Figure 1: Overview of the Main Concepts and Theories (own elaboration)

Figure 1 aims to provide an overview of the of the main theoretical background. The concepts and theories are placed in the way they unfolded to me when diving through them. While queer theory and 'intersectionality‘ form two complementary lenses for this thesis, the emerging field of 'queer agroecology‘ is also located here. Figure 1 is intended to guide the reader through this chapter and the rest of the thesis but does not claim to be ‚correct‘ in terms of content.

3.1 Queer Theory

Queer Theory analyses and destabilises the societal hegemonic norms of heterosexuality and binary gender constructions (Jagose, 2001). It is made up of three components: Firstly, the deconstruction and decoupling of sex, sexuality and gender; secondly, the role of performance in identity building; thirdly, a critique of identity politics (Seidmann, 1996).

In other words, Queer Theory works on the radical discontinuity of the chain sex - gender - desire - identity, and thus exposes the hegemonic interpretation of this chain as a social construct (Hark, 2005). It examines how sexuality is regulated and how this in turn structures, standardises, and influences social spheres such as state politics or culture. Sexuality is not a natural concern, but a

cultural product that is determined by power relations (Jagose, 2001). As a political agenda, there is an attempt to leave the regime of identity politics behind. In contrast, alliances against the rule of normativity should be based on political solidarity (Jagose, 2001). Queer Studies sees itself not only as critical of normativity, but also as critical of power (Degele, 2012). It is about the dissolution of clear identities and categories, the recognition of difference and political equality.

Queer Theory developed in North America in the early 1990s as a critical continuation of gay and lesbian studies and is concerned with the deconstruction of gender and sexuality. As a political reappropriation project, the term 'queer' was reinterpreted from an originally negatively connoted term to a collective term for sexually and gender marginalised groups and topics such as transgender, transsexuality, bisexuality and sadomasochism (Kroll, 2002).

This theory draws on post-structuralist concepts to emphasise the processuality and performativity of gender and desire, and the complex and unstable relationships between these categories. It is directed against an 'ethnic' logic of belonging, as has been prevalent in gay and lesbian studies as well as feminist and men's studies and sees itself as a critique of normative concepts of identity. Despite this demarcation from identity politics, Queer Theory is characterised by feminist theories and ongoing debates with the lesbian and gay movement (Kroll, 2002). Turner (2000) suggests that Queer Theory's focus on sexuality, gender, and their interrelation is a direct outcome of feminist political and academic efforts.

Warner (1991) describes 'queer' as resistance to 'regimes of normality' and emphasises its role as a comprehensive critique of socio-symbolic processes of standardisation, which include but are not limited to the privileging of heterosexuality. Queer Theory attempts not only to be a theory about queer subjects, but also to make theory itself 'queer' (Warner, 1991). It challenges the analytical primacy of the category of gender over other axes of identification and forms of desire, which has led to criticism from feminists (Kroll, 2002). These critics accuse Queer Theory of concealing the persistence of male hegemony under the guise of supposed gender neutrality and of losing political specificity by bringing together divergent groups (Jagose, 2001). Butler (1995) calls for a 'genealogical critique' of the term 'queer' in order to analyse the way in which 'queer' as a concept of identity also produces exclusions. She emphasises that gender and sexuality need to be understood as dynamic and interconnected categories beyond the heteronormative matrix[3].

The future significance of Queer Theory remains open, as representatives have repeatedly pointed out the historical contingency of the concept and its possible replacement by new terms. Despite

[3] Judith Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' describes the normative system that links gender, gender identity and sexual orientation in such a way that there are only two biological sexes and that these are heterosexually related. It imposes an artificial coherence and hierarchy between these categories in order to marginalise or render invisible deviant identities and expressions (Butler, 1990).

these controversies, the continued relevance of queer studies is evident in the differentiated analysis of historical, local and medial topographies and histories of gender (Kroll, 2002).

When applying Queer Theory to rural studies, it is important to avoid categorizing people, places, and institutions strictly as either heteronormative or queer. Scholars must balance the recognition of desires for state validation with understanding which rural identities and practices remain excluded (Keller, 2015). Labelling actions that disrupt rural heteronormativity as inherently queer oversimplifies the issue and fails to fully capture the complexities at play. Moreover, reducing social phenomena to a binary of queer versus heteronormative contradicts the goals of Queer Theory, which seeks to deconstruct such binaries (Butler, 1990). Another limitation in Queer Theory is the tendency to conflate heterosexuality with heteronormativity, overlooking the potential of transgressive heterosexual practices that challenge societal norms. Nonetheless, exploring these transgressive heterosexual practices offers a promising direction for rural Queer Theory (Keller, 2015).

3.1.1 Identity

Identity itself is a multifaceted concept that is the subject of many definitions, or the subject of refusal of definition because of its complexity. Identity (Greek tautotes, Latin identitas) describes on the one hand the logical relationship of equality between two objects, and on the other hand, in psychoanalytical and cultural theoretical contexts, it refers to the unity of a person or group. Identity as 'self-sameness' presupposes a subject whose often heterogeneous and historical existence is experienced as continuous in contrast to others (Posselt & Babka, 2016).

A person's identity is shaped by characteristics that can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral in nature. These characteristics may differ in their perceived value (desirability), salience (prominence or visibility), significance (importance), centrality (essentiality), and permanence (fixedness). The self-assessed value, salience, and significance of these identity traits can change depending on the context and over time (Troiden, 2008). Additionally, traits perceived as central to the self in a social context may or may not align with what one thinks they should be (relating to the ideal self), be judged as morally correct (involving self-evaluation), or be liked or valued (which impacts self-esteem) (Troiden, 2008). To maintain self-esteem, one might need to adjust the perception of the trait, the ideal self, the self-concept, or all three to minimize the gap between the self-concept and the ideal self (Atchley, 1982).

Furthermore, identity is created through exchange with the social environment and is formed both passively through attributions and actively through staging and reacting to these attributions. If the likelihood of coming out decreases rapidly, this is often due to a negative attitude towards homosexuality in the environment, both towards oneself and towards others. For example, young people

from strongly Catholic backgrounds come out later than those from less religious backgrounds (Watzlawik, 2014). Gender role stereotypes also influence attitudes towards homosexual and bisexual orientations and therefore coming out. Therefore, to understand identity development and individual experiences, the whole individual should always be considered in relation to their environment (Watzlawik, 2014).

Self-concept is seen as part of the cognitive aspect of the objective self. Identity, as a cognitive construct, is seen as a subset of self-concept and represents the activation of self-attitudes relevant to a particular social situation (Troiden, 2008). The main difference between self-concept and identity is that identity is tied to a specific social context or situation, whereas self-concept is not. Identity refers to labels that a person considers to be a clear representation of themselves in a particular social situation. Outside of that situation, the identity may become inactive and merge back into the broader self-concept. In essence, a person has a single self-concept but may have multiple identities relevant to different situations (Troiden, 2008).

Identity plays a central role in cultural and gender theoretical approaches, which is reflected in the multitude of different and sometimes contradictory identity theories. Identity is understood here as the site of a processual and often precarious negotiation of 'identity claims', based on interlinked axes (Posselt & Babka, 2016). bell hooks (2008) points out that identity is shaped of personal experiences, in particular related to gender, race and class. Further, she describes that within the concept of identity 'intersectionality' (see chapter 3.2) is critical to understand, because different facets interact and influence one's experiences and sense of self. Post-structuralist approaches question the usual characteristics of identity - such as stability, coherence and unity - and instead emphasise its contingency, fragility and historical conditionality. Identity is seen as dependent on social recognition and affirmation, which requires a constant struggle and reproduction through rituals, symbols and myths (Posselt & Babka, 2016). These relational conditions simultaneously create room for manoeuvre by deconstructing and reshaping identities as social constructs. In deconstructivist contexts, it is pointed out that identity must always be thought in terms of alterity (the other) and iterability (repeatability) (Posselt & Babka, 2016).

From a feminist perspective, the idea of a pre-existing, 'natural' identity is rejected as a patriarchal and Eurocentric construct. At the same time, normative and hierarchical distinctions such as masculinity/femininity, heterosexuality/homosexuality and Occident/Orient are critically questioned (Posselt & Babka, 2016). Feminist theorists such as Butler (2013) develop decentralised, processual and performative notions of identity with reference to Derrida's concept of iterability and as a resistance to normative models of identity. She specifies that *"identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression"* (Butler, 2013, pp. 13-14).

3.1.2 Queer as an Identity Category

Most simply resumed, queerness is a lack of definition. The use of the term 'queer' in the course of this work also refers to a deviation from the heterosexual and cisgender norm. It is used to describe people or groups whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity does not conform to heterosexuality or cisgender. Nevertheless, an embedding of the term in Queer Theory is considered relevant, and the following section therefore introduces some exemplary, non-exhaustive approaches and proposed definitions by influential queer theorists in order to make the term more accessible and tangible. The term ‘queer’ functions as an umbrella concept that can be interpreted in political and strategic ways, encompassing everyone who does not conform to dominant social norms (Perko, 2005).

Queer identity resists having a fixed definition or set of characteristics due to its inherent commitment to challenging and denaturalizing established norms (Jagose, 2001). As Halperin notes: *"There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. (...) It is an identity without an essence"* (1995, p. 62). This lack of a clear, stable definition makes queer a complex subject for study, characterized by ambiguity and relationality, which has led to its description as *"a largely intuitive and half-articulate theory"* (Warner, 1992, p. 19).

The indeterminacy of the term ‘queer’ is often seen as a strength, allowing it for Doty to serve as a *"flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception"* (Jagose, 2001, p. 97). Doty values the term's ambiguity, which enables it to encompass a broad spectrum of identities and cultural expressions, including bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness (Jagose, 2001).

Queer is frequently understood as a challenge to conventional notions of sexual identity by dismantling the categories and binaries that support them (Hennessy, 1994). However, what ‘queer’ precisely signifies or includes is not easily defined (Abelove, 1993). Sedgwick (1993) in her book ‘Tendencies’ describes queerness as *“the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically”* (Sedgwick, 1993, p.8).

Sedgwick (1993) further argues that, despite its use as a descriptive term, ‘queer’ fundamentally refers to self-identification rather than being an objective label for others:

> *Anyone’s use of ‘queer’ about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else. [...] ‘Queer’ seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A*

> *hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only when attached to the first person. One possible corollary: that what it takes —all it takes—to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person.* (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 10)

Thus, it was considered critical for this research to let the interviewees define the term by themselves and give space to explain what it means to them, personally. "Queer should be a place that allows for exploration disagreement, and discovery, for honoring of individuals' experience and naming of their own lives and experiences, and for ongoing conversations about possibilities", Henderson (2019, p. 8) contributes to the debate.

3.1.3 Gender, Sex and Sexuality

Gender is a multifaceted and broadly discussed term among feminists and within gender studies and there is no stand-alone approach to define it (Frey Steffen, 2017). In the social and cultural sciences, the category of 'gender' is an essential analytical category that is closely related to the categories of 'class' and 'race' (Posselt & Babka, 2016). In 1955, psychologist Money used the term to describe the mismatch of physiological sexual characteristics and the socio-cultural meanings of femininity and masculinity. In English, the term 'sex' refers to biological sex, while 'gender' describes the socio-cultural characteristics of the sexes and the corresponding social roles in their context (Posselt & Babka, 2016). In social psychology, the concept of gender identity originally referred to the conditions that enable a consistent perception of one's own gender across different phases of life and situations (Kroll, 2002). This identity was explained by internal processes of gender self-definition that took place based on positioning in the social system. Gender identity was thus derived from the gender roles acquired in the course of socialisation (Kroll, 2002).

The distinction between sex and gender is a central aspect of feminist theories. It is used to scrutinise the supposedly natural connection between biological sex and culturally constructed gender attributions (Posselt & Babka, 2016). Gender is understood as a social and cultural construction that is created through social staging and representation. In the 1980s, sociologists West and Zimmerman (1987) introduced the concept of 'doing gender', which describes the fact that gender identity cannot be regarded as a given but is created and negotiated in the context of social interactions. The supposedly natural gender differences therefore manifest themselves as the result of routinised and ritualised processes of self-presentation and attribution (Posselt & Babka, 2016). Butler (1990) criticises the strict separation of sex and gender and argues that biological sex is also constructed, as it is not possible to perceive sex independently of cultural and discursive contexts. She questions the assumption that a biological sex exists first, on the basis of which a gender identity develops through cultural and social processes. Instead, gender identities are formed through the repeated

performance of ritualised actions within regulatory discourses, whereby the impression of a natural, biological core of gender is only created retrospectively (Posselt & Babka, 2016). Tuider (2003) subsumes that sexuality and gender do not precede culture but are of equal origin with it.

Furthermore, an important dimension of gender pointed out by de Beauvoir (2018) is that gender is changeable and can develop further, based on the assumption that we are socially taught to be either man or woman, but that those characteristics are not innate. Gender, sex and sexuality do not determine one another, but they are rather influenced by social norms (Butler, 1990). By those norms we are pushed towards the learning a binary gender performance through the repetition of actions and signals. Those who conform to such norms a being rewarded by society with a superior power position compared to those who cannot fulfil the expectations (Butler, 1990).

Sexuality is a complex concept that, according to Foucault, was only defined as an identity in the 19th century, for example in the form of 'homosexuality' (Foucault, 1978-86). Prior to this, sexual acts such as 'sodomy' were regarded as criminal offences and not as identities. Foucault (1978-86) shows that these meanings are socially constructed and were often linked to reproduction and 'natural heterosexuality'. Literature also emphasises that the meanings of sexuality are socially created and criticise sexologists and Freud for defining the body too strongly as 'natural' rather than taking social contexts into account (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2011).

Feminist debates on sexuality centred on analysing patriarchal structures in heterosexuality and women's right to positive sexual self-determination. Two central topics were pornography and political lesbianism. Conflicts arose over whether all feminists should be lesbians and whether sex should be seen as positive or repressive (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2011). Segal (1994) and others criticised that these views ignored the pleasure aspect and led to a 'sexual conservatism'. Queer theories propose overcoming the strict division between homosexuality and heterosexuality and emphasising the 'performativity' of sexuality by showing how heterosexual identities are produced through constant repetition. This approach enables new forms of self-determination and emphasises the constructive potential of sexual diversity (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2011).

3.1.4 Community

Communities play a crucial role in providing a sense of belonging for individuals. Douglas (1970) examines community in terms of shared symbols and rituals that bind individuals together in a social unit. Further, for Douglas (1970), a community is not just a group of people, but a social structure that is shaped by cultural practices, shared meanings, and rituals that help define the community's boundaries and social norms. Fraser (1997) suggests that communities are formed around shared interests, identities, or purposes and are crucial for democratic discourse and the pursuit of social

justice. The focus lies on how different communities, especially marginalized ones, need recognition and representation in the public sphere. For her, community is less about geographic proximity and more about political and social solidarity.

Communities and identity are closely intertwined, with communities often serving as important contexts for the development, expression, and affirmation of individual and collective identities. Kirsch (2000) explains that the emergence of queer identities is closely linked to the development of capitalism. With the transition from a household economy to wage labour in the 19th century, families were increasingly seen as units of consumption and personal life rather than communities of production. As a result, the family lost its centrality to social bonding and identity formation. The 'community' of queer people developed in this context, as capitalist wage labour made it possible to live independently of family structures (Kirsch, 2000). At the same time, the separation of sexuality from reproduction and the social fear of deviant sexual practices led to increasing medical and social control over sexuality, which laid the foundation for the emergence of queer identities as a community (Kirsch, 2000).

Globalisation and the influence of transnational corporations have increased the exploitation of labour and resources, leading to the uprooting of communities and the fragmentation of social ties (Kirsch, 2000). Women and low-paid workers are particularly affected by these developments (Nash & Fernández-Kelley, 1983). The separation of people from their land and livelihoods exacerbates poverty. Cultural changes, such as the weakening of the family as a controlling authority, lead to new forms of alienation and social isolation (Kirsch, 2000). Despite economic growth, the standard of living of many people is falling, while ‘the market’ is often portrayed as unchangeable (Miller, 1997). The separation of individuals from communities and isolation reinforces inequalities and prevent collective resistance. This alienation supports the ideas of capitalism.

Jameson (1992) describes the replacement of alienation by fragmentation in contemporary late capitalism, whereby social and cultural ties are weakened (1992). Fragmentation leads to individual differences being emphasised but communities being destroyed, making resistance to inequality more difficult (Jameson, 1992). Political movements must include the building of ‘affective communities’ in order to mount effective resistance (Weeks, 1985).

> *The danger, of course, is that while we concentrate on decentering equation and identity, we succeed in promoting the very goals of global capitalism that work against the formation of communities or provide the means to destroy those that already exist, and with them, any hope for political action. The struggle to form, maintain, or prevent the destruction of community in late capitalism, then, is perhaps the most challenging quest of our times.* (Kirsch 2000, 72)

Identity and community are inseparable, and feminist theorist and social activist hooks (2008) explores their relationship in her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. To hooks (2008) community is much more than a group of people living together or sharing a common goal. It is a dynamic, inclusive space rooted in love, mutual support, and shared cultural identity, which has the power to heal, resist oppression, and promote personal and collective growth. Furthermore, she argues that place-based communities, especially those in rural or marginalized spaces, have unique cultural practices, values, and ways of relating that can offer profound lessons about connection, sustainability, and mutual support. However, hooks (2008) also warns that to truly realize this potential, communities must confront their own internal challenges and strive for inclusivity and justice.

3.2 Intersectionality

In order to understand those diverse, complex identities it is a prerequisite to see all of its facets as intertwined and co-constitutive – as intersecting – rather than as separate and independent of each other (Crenshaw, 1989) 'Intersectionality' describes how different structural categories - such as gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality and age - are intertwined and create social inequalities (Küppers, 2014), which is visually presented in Figure 2. The theory of 'intersectionality' examines how these categories interact in complex ways instead of being viewed as merely additive, and how they jointly shape social power relations. The aim is to show that none of these categories exists in isolation, but that each one influences social power structures, both on its own and in interaction with the others. This perspective expands gender studies by analysing multiple relations of inequality and oppression that cannot be explained by the category of gender alone (Küppers, 2014).

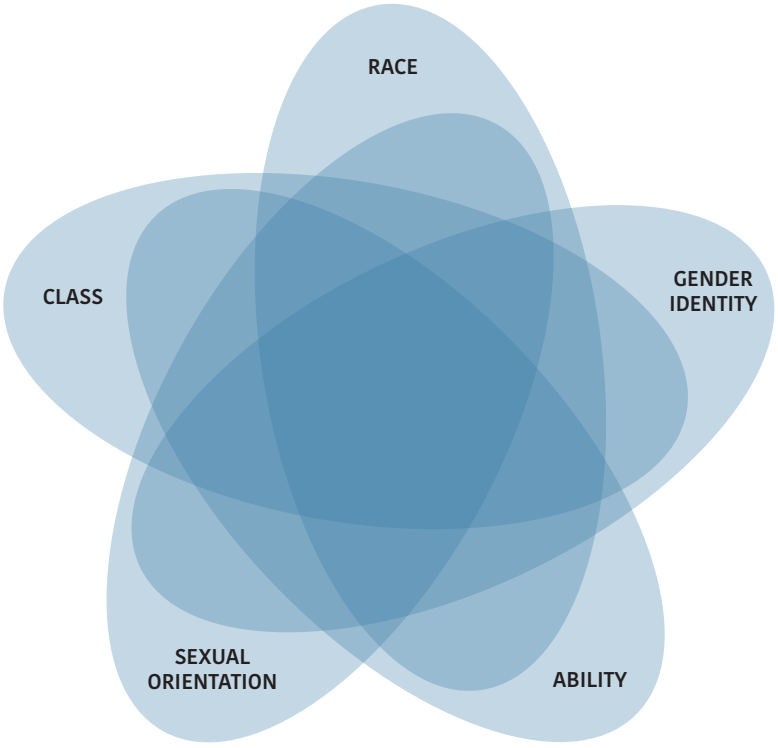


Figure 2: Visual Presentation of Intersecting Axes of Identity (own elaboration)

Historically, the origin of the 'intersectionality' debate lies in the experiences of Black women and lesbians who did not see themselves represented in the feminism of White, Western middle-class women (Küppers, 2014). The assumption of a uniform oppression of all women based on their gender was criticised by them as inadequate, especially in the context of racist exclusion. In the 1970s, Black feminists in the USA renewed this criticism by emphasising that the oppression of women was not only due to their gender, but also to their skin colour and class (Combahee River Collective, 1981).

The term 'intersectionality' was then coined in the late 1980s by the American lawyer Crenshaw (1989). She used the metaphor of an 'intersection', where different 'paths of power' intersect, to illustrate the complex interweaving of social inequalities (Küppers, 2014).

An intersectional lens strengthens all efforts for gender equality by addressing the reality of women with different backgrounds and identities, therefore leaving behind the impression that all women are the same, facing the same types of struggles and discrimination (Park et al., 2015). Among the advantages of an intersectional approach to gender issues, the consideration of complex and intersecting identities, the different experiences and tackling the structures of oppression, can be named- Different forms of discriminations are relational, reinforcing and cannot be seen as separated issues (Park et al., 2015). For instance, a queer person being a man or passing as one will suffer different forms of discrimination than a queer, female-read person – in particular in the male dominated sphere of farming. Here, the axis of being queer and being perceived as a women intersect. Further, inequalities among women can be ethnicities, social class, or the living conditions of homosexual women (Becker-Schmidt & Knapp, 2018), to mention some examples. However, there is also criticism of the intersectional approach, which emphasises that individual intersections are considered too much in isolation and that the focus is not sufficiently on the relationships between the strands (Küpper, 2014). Nevertheless, the idea that his intersectional lens can be used as a sensitisation strategy in academia (Küppers, 2014), also guides the analysis in this paper.

Finally, it is worth stressing that Queer Theory and 'intersectionality' are fruitful complementary lenses for this research because they capture both the complexity of social identities and the social and political power structures that influence them. By pointing to the fluidity of identities, queer theory promotes a flexible and inclusive view of power relations that can strengthen solidarity movements. At the same time, intersectionality balances out the abstractness and theoretical vagueness of queer theory by focusing on concrete, multiple experiences of oppression such as racism, sexism and classism. This allows the deconstruction of identities to be grounded in material reality and makes structural inequalities visible.

3.3 Agroecology: Counter-Hegemonic Pathways Towards Sustainable Food Systems

Agroecology is a science, a practice and a social movement (Wezel et al., 2009). As a science it has significantly impacted universities worldwide, becoming a vital part of academic programs. It challenges traditional agricultural sciences by recognizing the complexity of agroecosystems and promoting sustainable transformations. There's a call for agroecology to be integrated across all subjects in agricultural education to fully embrace its principles. In practice, agroecology's roots lie in the traditional knowledge of farming communities, who, through trial and error, developed effective agricultural practices. These ancestral methods, once undervalued, are now recognized and integrated into scientific knowledge, highlighting their importance in addressing global agricultural challenges. Practices such as seed selection, crop associations, and pest management have been refined over generations, tailored to local conditions and enriched by cultural and ethnic diversity. As a movement, agroecology is bolstered by social organizations, particularly those of small farmers. Politically, it serves as a tool for the dignity and autonomy of farming families, opposing multinational corporations and promoting local food systems. This movement advocates for policies that support agroecological practices, aiming for broader social and environmental impacts. By fostering direct markets between producers and consumers, agroecology counters the globalized food trade and makes healthy food accessible to all, not just the wealthy. The strength of social organization has positioned agroecology within public policies, laws, and constitutions in many countries, influencing public opinion and paving the way for more significant advances in the future (Intriago Barreno & Saura Gargallo, 2020). There is also a close link with peasants' studies and food sovereignty (Sevilla Guzman & Soler Montiel, 2010) and an agroecological approach seems to represent a peasant's logic of farming.

Gliessmann (2018) concludes that the integration of all of agroecology's facettes is critical to achieving food system transformation:

> *Agroecology is the integration of research, education, action and change that brings sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic, and social. It's transdisciplinary in that it values all forms of knowledge and experience in food system change. It's participatory in that it requires the involvement of all stakeholders from the farm to the table and everyone in between. And it is action-oriented because it confronts the economic and political power structures of the current industrial food system with alternative social structures and policy action. The approach is grounded in ecological thinking where a holistic, systems-level understanding of food system sustainability is required.* (Gliessman, 2018, p. 599)

Hence, agroecology serves a tool that can be used to reach over-arching sustainability by redesigning food systems (Gliessman, 2016). It is important to note that there are numerous definitions of agroecology, and this is merely one perspective. The epistemological diversity within the field contributes to the multifaceted and dynamic nature of agroecology. In Spanish, the term 'las agroecologías' is often used to more accurately capture this complexity.

In the European and Austrian context, it can be explained that the perception of agroecology differs from that in the Global South. While it is more strongly represented in academia, a purely scientific view often prevails as a hegemonic concept. Indeed, as a practice, agroecology is often not named or labelled as such, despite agriculture being practised according to the relevant principles. As a social movement and political actor, it is still in its infancy but is gaining ground with growing networks (Wezel et al., 2018) Social movements in Austria tend to use agroecology strongly linked to food sovereignty, and *Community-Supported Agriculture* (CSA) (Brumer et al., 2023). However, there are hardly any concrete policies that concern or promote agroecology (Wezel et al., 2018). Another reason named for the little knowledge of the concepts of agroecology is the fact that organic agriculture is so strong and well known. Brumer et al. (2023) argue that as a practice organic agriculture implicitly implements agroecological principles – at least partly and to a varying extent.

As previously outlined in detail, the term agroecology is not widely used in the local context of Austria. However, it can be observed that the term 'food sovereignty' is employed with greater frequency in its place or in the implicit context of agroecology (Brumer et al., 2023). As this represents a bridge between the contexts of organic farming in Austria and agroecology in general, the term is introduced and defined as follows:

> *Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of*

> *oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations*. (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007, p. 9)

In light of the aforementioned Austrian context, it is important to note that an analysis of the direct connection between agroecology and queer farmers was not possible. In Aguilar Aguilar's work in Mexico (2024), for instance, they encounter a completely different starting situation, allowing them to assume knowledge of the existence of agroecology and its contents. Therefore, for this research on Austria, I attempt to introduce agroecology into the discussion as a meta-level and take a comparative look at it. The reference that is used for this discussion (see chapter 6.1) is the set of 13 HLPE agroecological principles, which are based upon and co-developed with FAO's ten elements of agroecology (Wezel et al., 2020). Therefore, Figure 3 aims to introduce the principles visually to the reader to gain an easy understanding of the core aspects.

1. Recycling

Preferentially use local renewable resources and close as far as possible resource cycles of nutrients and biomass.

2. Input reduction

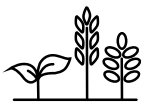
Reduce or eliminate dependency on purchased inputs and increase self-sufficiency.

3. Soil health

Secure and enhance soil health and functioning for improved plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biological activity.

4. Animal health

Ensure animal health and welfare.



5. Biodiversity

Maintain and enhance diversity of species, functional diversity and genetic resources and thereby maintain overall agroecosystem biodiversity in time and space at field, farm and landscape scales.

6. Synergy

Enhance positive ecological interaction, synergy, integration and complementarity amongst the elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil and water).

7. Economic diversification

Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that small-scale farmers have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers.

8. Co-creation of knowledge

Enhance co-creation and horizontal sharing of knowledge including local and scientific innovation, especially through farmer-to-farmer exchange.

9. Social values and diets

Build food systems based on the culture, identity, tradition, social and gender equity of local communities that provide healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets.

10. Fairness

Support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment and fair treatment of intellectual property rights.

11. Connectivity

Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by re-embedding food systems into local economies.

12. Land and natural resource governance

Strengthen institutional arrangements to improve, including the recognition and support of family farmers, smallholders and peasant food producers as sustainable managers of natural and genetic resources.

13. Participation

Encourage social organisation and greater participation in decision-making by food producers and consumers to support decentralised governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems.

Figure 3: HLPE Agroecology Principles (own elaboration based on Wezel et al., 2020)

In the course of the discussion, the aforementioned principles are employed to ascertain whether there is any reflection of agroecological principles in the farming practices and approaches of the participants. It is not the intention to pass judgement on the extent to which they are agroecological; rather, it is to provide an indication of where their management practices may be situated in relation to those that often extend beyond organic farming.

In conclusion, it should be noted that there are a variety of drafts of agroecological principles. The HLPE principles have not been chosen because they are considered to be the best or most appropriate. Other approaches could fulfil this role. The HLPE principles were chosen because they provide a broad overview and allow the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the holistic approach to agroecology relatively quickly.

3.4 Queer (Agro-) Ecology

'Queer agroecology' is an emerging field that combines principles of Queer Theory with agroecology to challenge normative assumptions in agricultural practices and to promote diverse, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to farming and food systems. It builds upon the ideas of 'queer ecology', which interrogates the heteronormativity and anthropocentrism embedded in environmental discourse, and extends these critiques into the realm of agriculture, food production, and land use.

'Queer ecology' examines the intersection of queer issues with ecological concerns, environmental justice, and biology (Sandilands, 2002). In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire,* Erickson and Mortimer-Sandilands (2010) introduce 'queer ecology' as a critical framework that merges Queer Theory with ecological studies to challenge the heteronormative and human-centered assumptions pervasive in traditional environmental discourse. They argue that both environmentalism and ecology have often been constructed around ideals that privilege heteronormative family structures and binary gender norms. 'Queer ecology', as they define it, seeks to uncover the ways in which these disciplines have excluded or marginalized queer bodies, desires, and practices. They explore how queer politics can inform ecological thinking and vice versa, ultimately promoting a more inclusive approach to ecology (Erickson & Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010).

Another approach from queer eco-feminist Gaard (1997) presents 'queer ecology' as a theoretical and political project that integrates the insights of Queer Theory and ecofeminism[4]. Gaard (1997) argues that both Queer Theory and ecofeminism share a commitment to deconstructing dualistic thinking, such as the binary between culture/nature or male/female, and that 'queer ecology' extends this critique to include sexuality and gender. In addition, her perspective emphasizes that 'queer ecology' critiques the ways in which cultural narratives of sexuality (e.g. heteronormativity) are linked with narratives about nature, highlighting how these narratives often reinforce each other to perpetuate systems of oppression and exploitation.

> *[…] the persecution of women through the witch burnings, of nature through science, and of indigenous peoples through colonialism -- which reached a peak during the same historical period in Western Europe, will lead to the roots of an ideology in which the erotic, queer sexualities, women, persons of color, and nature are all conceptually linked.* (Gaard, 1997, p. 149)

[4] Ecofeminism links environmental issues with feminism, arguing that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected due to patriarchal structures.

She contends that 'queer ecology' must address the interconnections between the exploitation of queer bodies and the exploitation of the environment, advocating for an ecological perspective that is inclusive of all identities and communities (Gaard 1997). Further, she constates:

> *Ecofeminists must be concerned with queer liberation, just as queers must be concerned with the liberation of women and of nature; our parallel oppressions have stemmed from our perceived associations. It is time to build our common liberation on more concrete coalitions.* (Gaard, 1997, p.149).

Drawing on 'queer ecology' Mejía-Duwan and Hoffelmeyer (2024) propose to apply this concept to both natural resource and agricultural studies, where gender and sexuality remain understudies and invisible. While conventional agriculture is based on a productivist regime, agroecology offers an alternative model for a sustainable food system (see chapter 3.3). It is much more than a set of ecological food production practices, or a science centred on agroecosystems. Its holistic, counter-hegemonic approach challenges the capitalist logics of production and profit in conventional agriculture. When using 'queer agroecology', they refer to the examples of international research on queer farmers (see chapter 2.5.2) which have been published in the last decade and address *"cisheteropatriarchy embedded in agri-food systems,"* (Mejia Duwan & Hoffelmeyer, 2024, p. 17) critically. They build on the work of Leslie et al. (2019) who argue that queerness and heterosexism play a key role in agriculture as it is considered as inherently relational. Furthermore, when imagining a transition towards sustainable agri-food systems, they point to the critical role of queer farmers (Leslie et al., 2019).

They argue that more work is needed, in particular regarding the intersectionality of racism and colonialism, and sexuality in agriculture. Examples like Sbicca's (2012) research on 'eco-queer movements' proves how queer individuals, interested in the intersections of environmental, sexuality, and gender issues, engage with food — either as a primary or secondary element — to foster community, resist oppression, and enhance the care of both the planet and human bodies. However, findings also show that queer rural communities are not necessarily inclusive, but also create exclusionary dynamics (Abelson, 2016; Morgensen, 2011), and Mehia-Duwan and Hoffelmeyer (2024) emphasize that it could be of added value to include Indigenous perspectives, such as TallBear (2015), who uses Indigenous Queer Theory to examine sexuality and nature.

The expanding field of 'queer agroecology' has significant implications and applications, given that gender and sexuality are deeply interconnected with agriculture and the environment (Leslie et al., 2019). Engaging with 'queer agroecology' offers opportunities for transformative change in the study of natural resources and agriculture und might open up new opportunities in strategically tackling the hegemonic agri-food system based on exploitation (Mejia-Duwan & Hoffelmeyer, 2024).

4 METHODOLOGY

Since this research enters a new field and no studies have been conducted on queer people in Austria's agriculture until today, the research questions will be answered doing an exploratory study (Prainsack & Pot, 2021). In order to investigate everyday life realities of queer people in Austrian agriculture, I use qualitative primary data collection (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014). This pathway explores how queer farmers think, act, and feel in their living environment and what their experiences and challenges are. Entering the field was difficult, therefore sampling was done with the help of a mixed-method approach. The qualitative data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews (Prainsack & Pot, 2021). The analysis of the interviews is undertaken by *Qualitative Content Analysis*, more precisely guided by the approach of Udo Kuckartz (2012) allowing to combine deductive work with inductive categories directly drawn from research material. Finally, the results were obtained by performing a category- or topic-orientated analysis (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

4.1 Research Design

Qualitative research distinguishes itself from standardised methods of empirical social research and refers to non-standardised forms in order to be able to approach the object of investigation appropriately and openly (Hopf & Weingarten, 1984). In contrast to the assertion that systematic research can only be quantitative, qualitative research is often the best and sometimes the only way to obtain data on a topic or subject area (Glaser & Strauss, 1979). Qualitative methods are valid insofar as they are based on the common-sense constructs of the interview partners and build on the everyday structures and norms of (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014). The goals of the research aim at gathering personal insights into the queer farmers' lives, thoughts, ideas and everyday experiences in their local environment, making a qualitative approach most suitable.

Figure 4 provides a schematic representation of the process of qualitative social research and the potential avenues for generating results. These include the testing of a hypothesis based on a theoretical framework (deductive) and the formation of a theory based on a hypothesis derived from the material (inductive).

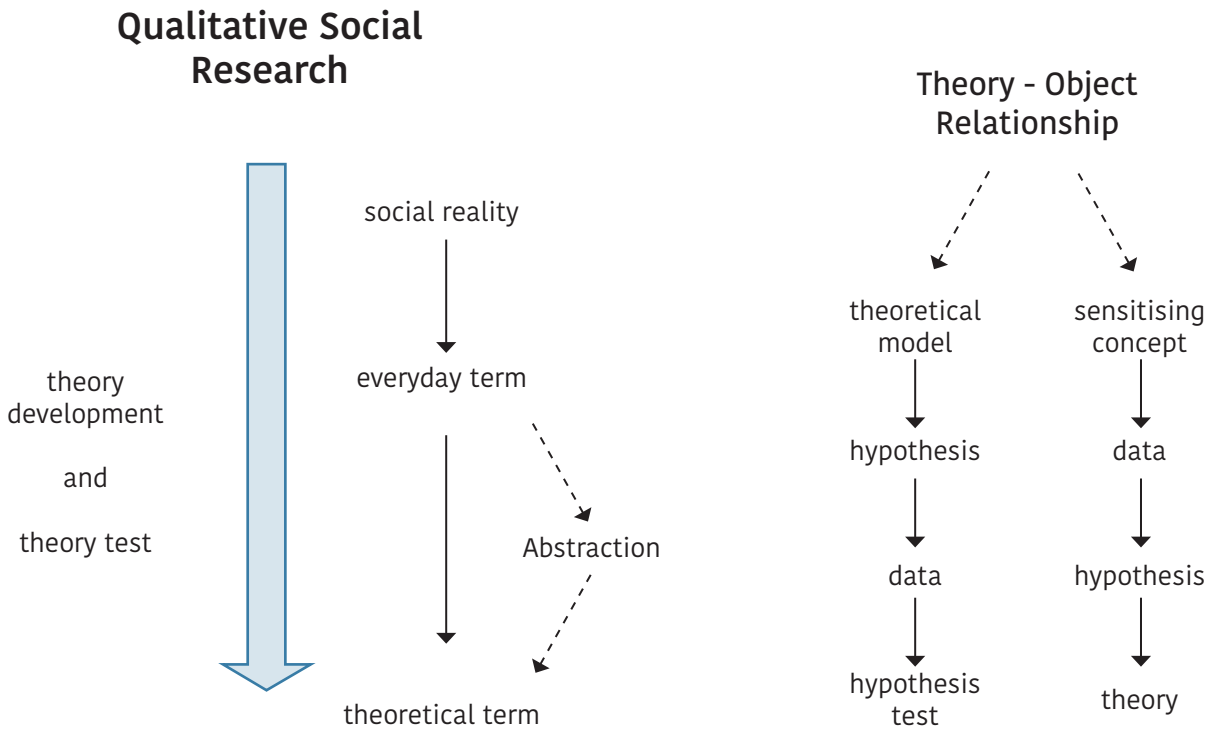


Figure 4: Overview of Research Qualitative Research Process - Deductive and Inductive (own elaboration based on Flick et al., 1995)

Mayring (2002) names six quality criteria for qualitative social research, which also guide this work: Process documentation, argumentative validation of interpretation, rule-guidedness, proximity to the research topic, communicative validation and triangulation of results.

Based on the state of research on queer farmers in the USA and other reports from the European area (see chapter 2.5.2), some assumptions were made for this research. For example, it is assumed that there are more queer people working in Austrian agriculture than has been conveyed by previous research and reporting. Due to the marginalization of queer people, it is also assumed that queer people in agriculture are more likely to face hurdles and challenges and experiences of discrimination than non-queer people. In addition, the state of research from the USA leads to the assumption that queer agriculture in Austria is also more sustainable and queer farmers are committed to a sustainable agricultural transition. These formulated assumptions are intended to avoid that the implementation of the research work reveals possible blind spots of the researcher and that an openness of results can be guaranteed (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

The systematic analysis of people‘s experiences in various social fields serves the search for knowledge. Specific problems or narrowly formulated questions in a field of interest are analysed. The

subjects and objects of investigation are people, school classes, companies, departments, hospitals etc., which are described by means of certain characteristics (Bortz & Döring, 2002). In my research case the common characteristics of the subjects are their queerness and being a farmer in Austria and the data collection method is to conduct guided interviews. Due to the limitations of the scope of my master's thesis the number of interview partners was limited to 4-6, depending on my success in finding them.

4.2 Data Collection – Approaching the Field

In the next sections I describe the process of searching for and finding participants, elaborating and conducting the interviews and the theoretical background and reasoning for each methodological choice. It touches the sampling strategy and process, establishing interview questions and how the process of interviewing the participants was carried out.

4.2.1 Finding Participants – A Tricky Challenge

At the start of the data collection, the aim was to interview queer people in agriculture from different regions and cultural landscapes of Austria, this is to ensure that a participant selection as heterogeneous as possible is made. Since queer people are not visible in Austria's agriculture so far, it is not known how many potential research participants there are. I assumed that it is challenging to get in contact with queer farmers. It was necessary to take a mixed approach, including browsing the internet for queer farms, reaching out to countless networks, institutions and talking to personal contacts in the queer and farming world. To reach out to a broader range of target groups, two different folders were designed:

Figure 5: Calls for Participation (own elaboration with Leonardo AI)

The leaflet (left; Figure 5) was aimed at a young, queer-feminist, probably more urban-related bubble and has a more playful design. Also, since queer might be a more frequent term among the target group I provided no definition of queerness. In contrast, the second version (right; Figure 5) is more generic and clearer and aims at a broad audience, thus this version was sent to agricultural institutions. To provide more guidance, this version of the call includes a simplified definition of 'queer' as an identity category.

The call for participation was spread via all my personal channels and contacts in the academic agroecology bubble and in various channels of the queer-feminist bubble in Vienna. I sent a countless number of emails to all queer organisations nationwide I could find when browsing the internet and I proceeded the same way with agricultural organisations and institutions, e.g. all nine federal agricultural chambers. In particular, I always tried to reach the regional organisations of the federal states in order to get away from the capital Vienna and dive deeper into the rural regions.

I received some hints via email and discovered two or three newspaper articles on male gay farming couples but decided that texting them would be inappropriate and too pushy, if others respond to my call with intrinsic motivation. Interestingly, all state institutions and all farming-related organisations were unwilling to spread my call in their channels, whereas at least some queer organisations were happy to spread the call. Of course, this disproportion of spaces and socio-demographic contexts where the call was shared and visible must be taken into consideration when critically reflecting the sample of participants in the further process.

In the context of Pride Month in June 2022, the Austrian *Mountain and Smallholder Farmers Association Via Campesina Austria* (ÖBV) organized a discussion evening on queer-feminist perspectives in Austrian agriculture. Coming across the event made me particularly hopeful to successfully reach out to an audience of queer farmers, but unfortunately this promising road led me nowhere. During this phase of the research work, I was often hopeless and had doubts about being able to find enough participants to carry out the interviews. As various powerful farmers' newspapers did not reply to me, not even the organic one *Bio Austria*, I even joined farmers' Facebook groups in order to reach a wider audience. I placed my call there and on the profiles of well-known farmers' organisations.

At the same time, I felt like having limited opportunities because I do not use and have access to the most popular social media, which is Instagram. Another strategy was to not only centre on Austria, but extend my attempts to Switzerland and Germany, where I got in touch with researchers like Prisca Pfammater and networks (e.g. *ELAN Germany, GAYFARMER*), respectively. There are probably many more queer farmers out there, participant Florian told seven of his queer colleagues about my research, but none of them was willing to participate. This is feedback which a got to hear more than once from friends and acquaintances: That they forwarded my call for participation, but

for some unclear reasons their contacts did not get back to me. Hence, the 'snowball method' was applied, but without success in this process (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014). I am transparent about the doubts, hurdles and dead ends I came across, because it is indispensable to see the queers who were willing to participate and their openness in the context of this long and complex process. Furthermore, this is the practical realisation of the quality criteria for qualitative research established by Mayring (2002).

Finally, four out of my six interview partners got the call forwarded from a personal contact, only Jana and Nadine from Hinterfeld4 farm collective came across the call because someone sent it through an email distribution list of alternative housing collectives. Overall, informal groups and personal networks had the greatest effects. Palys (2008) calls this approach 'criterion sampling', which is one of many strategies among 'purposive sampling'. 'Criterion sampling' refers to being guided by the fact that participants simply fulfil the criteria mentioned above. After about a month I was satisfied with number of interview partners and closed this chapter. A few potential participants reached out to me after that point, but I had to turn them down in order to stick to the scope and aims of my project.

4.2.2 Introducing the Farmers

As previously stated, modifications were implemented in the procedure for anonymising the data in order to safeguard the interests of the participants. However, the categories most pertinent to the research (pronouns, gender, sexuality, certification) were accurately represented. The remaining research data was adapted in such a way that it does not permit any inferences to be drawn, but rather reflects the circumstances of the respective interviewees as accurately as possible, to the best of my knowledge. To give an overview of the interviews I provide a table (Figure 6) with socio-demographic information. In addition, a few sentences on the farmers' contexts introduces each individual and enables the reader to grasp an idea of their current life and farming situation.

Name	Noah	Beatrix	Florian	Jana	Nadine	Stephanie
Pronouns	none/they/ them	she/her	he/him	she/her	she/her	she/her
Age	24	31	28	35	43	31
Gender	genderqueer	queer	male	female (indifferent)	female	female
Sexuality	queer	lesbian	homosexual	pansexual	sexual	lesbian
Farm	The CSA farm	The forest farm	The pumpkin farm	Hinterfeld4	Hinterfeld4	The pedagogy farm
Certification	organic	organic	organic	organic	organic	organic
Farm size (ha)	8	200 (mostly forest, some fields and ponds)	150	2,5	2,5	7
Emp-loyees / Workforce	approx. 10 (1 full-time, only 2 professionals, +interns +harvest workers)	1 full-time	3 full-time	3 full-time collective members (with helpers up to 10, varies seasonally)	3 (with helpers up to 10, varies seasonally)	1-2 part time (father or wife helping out)

Figure 6: Overview of the Participants and Their Farms (own elaboration)

Noah – The Commuting CSA Farmer

Noah (none/they/them) is 24 years old and comes from a small, rural town in southern Germany and became a gardener specialising in horticulture, because they always loved being in the vegetable garden with their grandparents and was passionate about plants but was also marked by living a year in Ecuador in a farming family. Noah made a conscious, political decision not to study, but to do an apprenticeship, as they come from a working-class family. After finishing the apprenticeship in rural Germany, they moved to Vienna and started working in the CSA, which is located in Lower Austria, 40km south-east of the capital. Therefore, Noah commutes 3-4 times a week to their workplace. The

CSA‘s marketing strategy is harvest shares, which are financed by socially staggered membership fees. There is also a sale of young plants in spring and members can help out on the vegetable farm.

More recently Noah identifies as genderqueer and their sexual orientation as queer, but examples from the past often refer to a time when they still identified as a homoflexible cis man.

Beatrix – The Forest Farmer

Beatrix (she/her), 31 years old, considers herself a queer and lesbian farmer. She is a forester, hunter and farmer who lives in southern Burgenland located in the very east of Austria. Beatrix holds two master’s degrees in forestry and after having lived in Scandinavia for two years she returned to live in the countryside where she grew up as well. Beatrix is a full-time farmer and forester, but that might change soon, due to economic pressure (additional wage work in the forestry sector). Further, she became a skilled worker in fishery to run the farm’s carp business, but the only keep a minimum of fish, because of problems with predators (otter) in the area. Barter economy (e.g. deer, eggs), wood industry and local partners are the main distribution channels of her products. In the village she is the only organic farmer. Her parents are retired, but still live at the farm and help out.

Florian – The Remote Large-scale Farmer

Florian is a 28-year-old gay full-time farmer who did the agricultural skilled worker school and also the agricultural master craftsman. On about 150ha the family grows pumpkins, onions and grains. The farm is located in Styria, in a very remote area and has been managed by his family for generations and his parents are still in the business. As the only son after three girls, it was always clear that he would take over the farm. He is very engaged in the local associations of Landjugend and Bauernbund. In the future his partner will most likely move in at the farm but is not going to participate in the daily family farming business. Their distribution channels are intermediaries who sell to wholesalers and their products end up in supermarkets or mills and the wood goes to a saw mill.

Jana – The Holistic Subsistence Farmer

Jana (she/her) grew up on Hinterfeld4, left to study social sciences in Vienna and returned about five years ago to start the farming collective together with Nadine and others back then. Initially, Jana‘s mom also lived at the farm, but today not anymore and they want to buy Hinterfeld4 collectively as an association from her. The 35-year-old DIY-expert loves to learn from books and from and with others and has a holistic perspective on her role as a (subsistence) farmer (e.g. traditional handicraft). She enjoys processing dairy products, such as making goat‘s cream cheese.

Nadine – Just Being Naturally Nadine

Nadine (she/her) is 43 years old and mother of two little kids. She is originally from a small town in Germany, also lived in Berlin and eventually came to Hinterfeld4 farm collective five years ago with her former wife. She grew up in her grandparents‘ gardens, but then became an educator. At some point she had a garden herself and taught herself a lot autodidactically. She is very much into plants, but animals are not her thing, which is okay if you live in a farm collective. Sexually, she is into humans and not into categories. The way she lives just makes sense to her and gives her a lot of satisfaction.

Nadine lives in the farm collective Hinterfeld4 together with Jana and another collective member. None of them is in a sexual or romantic relationship with one another. At Hinterfeld4 they have a some goats and chicken, a permaculture garden and a small field where they experiment with crops and management practices. They do not market any of their products commercial but embrace a gift economy. Additionally, the have temporary helpers on the farm, for instance from the WOOF platform. Further, they offer their space for camps or sometimes rent out rooms in the summer season. As a farming and housing collective they are connected with other projects alike in the area.

Stefanie – The Pedagogical Farmer

Stefanie (she/her) has already done a diverse range of trainings in her 31 years lasting life: Apprenticeship as a painter, agricultural skilled worker, disability pedagogue, certified social pedagogue and is now trained to become an animal-assisted pedagogue. With her background as a social pedagogue, she offers pedagogical experiences for children at her farm in Carinthia. They have some animals (e.g. sheep, goats, chicken, donkeys) for the pedagogical use, but only sell eggs and products from the farmer’s garden in a very direct and personal way. Stefanie promotes her pedagogical offers in thematic Facebook groups. She is a maker and together with her father and wife runs the farm part-time. Consequently, Stefanie’s farming model tries try to combine her manifold educational backgrounds. As a farmer she is still rather new to the field and still needs to learn a lot, she says. Based on traditional family roles her father did not pass on the knowledge she needs now. They are an organic farm, and this also seems natural and sustainable to them.

4.2.3 Interviews

The qualitative interview approach allows for an exploration of the lived realities of queer farmers, their particular challenges in agriculture and their local environment, and the perspectives they bring along on farming (methods) and being a queer farmer in Austria. In addition, this methodological approach allows for a better understanding of farmers‘ social construction of reality and to analyse people‘s cognition, subjective views, and social realities, including beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions

(Prainsack & Pot, 2021). To accommodate the prioritization and characteristics of each interview partner, semi-structured interviews are used in this qualitative study (Prainsack & Pot, 2021). The greatest strength of the qualitative approach is the identification of patterns that emerge in relation to the views and experiences of queer persons in Austrian agriculture. These patterns can correspond to the previously formulated assumptions, but also go beyond them (Prainsack & Pot, 2021). The guiding questions for the interview were formulated based on literature finding in the field, therefore deductively elaborated.

Every interview took place at the farm where my interview partners work and mostly live as well. Before the interview I usually got a tour of the farm. I was invited to hang around while Noah finished their task of the day, at Hinterfeld4 farm collective I was invited to join their lunch meal and the sharing routine afterwards, Florian showed me around all buildings, machines and technical equipment and Beatrix even drove me around in the valley to show me the different parts of the farm. Stefanie gave me a detailed tour of every animal, plant and inch of the farm. Those moments opened up new topics and expanded my perception of each context. After turning the microphone off oftentimes we would just stay a bit longer and chat and reflect together on the interview and the occurring themes. For instance, with Florian for two more hours with coffee in the kitchen or with Noah on the bike and train ride back to the city of Vienna. The conversations and observations off the record throughout the time spent together I wrote down in field notes and later transferred into my research diary.

Before the start of the qualitative content analysis, the interviews were transcribed with the help of the open-source software NoScribe (Dröge, 2024). Consequently, after the AI-supported transcription, I listened to every interview and corrected the transcript. Additionally, I modified the data of my interview partners to remain anonymity. Adaptions were made regarding name(s), socio-demographic data, farm type and size, crops, and location to ensure their anonymity and privacy.

4.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a widespread and frequently used evaluation method within qualitative social research. In simple terms, content analysis attempts to analyse communication that has been recorded in some way (Kuckartz, 2012). It distinguishes itself from other (hermeneutic) methods by proceeding systematically, in particular through its rule-based approach, which is intended to guarantee the intersubjective verifiability of social science methodological standards. In addition, the content analysis is conducted under a theoretical umbrella; the research question is theoretically underpinned, the lens of the analysis is guided by theoretical backgrounds, as are the individual steps of the method (Mayring, 2015).

There is no such thing as "the“ qualitative content analysis, but there are different, more or less

similar methods with the same name. In all methods, a category system is used for the analysis. Qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2012) is a method that analyses text material in a systematic and rule-based manner. It distinguishes between three basic forms: 'content-structuring', 'evaluative' and 'type-forming'. They are both, independent and building on each other and they form part of the category-based methods for systematic analysis of qualitative data (Kuckartz, 2012). In my case I am undertaking a content-structuring Qualitative Content Analysis since my research questions are rather explorative and descriptive and the programme, I use to do so is called MAXQDA.

Figure 7 shows the steps of the analysis in a way that reminds of a hermeneutic circle, which is proposed to be seen as an open process where one can jump back and forth between individual steps if needed. Having finished one step does not mean that is forbidden to go back and make further adjustments, but it must be done systematically and well documented to maintain reproducibility (Kuckartz, 2012).

Figure 7: Open Steps of Qualitative Content Analysis (own elaboration based on Kuckartz, 2012)

As a first step, to familiarize with the interview material I read them through thoroughly and wrote 'memos' along the text. These memos include paraphrased statements, confusing or unclear answers or simply notes on my thoughts and questions provoked in me by going through the material.

Content-structuring qualitative content analysis based on Rädicker and Kuckartz (2020) is a method that focuses on summarising and reducing complexity. The category-based work is at the centre of

the evaluation process. Analytical categories can be derived from the theory or research question(s) or developed directly from the material. Deductive-inductive category formation was considered particularly suitable for the exploration of research-led interview questions and main categories, complemented by material-induced categories adding new topics directly drawn from the data and not indicated by prior findings in the field (Schmidt, 2010).

Deductive categories, also known as concept-driven categories, are derived from the research question(s), conceptual ideas, previous experiences, literature, or theory. As researchers formulate their questions, they may anticipate specific types of responses or areas of interest, integrating these into the analysis framework prior to engaging with the text (Kuckartz, 2014). In contrast, inductive categories, or data-driven categories, emerge through an immersive engagement with the text. As researchers read through the text, they identify recurring themes or significant concepts, transforming these observations into codes. This process ultimately leads to the development of inductive or data-driven coding systems. The inductive approach is particularly advantageous when working with unfamiliar data or investigating understudied areas (Mayring, 2015).

In practical analysis, a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches is often employed, which is also the case in this research. The development of main categories in this approach is intricately tied to the interview guide, a product of thorough literature review, drawing from a theoretical background based on the state of the art in research (Kuckartz, 2012). Consequently, Schneijderberg et al. (2022) characterize the structuring of content in qualitative content analysis as a deductive process. In this deductive variant, main categories are initially established, drawing on existing knowledge, and subsequently, subcategories can be introduced through an inductive process. Kuckartz‘s (2012) inductive category formation methodology is conceptually inspired by principles of grounded theory, particularly the open coding approach proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2008). It is crucial to strike a balance between drawing on prior knowledge and remaining open to emerging patterns within the data (Kuckartz, 2014).

After creating main categories deductively, guided by my interview questions, a first round of ‘basic coding’ of the entire material was done. I proceeded with adapting and restructuring the main categories, based on what came newly out of the material. Consequently, I refined categorisations by adding data-driven subcategories, where appropriate. Thematically similar categories were merged into one another. With this updated structure I conducted a second round of ‘fine coding’ (Rädicker & Kuckartz, 2020), which resulted into about 280 coded segments. In addition, a definition was developed for each code and illustrated using an anchor example. Some segments are coded with multiple categories, since sometimes different topics are addressed in one unit of meaning. Throughout the analysis, thoughts were constantly recorded in notes or comments, also to point out possible interesting comparisons and connections with other segments and codes.

The final step of the analysis was writing down the results of each category, only considering the coded segments present. This step is about trying one's best to really understand what the interviewee wanted to express regarding the respective topic. I tried to identify the key results as uninterpreted and uncommented as possible and left this step for the discussion chapter.

4.4 A Critical Reflection

This chapter is dedicated to claim some things, which I could not do (but would have liked to have done), or I did, but in a limited way; things I did wrong and later learnt how I could have done better; things that let me question myself deeply. And it is also about being transparent about where I came from, who I am and what this research process changed in me because of the humans that shared a part of their lives with me.

4.4.1 Limitations

Although the studies are exploratory and I would like to be as open-minded as possible about their results, I would like to make two things clear at this point: Firstly, I would like to disclose my preconceptions as a researcher (see chapter 4.4.2), because nobody is free from them. Secondly, I want to emphasise that the deductive-inductive evaluation method is not intended to suggest that theoretical backgrounds have been ignored. The results of the current state of research were already taken into account when drawing up the research questions and deriving the interview questions. Here I am guided by Hopf and Schmidt (1993), who emphasise that disregarding theory-based research runs the risk of denying oneself the possibility of gaining knowledge. Kuckartz (2012) also emphasises the relevance of the state of research in the investigation of social situations and contexts.

Limitations regarding the methodological approach are given due to limitations of time, length of the piece and experience in the field of social science research. With more time and experience resources available other methods such as an ethnography, participant observation on site or more participatory methods could have been considered. I argue that these would be the next, more profound research steps to gain deeper understanding of both, everyday life of queer farmers in Austria and their life trajectories.

It should also be noted that not all queer people who work or want to work in agriculture have the same prerequisites as my interviewees. The heterosexual and cisgender norm in agriculture is also a White norm. This argument becomes particularly clear when one considers the origins of the agricultural value system in the Nazi ideology of the 1930s and 1940s (Pieper, 2021). Further, the findings of this work do not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the specific experiences of Black queer farmers and queer People of Colour and other migrants in agriculture, as none of the interviewees

belongs to these groups. For example, queer people who are racialised could be even more affected by hetero- and cissexism than my White interview partners due to multiple forms of discriminations which intersect (Crenshaw, 1989).

It is also worth noting that a transgender perspective is not represented in my work, or only in a very limited form. While some participants identify as cisgender, others also identify as genderqueer to varying degrees, yet they have been read almost exclusively as cisgender by those around them. The interviewees in question described that although they are sometimes read as queer by society, this primarily relates to their sexual orientation.

4.4.2 Research Positionality – What About My Role?

I am White, able-bodied, and come from a middle-class, academic background in a wealthy country of the Global North. I'm also read as female and grew up in the countryside, but not on a farm. As a child, I spent a lot of time on friends' farms, but as a teenager and young adult, I was drawn to urban, student circles that would probably describe themselves as queer-feminist and environmentally conscious and activist.

We lived outside the village, in the valley, and when I tried to connect with the other teenagers from the village, it didn't work. In retrospect, I can only speculate as to why this was the case: I think it mainly had to do with class, and perhaps with unnameable feelings of queerness that had been rising in me for a long time, without me naming them as such. Not for another ten years at least. What I felt was a kind of insurmountable distance. None of this is to say that my childhood was unhappy, on the contrary: I love this place and this valley. And my friends were just somewhere else.

My relationship to my own queerness is characterised by constant change and doubt, but a long-standing affinity with queer feminist approaches. For the longest time in my life, I avoided any kind of categorisation or labelling because I felt it was inadequate to express how I felt in my body, in relation to femininity and masculinity and the people I was attracted to. This also applied to queer, because I rejected that label on the one hand to escape it, but also because I felt I didn't have to experience the discrimination that many queer people do. I am read as female and in a normatively beautiful body, and my visible romantic and/or sexual relationships have also mostly given a heteronormative impression to the outside world.

Recently, I've been trying to take a more nuanced, perhaps playful approach to my queerness by constantly questioning everything: I don't hate my female body, but I do not feel femininity either. Do I feel masculine? Maybe sometimes. What is femininity? No resonance. Some days I don't mind being called a woman, other days my chest hurts because it feels terribly wrong. Would I prefer to

have a penis and no breasts? I think so. Can I still have a life with a vulva and breasts? I think so, at least for now. Some days I even like them. Am I genderfluid? Non-binary? What is a woman? Have I just learnt to relate more to cis men and allowed too few options in my head? I am not fully straight. I do not feel like a woman every day, but I feel like a human every day. Don‘t (gender) identity and sexuality change over the course of a lifetime anyway, like so many other things?

What am I? I don‘t think there needs to be a definitive answer to that question. But it certainly influences my research process and creates biases, presumptions and blind spots.

So, this is how I became, who I am and where I see, think, and write from. A very privileged point of view, how I perceive it. To reflect on my ideas and doubts, I established capturing my thoughts in a research diary during the whole process. The material from the interviews is complemented with details from the research diary, which is sometimes useful to grasp the broader context of a situation. The whole process was reflected, and it makes up a collection of notes of about 10.000 words. Methodological doubts were also captured:

To conserve informal conversations off the record, observations on the farm, thoughts and critical reflections on the course of the interview, my role as a researcher, my bias and presumptions, I took field notes during the day. These were consequently transferred into my research diary, which thereby already provokes another cycle of reflection when reformulating my thoughts into semantic units of meaning. Another tool of introspection was recording voice memos on my phone on the way home after the day on the farm, which also found its way into the research diary.

Coming from a queer-feminist bubble where a) queer and feminist struggles are strongly intertwined and b) queerness is enacted as an approach to life that puts many things related to heteronormativity in question and not just an identity category or a label. Throughout the research I learnt to let go this idea of the queer environment that is familiar to me and realised that anyone can use the label ‘queer’ if they consider themselves part of LGBT+ community. Theoretically, of course, I was aware of that before, but putting in into practice was something different.

While transcribing, I also felt very inhibited at the thought of writing *about* others. A reality and a life are simply too complex to talk about from the outside and perhaps shorten it inappropriately, focus on the supposedly wrong things, draw the wrong conclusions and so on. It seems pretentious to me to comment on such complex areas of private life and reality, of which I have only fragments, sometimes without context.

At the beginning of the research process, I assumed that specific practices named by the queer farmers would form a set of queer farming practices and shape my results section. As the research process

progressed, I came to understand that their very existence in the agricultural sector and rural space was a subversive act in itself. Their farm and farming concepts, their views on agriculture, their role as farmers and so on, complement and specify their queer practices in a cis-heteropatriarchal power structure. When directly queried, the participants largely denied that they had a queer approach to farming. Now, putting all the material in context, I can judge this question as poorly formulated and have a better understanding of the fact that it is my part as the researcher to do this analysis of thoughts and actions and to transfer them to a certain degree of abstraction. Consequently, I do not see this question as a failure because it was barely answered, misunderstood or neglected, but as a learning experience that challenged my assumptions and hopefully improved my analytical work as a result.

5 RESULTS

The results of the empirical investigation are presented in the following chapter. The structure is based on the research questions to be answered, but it was often possible to generate results that extend beyond this, thus providing a multi-layered insight into the everyday lives of queer farmers in Austria. Thematically, therefore, agriculture and their role as farmers are addressed initially, followed by the specific challenges they face as queer farmers, although space is also designated for the positive aspects of their everyday lives. Finally, the section dealing with integration into communities and networks is presented.

5.1 Queer Views on Agriculture and Farming

This chapter is dedicated to the significance that agriculture has for the farmers interviewed and, subsequently, their own role as farmers in their personal context and in society in general. The farmers‘ own role and perspective on agriculture are often interdependent and blur into one another, which means that the results meander through the chapters and cannot always be presented distinctly. Consequently, the views on organic farming are explained and counter-hegemonic agricultural practices are identified.

5.1.1 The Meaning of Agriculture

Noah is deeply moved when they arrive at the farm in the morning and see a herd of deer on their way, mist over the fields and the sun about to rise. Everything is growing and the soil is steaming, they enjoy this feeling. Politically, farming for them means being on the ground, developing and experimenting with counter-hegemonic models of agriculture. However, this does not refer to them as an individual, but as a collective responsibility and task. The COVID crisis led Noah to become more involved in agri-political issues, and they are particularly critical of the fact that states (“if we have to talk about states as organisational units”) are far from achieving food sovereignty. They argue that communities need food sovereignty in order to be stable, and that the fact that Germany produces only a third of its plant-based products itself, but exports 200% of its animal-based products, is not a country that can feed its population. They relate the national struggles of agricultural workers to the poor working conditions in the importing countries and see this as a global, relational issue where counter-drafts are urgently needed.

For Florian, working in agriculture means first and foremost preserving the landscape. He also mentions food security on the one hand and innovation on the other as important aspects, and that farmers must keep abreast of social developments in order not to be displaced by the agricultural

industry. This implies a certain openness, for example to the idea that mealworms will be a normal part of our diet in 30 years‘ time. He also sees these developments in the context of sustainability. Florian also enjoys the new opportunities that each new year brings for him in agriculture. And even when he is frustrated by a poor harvest, he can look forward to the next season.

Jana questions what agriculture is and feels that today‘s understanding of it is wrong, so she wants to reclaim the term for herself. On the farm, Hinterfeld4, where Jana lives and grew up, she has always experienced a lifestyle where her parents tried to do things differently: self-sufficient, independent, self-taught and environmentally friendly. Neither of her parents came from a farming background and Jana is not sure if they would have described their lifestyle as farming. There were always animals on the farm, both their own and from others, to care for. So that‘s where her connection to the field comes from, and also the agri-political stance that routes in it. Jana believes that the concept of what they do today is more agricultural than what is commonly known as agriculture.

Nadine reflects on her connection to agriculture and farming. She explains that her family has a long history of gardening and farming, with her great-grandmother growing up in the fields instead of going to school and her grandparents maintaining a garden to provide food for the family. Having grown up with this tradition, Nadine took up gardening herself in her mid-late twenties, studying and observing all the plants and animals she could find. She questions whether farming is more than just having a garden and whether it must have anything to do with animals.
For Nadine, farming gives full satisfaction, especially through the direct relationship with her food:

> *I don‘t need to earn money somewhere in order to be able to buy something. Instead, I take the direct route, not the diversions, the direct route to having the vegetables here. So that‘s my work […] when I was still doing it a lot, it was so clear that it somehow made sense, this relatedness. (…) The connection. The link, so knowing exactly where it comes from and not just that it‘s there and not having had anything to do with it. That somehow no longer makes sense to me.* (P5-NADINE: 50)

On her farm, it is important for her to be able to go outside and be immediately surrounded by nature, to know where her food comes from, and to use sustainable methods that rely on manual labour and natural processes rather than machines and monoculture. She values doing this work together as a community. Nadine also touches on feeling like an oddity or an endangered species because of her sustainable practices, and questions why conventional farming is considered the norm, while organic methods are considered the exception. She feels that what is labelled as ‚conventional‘ should be explicitly labelled, as she perceives organic farming as the natural and normal way.

5.1.2 Their Role as Farmers

For Stefanie, the importance of agriculture is divided on the one hand into the predominant area that serves to feed the world‘s population, just as Florian views it, and on the other hand into sustainable concepts that focus less on pure productivity and more on aspects aimed at ecological added value (e.g. soil structure, biodiversity, etc.). She beholds this form of agriculture, to which she also assigns her own farm, as a small niche, but one that is on the upswing overall. What Stefanie loves about farming is being with the animals, who take you as you are and can reflect your moods in an honest, uninhibited way. Stefanie emphasises that her sexual orientation has no influence on her work with the animals. The animals are not interested in whether she is gay or not. She likes the grounding work in the garden and on the meadow, where she can relax, even though it is often stressful due to external factors such as the weather.
In their current role in the CSA, Noah primarily works with plants. They point out that this might seem obvious, but many agricultural workers focus more on soil processes and soil management. Noah, however, dedicates much of their time working directly with plants, which brings them immense joy. They feel a deep connection and understanding with plants, often finding it easier to relate to them than to people. Noah appreciates the pace at which plants grow and interact. In addition, Noah loves cooking and exploring flavours, having adhered to a plant-based diet for many years. They are keen to continually expand their culinary knowledge and skills. Noah‘s enthusiasm for botany is also a significant aspect of their work, as they enjoy learning more about plant biology. For Noah, the combination of working with plants, cooking, and their interest in botany is strongly intertwined.
Noah has been engaged in agriculture, particularly vegetable farming, for several years. They mention having an interest in exploring different career opportunities and note that commuting so much is tiring. Noah‘s main goal is to eventually work one or two days a week in Vienna in a different field, but they are in no rush to make this transition. For now, farming remains their primary source of income.

Florian emphasises that he presents himself as a full-time farmer to make it clear that farming is his sole source of income and isn‘t just a hobby. It is important for him to show that he is directly affected by price fluctuations and changes in agricultural policy, unlike part-time farmers who have an additional 40-hour job. He reflects his role as a farmer and that of his colleagues in maintaining a cultural landscape, such as alpine pastures, which would not be there without the work of cattle farmers.
On his farm, Florian‘s main responsibility is crop rotation planning. He decides which crops and varieties to grow to adapt to different climatic conditions. He also takes care of ordering fertilisers, but his father takes care of the accounts and other business management tasks.
Beatrix explains that the fishery business has unfortunately disappeared due to problems with

predators. However, she loves working with fish, which was one of the main reasons why she returned to continue the direct marketing of the extensive carp family business. The forest is now her main income job, so she considers herself more as a ‚forest farmer'.

Beatrix looks upon farming as a great responsibility and not, like many others, as a resource from which profit can be maximised. She values the land as a continuum that she happens to be farming and emphasises that land ownership is a rather modern concept. Her land means a lot to her emotionally and she could never sell or rent it except in an emergency because she feels a moral obligation to manage the land carefully and pass it on to future generations in decent condition, regardless of family ties such as her own descendants. It is also part of her philosophy to care for and preserve this human-made ecosystem, making the best of all conditions and not destroying anything, out of responsibility to all other living beings.
As a farmer, she is her own boss and has the freedom to organise her day-to-day life, limited only by the seasons, the weather and the legal framework, which she particularly values. She finds her work extremely meaningful and feels much more effective in farming than in her previous academic research job, as she is now truly at grassroots level. She appreciates working directly with nature, growing her own vegetables and keeping chickens, something she missed in urban life. She also experienced a sense of alienation in the city, which is not the case in the countryside. For her, the positives outweigh the negatives.

Jana emphasises the importance of preserving and passing on agricultural knowledge, especially in a holistic and nature-based approach. This includes traditional crafts such as sheepskin processing and spinning. For instance, she learns a lot from and with her colleague Nadine and they exchange ideas on topics such as compost and seed propagation. Additionally, Jana is surprised how little knowledge there is in Austria about winter vegetables, and how the regional cuisine has lost its creativity, as imported vegetables serve as main ingredients. Therefore, passing on this knowledge is one of her missions. On the one hand her mother taught her a lot, on the other hand she uses books, but rarely the internet. She also practices regular skill sharing with others, such as her multi-talented neighbour Mischa, who is an expert in many fields.
Furthermore, Jana reflects on her feminism and how she is seen as a woman in agriculture. She questions whether the tasks she enjoys performing are a result of her socialisation or her own interests. Jana loves hard physical work, which is often considered as masculine, and does not want to be excluded from these activities. At the same time, she feels that the work is often not good for her body. She practices many of her agricultural activities in relation to feminist considerations, such as learning how to repair agricultural machinery, but less in relation to her queerness. From a non-binary perspective this might be obvious, but she doesn't perceive society at that point yet.

Nadine considers her main role in the agricultural context as having a deep relationship with life and

the natural cycles. She describes how she experiences the entire process from seed to plant growth to harvest and consumption. The cycle of returning nutrients to the soil via the human body is particularly important to her. Not only does she want to experience this full life cycle for herself, but she also wants to set an example for other people. She refers to the practice of the farm community collecting their organic waste in a composting toilet and using the resulting fertiliser to supply their agricultural land with nutrients.

Nadine emphasises that she does a kind of passive political work through her daily life and work, showing other people by example that there are alternative and sustainable ways of living. She does not want to proselytise, but to inspire through her own actions, that ultimately it is simply about life and a deeper kind of connection with nature. Hence, she sees herself as a role model and living an example of how to do things differently.

Nadine came to the farm through the online platform 'Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms' (WOOF), originally looking for a plant-only farm. When she arrived, she realised that there were animals such as goats and chickens alongside the plants. Although she did not originally want animals on the farm and also clearly communicated that she would not want to look after the animals, she supports the other community members in caring for the animals when necessary. Still, for Nadine the plants are the most important area, but she is willing to take on tasks such as haymaking as long as this is not her main area of responsibility:

> *That's why this plant farm, even though it's so animalistic, still suits me perfectly. Because this community is also extremely important to me. In other words, the way community is lived here.* (P5-NADINE: 56)

Stefanie describes how she had always planned to take over the farm, even though she didn't learn much about farming from her father. Traditionally, their tasks were divided along gender lines: the men worked outside and the women inside the farmhouse. As a result, she couldn't even drive a tractor at first, although she has since learnt to do so. Her parents had hoped that one day she would have a strong farmer as a partner to help her.

Stefanie's main aim on the farm is to teach people – especially kids – about where their food comes from. She wants them to realise that agricultural products come from farmers and that consuming meat means that an animal has died for it. She says that some children do not even know that eggs come from the back of a hen. She also teaches them what animals eat and how to distinguish between them, for example sheep and goats. She starts with the very basics, as this knowledge is often not retained.

Despite her efforts to show the children the reality of farming, Stefanie herself does not want to be a 'real' farmer who kills animals. There is a contradiction here, as she also wants to convey an image of the reality of farming. For her, farming is more of an educational task.

Compared to her female colleagues, whose male family members take on manual labour, Stefanie

does a lot of the work herself. She mentions, for example, that she builds the boxes for the animals herself, sometimes together with her father, realising her own ideas. She sees this as a feminist and perhaps also queer aspect of her work and a sign of her independence. Although her wife is a talented craftswoman, she is unable to help because of her position in her own catering company, so Stefanie takes on many physical tasks alone.

5.2 The Farming Models – Why This Way?

In chapter 4.2.2, I provide an overview of all participants and their respective farms and farming models, offering a visual representation that facilitates contextualisation of each individual. The subsequent sections are dedicated to an in-depth examination of the motivations behind their certification as organic farms and the implementation of practices that extend beyond the conventional, market-driven logic of farming.

5.2.1 Organic Farming

Interestingly, all farms are certified organic farms, even the ones who do not sell their products. This fact might be linked to the special role of organic farming in Austria, which I explain in chapter 2.2.

Florian describes the current challenges of organic farming compared to conventional farming. He emphasises that organic arable farms are currently in a worse financial position, as the price difference that used to exist in supermarkets between organic and conventional products no longer works in favour of organic farmers. Despite equal prices for organic and conventional wheat, organic farmers harvest around 3000 kilograms less per hectare, which is not motivating and makes the economic situation more difficult. Florian has not yet taken over the farm; it still belongs to his parents, who also make the final decisions. However, he can contribute his ideas. Due to the current market situation, his father is in favour of a move back to conventional farming, while Florian firmly believes in the future and importance of organic farming. He sees organic farming as what society will demand in the future, even if this is not currently financially rewarded. Florian perceives himself as an environmentalist and wants to contribute to biodiversity. For him, organic farming fits better into this concept. Despite the economic challenges, he remains determined to run the farm organically and considers it as a step backwards to return to conventional farming.

Beatrix describes her views on organic farming and how she runs her farm, which specialises in organic carp farming and arable farming. The farm has always worked without synthetic products and fertilisers and was certified in the 2000s because organic products fetched better prices. This certification did not lead to any change in the farming methods, which have not changed for 100 years and follow the natural conditions of the land. Intensifying carp pond farming would not make

sense anyways, due to the high investment costs involved.
Beatrix fully supports organic farming and takes a critical view of conventional farming. She feels that it has drifted in an unsustainable direction due to greed and the constant drive for higher yields. She observes that large farmers who cultivate a lot of land and keep many animals are often dissatisfied because they must work too many hours. These farmers are often forced to workday and night to manage their large farms with countless animals and leased hectares. In contrast, Beatrix appreciates the benefits of organic farming, which gives her more free time and a better life quality. In her opinion, conventional farmers could lead a more relaxed life by transitioning to organic farming, without the constant pressure of industrialisation.

Jana describes how her farm is certified organic but no longer belongs to Demeter, even though they were 'demeter' certified for nine years. As she and her colleagues no longer had any connection to 'demeter' farming concepts and no longer wanted to use any preparations, they gave up 'demeter' certification. Nevertheless, they are maintaining their organic certification, even though they are not currently selling anything, as it is firstly symbolic and secondly offers practical advantages. This certification allows them to state that they are an organic farm when renting via Airbnb, which makes a difference for guests. They also benefit from organic certification for their offers of woofing and summer camps.
Jana and Nadine emphasise the importance of their organic certification, even if they are not currently selling any products (but they could do so in the future if they wanted). For them, this certification is more than just a formal status; it symbolises their identity as a sustainable and organic farm. Nadine explains that she feels more comfortable calling the farm an organic farm because it better represents their ecological focus and identity than only the term 'farm'.
Further, Nadine criticises the economic support that conventional farming receives and feels that it is short-sighted and only focused on profit. She emphasises that nature-based and organic farming, which is future-proof and sustainable, is the one that deserves monetary support. The two live and work together on their farm and agree that the organic approach is not only of practical nature, but also part of their shared identity as farmers.

Stefanie explains that their farm has always been organic, even before they were officially certified as an organic farm. However, her parents, especially her mother, were not keen on the additional administrative work and the many forms associated with organic certification. Therefore, they were not officially recognised as an organic farm, although they always bought organic feed and fed their animals organically because they consumed the meat themselves and did not want to use non-organic products.
The step towards official organic certification was finally initiated by Stefanie's wife, who needed the organic logo to be able to officially claim that the products for her catering company come from an organic farm in the Drautal region. Stefanie emphasises that the additional administrative work

and the associated costs are manageable and do not represent a significant change compared to her previous practice.

5.2.2 Management Practices Beyond Profits

Noah describes the community-supported farm, which covers around ten hectares and mainly grows vegetables, but also herbs and a small amount of fruit such as melons, peaches and apricots. The focus is on seed-resistant varieties, although some hybrid varieties and own crosses are also grown. The variety of plants grown is large, with around 800 different lines of vegetables, herbs and flowers in the seed store. The team consists of 14 people, most of whom work part-time. At the moment, only two people are employed full-time, while others work only ten hours a week.

Florian begins by explaining that his business also includes forestry, but that this was severely affected by the bark beetle infestation in 2019. This infestation destroyed half of his forest stand and turned the forest into a workload with little income. When asked about adapting to climate change, Florian explains that they are now trying to plant firs, oaks and various other trees. However, these trees do not produce the valuable timber for construction purposes that spruce trees do. In addition, these new trees grow more slowly, so the yield will only be relevant for future generations, most likely his grandchildren.
As far as the future of his business is concerned, Florian believes that it will basically stay the same. However, he sees a major challenge in his parents‘ declining capacity to work. As his partner is not professionally involved in farming, Florian will have to decide in the next five to ten years whether and how he can continue to run the business. The fact that he can use the infrastructure of his pumpkin production and storage flexibly for other purposes, such as a mushroom farm, fish farm or grain storage, which would not be so easy in animal husbandry with a barn, is something he considers as an advantage.

Beatrix describes her way of farming, which is currently based on extensive, organic carp farming and the cultivation of fields and forest. The carp farm is run on a minimal basis and includes tench and pike as well as carp. Part of the area is a ‘Natura2000’ protected reed bed. The farm covers 10 hectares, including 4 hectares of meadow, which is mown by a neighbour and used as feed for cows. As Beatrix has no machinery of her own, she relies on neighbours and friends to cultivate and thresh her fields. She grows winter triticale and winter barley on the fields in a three-year cycle, with one part always in cereals and one part fallow. Beatrix stresses the importance of building up humus and keeping the land fallow to maintain soil quality, as she has no animals to produce manure. The humus build-up is working well, and yields remain stable. Root crops and vegetables are out of the question because of the heavy clay soils in the area. The grain is mainly sold to an organic pig farm, and some is used to feed the remaining fish. Selling the grain is not profitable, but it covers the costs

and is part of the farmers‘ mutual help, which she often mentions and is pronounced in the form of various types of barter. To be highly self-sufficient, Beatrix and her parents keep chickens and occasionally geese and grow vegetables for their own use. As a hunter, she also hunts and processes game for her own use, and occasionally barters informally for other food. This combination enables her to be 90% self-sufficient in terms of meat consumption, for example.
She regrets that the farm, which used to feed several families, can now only employ one person full-time - and that too is under threat. This means that a lot of work remains unattended when four full-time workers would be needed to get all tasks done. She would like to see more people working and living on her farm, but with food prices so low, this is unrealistic at the moment.

Regarding forestry, she emphasises that she has a more ecological view than many of her colleagues, which is related to her educational background and focus. However, she recognises the common goals within the Austrian forestry and believes that many things are going well. The forest operates on a different time horizon, spanning more like 200 years, just as mentioned by Florian. It will only be possible to harvest and evaluate what is being planted today in the distant future. She feels a deep obligation to pass something on to future generations, independent of her own family ties. After all, this forest existed long before her ancestors lived here. Historically, people believed that spruce was the perfect wood, but 100 years ago, no one had anticipated the impacts of climate change. Our actions today will have unknown consequences in the future, and we must view everything as part of a continuum.
She faces significant challenges, such as witnessing the immediate impacts of the climate crisis firsthand and missing the appreciation from an increasingly alienated urban population, especially regarding food production. Additionally, she feels a lack of political appreciation and presence in society. Even within her village, she experiences a sense of alienation; as the only organic farmer in the area, people often think she is crazy for not pursuing the most profitable farming methods. Despite these difficulties, she remains committed to sustainable practices, understanding that the value of her work may only be fully realized by future generations.

Jana and the farm community run a self-sufficient farm where they take a holistic approach. They not only produce vegetables, but also take care of every step from cultivation to harvest. They attach great importance to sustainability and self-sufficiency. This means that they not only grow their own vegetables, but also make most of their own furniture and tools and carry out repairs and construction work themselves. A grandchild-friendly lifestyle is particularly important to them, in which they endeavour to consume as little as possible from outside the farm. They have deliberately chosen not to own a tractor or a car and instead use machines that they can borrow, just as Beatrix. This basic attitude characterises their entire life on the farm and is reflected in their daily activities.
Although they produce everything they can themselves, Jana would like to see a stronger community around the farm. She dreams of a village in which everyone contributes their skills and resources and

supports each other. Unfortunately, they often feel left alone, especially as the only organic farmers in the village. The lack of appreciation and support from conventional farmers and the urban population is a challenge for them. This shows another clear parallel to Beatrix and Noah.

Despite these obstacles, they have clear goals for the future of their farm. They plan to buy the farm from Jana‘s mother and maintain it in the long term. They are looking for ways to incorporate it into a foundation to ensure that it remains in good hands and is managed sustainably in the future. This vision drives them and gives them hope.
Nadine emphasises that an important aspect of farming on her farm for her is living directly in nature and observing where her food comes from. She appreciates living in close proximity to her food source and experiencing this connection on a daily basis. She, Jana and their colleague try to do as much as possible without machines and with simple means such as foot, hand, bicycle and cart. They avoid monocultures and emphasise natural and diverse farming methods (e.g. the milpa[5]). The communal work on the farm and the appreciation of nature are particularly important to Nadine and make the work meaningful and satisfying for her.

Stefanie explains that an institution such as the chamber of agriculture ‘Landwirtschaftskammer’ has difficulty categorising her farm as it is very different from any conventional or known model. Although she produces hay and therefore utilises her meadows, her animals are mainly used for educational purposes. She is asked whether she is ‘really generating something’, whether what she is doing is real farming. Stefanie sees farming as more than just food production: Her aim is to organise the farm in such a way that it is sustainable and educational, even if this means working less efficiently in economic terms. In particular, she wants to make the farm a holistic experience for all the senses. Haymaking is an important aspect of her work. While she manages large meadows mechanically, she emphasises the importance of children and visitors experiencing and understanding the traditional methods of haymaking. This is part of her educational approach, which aims to promote an understanding and appreciation of agricultural labour. There is no room for children on traditional farms due to the pressure to be productive and the large agricultural machinery. In order to enable families from economically weaker households to participate, there are formats that can be visited free of charge. In future, she would like to finance her programmes through sponsors so that all children can participate without barriers.
Stefanie recognises a generational conflict when it comes to a more ecologically sustainable way of farming. What she observes on a societal level is something she also experiences with her parents, who have a more traditional view of farming and first must be convinced of an alternative model. Marketing has so far been less professionalised and often takes place via personal contacts. On the one hand, the majority of the products go to Stefanie‘s wife‘s catering company, while on the other

[5] The “milpa" is a traditional Mesoamerican agricultural system that involves the cultivation of maize, beans, and squash together in the same plot. This intercropping method promotes biodiversity, soil fertility, and sustainable farming practices, as each plant benefits the others in a symbiotic relationship.

hand, the educational offers are advertised on social media, e.g. in facebook groups on the topic of hay. Stefanie and her wife are open-minded and have many plans for the future, especially once the planned extension and conversion work has been completed: they want to open up the farm even more, and one option is to take in queer refugees, crisis care children or other socio-educational programmes. Only her parents still need to be convinced of the ideas - which has been successful so far. To summarise, Stefanie is pursuing an agricultural model that deviates greatly from traditional designs. It is socio-educationally orientated, sustainable and emotionally enriching, with a clear focus on inclusive education, animal welfare and ecological added value.

5.3 Experiences in the Local Context

At this point the reader learns more about the background of why the interviewees chose to work or live where they do, and what experiences they have as queer farmers in their respective contexts. The focus here is on the challenges and experiences of discrimination, but also on the positive aspects that they are able to experience as queer farmers in a predominantly rural context.

5.3.1 Living Spaces – Why Here and not Elsewhere?

The approaches are strikingly disparate. They encompass everything from commuting from the big city to the CSA Hof, residing in close proximity to an urban center, to living in seclusion, a two-hour drive from the nearest larger city. Each individual‘s circumstances are unique, with some having chosen their living and working arrangements involuntarily, while others have seized opportunities that presented themselves.

Rural Context

For Florian, it is clear that he would not be able to commute to work as a farmer. Although they have a great circle of friends where his partner lives, which is around 1.5 hours away, and feel very comfortable there, it is nevertheless clear that he will move in with Florian in the medium term. It is actually even more pleasant for the two of them there, as living with their parents on the farm harbours a lot of potential for conflict. Florian used to date a lot of men in Vienna, but they never understood why he couldn‘t move away from the countryside and go to Vienna. There was a lack of understanding for the reality of farming, which also made relationships impossible.

For Jana, it was not always clear that she would live in a farm community on the farm where she grew up. It was more to do with the fact that the opportunity simply presented itself: Her mother was ready to hand over the farm to a community and Jana took the plunge. Jana doubts that this would have happened if the farm had not already existed. Living in the countryside was a result of

the opportunities and was not forced.

It also made sense for Beatrix to return to the land and her parents‘ farm, as they had just retired. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Beatrix also realised that she no longer wanted to live in the city, and at the same time she made the decision to leave Sweden after two years and live in Austria again. She simply wanted to give country life a chance and realised that she didn‘t want to go back. She prefers living in the country and travelling to the city by train at the weekend rather than the other way round. Beatrix emphasises in this context that she felt alienated in the city and missed growing her own vegetables and keeping chickens.

Nadine, on the other hand, can clearly state why she doesn‘t want to live in the city: it makes no sense for her to live in a city made of concrete when she knows that the resources for sand are limited. So, living in the country seems to be the logical conclusion.

Stefanie finds the city too anonymous and likes to know what is going on around her. She enjoys being informed about everything and getting to know a lot about the lives of others in the village. In addition to the neighbourhood, she also likes living in the family home where she grew up and when she thinks about the COVID-19 pandemic, she is all the happier not to have spent that time in the city. However, she also emphasises that she is glad that the nearest major city is too far away and that she used to party a lot in the city and had her circles there.

Urban Context & Commuting

Noah has chosen to live in the city and commute to the countryside to work as a farmer in community-supported agriculture. This commute takes Noah about an hour each way, including a ten-minute bike ride, totalling two hours on approximately 3-4 days a week. However, the farm itself does not have any residential buildings, and initially, Noah lived in a car on the premises of the farm. The separation between workplace and home has the advantage of being able to better switch off during leisure time and not feel constantly responsible.

The region around the farm is heavily urbanized and functions mainly due to its proximity to Vienna, with a large portion of the residents commuting to Vienna for work. There is little community life and self-sufficiency in the surrounding villages, and the area feels to Noah like a ‘suburb of Vienna’. It doesn‘t feel like ‘real’ rural life to Noah, as they know it differently from their small town in southern Germany where they grew up. There, the community was strong, and one felt surrounded by nature and appealing landscapes. In contrast, Noah still knows hardly anyone from the local area here and feels that everything is separated. Noah sees one reason for this in the fact that the farm primarily produces for Vienna, and they do not sell their vegetables at regional markets in the surrounding communities. The farm is also not located near a town centre, but is mostly surrounded by farmland,

and a residential area a few hundred meters away. The region, also known as the 'vegetable chamber of Austria', is mainly characterized by large-scale conventional agriculture. Noah concludes that one experiences the disadvantages of rural life here but must forgo the beautiful aspects, too. Noah enjoys the advantages of city life in Vienna, especially regarding their queerness, as the freedom and opportunities to express themselves and find a community are significantly greater in the city. However, Noah's observations are not specific to this region but are based on their general experiences with rural areas. The entire younger part of the agricultural team also commutes from the two-million capital to the farm.

5.3.2 Farming and the Rural: Conservative Environment as a Challenging Field

This section contains the statements relating to the interviewees' local environment and describes the difficulties they face in everyday life. As everyday sexism and homophobia were particularly prominent, a separate sub-chapter is dedicated to each of these experiences.

Nadine emphasizes that it doesn't make a big difference to her whether she works in agriculture or in another environment, but that the conservative environment is formative. The place itself, whether it is Austria or Germany, for example, is also not decisive, but rather the structures of the environment. Living in rural Carinthia reminds her of her hometown, a small town in Germany, where there were only white people, binary genders and queerness did not exist. She also finds this silence and the rare, but then derogatory, remarks in her current environment.
In the region, there is the newspaper 'Kärntner Bauer' (male farmer of Carinthia), which occasionally publishes a special edition called 'Kärntner Bäuerin' (female farmer of Carinthia), which is then inserted into the 'Kärntner Bauer' as a special insert. For her, this very graphic but concise example shows how heteronormative and conservative the environment is.
Nadine reports that she does not consciously deal with her queerness in the context of agriculture, but rather processes it unconsciously. She talks about her experience of sitting in a tractor as a woman and how this makes her stand out. People react strongly to this, smiling and greeting her, as it is unusual to watch a woman in a tractor, especially when she is also carrying a baby. This makes her particularly visible in her role as a female, emancipated farmer in this traditionalist environment, because for Nadine what seems exotic to others is completely normal.

Jana does not think that her queerness shapes her life and work on the farm and in agriculture, but she sees a strong connection between queerness and rural life. In her region, queerness does not exist, people do not talk about it and therefore there is no visibility. She knows people in the area who are queer and suffer from discrimination, for example the son of a friend is insulted or declared crazy - even by his own father - because he sometimes wears women's clothes. She has gained the

impression that hardly anything has changed socially in the region in the last hundred years and describes this as 'backwoods'.
Her personal approach to her own sexuality in the village is on the one hand open and normal, i.e. she does not hide this aspect of her private life, but on the other hand she has never made a big issue of it. So far, she has always had the impression that those around her have accepted and respected this. Like Beatrix, Jana is also sure that her self-confidence and her appearance play a decisive role in this.
She explains that her identity as a woman and the associated feminist issues are more present in her everyday life than queer issues and can identify a contradiction between the two. Because she is read as a woman here in the countryside (which is fine for her, but not entirely clear), she is more concerned with classic feminist issues and less with queer-feminist issues. Jana believes that living in the countryside helps her to deal less with questions about her own gender identity, for example, as her everyday rural life is characterized by the binary structures that prevail here. If she lived in a context where these issues were dealt with more in daily life, she would deal with them differently herself.

Stefanie describes how she is perceived as a lesbian farmer in her community. There is a lot of talk behind her back because it is simply common practice in the countryside and although people know that she is a lesbian, this is not openly addressed. She notices that older people in particular are reluctant to talk directly about their sexual orientation and has the feeling that younger people are open about it. Stefanie emphasizes that she has always been 'at odds' with society, be it because of her hair colour or other unconventional characteristics. Having a foster child at home is also something unusual in her environment, which catches people's eye and provides a topic of conversation. Subliminally, she has repeatedly heard talk about her queerness but has not yet been openly confronted or attacked.
There are mixed reactions to her queerness in her family: her parents had been waiting for the 'strong farmer' on her side, but eventually accepted it. While her brother actually rejects homosexuality and is politically located in the right-wing conservative milieu, he did attend Stefanie's wedding after some initial resistance and enjoyed the ceremony. Stefanie wanted to get married partly because she feels connected to the Catholic Church, but also because she wanted to show that their relationship was not 'just a phase'. The wedding is an official statement and it is clear to those around her that this is a conscious decision.
Another topic that Stefanie addresses is the prevailing prejudice that women are weaker and more emotional than men. However, she notes that her father also shouts and swears when he gets angry at work because things aren't going as planned. Contrary to this stereotype, women have traditionally been the strong figures in her family, taking on financial responsibility and administrative tasks while the men do the physical work. *"So, the men only work for us,"* she adds with a wink (P6-STEFANIE: 49). She considers herself as a doer, while her wife takes on the administrative tasks.

Stefanie also explains that there are prejudices that she, as a woman, has no idea about agricultural topics. She attributes this to generational differences and traditional ways of thinking. This is evident, for example, in discussions about farming methods, where her ideas are often rejected because she is seen as inexperienced and it doesn‘t just affect her parents, but obviously uninvolved uncles and aunts also want to have a say. This is where classic sexism strikes and the discrimination she experiences does not relate to her queerness.

Florian talks about his experiences as a queer, gay farmer in a rural, extremely conservative environment. He describes how he and others try to simply do their own thing and not stand out. A friend from the ‘Landwirtschaftskammer’ once told him that gay people are often more successful because they feel they have to prove themselves: *"Because just being me isn‘t enough, you have to prove that you can do something“* (P2-FLORIAN: 65).
Florian does not know how others feel, but from conversations he assumes that similar experiences are made and that in this environment, coming out and finding one‘s identity is particularly difficult in the initial phase. He finds it exhausting and tedious to have to constantly educate people, as many people in rural areas know little about queer issues. He tries to be respectful and sensitive, for example by speaking in a gender-neutral way and avoiding direct, personal questions, and he is also interested in and listens to many podcasts about queerness. He himself is often confronted with indiscreet and offensive questions that show how little respect and awareness there is for LGBTQ+ issues. For example, a professional colleague, whom he has known well for a long time and they see each other regularly, doesn‘t understand why Florian doesn‘t just decide to be straight because he seriously thinks you can choose your sexual orientation. Florian emphasizes how insulting and hurtful it is when people think they can change others. As an adult, you can already inform and argue better but having to explain to others what ‘gay’ means at the age of 15 is too much for young people who are already going through a challenging phase. Despite all the negative experiences, he is keen to emphasize that not all (but many) people are so arch-conservative and that he sometimes receives positive feedback and support.

Beatrix found her youth in the Austrian countryside very difficult, as there were no reference persons or role models for queer people. She felt isolated and felt the need to move away. *"The fact that you feel these structures and then eventually free yourself from them or not,“* (P3-BEATRIX: 38) is a feeling that she feels is common to all people who grew up in the countryside.
In Sweden, on the other hand, she experienced a much more open and equal society in which queer people were visible, normal and accepted in various professional fields, such as forestry. There, she saw that many queer people move to the countryside because they have more freedom there. However, she clarifies that these positive impressions are strongly based on the more progressive Swedish society and are not necessarily transferable to Austria. The situation for trans people in the countryside in Austria is probably even more difficult, while she knows trans people in Sweden who

enjoy country life.
Beatrix emphasizes the importance of visibility for queer people, although she understands that not everyone can or wants to expose themselves. She also talks about experiences of sexism, (in)visibility and the role of the Catholic Church in our patriarchal society in the context of her everyday environment, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Noah experiences situations of heterosexism, i.e. cis-male hetero colleagues trust them less to know how to operate a machine or drive a tractor. They explain it to them unasked and unnecessarily because Noah often has more experience than the people in question.

Good Old Sexism (not Queerphobia)

All of the female-read characters, i.e. Stefanie, Nadine, Jana and Beatrix, experience sexism in their everyday lives. Even if this is the case to varying degrees, there is no getting around the fact that this quota itself brings the urgency of the issue to the table. In addition, all of the female-read interviewees emphasized that they were significantly more affected by everyday sexism than they were by queerphobic experiences. For this reason, I decided to present this type of discrimination in a separate sub-chapter and thus give it the space it deserves.
Beatrix reports on her experiences as a woman and queer person in a male-dominated working environment, in her case agriculture and forestry. At the beginning of her time as a forester, she had to position herself strongly and relied on a harsh and determined strategy to assert her position. Beatrix emphasizes that the difficulties she encounters have more to do with her being a woman than with her being queer. She describes the patriarchal environment in which many men find it difficult to accept that a woman can be in a leadership position. She is often underestimated professionally and has to prove her competence, as in one example with a timber merchant:

> *And then I sort of consolidated my position there through professional discussion. And then I spent eight hours with this guy, I had to work with him for a long time because we were processing all these piles of wood chips, and I spent eight hours with him discussing the quality of each pile and what percentage of what it was. Whether it was good or bad in terms of quality. After that I had a migraine for three days, it was really bad. Because it was so stressful, it really cost me a lot of nerves, but since then he's been good. So, I really had to push through that very hard. And I wouldn't wish that on anyone, that you have to do that all the time. However, it's extremely emotionally exhausting to assert yourself. But that has a lot more to do with being a woman, because as soon as a man is here in this area, in this interaction, people deal with it very differently.* (P3-BEATRIX: 70)

To deal with sexism, she sometimes sends her father to difficult customers because these men treat him differently. Her feminine reading requires her to constantly assert herself against men who

don‘t take her seriously. She works almost exclusively with cis-men, while women are usually only present as secretaries. She is often mistaken for the secretary on the phone and has to correct them, which makes her extremely angry because it‘s a stupid cliché. *"It‘s simply the patriarchy. For many people, it‘s inconceivable that a woman is not a servant, but rather a provider. And that‘s difficult for many. But then they don‘t expect me to be professionally competent."* (P3-BEATRIX: 68)
Since Beatrix‘s male colleagues usually quickly understand from her appearance that they have no chance with her, she has the ‘privilege’ or the ‘advantage’ of being queer to spare herself the everyday sexism that many of her cis-hetero female colleagues in forestry experience. Although lesbians are also often sexualized in society when they are not invisible, Beatrix escapes this because she does not conform to the outward images and expectations. Despite the challenges, she remains in agriculture because she can continue her work due to these ‘privileges’.

Nadine also emphasizes that her experiences as a woman outweigh those as a queer person, as she is read as a woman, which is also consistent for her, and her queerness is not visible from the outside and she does not wear it outwardly. From Jana‘s point of view, there were very rare but isolated sexist remarks from men who, for example, sexualized and fetishized her lesbian relationship. Stefanie also says more than once that the focus is more on her role as a woman than on her queerness.

Heterosexism Coming Around as Homophobia

"Lesbian women are simply invisible," (P3-BEATRIX: 72) Beatrix summarises her experience of female homosexuality. Gay men have other difficulties, however, because homophobia towards gay men is particularly pronounced. This is also reflected in the statements of Noah and Florian, who had to go through their experiences in this role. In order to give adequate space to the heterosexism - which occurred more specifically as homophobia - that was experienced and described in this context by the as male read interviewees in particular, the following section is specifically dedicated to them.

During their apprenticeship in a horticultural nursery in the south of Germany, Noah was not out because they were still in a process of identity discovery and were afraid. Although Noah was out to some close team members, this was not the case with the larger group. Due to their opinions, discussions, and appearance, including clothing and piercings, the team suspected that they were queer, which was true. A foreman, who was hierarchically above Noah in the company, frequently referred to them derogatorily as ‘faggot’. One day, Noah snapped, scolded the foreman severely, and threatened to go to the company‘s bosses. After this confrontation, these homophobic remarks stopped.

Noah describes another situation where their former trainer often used the word ‘faggot’ negatively. Noah early on pointed out to him that this was inappropriate. The trainer responded very correctly, immediately stopped this behaviour, and thanked Noah for the criticism, saying he did not want to reproduce such behaviour. In the region where Noah grew up, ‘faggot’ was often used as a derogatory

term without considering its actual meaning. This parallels Florian‘s experience in a remote, rural area of Austria where he faced similar issues with this term.
When Noah started at their current CSA position, they were open about their queerness and shared their private life freely. However, they encountered remarks from, for example, a colleague with a conservative, religious background. For self-protection, Noah became more reserved and selective about sharing personal topics with the team. The aspect of religiosity and homophobia or queerphobia will be explored further in the course of the thesis.

Looking back, Florian describes how strongly the homophobia he experienced during his school years shaped him. At the age of about 15, when he thought he could confide in everyone, he told a classmate at agricultural college that he was gay. He spread the news like wildfire, making the following three years the worst of Florian‘s life. His classmates had an extremely conservative upbringing and hardly knew anything about homosexuality. At that time, ‘gay’ was the worst swear word you could use and actually being gay was even worse. This experience showed Florian how conservative the farming community is. At the same time, he surmises that a lot has happened among young people in the last decade. Florian describes another example of homophobia he has experienced in relation to visits to workshops with agricultural machinery:

> *(...) and then I realise when I come in that people are whispering. And that people are talking about the gay guy. Even if they don‘t say it to my face, they say it. And I notice that. And that hurts when you‘re reduced to that.* (P2-FLORIAN: 41)

Such experiences are reinforced for Florian by encounters such as the one with an apprentice from the workshop in question, who asked him directly if he was gay when he was partying because everyone would talk about it when he left the workshop. He is also often reduced to his sexuality at the rural youth organisation Landjugend, where he is very active and regularly involved: *"And that just annoys me, because I‘m not just gay. I‘m also more than that."* (P2-FLORIAN: 41) Florian‘s feeling of not belonging also intensifies on social occasions, such as celebrating with other farmers, where he often does not feel part of the group. An experience when collecting potato seed from a neighbour illustrates this: While he himself was not invited for beer, the farmer drank several beers with his brother-in-law on the same afternoon. This is the norm, and the neighbour does this with all visitors. He regularly scrutinises himself and his feelings, speculating whether he has become paranoid due to his experiences of discrimination. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that he is certain that this feeling of exclusion has to do with his homosexuality. He notes that ‘gay’ is still used as a swear word and that younger people apologise to him after using the word. Although this would sometimes make him uncomfortable, he thinks it is indispensable that people understand that ‘gay’ is not a dirty word.

5.3.3 Heavy Workload Structures, Less Open-Mindedness?

In some interviews, the topic of whether the high workload and physical ties to the farm, i.e. the place of work, make it structurally more difficult for people in agriculture to participate in social developments and struggles came up. In a broader sense, this also raises the question of whether typical farming structures work against an open, progressive world view.

Noah believes that agriculture lags behind in terms of social justice, for example, because farm successors often don‘t have the time or opportunity to study or otherwise further their education. The constant work and stress leave little room for social engagement. In addition, people in agriculture often experience classism and are seen as less educated because their formal education does not last as long. However, this overlooks the enormous amount of education that farmers receive through their daily, practical work in agriculture. This is shown by the fact that ‘farmer’ is still used as a dirty word or a term with negative connotations.
Noah is more tolerant of cis-heterosexist experiences in agriculture than in other contexts. They understand that it is difficult for farmers to participate in social development and that many are heavily involved in work from a young age, which influences their social and intellectual development. In addition, many farmers are only well connected with each other, but there is a lack of dialogue with people from other sectors, which leads to isolation and existence in a parallel world. Nevertheless, Noah is conflicted as to whether they should really justify this attitude, as social responsibility applies to everyone, and no one should shirk it. Noah appreciates the warmth and down-to-earth nature of people in agriculture and believes that change is possible if people are given the opportunity and time to do so.

According to Florian, racist terms such as ‘Negro’ are still used in his environment and there is a lack of historical awareness and education. Some of his colleagues don‘t even want to go to Vienna because there are ‘too many foreigners there’. He is shocked by statements of this kind and emphasises that the structures in agriculture allow little free time, which leads to a lack of knowledge of the world and conservative attitudes. As a farmer with an arable farm, Florian has more freedom and support from his parents, which allows him to travel more and develop more open perspectives. This privilege contrasts with many of his colleagues, for whom this is structurally more difficult because they have a dairy farm, for example.

Beatrix reports that she has had more negative experiences at university than in everyday life in the countryside. She doesn‘t know whether people are talking behind her back and does not want to know in order to protect herself. She prefers to keep to herself and is not interested in possible gossip. Her experiences are therefore in stark contrast to those of Noah and Florian.

5.3.4 (In)visibility

The people‘s statements on the topic of (in)visibility and the role of a lack of role models show a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Noah notes that queer farmers are barely visible and that they therefore experience prejudices against queer people and farmers separately.

Florian emphasises the importance of being open about his sexuality, especially in the Landjugend. He regrets that there were no visible gay role models in his youth and that he himself is now taking on this role in order to offer guidance to younger people. Florian also criticises the fact that homosexuality is barely present in traditional institutions such as the Bauernbund and agricultural schools and that queerness in agriculture is barely present in the general perception of society. The lack of visibility also means that people like Florian‘s parents, for example, have no or a false image of queer people, which makes outing situations even more difficult, as this goes hand in hand with a lot of education. For example, clichés prevail that a gay man is automatically queer and conforms to the image of a drag queen. He would like to see more formats like the reality TV programme ‘Bauer sucht Frau’, where gays and lesbians are also looking for a partner. He is happy about modern, queer Netflix series that create normality and visibility, but his parents‘ generation is unfortunately not the target audience.
Beatrix also emphasises the importance of visibility as a queer person in the forestry industry:

> *No matter what I do, it‘s extremely political. It‘s radical to just be there and exist in what I do. Because there are no other people in my circle who are queer and are in the forestry industry. And are visible in a certain way, so to speak. And where it‘s possible, I try to bring that out. I‘m not super openly queer in this forestry context. Because I‘m still protecting my private life in that sense. Because I‘m quite early in my career. But I would say, in a few years or something, if things don‘t change drastically politically in Austria and we‘re still in an open society, why not? I think it‘s important to have a role model function. Because I didn‘t have these role models. And I always wished I did, during my studies.*
> (P3-BEATRIX: 54)

It would not have mattered in what way this person was queer, what their attitudes were or whether they were a forester or a forestry worker. In her neighbourhood, outside of the forestry sector, Beatrix is out and has never hidden her relationship with her ex-partner. However, she believes that many people did not understand that they were in a romantic relationship because there were no references for such a thing. Whether people realised it or not was ultimately irrelevant to Beatrix. In general, her private life is highly respected and there are no unpleasant questions about it, but this is also due to the fact that she strictly separates these areas of her life.
She also finds it relevant to be visible as far as she can because of the conservative Catholic-church structures, but at the same time she understands all those who do not want to or cannot do this.

When she has queer friends visiting, they walk through the village and joke about being the first pride parade in town. Beatrix points out the ambivalent difference that lesbian women are usually simply invisible, but gay men in rural areas experience significantly more homophobia.

Jana emphasises that the discourse on queerness is less present in rural areas than in urban contexts, where it is a big issue in certain bubbles. She has found that many people in rural areas are overwhelmed by complex identity categories and that such issues do not play a major role in their everyday lives. An encounter with a non-binary person showed her that understanding and integrating such identities requires a lot of practice, but also made her want to be more playful with her gender identity again. Overall, it is clear that the visibility of queer people in rural and agricultural contexts is limited and that the lack of role models makes the perception and acceptance of queer identities more difficult than in urban contexts. Nevertheless, the interviewees recognise the necessity and the positive influence that visible queer role models can have and are committed to closing this gap in various ways.

5.3.5 Two Powerful Accomplices: Catholic Church and ÖVP

In relation to structural drivers of traditional, conservative values, participants mention in particular the strength of the Catholic Church and the dominant position of the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP). This party represents Christian-conservative attitudes, is extremely powerful in rural structures and counts a large proportion of farmers among its voters because it supposedly represents their interests. As the Catholic Church and the ÖVP are closely intertwined, the following subchapter is dedicated to them.

Florian is a member and very active in the largest farmers‘ association Bauernbund, which is even officially a sub-organisation of the ÖVP. He doesn‘t expect to be accepted as a gay person there either, because it doesn‘t fit in with the family values of these conservative, ÖVP-affiliated organisations. In general, many people in the agricultural sector cannot imagine that someone can be gay AND a farmer, that there are queer people in all areas of society.
Florian is very concerned that his liberal values do not fit in with those of the ÖVP and its organisations. He feels torn in his voting behaviour because, as a farmer, he feels that the ÖVP best represents his professional interests in terms of party politics. However, this contradicts his individual, socio-political and ethical values. In Florian‘s perception, the Catholic Church strongly influences the values of people in the countryside. He gives the example of his parents, who have always been taught these values and live by them. As a result, they find it difficult to understand Florian‘s values and his queerness, which often creates a potential for conflict. This was particularly difficult in the beginning after he came out, but Florian is optimistic: *"Confrontation is the best therapy."* (P2-FLORIAN: 69)

Noah withdrew more emotionally at work because a religious colleague at work said it was a shame that Noah was going to hell, but unfortunately there was no alternative. After a separation, however, this and other conservative and religious colleagues were very compassionate and supportive when Noah was visibly unwell. At the same time, they realised that this colleague was now hoping that Noah would find the right way. Because Noah knows his colleagues and their backgrounds, they are less affected by this kind of queerphobia than in other contexts. They can understand to a certain extent why they are like that and even sympathise with them to a certain extent: *"And I don't think you can expect the same from everyone at the same time."* (P1-NOAH: 37)

Beatrix is convinced that society in Sweden is so much more progressive than in Austria, partly because of the Protestant Church. For example, the fact that a lesbian married woman is a priest is nothing unusual in Sweden, but would be completely unthinkable in conservative Austria.

Unlike others who see a contradiction between their values and those of the Catholic Church, Stefanie uses the powerful statement of marriage to legitimise her relationship, so that those around her understand that her relationship with her wife is not just a phase. It was also important for her to have a church wedding because she feels connected to the Catholic Church and has links with a nearby parish.

5.3.6 Not All is Bad: The Perks of Being a Maverick

In addition to the hurdles and difficulties, the interviewees never tired of emphasising that life as a queer person in agriculture and rural areas also has many positive aspects and equally positive experiences. The following section is dedicated to these advantages of queer rural life and the support they received.

Noah reports a high level of support and empathy that he received from his conservative and religious colleagues when they were in a bad way due to a separation. They emphasise that getting to know a queer person can break down prejudices. Their own boss during their apprenticeship at the time changed his attitude towards queer people after Noah came out to him – back then as gay – at the end of the apprenticeship. Because he first got to know Noah as a person and not immediately as a queer person, a relationship was able to develop and Noah is certain that their former boss now treats queer people differently, is sensitised to the difficulties in his company and will make sure that discrimination is no longer reproduced there.

Florian sees his queer identity as an opportunity for personal development and to strengthen his self-confidence. He mentions that queer people often mature earlier because they are forced to deal intensively with themselves and their environment. He has also made valuable contacts through his

queerness and gained support from a gay mentor, which has opened up professional, personal and political opportunities for him. The commonality of being gay immediately provides a good basis for dialogue. Florian emphasises that there are positive examples and that not all people in the country are arch-conservative, although the majority are. However, there are also some people around him who are open and supportive and where his homosexuality is not an issue. This gives him hope for the future, especially for future generations in the country.

Beatrix describes several advantages she experiences as a queer person in agriculture and forestry in the countryside. She emphasises that as a queer woman who does not fit into traditional gender roles, she enjoys more freedom and respect in her working environment. Her unconventional demeanour and queerness mean that people tend to reduce her to her professional expertise rather than her personality. Due to her queerness, Beatrix has learnt to question social structures and norms, which gives her a deeper understanding of alternative ways of thinking and more social skills. These skills help her to be more empathetic and open in her interactions with others and to create safe spaces for her employees. She asks different questions and considers the needs of her employees, which is not common in her industry. She also sees it as an advantage that she is not sexualised and is therefore less confronted with everyday sexism, in contrast to her cis-hetero colleagues. Although she feels part of the queer community in the city, she realises that there is often little understanding of life in the countryside. She values the freedom she has gained through her queerness and would never want to return to a cis-heteronormative role, as she finds this very restrictive. Her queerness allows her to lead an authentic and self-determined life, far away from traditional role models and social constraints.

Jana describes that in her farm community Hinterfeld4 and its social network, queerness is often considered as normal and is therefore not discussed. She emphasises the importance of meeting spaces where people with similar attitudes come together. In her experience, these do not necessarily have to be people in the immediate neighbourhood, but they are simply well connected in the region with people who have similar attitudes. In her immediate, rural neighbourhood, she either experiences acceptance and no significant resistance to her queerness, or it is not an issue anyway, as there is a lack of suitable meeting spaces to even talk about it with people who are more conservative, for example.

5.4 Identity, Community and Networks – An Intertwined Web of Being

The next section of the work is dedicated to the queer and peasant identity of the participants, their (non-) belonging to a community and the role of networks. As these categories are closely interwoven,

at times it is not possible to clearly separate the individual aspects and there are overlaps in terms of content. In order to avoid duplicate statements, these were therefore only ever assigned to one of the categories.

5.4.1 Meaning of 'Queer'

To better understand each farmer's context and perspective, I first shed light on their personal views on the definition of queer or queerness. This makes their stance more accessible and lets the reader know where their approach is originating from.

Noah defines queerness as living outside of cis and heteronormative gender identities and sexual orientations. It also includes people who break conventional gender images and do not allow themselves to be categorised in binary, stereotypical or patriarchal gender identifications. This definition is inclusive and also includes those who do not wish to define themselves in a certain way.

Florian defines queer as an umbrella term for all possible sexual orientations. For him, it also means openness towards all people, regardless of their sexuality or skin colour. He associates queerness with joie de vivre and friendliness and automatically sympathises with people who define themselves as queer, even if this is not always logical. He sees the queer community as friendly and open and wants everyone to be allowed to be who they want to be - that's how it should be in the future.

For Beatrix, queer is a broader and more beautiful term than LGBTI+, which she likes to use as an identity word. For her, queer means standing apart from heteronormative society and is also a fighting term in Austria because of the strong patriarchy. She identifies as queer because the term has more to do with identity than sexuality and leaves many things open.

For Jana, queer means exploring non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations. She is fascinated by queer theory, especially the idea that you don't have to define yourself and can subversively transcend categories. At the same time, she perceives the multiplication of identities as exciting, as there are many terms for sexual orientations and gender identities. For Jana, queer is a term that means that gender identity and sexual orientation do not correspond to the 'norm'. Jana has never defined herself as queer because she classifies queer as a non-category. She is interested in queer theories and philosophy, but she feels that labelling herself as queer is an unnecessary category. She simply describes herself as a person who likes people.
Jana concludes that discussions about queer topics mainly take place in urban discourses and certain bubbles. In the countryside, such topics are often unknown and overwhelm people. Since she has been living in the countryside again, identity categories are no longer an issue for her, as it is okay for her to be read as a woman. She talks about a positive experience with a non-binary person

who came to her farm last year and how she enjoyed practising using gender-neutral language, although she realises that many people find it difficult and still need a lot of practice to integrate such people well.

Nadine describes her difficulty in having a clear definition of 'queer'. She doesn‘t feel comfortable labelling herself as queer as she doesn‘t have a clear idea of what the term means. Nadine grew up in an environment that was very homogenous and did not recognise diversity in terms of gender identities and sexual orientations. It was only later that she realised that there are more than the typical, normative categories. She is interested in people in different ways without having to deal with specific terms. She does not have a precise definition of ‘queer’ and understands it as something that is not limited to men or women. In terms of her sexual orientation, Nadine says that she is a sexually active being who relates to people in general without committing to specific labels.

Stefanie describes her meaning of ‘queer’ briefly and succinctly as diversity.

5.4.2 Identity – Queer and Farmer, but not a Queer Farmer

Noah describes how they would never have thought of living in a big city because it doesn‘t really suit them. However, the current model of commuting allows them to combine the urban, queer and rural worlds and thus live out both identities, although they have very little overlap. In general, Noah has a feeling of being a farmer and being queer, but they perceive a parallelism of these identities rather than a fusion of them.

Florian is politically active and a member of the Bauernbund farmers’ union, although its values often do not match his own. He describes the conflict between his professional and personal identity, especially in political elections. Florian feels part of the LGBTQ+ and farming community but does not see a community that unites the two. He believes that gay farmers often try not to stand out and disappear into the crowd or are particularly achievement-orientated and try to stand out by having outstanding farms because they have been constantly taught that just being themselves is not enough.

Beatrix clearly separates her personal identity from her professional, rural environment. She has never experienced open hostility and is not asked about personal matters, which she believes has to do with her self-confident appearance and attitude, but also with self-protection. Her private life feels respecte, as does her non-heteronormative lifestyle: For example, not aspiring to start a traditional family and have children. However, she felt out of place in the city‘s queer community because of her agricultural work. Her identity as a queer farmer does not fully fit either in the countryside or in the city.

Jana describes queerness as an urban discourse that is not very present in the countryside. Since living in the countryside again, the topic of queerness has become less relevant to her. She has experienced how difficult it is for people in the countryside to understand non-binary identities or the rejection of heteronormative role models and that you have to start at completely different points if you want to get into a conversation so as not to be overwhelmed. Jana emphasises that in the city, she would deal more with her gender identity and queer feminism, whereas in the countryside, classic feminist topics are more important to her. In the city, there are more opportunities for philosophical discussions, events and social interactions that normalise queer identities and enable diverse forms of expression such as cross-dressing. These urban spaces also offer more opportunities to meet non-heterosexual women. Since returning to the country, queerness has become less important in her everyday life as it is acceptable for her to be perceived as a woman. This spares her the need to constantly explain herself or defend her identity. In everyday encounters, such as at local markets or in local council meetings, her queer identity plays a subordinate role and personal identity issues are rarely discussed.

Nadine is sometimes categorised as a lesbian because of her past marriage to a woman, which she does not find reflective, but is able to deal with it well and is sometimes amused by it. She accepts that people think in categories, even if she doesn‘t classify herself in them. For her, it is more important how she defines herself and does not perceive it as a disadvantage how others perceive her because she rarely comes into contact with it.

Stefanie says that people around her often know about her sexual orientation but prefer to emphasise other aspects of her identity because it makes them uncomfortable. Like Nadine, Stefanie also takes this with humour. In her youth, she was strongly masculine and dealt intensively with the issues of masculinity and femininity. Today, she values her identity as a woman very highly.

5.4.3 (No) Belonging – Who is My Community?

Beatrix describes her experiences and feelings of belonging and community both in rural areas and in the city. She recognises that people who do not follow the usual structures in the countryside immediately stand out, and she often finds contact with other ‘oddballs’ very pleasant because they also do their own thing. She feels partially integrated into the hunting community, even though it consists only of hetero-cis men. She describes her membership of this community as membership of a club, based on common interests and mutual respect. However, this community is not queer, and her queer contacts are mainly from Vienna, where she has a queer community.
Interestingly, she appreciates the physical separation of her queer community in Vienna and her life in the country, even though it would be nice to have a queer community locally. However, this separation gives her the feeling of variety and different influences, which she finds pleasant. However,

Beatrix has also found that her professional identity as a farmer does not quite fit in with the queer community in Vienna, which is often philosophically, academically or artistically orientated. This discrepancy means that she never feels like she fully belongs either in the city or in the countryside: In the countryside, her professional identity as a farmer and forester fits, but her queerness stands out, while in the city she is queer, but her identity as a farmer stands out.
Beatrix dreams of bringing more queer people to the countryside in the future and hopes to create a farm collective or similar community in the next few years. She would like to bring more of her friends from the city to the countryside, who could either work as farmers or simply live on the farm.

As a queer farmer, Stefanie does not really feel part of a community, especially not in her village, which is strongly traditional and characterised by agriculture. She notes that there is no queer community there and that the networks of the queer and farming communities are very different. Nevertheless, she has slowly started to network with local farmers, especially by buying their produce, which has generated a positive response. In terms of the queer community, she has made contacts in the past through queer organisations such as 'HOSI' and through the nightlife in the nearest larger city, but these were not agricultural.
Stefanie really likes her neighbourhood and enjoys life in the village, where everyone knows everyone else and people support each other. She appreciates the non-anonymous, close-knit community, although she does not feel fully integrated here either. She also takes part in the activities of the parish community, but even there she feels rather marginalised. Her close friendships are often widely dispersed, as she has completed many different training programmes and lived in numerous places, meeting a lot of people along the way. This spatial distribution of her social contacts does not make her feel fully integrated into a local community, but rather networked across a wide area.

Jana describes that she does not feel part of a community, especially not a queer farming community. She most likely considers herself as part of communities centred around alternative farm projects, alternative housing projects or community farms and farm collectives. She feels well connected and integrated in these areas.

Nadine describes her sense of belonging and community experiences mainly in relation to the Hinterfeld4 farm project. She feels most like part of the Hinterfeld4 farm community, which she sees as a kind of family of choice or close-knit community. This community is characterised by the fact that decisions are made jointly and in a structured way and there is a strong social exchange in which personal sensitivities and needs can be openly communicated. Nadine values this social circle and genuine participation, which differs from a purely purpose-orientated community. Nadine is less involved in networking with other farms, which she leaves to Jana, who is an active networker. Her main focus and identity within a community remains centred on Hinterfeld4, where she feels strongly connected through the communal and social structures.

Noah feels anchored in several communities that are defined by interests, work and personal orientation, but these form little overlap. They are therefore separate communities. With regard to the queer community in agriculture, Noah states that it is difficult to find such a community, as the work often takes place in isolation on remote farms. This makes regular encounters and dialogue difficult. In the city, especially in Vienna, it is even more difficult to meet queer farmers, as there is less of an agricultural presence there. He does have some queer friendships in agriculture, but would not describe them as a cohesive community, but rather as individual friendships. They largely feel comfortable and at home in the agricultural community, as he appreciates the farming community on a human level.
Within the CSA they describe a feeling of only partial belonging to the farming team, where there are both strong team feelings and areas where they feel less community, often due to generational differences or different areas of work. The farm is not completely homogeneous, but is also characterised by competition, which they believe can also be part of the dynamics of a community. Another reason why Noah lives in the city is that they have no access to the local community in the CSA area and everything seems to function separately from each other (see chapter 5.3.1)

Florian feels a clear affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community and also to the farming community, but he doesn‘t see an intersection that unites the two identities. Although there are gay farmers on platforms such as Instagram, he does not feel actively involved in such a community. He believes that gay farmers often try to remain inconspicuous and disappear into the crowd to avoid attracting attention. Despite occasional attempts to network with other gay farmers in his region, he finds that these often fail because the expectations of these meetings are centred on sexual contact rather than friendship. This makes it difficult to build deep friendships and means that his contacts are loose and not part of his close circle of friends. Florian would like to have more genuine friendships within the gay community in his region but realises that this is difficult because there are so few openly gay people. Florian describes his ambivalent relationship with the community and belonging as a gay farmer in rural Austria. He feels disadvantaged by the geographical isolation of his farm and would like to be closer to Vienna, where he believes he can better express his personality. The rural area in which he lives is strongly conservative, which often brings him into conflict with social norms. As already described in detail in previous chapters, Florian often feels that he does not fully belong to the group in social situations and surmises that this has to do with his sexual orientation, that he feels latent marginalisation. This isolation is exacerbated by the limited social opportunities, which he attributes to the small number of openly gay men in his neighbourhood, among other things. He often already knows these few men, or they are otherwise committed (e.g. officially married to a woman, have children, etc.). Although he and his partner actually have a stable circle of friends in his region and feel more comfortable and less isolated there, it is clear that his partner will have to move in with him if Florian wants to pursue his profession as a farmer.

5.4.4 Networks – The Power of Relationships

Beatrix repeatedly emphasises the important role of informal, peasant bartering and mutual help. On the one hand, labour and machine power is exchanged for fodder (mowing the meadows and fields), on the other hand also natural goods (game meat for pumpkin seed oil), whereby no one counts exactly, and everything balances out over time.
In addition to this kind of informal network, however, they also have a strong social function. Beatrix has to fight hard to be part of these networks because they have to do with power, family affiliation, disputes, etc. and there are many gatekeepers. She doesn‘t take the norms of these meetings seriously and then just turns up there, as a female quota and queer quota and only older cis men. They are obviously unhappy about it, but don‘t dare say anything against her presence. It is particularly explosive that she appears in these spaces of power as a queer being read as female. Because in her region, it is unusual for women to be found outside the sphere of the household and child rearing. So, there are women‘s spaces, but Beatrix doesn‘t really feel like she belongs there either and she criticises the patriarchal structures behind this division into traditional family roles.
In forestry, the few women who work in practice and not for the authorities can be counted on two hands. They are spread all over Austria and are poorly networked with each other. However, she sees the networking of queer farmers and foresters throughout Austria as the first and next step in order to create a framework for professional exchange. She cites the network ‘Perspektive Landwirtschaft’ as a reference, which was also once launched as a project and is now supported by the state institutions. Another example would be the ELAN network in Germany. An annual meeting could provide a space to exchange expertise. For her, there is no need to talk about queerness, but she would appreciate the shared perspective to then talk about farming issues. In Austria there is a need for networking, whereas in Sweden this already happened 50 years ago, and such networks no longer play such a big role there, as queer rural life is the norm.

Stefanie also reports mutual help from farmers as an informal network. For example, the neighbours have their animals on Stefanie‘s pasture free of charge and in return help with the haymaking every year when many hands are needed.

The Hinterfeld4 farm community is organised as an association and is currently trying to network with others in order to ultimately buy the farm from Jana‘s mother. To this end, they are even in contact with a foundation, as the aim is to ensure that the farm and land are in good hands in the long term. Jana also feels part of a network or community of alternative housing and farm projects. This network gives her existential support, an exchange of ideas and mutual help, and inspiration on how community can work. The network has only loose, informal structures and is essentially organised through an e-mail distribution list. There is also an exchange meeting about once a year, with Jana co-organising the last one with 13 participating projects.

In terms of networking itself, Florian has the feeling that queer farmers find it easy to get into conversation with others because he experiences them as extroverted. Overall, he would like to see more networking with gay farmers in the area.

5.5 Political Demands and Calls for Change

Beatrix would like to achieve visibility and contact persons in every federal state at a political level: *"Well, what would be really cool would be if, for example, an institution like the Chamber of Agriculture (...) ran a campaign saying, hello, there are also queer female farmers"* (P3-BEATRIX: 82). There could be a separate advice centre for queer people who are interested in farming but do not yet know, for example, how they can get into the industry or what options there are for handing over a farm outside the family if they do not have access to land. She doesn't feel like she belongs in organisations such as the Bauernbund or the Landjugend and in her youth she got the impression that the festivals of the Landjugend were all about excessive drinking, which for her is not an inclusive climate. Structurally, Beatrix dreams of an explicit queer friendliness that permeates all organisations, whether rural youth association Landjugend, Bauernbund or Landwirtschaftskammer. She is aware that this may sound utopian, but:

> *And I think it's also possible, I think other countries that are more progressive than, I don't know, just Austria. But, yes, that is of course the utopia, that institutions like that would do something, I would say, unlikely, because the ÖVP and so on.* (P3-BEATRIX: 82)

Overall, Florian would like to gain more support through visibility. On the one hand in the media, so that society is aware that there are also queer farmers, and on the other hand in political organisations such as the farmers' union Bauernbund. Another crucial measure, based on his personal discriminatory experiences at agricultural college, would be to focus more on educating and informing young people in order to add a different perspective to their often conservative upbringing.

Jana does not see any need for support for herself personally and also knows which organisations she could get involved in politically if she wanted to work on the issue. She could get involved in the ÖBV and promote the topic of queerness herself, but she has realised that this is not important enough for her right now.

Stefanie feels that she receives good professional advice from the regional chamber of agriculture 'Landwirtschaftskammer Kärnten' and notes that her queerness is absolutely irrelevant to them. You

can call with any technical questions, give your farm number on the phone and receive helpful and specific advice or access to further and advanced training in the agricultural sector. A network with other queer people in agriculture would also be helpful for them, where they can exchange expertise, support each other and provide practical help and tips. She is currently also experiencing this kind of exchange in a training programme that she is doing with other women and finds it enriching to learn how others solve certain problems.

6 DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the findings of my exploratory research questions. It is acknowledged that all research is subject to a certain degree of subjectivity. Consequently, efforts have been made to present the results of the interviews and observations in an objective and descriptive manner. This is to facilitate a clear distinction between the interpretation of the researchers and the discussion based on the literature, which will be presented in the following chapter. The aim of this structure is to enable the reader to navigate between the results themselves and their interpretation and contextualisation with greater ease.

This thesis significantly contributes to the under-researched field of queer farmers in Austria by offering a nuanced exploration of their roles in agriculture, the challenges they face, and their integration into communities. Providing answers to these research questions bridges gaps in rural, queer, and agricultural studies, providing insights into how queer farmers navigate ecological and counter-hegemonic practices while also highlighting areas where sustainable agriculture movements must take care to be truly inclusive. The primary objective of this empirical study is to generate the material, analyse it and process the results. In the subsequent discussion chapter, I concentrate on individual aspects that appear particularly pertinent in relation to answering the research question and these aspects are as follows:

The initial section of this chapter examines the extent to which the findings of this study have identified examples of counter-hegemonic farming practices that have the potential to contribute to the development of sustainable agriculture and the transformation of food systems. These aspects are discussed in particular in terms of their alignment with the principles of agroecology.

In the second section, it is demonstrated that all female interviewees are significantly more confronted with heterosexism, or so-called everyday sexism than with queerphobic experiences. This and other facets indicate that queer-feminist topics are less relevant than classic feminist struggles in this gender binary context.

The final section of this study focuses on the role of communities and networks in the context of rural and farming communities. It highlights that many of the farmers in this study do not identify as ‘queer farmers’, as the contexts for this identity are lacking. They are either ‘queer’ or ‘farmers’, but not both simultaneously.

6.1 Counter-Hegemonic, Sustainable Farming Practices

As international literature suggests, queer farmers tend to farm in sustainable and innovative ways (Dentzman et al., 2022; Straus, 2022). In this study numerous practices were identified, which do not act within a hegemonic and productivist farming paradigm. As Jana said, she tries to reclaim the term ‘farming’ / ‘agriculture’ for herself and scrutinises the image of what farming is or should be. In the context of Austria, it was not possible to make a direct link between queer farmers and agroecology, due to its unfamiliarity in the local context (Brumer et al., 2023). In this discussion, I identify practices and perspectives on farming that are aligned with agroecological principles. To clarify, this is just a tool for the purpose of exemplification and simplification, with the aim of bridging the gap between Austria and other regions where agroecology is well known. It is not the intention to make a full assessment of their farming practices or to judge how far they are 'agroecological'. Rather, this approach provides further insight into the potential role of queer farmers in a shift towards a sustainable food system transformation (Gliessman, 2018).

The fact that all five farms are certified as organic is of no surprise, considering overall numbers of organic certification in Austria (Ladinig et al., 2023), but a vast number of their management practices appear to go far beyond the basic requirements for certification. Besides the fact that Restrepo et al. (2000) consider organic agriculture an approach that has contributed to strengthen agroecology, among others, they also see permaculture among those contributors.

Jana and Stefanie run their garden based on permaculture principles, but not in an idiomatic or ideological way, as they explained, but because it seems logic to work with and not against ecology. At Hinterfeld4 they use their human residuals as fertilizer, which can be linked to the agroecological HLPE principle of *(1) Recycling* but also touch *(2) Input reduction* and *(3) Soil health* and *(6) Synergy*, which refers to the enhancement of interactions in agroecosystems (Wezel et al., 2020). Furthermore, by learning together and sharing their (traditional) knowledge and skills among another as well as with neighbours, helpers, guests and friends of the farm, they long for *(8) Co-creation of knowledge* as well as *(9) Social values and diets*, and *(10) Fairness*. Their farming model does not only address *(4) Animal health* and *(5) Biodiversity* but goes as far as to consider the campers and guests they host and the helpers who live with them temporarily as *(7) Economic diversification*. Besides that, they even try not to take part in the economic system at all and establish counter-hegemonic models on the farm and with others, such as gift economy.

Stefanie’s pedagogical farming model and practices can be linked in particular to HLPE principle *(7)*, but further touch *(4), (8),* and *(9)*. When examining the results of Beatrix’ farming practices principle *(1), (2), (3), (4), (5) Biodiversity* as well as *(6)* are represented. Further, she attempts to address *(7), (9)* and *(10)* by treating her employees with particular respect and empathy, based on

her experiences as a queer person. Even Florian whose farming model is more hegemonic and productivist aims at level *(1), (2)* and *(3)*. The objectives of the Noah's CSA farm initiative include the pursuit of food sovereignty, resilience, social justice, a liveable future and, most importantly, the provision of good food for all. As a result, their actions extend beyond the farm level and thus pursue a transformative component within their farming model, which is reflected in *(11) Connectivity*, among others.

This comparative approach illustrates that many of the participants' practices go beyond certified organic and that parallels with agroecology can be drawn, although not necessarily intended. At the same time, it is to acknowledge that their focus and degree varies, and they are not to be seen as a monolithic group, nor does their existence speak for all queer individuals involved in agriculture.

Taking the sum of these statements, I argue that they do not only strongly align with an agroecological worldview but involve a peasant's mindset and counteract a market-driven, productivist model of farming. In *Naturaleza y Lógica de La Economía Campesina* Shanin (1976) defines the peasant's logic as fundamentally distinct from capitalist economic principles. Peasants prioritize subsistence, social obligations, and long-term sustainability over profit maximization. Their economic decisions are influenced by a combination of cultural norms, familial responsibilities, and community relationships, resulting in a multi-dimensional approach to resource management that values stability and resilience. Shanin (1976) emphasizes that this logic challenges conventional economic theories, highlighting the importance of understanding the social and historical contexts of peasant life. Or as Krammer (1976) articulates it in a pointed way:

> *The competition between the capitalist mode of production and the peasant or pre-capitalist mode of production, one essential difference becomes apparent difference: the capitalist ceases to produce when the capital he has invested is no longer utilised, while the peasant farmer usually continues to produce even when his income is considerably lower than that of a labourer. The concept of capital utilisation as a goal of production is foremost not recognised by them*. (Krammer, 1976, p. 56)

I argue that such peasant's approach applies to Jana, Nadine, Stefanie, Beatrix and even predominantly Noah's CSA farm. The CSA also pursues practices of this logic, as the costly measures they practise cannot be utilised economically. For example, the preservation of a seed bank or the planting of rare or old varieties that have almost disappeared.

By their actions they support a food system transformation towards food sovereignty and more importantly, reshape and redefine what farming and the farmer's role means. As farmers they prove that they can be more than producing, they embrace their roles as educators, idealists, role

models, climate change mitigators, subsistence farmers, observers, activists, forest farmers, biodiversity advocates, community builders, co-creators, and life-long DIY learners. By putting social and ecological sustainability at the centre of their actions, productivity paradigms are dismantled and deconstructed and a care approach is applied to both humans and nature. More precisely, the dichotomy of humanity and nature is torn (Erickson & Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010; Gaard, 1997). By adopting an alternative approach and scrutinising the productivity narrative through practice, five queer farmers demonstrate that this is a viable option. They challenge the conventional perceptions of agriculture and the heteronormative representations of farmers and their (family) farms. They illustrate that alternative models are not merely hypothetical but are, in fact, feasible. Simply by existing in agriculture and in the countryside – against all odds – there is a subversive component, and queer practice is reflected in this act itself. Or as Beatrix aptly puts it: *"I stand here, I will not move"* (BEATRIX: 58).

Soler Montiel and Perez Neira (2013) introduce three biases of the Western world view from an eco-feminist perspective: anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism, and androcentrism. They contend that anthropocentrism elevates human beings above all other species and nature, framing the natural world as something to be dominated and exploited. Ethnocentrism, on the other hand, dismisses non-Western cultures as 'backward', thereby discrediting other forms of knowledge while positioning Western rationality as the only legitimate standard. Androcentrism further shapes Western society by centring it around a masculine viewpoint, where White, adult, heterosexual men who own resources are considered the norm, while women and feminized identities are rendered invisible and deemed irrational (Soler Montiel & Perez Neira, 2013).

Building on this, Duran Gurnsey (2015) notes that agroecology is not immune to these biases either, as patriarchal structures surround us everywhere. Based on her research, she raises the question of whether agroecology may have a heterocentric bias. I would go further and ask whether there is a cis-heteronormative bias and blindspot in the movement. In order for agroecology not to reproduce these biases and to identify as an inclusive 'eco-queer movement' (Sbicca, 2012), Giraldo and Rosset (2021) propose 'emancipatory agroecologies'. The term refers to *"radically transformative processes that take place within collective struggles,"* (Giraldo & Rosset, 2021, p. 823) based on seven principles. One of the seven principles is called the 'political principle' consists of four key points: *"Challenge and seek to transform power structures; Fight for land and the defense of territory; Depatriarchalizing and decolonizing; Seek a union between popular sectors and classes in the countryside and in the city"* (Giraldo & Rosset, 2021, p. 826). The approach is feminist, yet it also incorporates an intersectional lens that encompasses class, colonial heritage, and place. These four key aspects align with existing arguments but transcend them, articulating a demand for action that is central to moving from theory to practice. When considering and proactively welcoming queer farmers and agricultural workers as equal members of a movement, these aspects could serve as guiding principles.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the fact that not everyone 'fits' into this picture and that there no monolithic interpretations can be made nor can be spoken of 'the queer farmers in Austria'. Each individual's experience is multi-layered and by no means a statement on others' realities, but first insights open up new fields and raise further questions. In any case, Florian's management model is forced to operate within market economy mechanisms and thus acts according to a different logic that can be described as more hegemonic and conventional.

Not fitting the normativity of the non-normativity, the question remains whether queer farms tend to implement counter-hegemonic farming models and management practices more likely, or, as scrutinised by Hoffelmeyer (2020b), conventional queer farmers or queer land workers remain unasked. At this point I agree with Mejia-Duwan and Hoffelmeyer (2024) and Leslie et al. (2019) that further research is needed to get to know this spectrum of queer individuals in agriculture who had not been asked at all. Furthermore, the role of researchers in this underexplored area remains open: Do we know more about the likely innovative and sustainable practices of queer women farmers because research in the field of alternative agriculture is more likely to focus on queer people than researchers in the field of conventional agricultural science? It is important for researchers in the respective fields to question their own positions and research focus and create a more balanced picture of knowledge in the future.

From the same direction, the question arises as to why we know so little about queer large-scale farmers. Hypotheses for the reasons are *(1)* they don't exist, *(2)* they were unasked, *(3)* not found or *(4)* not willing to talk. Both in my research (except for Florian) and in international literature, there is a clear gap. In the case that they actually do not exist, what are the barriers that lie behind them and keep queer farmers from large scale-farming and more conventional farming models?

Florian is an advocate of organic farming, but certainly speaking from a different point of view than the other participants. The structure of the farm already points there, by being large-scale and strongly dependent on market prizes. Delving deeper into farmers' realities like Florian's or conventional farmers could provide valuable information and broaden the academic niche. Furthermore, I argue that from an intersectional perspective including conventional farmers and land workers, is essential to speak about the sector in a more informed manner. Besides taking into account intersecting categories such as race and class, I assert to continue with an queer-ecofeminist or in other words, a queer agro-ecology lens on gender and sexuality in farming.

Besides the example of Hoffelmeyer (2021b) in the USA, Vogel and Wiesinger (2003) indicate that the imagery of a sustainable production of family farms is also true for Austria. Taking into account the exclusion of heteronormative family farms for queer farmers, it is implied that they are also excluded to the advantages linked to this belief. Hence, I argue in line with many scholars on queer

farming that it is crucial to deconstruct this imaginary and anybody, also queers, who were unseen so far can be sustainable farmers, no matter whether they farm in a CSA (Noah), farming and housing collective (Jana and Nadine), mostly alone (Beatrix) or in other unconventional farm models (Stefanie).

6.2 Heterosexism as the Dominant Form of Oppression of Women*[6]

Although homophobia hits men particularly hard in rural areas, and hatred against gays seems to be more open and aggressive than against queer women*, this chapter is dedicated to women*. This is because it is a striking, but not necessarily surprising result that all female* interviewees (Jana, Nadine, Stefanie, Beatrix) are mainly confronted with sexism in everyday life. This does not mean that they fully identify as women or that they do not question their gender to some extent but puts at the centre their external feminine perception in their environment. When they find themselves in their role as women* in situations of sexism - practised by hetero-cis men - it becomes clear that even a supposedly 'socially progressive country' like Austria is still deeply permeated by patriarchal structures and that rural and agriculture are part of this system (Oedl-Wieser, 2007). On the one hand, this means that Jana increasingly deals with classical feminist issues in her rural context, while queer feminism and the examination of her own gender identity take a back seat. This is because there is no suitable environment in which there could be more space for such an examination. On the other hand, it means that Beatrix has to deal with sexist clients, who are looked after by her father, and that she has to constantly prove herself competent and worthy of respect through her expertise. What will it mean for her economic situation if one day her father is no longer able to fulfil this role?

These findings suggest that the category of ‘women’ must continue to be of particular importance in the analysis of structural inequalities. Oedl-Wieser (2006, 2007, 2009) has not only carried out razor-sharp analyses of the situation of women in Austria's rural areas but has also proposed measures for gender-sensitive and equitable rural development (Oedl-Wieser, 2008, 2020, 2022), such as gender democracy. *“Gender democracy means replacing 'hegemonic masculinity' as the dominant structuring pattern in all areas of society”* (Oedl-Wieser, 2007, pp. 113-114). It is now up to politicians to take such proposals seriously and to commit themselves to their implementation at the institutional level. In this case, the problem is not a lack of data, but a lack of implementation of policies that have long been developed. The strategy of gender mainstreaming, to which Austria has committed itself as an EU member, still has a lot of catching up to do in the areas of rural development and agricultural policy, which are considered ‘gender-neutral’ (Oedl-Wieser, 2007).

[6] In this chapter I use the term women* and female* to point out that they are read as women by their environments, but they do not necessarily identify as cisgender woman, or their current context impedes further engagement with the topic. One participant thinks she might see her gender differently if there was a space for that, e.g. in an urban queer community.

Furthermore, what does it mean for the identities of these non-heterosexual and sometimes gender-queer women* to be read as cis women in a binary way? In a rural area and agricultural sector that is still traditionally characterised by hegemonic masculinity (Oedl-Wieser, 2006, 2007), their queer sexual orientation is made invisible and reduced to womanhood through binary thinking. In some situations, sexism and homophobia are described as clashing; from an intersectional perspective, it is therefore the (supposed) identity categories of 'woman' and 'queer' that overlap. Or as Andrews et al. (2019) subsume:

> *Women's identities, experiences and access to adequate food are shaped not just by gender, but also by race, ethnicity, caste, class, sexual orientation or identity, geographical location, and (dis)ability, among other factors. An intersectional approach is required.* (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 15)

This comes in line with the findings of Cramer (2020), Duran Gurnsey (2015) and Pfammater (2021) and suggests that an intersectional perspective is a valuable addition to Queer Theory, especially 'queer agroecology'. There is also another factor: locality, 'place'. Participants know that they could have communities in other places where these issues are relevant, and their perception is not reduced to a woman's body. It is important to emphasise here that not all the women* involved perceive this as a negative or restrictive situation in their daily lives, but that they have come to terms with it and not all of them feel a sense of suffering. Living in the countryside is not a burden, but rather a conscious choice that gives them other things that they cannot have in the city. This compromise is accepted and is not a burden.

Another area that could be valuable for future research in this context is the experience of women* in agricultural education in Austria. In Germany, Parbel (2022) was able to present first results showing that the situation for queers and women is characterised by discrimination. As agricultural education in Austria is structured differently and almost half of the students are women (BML, 2022), it is questionable whether similar experiences are made here.

In view of the experiences of discrimination of these queer women*, I advocate expanding the 'classical' feminist perspective (Oedl-Wieser, 2006, 2007, 2020, 2022), which dominates the agricultural gender discourse and is also reflected at the institutional level - whether nationally in Austria or internationally - towards a queer-feminist perspective. Much of the research on queer farmers builds upon feminist analyses (Hoffelmeyer, 2020b). Current research on queer farmers recognises its value and that we would not be where we are now without the efforts of feminist scholarship (e.g. Whatmore, Oedl-Wieser) in rural sociology. At the same time, queer rural and agricultural theorising tries to expand perspectives by acknowledging that queer individuals are also prone to heterosexism and thus suffer from patriarchal forms of oppression. Von Redecker and Gioia (2018) argue

to include queers in the struggle for food sovereignty within *La Vía Campesina* and why a feminist agenda is not enough:

> *However, this empowerment should not be justified solely by the fact that 'women' provide for the family and maintain subsistence farming in large parts of the world. Even if this may be the reality in many places, from a queer perspective this is only one possible view of the realities of women's* lives and identities. Such attributions construct women's roles and establish their socially normative position instead of overcoming and expanding it. Only when issues of care, care work and communal living are communitised, only when heteronormative and gender-specific exploitation comes to an end, can gender diversity and queer life models be freely developed.* (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018, para. 4)

As a tremendous amount of work has already gone into developing a body of policies and recommendations for gender-responsive rural and agricultural politics in Austria (Oedl-Wieser, 2008, 2020, 2022), I would like to point out the potential of extending such existing work. Policies could be reviewed, adapted and expanded to include queer gender identities and sexual orientations.

While recognizing the above stated issues of women*, queer-feminism expands to include more oppressed identities to support the feminist fight but expand it at the same time to unite in aiming for food sovereignty (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018) and I argue further, also for agroecological agri-food system transitions. Identifying more victims and possible agents of patriarchal oppression and fighting together for liberation from those structures strengthens a movement. To the point: "No hay agroecología sin feminismo queer! There is no agroecology without queer feminism!"

6.3 'Identity Split': Queer and Farmer, but not a Queer Farmer

The notion of an 'identity split' can be applied to the experiences of queer farmers who perceive that they are situated within distinct communities, where they are either regarded as 'queer' or as 'farmers', but not as both simultaneously. Thus, even if their 'self-concept' unites both facets, their identities are split into either 'farmer' or 'queer' (Troiden, 2008). The perception of this as a limitation varies among the interviewees, but there is a consensus that greater networking and exchange with other queer individuals in the field would be beneficial. The results show that the queer community of the interviewed farmers often lives far away in cities or urban regions (Jana, Beatrix, Florian), only Noah lives in the city and therefore close to their queer community and commutes to the CSA farm. The interviewees often feel misunderstood by their urban, often student-artist, queer community that clashes with their farming (and rural) reality of life, which points to the metronormative orientation of the bubble (Halberstam, 2005). It ignores people in (sustainable) agriculture and rural anti-capitalist queers within the movement (Leslie, 2019). Added to this is the experience of classism

described by Noah as a working-class child in a skilled trade, who therefore only feels partially part of this urban queer group.

Here, too, the feelings are multi-layered and ambivalent: Beatrix, for example, can gain a lot from her separate worlds - everyday working life in the countryside and similar friends in the big city - but would nevertheless like to see more networking and future queer residents on the farm in the future.

hooks (2008) posits that place-based communities play a distinctive role in rural areas, as particular cultural traits and values can emerge within them. In light of the limited understanding between both communities – namely, urban queer individuals and farmers – such a network could serve as a foundation for fostering a comprehensive sense of belonging and recognition within these two dimensions of identity.

It has been demonstrated that existing networks, such as the Landjugend and Bauernbund, are not aligned with the values espoused by queer identities. These institutions or associations are characterised by traditional values, with the ÖVP exerting considerable influence. Therefore, these are locations where they either do not feel inclined to participate (Beatrix) or are compelled to advocate strenuously for recognition (Florian). This aligns with Cramer's (2020) findings regarding networks, namely that individuals require their own. The health report (Gaiswinkler et al., 2023) illustrates the significance of intact networks for queer individuals. A robust social network exerts a particularly beneficial influence on mental health.

The influential role of the ÖVP and its affiliation with Catholic-conservative values also exemplifies the heteronormative ideal of the 'family farm' (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b; Leslie, 2017; Pfammater, 2021). Throughout the ÖVP election campaign, Florian found himself on stage alongside an ÖVP candidate who also held a high-ranking position in the Bauernbund farmers' union. During the course of the latter's speech, he stated that to the ÖVP family still meant father, mother, child. Another network where there is a discrepancy between the socio-political values espoused by the various members and Florian only feels like he has one foot in. At the same time, he was also able to get to know other gay people there and make interesting contacts. In the context of the concept of the 'family farm', it is necessary to undertake a critical examination of the definitions that are currently in use. What assumptions underpin these definitions? Does the term 'family farm' truly encompass 'all people in a household', as defined by Eurostat (*Agriculture statistics*, 2023)? Can the Hinterfeld4 farm collective be considered a family of choice, a conscious decision in favour of kinship without sexual intimacy or blood ties? Or are such constellations systematically overlooked and made invisible? What disadvantages arise for those who cannot claim the positive image of the family farm for themselves? In any case, the way some of the participants work (and live) on their farms means that gender roles are queered and thus deconstructed through 'daily performance' (Pfammater, 2021). It shakes the

pillars of the heteronormative nuclear family (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b) when you see how Nadine, Jana or Stefanie, for example, organise their daily (working) lives. Or Noah's CSA concept, which inherently deconstructs the link between family and agriculture (Raj, 2024). Or as Beatrix summarises it in relation to forestry: "*No matter what I do, it's extremely political. It's radical to just be there and exist in what I do.*" (P3-BEATRIX: 54)

As far as the organisation of queer rural life is concerned, there certainly seems to be movement in the matter: Following the Pride event in Bad Ischl, the organisation 'salzkammerqueer' is to remain in operation and serve as a network. In Austria's westernmost region, Vorarlberg, the 'GoWest' association is organised at the local level. Additionally, the Landjugend participated in Pride in Vienna for the first time this year to set an example (Landjugend, 2024).

It is unanimously agreed amongst academia and politics that rural areas should be made as attractive as possible to as many people as possible in order to prevent their continued decline. Oedl-Wieser (2020) posits that social diversity plays a distinctive role in fostering innovation in rural settings and Fidlschuster et al. add: *"For the development capacity of rural areas, however, it is crucial to support and utilise the existing potential for social diversity in the development process in a targeted manner"* (Fidlschuster et al., 2016, p. 7). This is also evidenced by the alternative, sustainable farming models espoused by the interview participants. However, it also became evident that discriminatory practices persist in the domain of sustainable agriculture (Leslie, 2019). This was exemplified in specific instances within Noah's CSA. Raj (2024) presents an example of a queer-friendly CSA in his research in Portugal. Additionally, they have developed a guide for CSAs on how they can integrate queer friendliness into their operations. To foster a more inclusive farming community, Florian posits that addressing queerness with young people during agricultural training is crucial. Kaiser (2023) has developed a curriculum on 'Queer Agriculture and Rurality' that could serve as a potential foundation for this. Furthermore, the work of Parbel (2022) suggests that educational reforms are necessary.

To conclude, Fraser (1997) underscores the significance of communities comprising marginalised groups to foster visibility in the public sphere. Beyond the expressed desire of participants, this also underscores the potential value of queer, agricultural networking in Austria. It remains to be seen whether this will initially serve merely as a space for exchange or whether it could foster a sense of belonging and community.

7 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This thesis investigates the lives and experiences of queer farmers in Austria, a group that has been largely overlooked in both agricultural and queer studies. With the help of semi-structured qualitative interviews with six queer farmers, their role as farmers was analysed and their perspectives on agriculture captured. Further, I asked them about specific challenges they encounter, and to what extend they are involved in communities or networks. the research aims to provide insights into the current situation of queer people in Austrian agriculture.

Understanding the experiences of queer farmers is critical for the development of inclusive agricultural policies that challenge traditional heteronormative power structures. By centring their voices, this research highlights the potential for agroecological practices to contribute to a sustainable and just transformation of food systems, demonstrating that social diversity is crucial to rural communities. In an international context, this research contributes to the exploratory expansion of the new field of 'queer agroecology' to include a Central European perspective.

Initial exploratory findings from this qualitative work show that queer farmers tend to use ecological and counter-hegemonic management practices, which in many ways go far beyond the logic of profit and can be compared to a 'peasant mindset' (Shanin, 1979). It also reflects a large number of agroecological principles (Wezel et al., 2020), although these would not be labelled as such in Austria and are largely unknown (Brumer et al., 2023). The pursuit of an agroecological approach contributes to the transformation of agri-food systems towards sustainability and future viability (Gliessman, 2016; Spirito et al., 2024). However, alternative, sustainable movements must also constantly take a critical look at themselves in order to be radically inclusive, to move beyond heteronormative models such as the 'family farm' (Hoffelmeyer, 2021b; Leslie, 2017), to focus on the people behind them in all their diverse lifestyles, identities and desires, and to be able to act successfully as 'eco-queer movements' (Sbicca, 2012).

With respect to the challenges faced by participants, results indicate that gay farmers are comparatively more likely to be openly confronted with hostility due to their sexual orientation, particularly in the context of training on the farm or at agricultural school. In contrast, queer farmers who identify as women describe their experiences with everyday sexism as the most formative, which leads to a focus on feminist struggles and a subordination of their own and political queer issues. In Austria, the ÖVP, with its Christian-conservative values, appears to play a pivotal role in the erasure of queer peasant identities, reinforcing patriarchal and traditional values in predominantly rural contexts. However, it is crucial to underscore that these experiences are not monolithic, and that numerous advantages and freedoms were identified, with not everyone experiencing the same degree of adversity.

With regard to the question of integration into communities, it has been demonstrated that there are frequently distinct queer and rural communities to which the participants feel varying degrees of affiliation. The two groups have minimal overlap and limited mutual understanding. This results in an 'identity split', whereby queer farmers lack the space to be seen and fully recognized as 'queer' and 'farmer' simultaneously. There is a desire for professional exchange and networking with others, albeit to varying degrees.

These findings have practical implications for policymakers and rural development initiatives. Creating intersectional, queer-feminist agricultural frameworks will ensure that marginalized groups within rural communities are not only visible but also supported. This could include specific policies to support queer farmers, such as the creation of queer farming networks and resources to address the unique challenges they face. However, these findings provide preliminary insights, but it is not possible to make generalised statements about queer farmers in Austria. Further research could explore in more detail how the approaches of queer farmers could contribute to the implementation of a just, agroecological transformation of agri-food systems and thus actively contribute to the achievement of food sovereignty in a regional context. While this research provides important initial insights, it opens the door for further investigation, particularly regarding the experiences in conventional agriculture and the largely overlooked queer migrant seasonal workers.

It is of the utmost importance that counter-hegemonic, sustainable movements in agriculture, such as agroecology, integrate a queer-feminist perspective in order to effectively challenge the prevailing power structures of extractivist and productivist agricultural and food systems (von Redecker & Gioia, 2018). Nevertheless, in the particular context of Austria, it is crucial to ensure the effective implementation of existing proposals for gender-sensitive regional development (Oedl-Wieser, 2009) and to conduct a comprehensive analysis of current policies and measures to ascertain their potential for redesign in a queer-inclusive manner. This approach would facilitate a more targeted exposure and dismantling of patriarchal structures.

For a queer perspective on agriculture to be integrated into the debate on the sustainable design of our agricultural and food system, it is necessary to ensure that queer people are granted the right to occupy the space. Without visualisation of the queer community in agriculture and a comprehensive understanding of their needs, it is impossible to effect change in the political and institutional framework (Leslie et al., 2019; Straus, 2022). The future of agricultural and food systems is contingent upon the inclusion of all social struggles within an agroecological, post-capitalist economy.

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