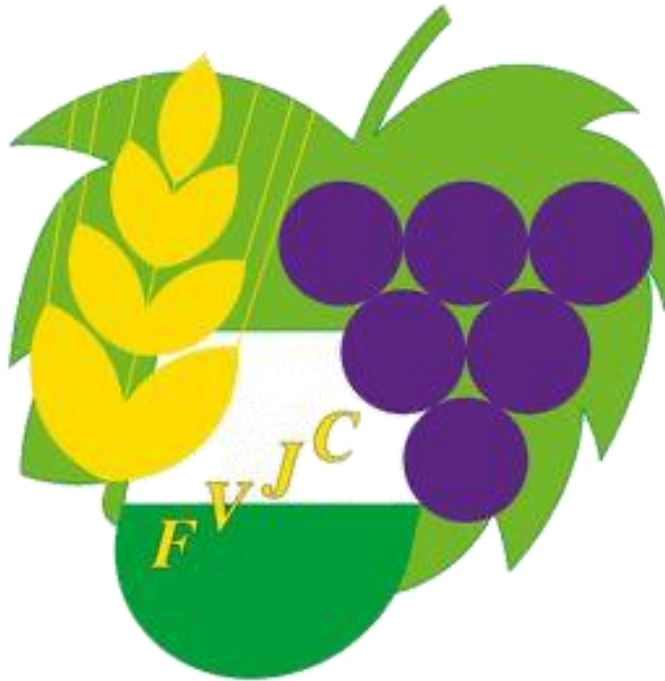


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QUE VIVE LA FÉDÉ?
WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE JEUNESSES OF THE
COUNTRYSIDE OF SWITZERLAND.

CÉLESTE LEU

SUPERVISED BY MARK WESTMORELAND
CADS, Leiden University

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ABSTRACT

The *Jeunesses Campagnardes*, are social youth groups for young people living in the rural villages of French-speaking Switzerland. Meant only for boys at first, women have been gradually accepted through the years, albeit some of them remain exclusively for men. They are groups stereotyped in the non-rural areas as undesirable and very sexist. This study used a mix of participant observation, photography, film, and semi-structured interviews to explore gender dynamics in the Jeunesses, female members' perspectives on them, and how it is linked with rural identity and community. In that way, my two outputs - an article and an installation - will serve to have a theoretical perspective, and a wider context of the Jeunesses highlighting the different issues, as well as providing a tangible understanding of the Jeunesse and the experience of being part of this community. Overall, the study found that even if my interlocutors and interviewees were interested in the question of gender and feminism or acknowledged there were some problematic behaviors, they were indifferent to some aspects of the apparent sexism or the existing gender norms, prioritizing general understanding in the Jeunesses. The Jeunesse holds significant importance for them and has throughout their lives. These findings suggest that the desire to belong and be part of a community can outweigh personal values because being a respected and accounted member requires you to conform.

Key terms: gender, rural areas, community, agency, women, (visual) ethnography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Context of the Jeunesse and its History</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Countryside, Work, Solidarity, Friendship</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>“All of this because of this slut.”</i>	<i>11</i>
Gender in the Jeunesses	<i>13</i>
<i>Positionality and Methodology</i>	<i>19</i>
My position as a Researcher and Feminist point of view.....	<i>20</i>
Methods	<i>22</i>
Participant observation	<i>22</i>
Filmed Interviews	<i>23</i>
Film & Photography	<i>24</i>
Sound	<i>26</i>
The installation.....	<i>26</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Appendix</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>Annex</i>	<i>II</i>

Jeunes coming from all regions
To take part joyfully and fairly, in the events
Whether in winter or summer, sportsmen are there to defend
Their society.

Long live the federation, let's join forces
To bring our values and traditions to the canton.
Age doesn't matter, let's keep this atmosphere
May the young and the alumni share
Together the same peaceful path.

Let's march confidently into the future
The *Jeunesse* has no borders, it's friendship that has brought us together.
Let's continue in this spirit of brotherhood
And let's sing this chorus together.

Long live the fédé, let's join forces
To bring our values and traditions to the canton
Age doesn't matter, let's keep this atmosphere
May the young and the alumni share the same path
Forever, forever...¹

Federation's anthem (FVJC)
Music and lyrics: Cugy's jeunesse, 1994

¹ Translated from French. See the Appendix for the original.

INTRODUCTION

Those are the words that hundreds of young people sing at the same time during festivities organized all year round, to showcase their values shared with generations and shout out loud how proud they are to be part of this, part of a *Jeunesse*. The *Fédération des Jeunesses Campagnardes* [Rural Youths Federation] is an important social youth federation found in almost every rural village in the Vaud canton of Switzerland, which young people can join after obligatory school, around the age of sixteen. These lyrics represent the anthem of the Jeunesses, a symbol of the Jeunesses' core values. My research is about women involved in these *Jeunesses* and the gender norms present in these groups. I went there to learn what women who are part of such social groups in rural contexts think about these norms and understand how they negotiate them and deal with gendered dynamics, in relation to their belonging to a rural community and rural identity. For this, I used a mix of film, photography, observation, and semi-structured interviews, to create two outputs – an installation and an article – and allow people to discover the Jeunesses, its context and atmosphere, and understand more about what it is. Doing that, I wanted to illustrate the subjectivity of the women members, a minority in the Jeunesses, to talk about their experiences, and try to explain their perspectives. It took place in a village close to the chief town of this canton from January to March 2024.

These groups are a vital part of the villages and are seen as a 'school of life' for young individuals transitioning from childhood to adulthood, instilling rural values in them. The members strive for solidarity, friendship, love of the countryside, sharing, and transcendence of generations. The Jeunesses are very specific to Switzerland, especially in the rural part of the French-speaking Vaud canton. Initially, solely for boys, women have gained acceptance into these groups over time, although some remain male-exclusive. It is believed in common sense and observed in some research that gender norms or the "presence of patriarchal relations [are] dominating the lives of rural people" (Pini et al., 2015, p.198), but few research looks at what women in these contexts think. Rural women are often overlooked concerning their stance or viewpoint on this matter, their understanding of it, and their control over these norms, usually seen as passive (Santana & Prévost, 2022, p.195).

During this research, I found that even if some women members were interested in the question of gender and feminism, they were indifferent to some aspects of the apparent sexism or the gender norms that were in place in the Jeunesses. Thus, in this article, I will argue that their attachment to the community and its members – and therefore the longing to belong –

compels them to conform and restrain any inclination to transgress and fight against gender norms. This need to belong requires conformity, which they prioritize at the expense of other possibilities. While they agreed that there were some problematic comments and behaviors, they also insisted on how safe they felt and how the Jeunesses were an important place for them and had been their entire life, putting their community on a pedestal. Because being part of something bigger than yourself, in which you believe and is part of your identity, is sometimes more important than anything else.

Thus, questions on belonging and conformity, especially in a rural context, are important as it is very salient in the Jeunesses and are an important part of this group. Indeed, being part of a community and the concept of a community asks for members to share certain values² endorse its rules and lifestyle, identify the other people in the group as members, and feel togetherness (Mason, 2000, p.26). Mason explains that associating with a particular group and its customs brings a dedication to supporting its practices and working towards its interests, all while considering one's well-being as tied to the group's prosperity (Mason, 2000, p.23). In rural places, the community is felt as a close group with mutual support whether you know the other people or not (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, pp.41-42). However, this implies recognizing the other person as a member of your community and thus asking for the people to fit the broader norms and have the same values. Therefore, straying too far from hegemonic norms can cost belonging and acceptance, as boundaries delineate inclusion. Indeed, cohesion within a group affects its members by increasing the chances of conformity; hence, individuals and the group mutually influence each other in a bidirectional manner (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.44), pushing members to conform to the hegemonic norms and values. There is a need for belonging, which Campbell-Halfaker defines as “a sense that one is valued, needed, and accepted; and personal fit with the system or environment” (2023, p.69).

Gender is also central, as it explains the dynamics and differences in behavior and expectations between genders. It influences how women are treated in a group and how they act (among other elements). It encompasses gender roles and norms, which impact these social interactions and power structures and create two distinct categories (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.510). Ridgeway and Correll talk about ‘rules’ to perpetuate the gender system which includes the beliefs about gender in our culture (2004, p.514). This can also be seen as a form of violence against women in the sense that it “serves to preserve asymmetrical gender systems of power”

² Those include the importance of work, solidarity, fraternity, and respect for traditions and elders.

where it could take the form of an “invalidation” of certain perspectives (Sullivan et al., 2020, p.xiii). The ‘rules’ of gender are then followed in “social relational contexts” which influence people’s behavior toward one another, and towards other genders (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.514). These social relations are also impacted by ‘gender stereotypes’ which create an image of what a man and woman should be, putting expectations on people and how they appear and behave which “prescribe[s] what a good group member is like” (Ellemers, 2018, p.287).

Finally, understanding the concept of agency is crucial for comprehending how people act in particular contexts and what qualifies as agency. Indeed, agency has many ways of being defined. In this context, I will make use of the ‘reformist’ definition of agency advanced by Dyson & Jeffrey (2022) which is a type of repetitive action where women go between pushing the boundaries and adjusting their behavior to conform to the expectations in order to change norms in the long term (p.1237) which seems adequate to some of the girls’ experiences. The authors highlight “the extent to which agency is performed within the frame of local patriarchal ideas”, in a persistent but subtle way, suggesting “both conformity and creativity” (Dyson & Jeffrey, 2022, p.1248). I will also take Mahmood’s (2001) “non-oppositional” way of describing agency into account as it can help understand women’s intentions, emotions, and desires that were developed in a certain context (p.203). In the context of the Jeunesses, it is important because “what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency” (Mahmood, 2005, p.15), and helps understand how women stand in the Jeunesses.

Since the Jeunesses are specific to Switzerland, little research has been done on them. Notable work was by Alexandre Dafflon in an ethnography of a Jeunesse in 2014, for which he wrote his book *“Il faut bien que jeunesse se fasse !”: Ethnographie d’une société de jeunesse campagnarde*. and an article specifically on sexuality in the Jeunesses. However, he treated in his papers the sense of rurality and gender separately, which failed to understand the intersection of both and the subjectivity of women members. This being the only anthropological work done on this community, a large gap must be filled. Moreover, given that Dafflon’s study was conducted ten years ago, I wanted to build on his work considering the recent political climate around feminism, and investigate whether it has reshaped gender dynamics in the Jeunesses. Moreover, throughout this inquiry, I sought to carve out a platform for women within the Jeunesses to articulate their experiences regarding these gender norms, thus “putting women at the center of knowledge” (Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p.303). However, following Abu-Lughod’s (2002) insight, my intentions were not to “rescue” them or impose my

opinions on them, but rather to foster a space where diverse perspectives can flourish. Furthermore, recognizing the nature of ethnographic research as being influenced by the researcher's positionality and that previous research had only been done by a man, I was determined to bring a different perspective on the subject and adopt a feminist lens. It is also important to acknowledge that my social and political context influenced my choice of subject and the way I conducted research, as Isabelle Clair (2016) emphasized in her text on doing fieldwork as a feminist.

CONTEXT OF THE JEUNESSE AND ITS HISTORY

The Jeunesse is a social youth group found in almost every village of the Vaud canton in Switzerland that aims to promote the interests of young people living in rural areas. It provides a platform for youth in rural communities to unite and organize activities and events. To be part of a Jeunesse, one must be at least 15 years old, have completed obligatory school, not be married, and in some cases, be a man. Members usually stay in the Jeunesse until they are 30 years old or once they marry. As one of my interlocutors explains, it represents a transition between childhood and adulthood, where “it is not yet being an adult, but the stage just before”³. She explains it as a step to insert yourself into society and contribute to your village, “make something of themselves, for themselves and others”⁴. Thus, by engaging in the Jeunesse's activities and organizing events, they learn to take initiative and be responsible (“FVJC,” 2022). While most members work in contracting or rural jobs, more and more choose to study in the city and orientate towards less manual jobs. In such rural contexts, groups like that are important to keep the community together and to increase the sense of belonging. Moreover, informal mutual support and thus social belonging is essential as access to services is restricted (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, pp.62-63).

The tradition of the Jeunesse Campagnardes traces back to the Middle Ages when unmarried young men of 15 or 16 years old from the countryside gathered in what was called *abbayes*⁵ in the Vaud canton. They practiced shooting and aimed to uphold moral standards for young celibates within their group and village, sometimes resorting to sanctions or fines for those who transgressed the norms (Devanthery, 2018; Dubler, 2013). As Devanthery states, “they policed

³ « C'est pas encore être adulte, c'est l'étape juste avant. »

⁴ « faire quelque chose d'eux, pour eux et pour les autres. »

⁵ Abbayes are now known to be shooting festivals.

morals by enforcing village community standards.”⁶ (2018, p.4) and regulated people’s love life. In this context, the members took it upon themselves to oversee unmarried young women and participate in various activities with them. However, albeit being informally compulsory for every man of marriageable age, there is little information on these associations before written manifestations from the 17th century in legal documents, as they were non-official and sustained their traditions orally (Dubler, 2013, p.2). In 1919, Albert Jaton regrouped twenty-six Jeunesses to create a federation called the *Fédération des Jeunesses Campagnardes*⁷, intending to bring together youth from different villages around a shared project. With “Homeland, Work, Friendships, Progress”⁸ as their motto (Devanthery, 2018, p.3), the intention was to stem the tide of young people migrating to cities and to counter the rise of the working class, by encouraging their patriotic and sportive spirit, reaffirming their identity as rural youth. As stated on their website;

“The Federation is interested in all patriotic, economic, social or sporting issues, tending to the progress of the agricultural, winegrowing and mountain cause, as well as the material, intellectual, moral and physical development of its members in particular and the community in general.”⁹ (“FVJC,” 2022).

The FVJC now counts 208 different Jeunesses and more than 8’000 members, of which a little less than half are alumni. The federation works exclusively on voluntary work from 110 members split into three administrative organs, everything funded by the municipalities and various sponsors. There is a head office, a central committee, and commissions for each region that take care of the different events, and the smooth functioning of the federation (“Fédération vaudoise des jeunesses campagnardes,” 2023). The districts, known as *Girons*, are la Broye, le Centre, le Nord et le Pied du Jura. Indeed, as stated on their official website, the federation has a defined structure and organization even if governed by young people. Because of its size, it is part of *Les 7 Grands* [The Big 7], which regroups the main associations in the canton, highlighting how important it is. Although similar organizations and social youth groups exist in other cantons in Switzerland, such as the FCJF in Fribourg or the FJVS in the canton of Valais, the FVJC is the oldest and the biggest.

⁶ « elles exerçaient un rôle de police des moeurs en faisant appliquer les normes de la communauté villageoise. » (Devanthery, 2018, p.4).

⁷ *Country side’s Youths Federation*, abbreviated FVJC in French.

⁸ « Patrie, Travail, Amitié, Progrès », (Devanthery, 2018, p.3).

⁹ « La Fédération s’intéresse à toutes les questions patriotiques, économiques, sociales ou sportives, tendant au progrès de la cause agricole, viticole et montagnarde, ainsi qu’au développement matériel, intellectuel, moral et physique de ses membres en particulier et de la communauté en général. » (“FVJC,” 2022).

For the recruitment, most participants join naturally, following in their parent's footsteps, as it is traditional to be part of a Jeunesse when living in a rural village. Moreover, membership is open to anyone from the village, while those from outside have a one-year trial. Being part of a Jeunesse requires significant commitment. It is time-consuming, with meetings held almost every weekend to organize the coming events and parties, especially if they organize official events. Their year is well-organized and revolves around various events, including a ski camp in February, a biennial theatre competition in the spring, four *Giron* parties (one for each district) in the summer, and a shooting event in September. Every five years, a large manifestation called a *Cantonale* is organized instead of the four *Giron*, where all the Jeunesses regroup in one place. Aside from the festivities, diverse sports are at the center of the *Giron*, with members competing in tug-of-war, athletics, wrestling, football, and volleyball (“FVJC,” 2022). At the end of every official event, an official ceremony takes place where flags from every village are shown, everyone sings together the federation and the canton’s anthem and where people who have competed get prizes.

The members regard being part of a Jeunesse as a school of life, where respecting hierarchies and elders is crucial as it is a core value and demonstrates adherence to traditions and cultural foundations brought by alumni (Dafflon, 2014; Garnier, 2003). Thus, their frequent interaction helps members internalize the group's worldview (Magnollay, 2021). Being run by young people, some values may change with the context but what is conveyed stays the same; the importance of work, social responsibility, solidarity, and respect for traditions and elders, allowing them to show their social belonging and value their cultural referents (Magnollay, 2021). In short, it is “A federation that wants to move forward while pursuing the goals set by its elders.”¹⁰ (“FVJC,” 2022).

However, despite their significance in rural areas, opinions on the Jeunesses are split and many Swiss people from the cities harbor a negative view of the Jeunesses. They see the Jeunesses and their members as sexist, racist, homophobic, backward, and far-right in politics. They are thought to only work on their farms and get drunk. In local newspapers, they are often, and mostly ‘exposed’, for their problematic behaviors, such as sexist decorations saying “You’re not a dog but a girl consumer” or “I’d put my hand on your ass, but it’s rude”¹¹ (Michoud, 2024) and free party entrances for women with big breasts (Martin, 2021).

¹⁰ « Une Fédération qui veut aller de l'avant tout en poursuivant les buts fixés par les Anciens. » (“FVJC,” 2022).

¹¹ « Tu n'es pas un chien, tu es un consommateur de filles », « Je te mettrais bien la main au cul, mais c'est malpoli » (Michoud, 2024).

COUNTRYSIDE, WORK, SOLIDARITY, FRIENDSHIP

In this article, I will use quotes from four women I interviewed during my research which allowed me to understand more about their experiences. Charlotte¹² is 23 years old and has been a member of her Jeunesse since 2019. She grew up in the same village where her family had been established for six generations. She went to study in the city and is now a teacher, which is not common for people living in the countryside. Her parents are honorary members of the Jeunesse, which means they brought something important to the federation and she aims to do the same. Amelie is 23 years old. She has been a member of her Jeunesse since 2017. She did not want to join at first, but seeing all the people her parents knew through it and her friends joining convinced her. Having studied gender studies, being part of a Jeunesse was sometimes challenging, but she still loves it. Even though she went to the city to study, she wants to stay in her village for the rest of her life because she is very attached to it. Emilie is 19 years old and became a member when she was 17. Her parents, albeit never having been part of a Jeunesse, were very active in her village, and she wanted to do the same. She is part of multiple clubs, such as the shooting club, the gym club, and the Jeunesse. Finally, Tamara, the new president of her Jeunesse, is 24 years old. She has been part of hers since 2019. She was intimidated to join a Jeunesse because she is shy but one of her friends convinced her to join.

For them, the Jeunesse is represented by the love for the countryside, friendships, respect towards others, solidarity, generations, volunteering, work, the desire for sharing, openness, partying, and sport. Jeunesses are popular because they enable young people in villages to appreciate and preserve their culture. By including adults in their 30s and youth starting from age 15, Jeunesses “help to pass on values and traditions from one generation to the next”¹³ (Devanthéry, 2018, p.3). Indeed, “emerging adulthood” is a period where young people develop their identity, which is defined notably by changes in romantic and platonic relationships (Arnett (2014) in Marlin et al., 2023, p.3307). This allows young people from rural areas to express their sense of belonging to their community, contributing to the popularity of the Jeunesses (Casparly, 2015). Indeed, the Jeunesses is a strong community for rural youth, and according to one interviewee “participates in the growth of their identity as youth from the

¹² The names used for the four interviewees in this article are real and have been authorized for use by them. The other names have been changed.

¹³ « participant aussi à la transmission de valeurs et de traditions entre les générations » (Devanthéry, 2018, p.3).

centre (one of the four *Giron*).”¹⁴. Despite the complexity of the concept of community, Mason defines it with four elements; “sharing values, a way of life, identifying with the group and its practices, and recognizing each other as members of the group” (Mason, 2000, p.26). He adds that, to be a community and not only a group, members must collaborate to achieve the group’s objectives, which differ from its members' individual goals and actions. In that sense, even though the community needs individuals to exist, its goals and actions are unique and cannot be fully explained by looking at each member separately (Mason, 2000, p.21), highlighting their need to conform to create a whole. As Tamara puts it, each member brings a stone to the ‘building’, so wanting to contribute to the group and being motivated is important for them.

In general, having a community is reported as very positive for people in rural areas. It offers mutual support, friendships, an entourage, and unity around shared values (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.5). This contributes to the feeling of belonging which “include[s] and extend[s] beyond personal relationships, as well as investment in the community in which people engage in altruistic behavior.” (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.42), where belonging is “a sense that one is valued, needed, and accepted” (p.61). This is also emphasized because family is one important value in rural communities and contributes to the group's tightness (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.22). Indeed, young people often join the Jeunesse because someone they know – like a sibling, cousin, or friend – is already part of it (Devanbéry, 2018, p.3). Everyone I talked to joined because family or friends were members, through whom they were indirectly already involved since their childhoods. Marlin et al. quoting Maslow (1943) add, that belonging is a “fundamental psychological need” that drives individuals to create strong relationships (2023, p.3308). Nevertheless, being part of a tight community can also have negative elements, like a loss of privacy and a sense of being constrained from expressing one’s true self to others (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.1). As Charlotte points out, “it’s as supportive as it is oppressing to have a mini society around you all the time”¹⁵, from which she tried to run away at one point in her life. However, getting away from there also made her realize that “this was [her] home and [her] culture”¹⁶. Relating this to my argument, the significance of community in rural areas highlights their desire and need to belong, which drives them to conform.

Other than official events, each Jeunesse can organize its activities and parties all year round, contributing to each village’s livelihood and local activities, and thus asks for a lot of

¹⁴ « participe à faire grandir notre identité je trouve, de Jeunesse du centre. »

¹⁵ « c’est autant soutenant qu’oppressant d’avoir constamment une forme de mini société autour de toi tout le temps »

¹⁶ « ça c’était chez [elle] et ça, c’était [sa] culture »

commitment. They play a significant role in village life, organizing various events and activities that contribute to the vibrancy of rural communities. These include festivities, Swiss National Day or New Year's Eve celebrations, traditional activities such as the lotto, sports events like shooting, wrestling, tug-of-war, etc. Through these activities, the Jeunesses help to sustain and perpetuate local traditions, fostering a sense of continuity and community spirit within the villages. For Charlotte, perpetuating traditions is also about allowing the next generations to have what she has. That makes her feel close to the village and the people in it. Village elders view them as diligent and healthy young individuals, embodying what they believe Swiss youth should represent (Garnier, 2003). Although they generally lean towards the right politically, they are not aligned with any political parties, and politics is not a focal point of the Jeunesses' activities. However, being a "leftist", which I heard a lot during my fieldwork and something that is associated with the city, is a repulsive figure and is often used as an insult.

In Leyshon's work "The betweenness of being a rural youth" (2008), he explains that young people in rural areas often construct their identity in contrast to urban counterparts, allowing them to express their own rural identity and affirm their belonging to the rural community, which serves as a means to resist being perceived as outsiders (p.18). The identities of rural youth are described as fluid and constantly evolving, shaped by a continuous daily process that connects them to their environment, influencing their behaviors and spatial movements (Leyshon, 2008, p.21). In the Swiss context, the Jeunesses Campagnardes serve as a means for country youth to affirm their belonging to rural life. They defend the interests of the countryside communities and aim to pass down their values, thus distinguishing themselves from the others, those from the cities (Dafflon, 2014, p.40-41). They have a complex relationship with urban areas, perceiving them as representing various social categories, including higher social classes and more precarious individuals (Magnollay, 2021). For Tamara, they and young people from the cities are different and do not think the same way. She gives the example of how they dress at parties where girls in the cities "are wearing high heels, short skirts, plunging necklines and a lot of makeup"¹⁷ whereas they are more casual. Indeed, "rural femininity" is often viewed as more relaxed, with a "tolerance of a more simple existence but also by their clothes and appearance.", when comparing themselves with urban women (Pini et al., 2015, p.116). Hughes states that the idea of the rural and its community is necessary to understand rural gender as adopting a rural perspective allows one to study "the co-construction of rural womanhood and idyllic rurality" (1997 in Pini et al., 2015, p.109). There is an image of 'rural womanhood' that

¹⁷ « sont plus à hauts talons, petites jupes, monstres décolletés et super maquillées »

dictates how women should be in the rural world and what norms they should follow.¹⁸ Thus, being a contributing member of the community and embracing the rural identity is of greater importance than risking incarnating values and fights such as gender equality seen as urban.

Tamara also sees people in the Jeunesses as being more attentive to one another. Amelie joins this idea by telling me about a time she went out to an urban club and was shocked because no one was helping a girl who was crying, pointing out the lack of community and support in cities. They feel safer going out in a Jeunesse than in the nearest town. Within this framework, the Jeunesses view themselves as embodying a distinct category: rural individuals prioritizing health, socializing, and their connection to the land and each other (Magnollay, 2021; Garnier, 2003), being regrouped by the Jeunesses. Charlotte finds life in the Jeunesses, and the countryside in general, warmer, because of the close-knit group which allows people to know each other better – which brings us back to the importance of a community for rural individuals –, compared to the cold distance in the cities.

Being a place for young people living in rural villages to shape social life and contribute to a thriving village life, it is not because you grew up there or live in this place that you will necessarily belong or be accepted. As one of my interlocutors said in an interview, “The people who accept to be part of the federation, are people who accept to incarnate [its values] and respect them.”¹⁹ Like many communities, there are boundaries to belonging. Thus, depending on who you are, it is not enough to believe in and respect the values if you do not fully embody the hegemonic norms, or to take Amelie’s words “an average member”²⁰, even if the Jeunesses are technically for everybody. Being a person of color or straying away from heteronormativity, can make it difficult to integrate. As a person of color, Amelie’s friend took longer to assimilate into the Jeunesse world, even though he was a member of one. Despite eventually becoming an accepted and well-integrated member, during my fieldwork, at every party and event I attended, he was the only person of color present. People referred to him as “the black guy”, clearly marking him as an ‘outsider’. Going to high school or university is also an aspect members can be teased about, as doing an internship right after obligatory school is seen as superior, highlighting the value of work in the Jeunesses and rural areas. We can see that being too different from the hegemonic norms and what is valued can be a boundary to inclusion and push members to want to conform more to the norms or adhere to the values (Campbell-

¹⁸ However, none of my interlocutors had a definition of what rural femininity was.

¹⁹ « Les personnes qui acceptent d’entrer dans la Fédération des Jeunesses, c’est des personnes qui acceptent d’incarner [ses valeurs] et de de les respecter. »

²⁰ « un fédéré moyen »

Halfaker, 2023). However, in recent years, the central committee has been advocating for more acceptance and integration, but many people still resist this change. Thus, straying even slightly from the central values can hinder your ability to be taken seriously and well-integrated into the Jeunesse. This resistance creates a barrier for those who want to introduce changes while still being respected, such as women members regarding gender norms.

“ALL OF THIS BECAUSE OF THIS SLUT.”

On the second morning of ski camp, the Jeunesse organizers woke us up at 7 am with lights and music in the gymnasium dorm. After lingering in our sleeping bags, we grabbed breakfast around 8:30, toast, and coffee. Then, back in the common room, non-skiers lazed about, killing time until the afternoon's festivities. At that point, I went to fetch my equipment in the car and took a moment to be alone, which helped me get mentally ready for the day and take a break from the boisterousness of the dorms. Once I was back in the common room, three boys from another Jeunesse joined Marie, Jeanne, and I. The guys were stuck there because they came by car and the one driving had had too much to drink the day before and had to wait 10 hours before being able to drive. One asked me about myself and how a 23-year-old was new in her Jeunesse. I explained what I was doing here and about my project. They did not say much in response and didn't seem to care. He then asked me where my cows were, to which I answered confusedly that I didn't understand. He sighed and shook his head. He then asked me where I was from. I realized it was a way to ask someone in the countryside where they lived, and thus where they kept their cows. A girl from another Jeunesse joined us as well. Everyone started to tease her because they saw her sleeping with a boy. She told us that she had only kissed him but the guys present speculated about what happened and made jokes about the assumption that she also had sex with him and that they heard her. She tried to defend herself saying it wasn't true and asked multiple times to stop that conversation, but they continued for a while. At that point, one of the three guys who had joined had fallen asleep, trying to rest before the evening. One of his friends came, took his penis out, and put it on his face to wake him up. Everyone laughed. One guy proceeded to ask every girl what their body count²¹ was. Each of the girls answered without returning the question. He ended up asking me, to which I responded as well. He then said, “Oh I didn't expect you to be a slut”. I was shocked by this answer not knowing what I should say and tried to defend myself saying that I was older than them, so it was normal

²¹ The number of people with which a person has slept.

because I had more time. He said it was true that he was 5 years younger and had had sex with double the number, but still, it was different because he was a guy. After that, I headed towards the slopes to join Charlotte and try to start getting some shots.

I took a coach at the dorm to the slopes. It was a well-organized transportation system running all day, allowing people to drink without needing a car. I arrived at 10:30 and started filming what was left of the snow and recorded the sound of the tent to capture the atmosphere of a Jeunesse event while waiting for Charlotte. We then went under the tent, ordered drinks, and joined friends at a table. We were approximately 10 around a table drinking wine, talking. I received comments about the fact that I had a lot of rings, asking if they were all engagement rings for different men to which I laughed without answering. A girl sitting next to me mentioned she came from the village we were in but could not join Jeunesse. She said she wasn't frustrated, but sometimes sad that she couldn't be in the official group, even though she could attend the events. She tried joining another Jeunesse, but it was complicated due to the distance, and it wasn't the same attachment because it wasn't her village. After a while, some guy started to tell a story about his friend in the army who took an army car to see his ex to have sex with her and got caught speeding which meant he would lose his license. He ended the story by saying "All of this because of this slut".

GENDER IN THE JEUNESSES

Having reviewed the significance of the Jeunesses for young people in rural areas and their integration into them, it is important to understand gender to study the position of women members towards gender norms and the related dynamics within the Jeunesses. In everyday use, the concepts of sex and gender are often used exchangeably, where gender is a 'softer' version of sex, (Clair, 2016, p.68). However, in feminist theories, the word 'sex' is used to define biological sex, and gender is assigned to the role that is socially attached to this masculine or feminine bodily association, which is then institutionalized and naturalized by a binary education that oppresses and subordinates women (Alam, 2018, p.238; Dorlin, 2008, p.5; Fletcher, 2018, p.2, Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.510). As Donkersloot (2012) puts it, what is associated with femininity and masculinity is "a configuration of practices that are dynamic, embodied, socially constructed and socially embedded" (p.579), and are situated in 'social relational contexts' where individuals "define themselves in relation to others in order to act" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.511). According to Butler (1988), gender is thus a repeated 'act' built through embodied actions, learned and rehearsed over time. This gendered body is, in that sense, not fixed (Cann, 2018) and malleable, implying that this repetition can be altered or disrupted to challenge the norms associated with these identities. These embodied 'rules' assigned to each gender through stereotypes establish norms that dictate how both should behave and are expected to act (Ellemers, 2018). Moreover, these gender performances cannot be understood in isolation but must be perceived by others to persist (Evans, 2006, in Cann, 2018, p.59-60). It represents a symbolic power, as "[it] requires, as a condition of its success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.87 in Alam, 2018, p.235). Hence, gender is crucial for understanding interactions between individuals and power dynamics within groups, especially between men and women in a historically men-exclusive group. This socially constructed order is often perceived as natural, reinforcing male dominance (Harding, 1987, p.19), but it also means that it can be challenged and deconstructed. The Jeunesses seem to fall into that category as they were first a men-exclusive club, built on a traditional patriarchal Swiss political model. Moreover, even if some Jeunesses started in the federation in 1919 with women already in them, some waited a while before being open to them or never included them. Women's integration into the Jeunesses Campagnardes remains an ongoing process, as the federation does not require them to accept female members. This only depends on the village's values.

In general, feminists, researchers, or urban people see gender norms as deeply entrenched in rural areas, with patriarchal relations prevailing, where women are thought of as not challenging these norms. Thus, they perceive these women as politically disengaged regarding gender issues. Moreover, rural women often avoid the 'feminist' label to privilege the rural identity and develop their identity around the homogenous category of a 'rural woman'. It is defined by Spivak as "strategic essentialism," this term intersecting both parts of their identity - namely 'rural' and 'woman' - as a method to achieve political objectives (1988 in Pini et al., 2015, p.7). However, this does not mean they do not carry out work to help women and are concerned with feminist issues and ideas. It is important to remember that, as Dyson and Jeffrey (2022) rightly note, the point is not for them to "[become] the passive dupes of urban lower middle-class ideas of appropriate modern femininity" (p.1249), but to contrast rural patriarchal norms with what we consider empowering to achieve particular objectives. For Charlotte, the rural world is not ready for feminism, even if they are modernizing:

"As there isn't just one idea of feminism, for me it's something too confusing and too new for the countryside to really dare to take an interest, to dive into it. I think there's still a big gulf before rural areas embrace feminism, but it'll happen one day, I think."²²

However, gender dynamics in the Jeuneses are similar to every social group. Men do the construction and women do the decorations. You shout, "Women are like Tsunamis, they arrive hot and humid and leave with your house."²³ before taking a hit of your snuff²⁴. There are a lot of sexist jokes, but they often are not taken seriously. Typically, sexist jokes are taken as 'humor', making them seem socially permissible and harmless, which replaces blunt sexism (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2020, p.2). For Charlotte, there is clearly sexism in her Jeunesse, but as Hudson remarks, she makes a difference between people who say comments like these as a joke and the others. However, it is not something that she is fundamentally against, as for her, none is right or wrong. She explained that she tries to talk about this with them, and shares her experiences, but she would not tell them that they are incorrect and is not something she will dwell on. For her, the Jeunesse is "something where you need a whole to create a togetherness, and everyone has the right to their convictions based on their lived experiences"²⁵. Similarly,

²² « Comme il n'y a pas qu'une seule idée du féminisme, pour moi, c'est quelque chose de trop confus et trop nouveau pour que les campagnes osent vraiment s'intéresser, se plonger dedans. Je pense qu'il y a encore un gouffre avant l'adhésion des campagnes au féminisme mais ça arrivera un jour, je pense. »

²³ « Les femmes c'est comme des Tsunamis, ça arrive chaud et humide et ça repart avec ta maison. »

²⁴ A powdered type of tobacco that is meant to be inhaled.

²⁵ « quelque chose de, où il y a besoin un peu d'un tout, pour créer cet ensemble et chacun a le droit d'avoir ses convictions à partir de son vécu »

Tamara finds these comments annoying, but still warrants the kindness of the people making them and joins in Charlotte's idea that you cannot change everything, she accepts them as they are because she has known them for a long time. Emilie adds to this in a very self-reflexive way, attesting that people "accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it" (Alam, 2018, p.232), as she finds these sexist comments normal because it is part of the environment she grew up in. All of them seem to be somewhat bothered by the comments that can be made but choose to ignore them and "keep this [nice] atmosphere [...] together in peace" as their anthem would say. As Mason (2000) mentions, "to identify with a group [...] is to commit oneself to it in a way that normally involves [...] seeking to promote its interests" (p.23). In that way, as argued, they appear to be taking these remarks lightly, prioritizing the well-being of their Jeunesse over their own, their primary concern lying in their bond with their peers.

As concluded by my interlocutors, there are generally more comments being made than injustices felt related to gender. Still, in their official events, women cannot compete in tug-of-war nor do wrestling. As 'mother sports' of the Jeunesses, they have always been part of their culture and always been for men, but for my interlocutors, it is something they do not mind and see as a complicated issue. The most recent president of the federation, a woman, who has been in this position for a couple of years is trying to push for a more inclusive place in sports, for example, with tug-of-war and wrestling for all. For Emilie, however, the push by the president for women's tug-of-war seems taking it a bit too far. She thinks it makes them take a step backward because it annoys the male members and thus receives much criticism. She thinks changes like this, 'extreme' changes that are clearly in opposition to what has been done for years slow the process of equality. Tamara explains a lack of volunteers to referee the sports, making it very hard to add this on top. This makes it seem clear that too strong of a push against traditions and outside the norms may risk doing the opposite of what is intended, highlighting again the need for conformity.

If the maintaining - or indifference - of the gender norms by the women in the Jeunesses is part of the process of identifying themselves in regards to the other members, following the "hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.512), one could see this as a lack of agency. Indeed, agency is often understood as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001, p.130), with individuals possessing agency based on their self-reflection (Burkitt, 2016, p.323). Feminist thinkers use this concept to explore how women challenge the dominant male order, subvert heterosexual norms by acting against cultural

traditions, and reappropriate these traditions for their interests. It also questions how their actions sometimes reinforce these norms (Mahmood, 2001). However, their behavior is not unintentional, as they are aware of the issues and enact agency in a way that fits the given context. Indeed, some are trying to change things even if they stay within the norms. As Mahmood (2001) suggests, agency is not necessarily oppositional but rather “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (Mahmood, 2001, p.203), where resisting is one way to act, but not the only way to act. Looking at it this way and taking Abu-Lughod’s (2002) argument regarding the veil, where it is thought of as something imposed on women rather than a habit retained by history, we could look at women Jeunesse members’ relation to their community as a motivation to act within their norms and values not necessarily without questioning the norms. As Foucault and Geertz have argued, culture has an important role in regulating people’s behavior where “our ideas, values, acts, and even emotions are cultural products” (Alam, 2018, p.74). Hence, accurately understanding people’s identification is important to explain their behavior and overall outlook on the world (Mason, 2000, p.33), and in this case, explain why women overlook the gender dynamics. Indeed, their concerns seem to be attached primarily to the well-being of their group and their identity as someone from the countryside rather than anything else, as community belonging influences their views and behavior toward the norms. Emphasizing this, members see their Jeunesse as a family; “that’s what motivates me, to promote my Jeunesse in the village”²⁶, underlying the strong bond between the members.

Nonetheless, this does not mean they neglect feminist concerns. Donkersloot contends that to understand the experiences and subjectivity of rural youth, one must consider power and gender relations in the countryside as dynamic and evolving, rather than fixed within the constraints of patriarchy (2012, p. 594), where agency is relational and non-oppositional and creates effects through interactions with others, this agency being intentional or not (Burkitt, 2016, p.323). This can be exemplified by how Charlotte tries to talk to them about it but in a very relaxed way without telling them they are wrong and just giving them examples, the agency is translated into a simple conversation, straddling the line between exceeding the norms and pushing the boundaries. Dyson and Jeffrey (2022) suggest viewing this sort of agency as ‘reformist’, characterized by a repetitive process where women alternate between challenging boundaries and adjusting their behavior to conform to expectations, thereby changing norms (p.1237). Women’s actions are diverse and not always aimed at resisting structures; “agency

²⁶ « moi c'est ça qui me motive, faire valoir la jeunesse au sein du village »

emerges through the processes that shape subjects' subordination, rather than reflecting 'free will'" (Dyson & Jeffrey, 2022, p.1235). Countering norms in the Jeunesses is a constant juggling between the two, requiring mastery and integration of norms to modify them.

As for Amelie, she is engaged in trying to fight against some gender standards, maybe more than other members, openly saying that there are still many aspects to change in the Jeunesses regarding gender. Due to the strong attachment to traditions, some customs from the early days of the Jeunesses are still in place, and many have gendered aspects. Amelie mentioned that she often felt frustrated when trying to suggest changes, as her peers would either mock her or dismiss her suggestions. For example, during their shooting festival, women must wear white dresses and men must wear suits when awarded their prizes at the end.²⁷ She wanted to change the color of the dress and asked if the girls were still comfortable with wearing dresses. This created a debate within the group where people reproached her; "Alright, you're not seriously going to revolutionize the world"²⁸. She was also taking care of their social media, writing in inclusive language on their Instagram which was voted on and banned because it bothered other members. Both seem like bold actions for the Jeunesses, being an explicit push against the gender norms.

However, she is part of three associations in the village, was on the committee of her Jeunesse, and is now on a committee for the federation, works a lot for the community and embraces everyone in the Jeunesse whatever their opinions might be, embodying the values that are the most important in the Jeunesses, namely the importance of work, social responsibility, solidarity. Because of that, she knows how to adjust her "level of assertiveness situationally to avoid the realistic threat of backlash" (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010, p.257). Getting teased by others, her position still allows her to push these boundaries that others could not, which represents well this idea of reformist agency, by alternating between "boundary-pushing" behaviors and more conventional activities, which if practiced in the long term could change standards of conformity (Dyson & Jeffrey, 2022, pp.1248-1249). Moreover, she is not defeated by the slow change and the pushback and still values the community. That is because despite recognizing sexism and gender differences and attempting to address them on a small scale, the preeminent importance lies in community belonging, which is what shapes her identity as a rural young person. In a sense, the agency of women members in the Jeunesses could also be seen in the way they choose to shut an eye on the sexism and enjoy time spent with their

²⁷ Noting that this Jeunesses lets women compete, in opposition to others.

²⁸ « C'est bon, tu vas quand même pas révolutionner le monde. »

community because what ties them all together is “the village and this attachment to [their] region. Clearly, [they] are all attached to [their] region, the societies, people who live there.”²⁹ (Emilie). However, it is important to note that all of them were also saying that they saw some positive changes over the last years regarding these issues.

As Amelie summarizes it well;

“What's funny, and what I love about the Jeunesses, is that I find myself next to someone, so me Amélie, who has studied gender and is passionate about it, and who is outraged about all the injustices done to women and the fact that women are still not accepted in certain Jeunesses. I find myself arm in arm with people from Château d'Oex³⁰ singing the federation anthem because, in the end, that's what brings us together.”³¹

²⁹ « le village et cet attachement à [leur] région. Clairement, [iels sont] tous attachés à [leur] région, aux sociétés, aux gens qui habitent ici »

³⁰ A Jeunesse that does not accept women.

³¹ « Ce qui est rigolo et que je me dis que justement que j'adore dans les Jeunesses, c'est que je me retrouve à côté d'une personne, donc moi Amélie qui a fait les études genre et qui est passionnée de ça et qui est méga révoltée par rapport à toutes les injustices qui sont faites aux femmes et que les femmes ne sont toujours pas acceptées dans certaines jeunesse, je me retrouve bras dessus bras dessous avec des gens de Château d'Oex à chanter en fait l'hymne de la fédé parce que finalement c'est ça qui nous rassemble. »

POSITIONALITY AND METHODOLOGY

It's Saturday night, 8 p.m., the Jeunesse and I are going to a concert by *Les Sales Gosses*. It is a band that plays well-known covers that everyone knows and sings along to. This is THE Jeunesse band who perform at almost every manifestation. We arrived there and the room was packed. I had my camera and Tascam with me, excited to be able to film something that is a staple of the Jeunesse events and party culture. Everyone seemed very enthusiastic to see this band perform, shouting with drinks in their hands. The atmosphere was very dense with a lot of people already drunk, singing and jumping around pushing everyone. I had the camera in another bag than its original one to be able to take it out more easily, but when I saw the crowd and the state of people it made me very nervous. I felt anxious. Scared for the camera, no desire to drink.

What am I going to film? How am I going to do this? We were packed like sardines on top of the woodchips in front of the stage when the band arrived and started playing. My arm holding the bag was hurting. How am I going to last for one hour? How am I going to take the camera out? I was trying to enjoy the concert, but all these worries were going through my head. People were pushing left and right, I felt like a ball thrown in between people. What if beer damages the camera? What if my bag breaks? How can I make a documentary if it is too chaotic to film in these places?

The atmosphere was vibrant, everyone was singing, drinking, dancing, and enjoying. But here I was in the middle of the crowd as if I was having an out-of-body experience, wondering what I was doing here. I felt like an intruder like I had nothing to do here, like I didn't belong there. How could they do this every weekend? I was thinking about the past weekends, all the mental load I was feeling with people hitting on me, commenting on my appearance, what I thought, or who I was. The intensity of these types of events where people, noise, music, and alcohol always surround you. So overwhelming.

I went outside and started to cry, I felt so tired, overwhelmed, and helpless. I was wondering how I was going to make a film with so few videos, people who were hesitant to be filmed, and participant observation at parties, which were not the best places to film. I brought my camera to the car, put it in its bag, and kept my photo camera and Tascam with me. I then took a few breaths and went back in. Everyone had gathered in the main room, listening to the DJ and grabbing some drinks. We took some shots, danced, and chatted the rest of the night.

After this episode, I came up with the idea of making an installation and leaning on a multimodal output instead of a documentary film. I realized that only filming wasn't suited for what I was doing and the situation I was in, the context of my research. Moreover, I had already started to take photography and sounds before, because it was the easiest in many situations with them. I felt more comfortable doing this, but they also felt more comfortable not being filmed, which made it all feel more natural. Changing my concept for the output at that moment relieved me and made me realize that I had to do that to suit my research best, even if it wasn't what I had prepared.

MY POSITION AS A RESEARCHER AND FEMINIST POINT OF VIEW

Arriving in the field was a challenging experience. Considering the close-knit community, its set of values, and the prevailing gender norms, I felt out of place and realized that despite being Swiss and living only 30 minutes away, we lived in completely different realities. First, I quickly understood that, although it seemed like a group of friends, it was bigger than this and I had to get accepted to take part in the activities and get access to information. I realized this one of the first times I went out with the group. We were going to a "Everything but a drink" party, and it was my first interaction with most of them. Before going to that party, we went to get ready at the twins' house. I was very stressed, but she instantly made me feel welcome. I went into her room with the others and tried chatting with them while they were getting ready. Each member wore their Jeunesse hoodie, displaying the logo on the back. She then asked me if I wanted to take an extra one she had for the party, which would get me a cheaper entry. Her sister asked why she gave me one, while another member did not say anything but looked confused and did not talk to me that night. I later learned that it is a strong symbol and that it was special that she asked me to wear it, once Charlotte, the person I had the most contact with told me how happy she was that this had happened. It showed that I was accepted and considered part of the group, at least by Cécile.

Secondly, as a woman who studies social sciences and for whom feminism and questioning the patriarchy are important, it was unsettling to be in an environment where sexism was so open and accepted. This was very hard for me to understand and accept, especially coming from Jeunesse members who had done gender studies and were aware of the norms in place. Indeed, through my experience of someone who does not come from the countryside and who does not have that community attachment, I could not get passed the gender dynamics I was

experiencing. But in this space, and to be able to conduct my research as I wanted to, I had to ‘orientate’ myself like them to see the world through their perspective (Ahmed, 2006). She explains, retracing the thinking of Edmund Husserl, “The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.545). For me and in this context, the starting point to understand the meaning of the Jeunesse and the way they were seeing the gender norms, was positioning myself as a member and putting aside my judgments. Using other terms, I had to “learn to see” like the women in the Jeunesse through participant observation (Grasseni et al., 2021). However, this was without forgetting that it is impossible to forget yourself completely and acknowledging that what I understood was also oriented by my subjectivity and baggage, because as Clair (2016) reminds us, advocating for a feminist positionality goes hand in hand with knowing that it is impossible to be neutral (p. 70).

Moreover, I had to, instead of asking whether they were very critical and against the gender norms in place, and through an “urban centric feminism” (Pini et al., 2015, p.196), I had to ask myself how their actions could be considered as challenging the gender norms, in their context. I needed, and still need, to be cautious about the viewpoints I shared regarding this context that is not my own and how I act within it. Indeed, it was important to let them ‘identify’ themselves in this situation, thinking about Brubaker’s (2013) point on who is involved in the act of identification and who is subjected to being categorized, thus not defining them as ‘victims’ just because of my outsider’s perspective and my sentiments. This is because "there might be different ideas about justice" in different places (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 788), each idea holding equal validity.³²

There is a fine line between wanting to fit in too much or being too critical of what is happening in front of a researcher’s eyes, and that is something I learned throughout my research. Even though I was internally very critical of what I was seeing, I had a deep desire to see the positive elements of the Jeunesses and understand why people loved being part of this so much. I was determined to be accepted, be part of the group, and be a good anthropologist. I was trying to become their friend, which was maybe my mistake. Because I wanted to put aside that part of myself, I did not realize how hard it was for me and the weight it had on my mental health. I forgot what a lot of feminist ethnographers advocate and what is the first point in the ethics of doing research: do not harm. I was so focused on this research and listening to my

³² This also considers my position as a woman from the city coming to the countryside, where my presence could be seen as a desire to emancipate my interlocutors (Clair, 2016, p.77).

interlocutors' experiences that I did not listen to mine. It took me some time after the fieldwork to realize I had been very sad, seeing what I had written in my journal; "It's starting to be very hard for me and it's taking a toll on my mental health. I've never felt so overwhelmed, stressed, and doubtful in my life.". This may have also been the case because my relationship with the members was very good, but my sentiments were split. I felt like I did not belong, but they made me part of the group, and I knew I was there just because I was doing my research. I also did not want to contribute to the tendency of people from urban areas to study "negative perceptions" of rural life (Campbell-Halfaker, 2023, p.3). I knew I probably would not have enjoyed time with them if I would not have been in a researcher's position, but for them, I was just another person being there, so I felt like an imposter. At the same time, I did have some nice moments, and even the most sexist guys were nice to me - acknowledging this without undermining the violence of some of the comments I heard. How could I separate both? I do not have an answer, but it is a reminder that it is always important to listen to yourself, and your needs but also take a step back and tell yourself that you are a human, just like all the other people around you, just trying to understand how other people live in their social world.

All of these aspects influenced my research and the methods that I used, but also how my interlocutors (re)acted to my presence, as Sarah Ahmed rightly states "Bodies [...] take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space." (2006, p.552), where none of them can exist independently.

METHODS

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

One of the main methods I used in my field was participant observation. It is a 'staple' for ethnographic research where researchers immerse themselves in a chosen group for an extended period. It involves listening, asking questions, analyzing behavior, and of course, learning via participation (Bryman, 2012, p.432). In addition, as clarified by Bryman (2012), the term "participant observation" is often employed to describe the method of conducting ethnography, wherein data collection involves observation and interviews, among other techniques (p.432). However, there is not only one way of doing ethnography. Researchers have developed a feminist way of doing ethnography that leverages the advantages of ethnography while being influenced by feminist principles, where the women are at the center of the

research, and their point of view is given significance and understood in their context (Reinharz, 1992, in Bryman, 2012, p.454).

Participant observation was important in my research to see the gender norms and dynamics that were in place because it allowed me to observe their behavior and the gender norms in place, without talking to them about this subject. It seemed like something that was not so important and disturbing to them, but I had a very different experience as an ‘outsider’, so it was interesting for me to be able to see the different subjectivities. Thus, participant observation also gave me insights through my subjective experience, since I am a woman who was researching in a patriarchal group. It also allowed me to build relationships with my interlocutors and earn their trust, because I was partying with them and trying to be part of their group. This was effective in the sense that many people were telling me that they were impressed by my dedication to always be there, but it did not make them closer to me. Some people did not even notice me and would forget who I was from one party to the other, which made me very discreet, but posed the problem of constantly introducing myself and what I was doing. As a result, they could not really ‘get used’ to my presence, so even less with a camera in my hands. I wanted to use participant observation with and without the camera, to create knowledge through observational cinema in addition to observation. However, I quickly realized that it would not be a suitable method in the situation and context I was in.

FILMED INTERVIEWS

I also used filmed interviews, which was an important part of data collection. It is a useful method to aid in shaping the interlocutors’ points of view and character (Lawrence, 2020, p.144) and get some important information. Using interviews in films became popular amongst filmmakers who wanted to challenge the dominant ideas about gender and sexuality in the feminist and gay liberation movement as a “social and cultural discourse” where multiple individual testimonies could comment on social structures (Sarlin, 2017, p.321). Indeed, Sarlin (2017) highlights that it is an approach that allows one to represent someone and their voice but also to make the personal political; “it is productive of politics at the same time that it is reflective of them” (p.332). She also specifies that there is a distinction between the interview as a “method” and as a “form”, where the former is the medium through which you represent a subjectivity through speech or “a way to deliver content” (a “process”). The latter is the manifestation of “political or social practices”, a “produce” of the method you used (Sarlin, 2017, p.322).

Filmed interviews helped me understand their subjective experience because I asked questions that could not have been asked at a party. It would not have been the right context and there were very few talks during these nights. I only interviewed women to put their voices at the center and make them the knowers of the subject I was researching. I wanted to know their subjective truths and perspectives about the Jeunesses and the gender norms.

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY

Starting my fieldwork, I was focused on doing a film documentary. However, I soon realized that using film in my fieldwork was harder than I imagined. I was faced with the same question over and over again, “To take or not to take?”, a question expressed by John Berger while taking photographs in the streets, as I felt “the possibility of violent reactions on the part of the [filmed].” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p.78), questioning the ethics of knowing when to film or not.³³ I persisted for a while but realized that I had to change the way I imagined my output and focus on other methods, such as photography and sounds, which I had used to some extent until that realization. I remembered an exhibition that I had seen in 2020 at the Festival Images in Vevey, Switzerland where a Swiss anthropologist named Aladin Borioli had made an installation about his research on the history of beehives named *Ruches*. I had never seen an ethnographic art exhibition and that moment struck me, inspiring me to do something similar. After that moment, I decided that I would make an installation for my project and use methods that were more suited to my field. It allowed me to be more discreet and more integrated because I felt that the camera was a problem and there was an interest in it but also an awkwardness in front of it. Thus, photography and sound allowed me to capture moments and elements without the social awkwardness of the big ‘movie’ camera and to take my photo camera everywhere, even at parties.

Photography has a long history in ethnography in which researchers questioned its use. During the colonial period, photography was used to document ‘scientifically’ the populations studied and was seen as a tool that would depict something objectively (Pink, 2007, p.2). It was a powerful tool that documented and represented cultures but was also complicit in reinforcing colonial ideologies and power dynamics. Today, there is a critical awareness of these issues, and

³³ Particularly because my interlocutors would ask me repeatedly to stop filming during activities, especially because I wanted to end the movement and would have material after them saying to stop filming. Moreover, it was difficult to know whether it was because they wanted me to participate or because they did not want to be filmed anymore. However, it is an interesting way to show my difficulties in the field and how to negotiate them, which would be an interesting paper on its own.

efforts are being made to use photography in more ethical and reflective ways in ethnographic research. As ascertained, photography and images in general, are never objective and are only a medium that translates reality into something else, that is going to be understood differently by multiple actors and seen differently than reality. Indeed, images do not convey reality accurately, but “They quote from [it].” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p.96). Drawing on this, photography is now recognized as a tool to produce certain types of (visual) information and a component of the analysis (Gerster & Morokhova, 2020, p.153; Pink, 2007, p.3). According to Pink (2007), using photography in ethnographic research can build “continuities” between the culture of the participants and the way ethnographic photography is made where the photographic portrayals reflect the “visual culture” of the field while also addressing the concerns of scholarly fields (p.3). Similarly to ethnography, the use of photography can foster connections between individuals at a deeper level than just documenting the research. It also invites the researcher to develop a discerning eye for the environment as much as the content of the photograph and enables creativity as much as analysis (Oliveira, 2019). As such, it can allow the researcher to create a multimodal output such as an installation, which is what I made.

Employing photography as a method, forced me to focus more on things and pay more attention to the objects I saw or the environments I was in. For example, it helped me capture different elements I saw regularly and define the cultural world of the Jeunesse. It forced me to be aware of what I was seeing and consider everything. It also forced me to visit the village more often for example and get to learn every bit of it in my visual research. Doing that allowed me to capture the imagery of the place and reveal possible cues to what contributes to the rural identity. I inspired myself with TV segments that have been made over the years showing Jeunesses Campagnardes, where the village environment was shown a lot to depict the rurality of the place and the Swiss culture such as Goël’s (1998) *Une jeunesse au goût de terre* and Garnier’s (2003) *Une belle jeunesse!*. It is a way to make the audience understand the atmosphere and the context of the place and maybe grasp my interlocutors’ perspectives.

SOUND

Indeed, along with the other methods, recording sound seemed to be an important part of my data collection. The Jeunesse world has a specific soundscape that brings a lot to the atmosphere of its events and is characteristic of my experience in them. I noticed during my fieldwork that, even if my interlocutors never really pointed it out, music was central, and the same songs came back repeatedly. I was also astounded by the contrast between a village during a festivity and a village the rest of the year. This contrast between loudness and deep calm was central to my understanding of their experiences, the calmness of rurality, and their bustling community life. Moreover, the song of the federation is a very important part of their identity. For these reasons, having an element of sound in my work was crucial to me, as it would contribute to the building of the social reality of the Jeunesse (Grasseni et al., 2021).

THE INSTALLATION³⁴

In addition to this article, I made an installation to communicate my findings and the experience of the Jeunesses in a more embodied way and provide two layers of understanding. Next to the text which allowed me to provide a ‘theoretical’ insight into what a Jeunesse is, what it means to the members, the issues of gender, and how the women members position themselves regarding these with this article, the installation afforded me to communicate a sense of place through sounds, smells, pictures and videos that were accompanied by my interlocutors’ discourses. I chose this type of output because it was such an experience for me to arrive in this place and discover the world of the Jeunesses and all the different elements that made it that I thought recreating that space was the best way to share this understanding and experience, which is stronger than words. The installation offers a more embodied understanding of the culture of the Jeunesses and why one would be part of something like this. It communicates in a non-textual way how it feels to be part of this community, especially women, in this case, creating a ‘sensory’ understanding of the place (Howes, 2019), that can add a deeper understanding of the issue. Similarly to what De Leon (2015) described for his research on border crossers, even if my context is not similar at all, I could not have imagined being able to describe the atmosphere and complexity of the Jeunesse world with words only, because you have to see, hear, smell, etc. to understand why they love it so much.

³⁴ For documentation about the installation and the different media, please refer to the annex.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the Jeunesses of Switzerland, the women in them, their attachment to this community, and their stand towards gender norms were discussed. I argued that, although there is strong evidence of sexism in the Jeunesses and women are conscious of this problem, their relationship with their peers and the proliferation of the Jeunesse is most important to them. Taking sexism lightly is thus a concession that the women must make to be 'happily' part of the Jeunesses and belong. However, they do not lack agency in this regard, as their strong integration allows them to go between pushing the boundaries to change some aspects of the gender differences and fitting the norms. Their agency is also shown in the way they choose to ignore the problems for the sake of their community. This goes against a widely spread stereotype about women in rural areas who are dominated by patriarchal systems and do not have any say in their condition. However, there is still a cost in this conformity as women have to take it upon themselves to ignore the comments and maybe not speak up or revolt as much as they would want to. It is a choice they are making to stay integrated and keep their agency to have some power over the change of the gender norms. However, their having agency does not mean that it is not a burden.

This research allowed me to go beyond what I knew about Switzerland and its countryside. It taught me to be open and not follow the stereotypes we have of people. Entering the fieldwork - and for my whole life - I almost felt sorry for the women in the Jeunesses always wondering how they could be part of something like that, viewing them as victims. That was influenced by the fact that I am from an urban area where this is the main idea about women in the Jeunesses. I also learned to be open to people I would not have spent time with in another context and try to understand perspectives other than my own. Thus, it allowed me to explore what I did not know and question what I thought I knew (Fassin, 2013, p.642).

For future research in the Jeunesses, I would first advise starting the research in spring as it is the time of year when most activities are starting. The peak time is summer when a lot is happening and when you would probably get the most insight. Secondly, I would advise the researcher to make sure to choose an active Jeunesse as all the Jeunesses are different and not all of them are consistent, meet often or have a meeting place. Making sure of this would allow an optimal situation for research. Moreover, what needs to be done next, is to expand my research. Indeed, my data and findings are restricted as I only had two months and was doing it in winter. It would be important to stay in a Jeunesse for an extended period and look at

possible changes introduced by women. It would also be very interesting and important to explore the men's side of this issue to know what they think and what they know about the apparent gender norms and discrimination.

Finally, sexism may be more 'out there' and owned but the mechanisms are similar to most groups in our contemporary society, and women in the countryside might not have it worse than women in the city but be faced with it more openly. With my two outputs, I wanted to balance the experience and the view that one can have on this institution, as well as point out what can be problematic, where both my outputs serve a different function, and offer a different way of understanding while complementary. In a sense, with this research, I tried to show that, sure it can be a sexist, patriarchal place, but it is a very important part of life for many people in the countryside, as it allows them to have social interactions and learn. It is a part of the Vaudois culture, in which the region and the identity linked to it are important to people. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that while some (male) members have sexist and problematic behavior, they do not represent everyone in the group. Most people are kind and well-intentioned, and the presence of certain issues does not mean the entire community is fundamentally flawed.

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APPENDIX

Jeunesses, venues de toutes les régions

Pour participer dans la joie et le fair-play aux manifestations

Que ce soit l'hiver ou l'été les sportifs sont là pour défendre

Leur société.

Que vive la fédé, unissons nos forces

Pour porter dans le canton toutes nos valeurs et nos traditions,

L'âge n'a pas d'importance, gardons cette ambiance

Que les jeunes et les anciens partagent

Ensemble le même chemin dans la paix.

Allons, marchons confiants vers l'avenir

La jeunesse n'a pas de frontières, c'est l'amitié qui nous a réunis

Continuons dans cet esprit de fraternité

Et chantons en chœur ce refrain.

Que vive la fédé, unissons nos forces

Pour porter dans le canton toutes nos valeurs et nos traditions

L'âge n'a pas d'importance, gardons cette ambiance

Que les jeunes et les anciens partagent ensemble le même chemin

Pour toujours, pour toujours...

Hymne de la Fédé (FVJC)
Musique et paroles: Jeunesse de Cugy, 1994

ANNEX

The following pages show the digital portfolio of the installation I created to present my research. To see a tour of the space, click on this link: <https://dai.ly/k1D07bwn3lXPYyAS10m>

Two videos and sounds were part of the installation. You can access them by following these links:

Interview video: <https://dai.ly/kTSoUoFavfajwvAS0pK>

Activities video: <https://dai.ly/k3NLGVW6bXdJz9AS0rU>

Village sound: <https://dai.ly/k57BiUeeDT9ZycASp6C>

Events Sound: <https://dai.ly/k2UgXILvnP48dPASp8i>

La Place de Fête

The Festival Square



Welcome to La Place de Fête !

An installation that reflects the research I conducted in a small village in the Vaud Canton of Switzerland, from January to March 2024. My work was done in collaboration with the Jeunesse Campagnarde of the village, a social group for young people in the countryside.

During my time there, I engaged deeply with the women involved in these Jeunesses to explore the gender norms present in their community. Being Swiss but coming from an urban background, I wanted to understand their perspectives on these norms and their sense of attachment to the place and each other. Through interviews, participant observation, and audiovisual methods, I sought to uncover why the Jeunesse is so significant to them and what it feels like to be part of it.

The “Place de Fête” is the heart of the Jeunesse world, where members gather for events and have official ceremonies, in one village’s field. It holds a symbolic importance, encapsulating the spirit and camaraderie of the Jeunesse.

I hope this installation allows you to immerse yourself in the Jeunesse world as I did, experience what it is like to be a (woman) member, and understand why they enjoy it so much!



This is the flag of the Vaud Canton, where my fieldwork took place and where most of the Jeunesses are. It is a symbolic representation of the members' strong patriotism and pride of their origins.



What is a Jeunesse?



The Jeunesses is a social youth group found in almost every village of the French-speaking Vaud canton in Switzerland that aims to promote the interests of young people living in rural areas. To be part of a jeunesse, young people must be at least 15 years old, have completed obligatory school, not be married, and in some cases, a man. Members usually stay in the jeunesse until they are 30 years old or once they marry.

The members strive for solidarity, friendship, love of the countryside, sharing, and transcendence of generations. They organize festivities, manifestations, and activities that make the livelihood of the villages or sports activities and perpetuate traditions. The members of the Jeunesses feel it is their responsibility to organize such events to value their cultural referents and what constitutes their collective identity. This allows young people from villages to express their belonging to this community.





Here are some popular prayers you can say before taking the snuff

"The sky is too high, the earth is too low, the happy medium is the bistro table."

"Men are like teapots-a small head, a big belly, and always with their tails in the air."

"Women are like tsunamis, they come in hot and wet and leave with your house."

"Wine makes you sing, beer makes you piss, women make you mad."

prise!

Voici quelques prières populaires que vous pouvez réciter avant de prendre la snuff

"Le ciel est trop haut, la terre est trop basse, le juste milieu c'est la table de bistro."

"Les hommes c'est comme les théières, une petite tête, un gros ventre, et toujours la queue en l'air."

"Les femmes c'est comme des tsunamis, elles arrivent chaudes et mouillées et repartent avec ta maison."

"Le vin fait chanter, la bière fait pisser, les femmes font chier."

prise!

The village



1

WOMEN'S INTEGRATION INTO THE JEUNESSE

Depends on the dynamic of the village, its values, and geography...

There are three Jeunesse that still do not welcome women as members, and they are all in the mountains.

BECAUSE THE CLOSER YOU ARE TO THE CITY, THE EASIER IT IS TO LEAVE YOUR VILLAGE

SO JEUNESSES CLOSE TO CITIES HAD TO LET WOMEN IN TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO STAY IN THE VILLAGE

2

THE VALUES

THAT ARE CENTRAL FOR THE JEUNESSES ARE

IMPORTANCE OF WORK, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND SOLIDARITY

4

The Vaud Canton and its regions are a big source of pride for the Jeunesse members. Everyone is always ready to defend their origins and say loud and clear from which part of the canton they are from.

Members are very attached to their village and it is an important part of their Jeunesse/rural identity.

One way they express this is by showcasing their village's flag at the official ceremony at the end of each event.

This ceremony is also when they sing the Federation's anthem, standing on the benches, and is the favorite part of a lot of members.

3

SPORTS

ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN THE JEUNESSES

However the "mother disciplines" (tug-of-war and wrestling) are only for men in the official competitions

BUT SPORTS LIKE VOLLEYBALL, ALBEIT HAVING A DEDICATED DAY FOR WOMEN, ALSO FEATURE A MIXED-GENDER COMPETITION.

6

5



6

"I've always preferred the countryside to the city. Let's say the Jeunesse aligned with what I preferred, so it just reinforced my preference for the countryside over the city."

Tamara

7

"The Jeunesses are run by a central committee, but after that, each one is organized differently because of the mentality of its village, because of the values of the village, because of what's going on in the village."

Amelie

8

"I think that if I hadn't been involved in the Jeunesse, I'd never have met the people who live 2 hours away from me and we wouldn't be buddies, and in this case, I'm meeting the children of my parents' Jeunesse buddies. And just thinking "Hey, our parents partied together when they were young!" And then you create affinities, things through sports, through volunteering, through all that, well that creates a bond, which is really important."

Charlotte

7



9

“There are a lot of stereotypes, where we, in the countryside, think that city people are this and that, they’re a bit like hooligans. And they think, “they’re just peasants, they live in their mountains with their cows, all they do is get drunk.” Of course, there are stereotypes, but it’s important to open our eyes and recognize that it’s not solely that.”

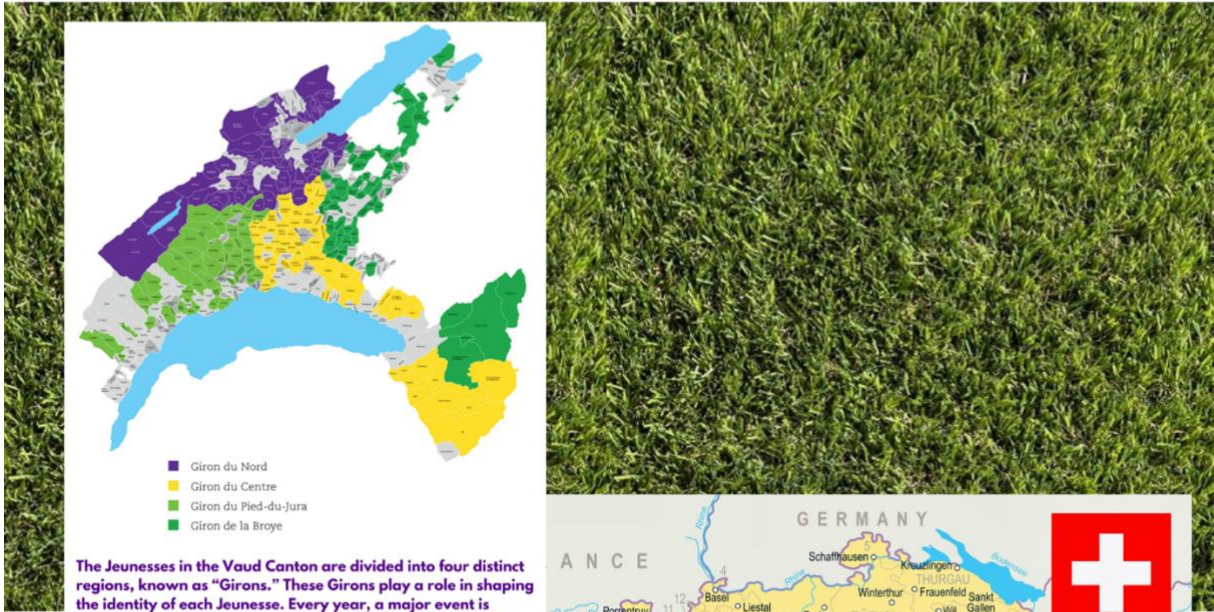
Emilie

10

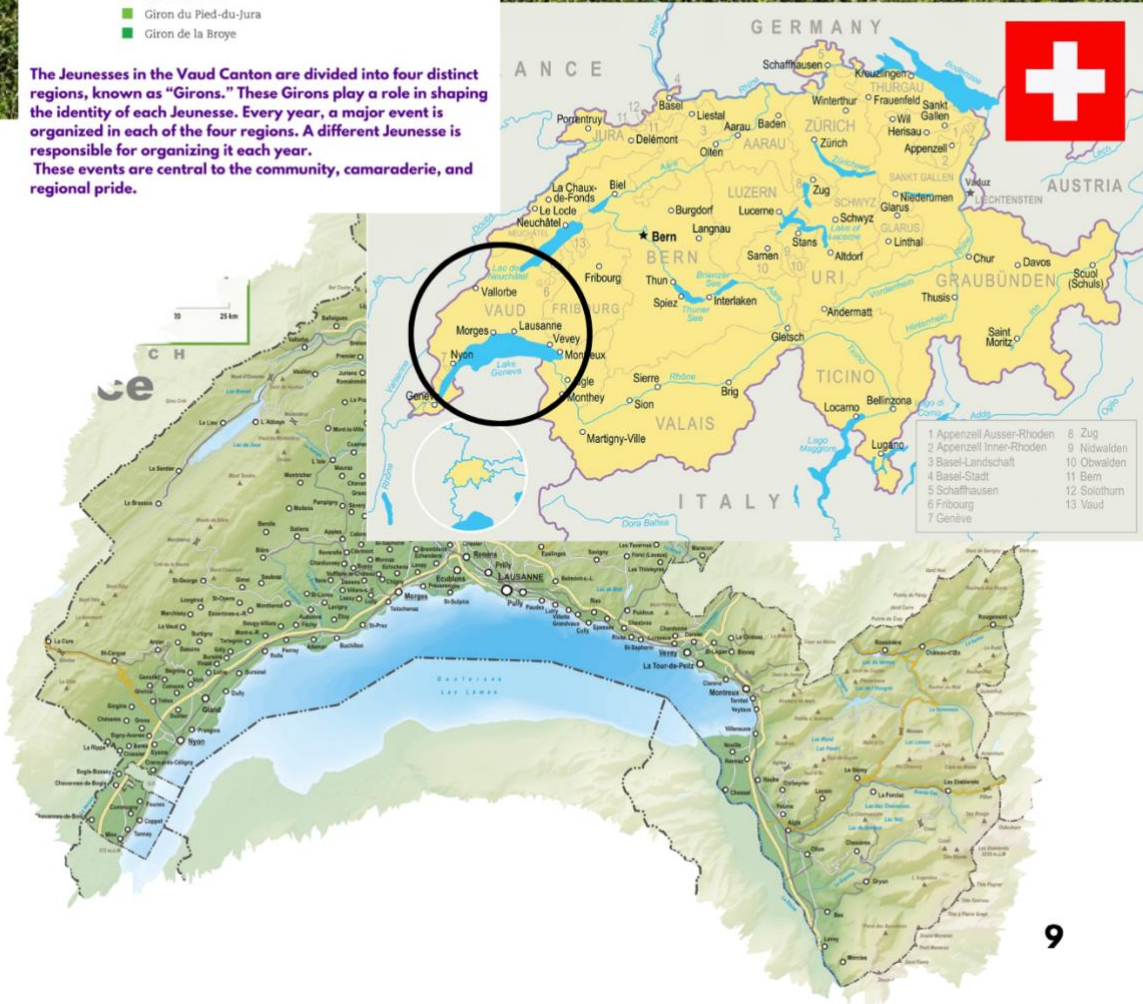
Stepping into the field proved to be a significant challenge. The close-knit community, with its distinct values and entrenched gender norms, made me feel out of place. Despite being Swiss and living just 30 minutes away, our lives were vastly different. As a woman studying social sciences, with a strong commitment to feminism and challenging the patriarchy, I was disturbed by the overt sexism that was readily accepted. This was particularly hard to reconcile, especially since the jeunesse members were aware of these issues.

Coming from an urban background without deep community ties, I struggled with the gender dynamics I encountered. Nonetheless, despite my internal criticisms, I was determined to see the positive aspects of the Jeunesses and understand their appeal. I was committed to being accepted, integrating into the group, and excelling as an anthropologist, even though it was challenging for me.

8



The Jeunesses in the Vaud Canton are divided into four distinct regions, known as "Girons." These Girons play a role in shaping the identity of each Jeunesse. Every year, a major event is organized in each of the four regions. A different Jeunesse is responsible for organizing it each year. These events are central to the community, camaraderie, and regional pride.





The events



1

Federation's anthem



Jeunesses coming from all regions
To take part joyfully and fairly, in the events
Whether in winter or summer, sportsmen are there
to defend
Their society.

Long live the federation, let's join forces
To bring our values and traditions to the canton.
Age doesn't matter, let's keep this atmosphere
May the young and the alumni share
Together the same peaceful path.

Let's march confidently into the future
The Jeunesse has no borders, it's friendship that has
brought us together.
Let's continue in this spirit of brotherhood
And let's sing this chorus together.

Long live the fédé, let's join forces
To bring our values and traditions to the canton
Age doesn't matter, let's keep this atmosphere
May the young and the alumni share the same path
Forever, forever,...

Music and lyrics: Cugy's jeunesse, 1994

Hymne de la Fédé



Jeunesses, venues de toutes les régions
Pour participer dans la joie et le fair-play aux
manifestations
Que ce soit l'hiver ou l'été les sportifs sont là pour défendre
leur société.

Que vive la fédé, unissons nos forces
Pour porter dans le canton toutes nos valeurs et nos
traditions,
L'âge n'a pas d'importance, gardons cette ambiance
Que les jeunes et les anciens partagent
Ensemble le même chemin dans la paix.

Allons, marchons confiants vers l'avenir
La jeunesse n'a pas de frontières, c'est l'amitié qui nous a
réunis
Continuons dans cet esprit de fraternité
Et chantons en chœur ce refrain.

Que vive la fédé, unissons nos forces
Pour porter dans le canton toutes nos valeurs et nos
traditions
L'âge n'a pas d'importance, gardons cette ambiance
Que les jeunes et les anciens partagent ensemble le même
chemin
Pour toujours, pour toujours...

Musique et paroles: Jeunesse de Cugy, 1994

11



The installation included two videos. One [interview video](#) and one [activities video](#) of what the Jeunesses do together (click on the underlined text to access the videos).

In addition to videos, two sounds were played to convey the atmosphere of the [events](#) and of the [village](#).



12

3



This is Tamara, she is 24 years old.

She's been part of her Jeunesse since 2019.

She is the new president and the first woman president of her Jeunesse.

She was intimidated to join a Jeunesse because she was very shy but one of her friends convinced her to join. Her parents were never part of one.

She sees the Jeunesse as a second family, on which she can always count.

4



This is Emilie, she is 19 years old.

She's been a member of her Jeunesse since 2022.

Her parents, albeit never having been part of a Jeunesse were very active in her village, and she wanted to do the same.

She is part of multiple clubs in the village, such as the shooting club, the gym club, and the Jeunesse.

5



This is Amelie, she is 23 years old.

She's been a member of her Jeunesse since 2017.

She didn't want to join at first, but seeing all the people her parents knew through it and the fact that her friends convinced her.

Having studied gender studies, being part of a Jeunesse was sometimes challenging, but she loves it nonetheless and is part of a committee.

Even though she went to the city to study, she wants to stay in her village her whole life because she is very attached to it.

6



This is Charlotte, she is 23 years old.

She's been a member of her Jeunesse since 2019.

She's lived in Morrens for her entire life and her family has been established there for 6 generations.

She went to study in the city and is now a teacher, which is not common for people living in the countryside.

Her parents are honorary members of the jeunesse, which means they brought something important to the federation and she would like to be able to do the same.

7



This is me, the researcher, I am 23 years old.

Like my interlocutors, I grew up in Switzerland, but my reality greatly differs from theirs, as I come from an urban area.

I wanted to know more about the Jeunesse because I'd heard about it my entire life but didn't know what it was all about. I had, like many young people from the cities, a negative image of them, seeing the members as all sexist, racist, homophobes who were only drinking and making offensive jokes. This made me wonder why any woman would want to join this kind of community. Thus, I sought to understand their experience of the Jeunesses and their subjectivity. This allowed me to get out of my comfort zone and try to understand people and the way they viewed the world without judgment. It also allowed me to learn more about my country of origin and see events and traditions I did not know existed.

17



8

“We’re quite patriotic, actually; we love our country, we’re proud... In fact, we’re very attached to and proud of our country, of Swiss traditions. I think that’s a value we have here.”

Emilie

9

“People always told me I wouldn’t fit in with the Jeunesse because I was too reserved, didn’t like people, and was afraid of them. In the end, I think it’s the thing that helped me the most to open up to people, to dare to do things, to dare to call people, to dare to approach people, and everything.”

Tamara

10

“There are elements that are still present in the mentalities of some people in the Jeunesses that no longer reflect today’s society, in my opinion.”

Charlotte

11

“I think it’s a change in mentality that goes hand in hand with the change in mentality in Switzerland. We’re going through an evolution at the moment, whether it’s in the city or the countryside. And in the Jeunesses, yes, maybe we’re not moving at the same pace as the city, but there’s still a change.”

Amelie

18

