

**UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST  
DEPARTMENT UNESCO CHAIR ON THE STUDY OF INTER-  
CULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS EXCHANGES  
Master “Intercultural Communication”**

**Dissertation Paper**

**FUNCTIONAL MULTICULTURAL  
PARADIGMS – SWITZERLAND’S CASE**

**Author:**

**Diana Hodoivanu**

**Scientific coordinator:**

**Prof. Univ. Dr. Martin Hauser**

**Bucharest  
June 2009**

## **Summary**

### **1. Introduction / 3**

### **2. Overview of Multicultural Theories / 6**

#### 2.1. Definitions of Culture / 6

##### 2.1.1. Manifestations of Culture / 7

##### 2.1.2. Layers of Culture / 8

#### 2.2. From Cultural to Multicultural – Key Issues in Multicultural Communication / 9

##### 2.2.1. Multiculturalism and Reconciling Cultural Differences / 11

##### 2.2.2. Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition / 12

##### 2.2.3. Multiculturalism and the Linguistic Matter / 16

##### 2.2.3.1. Multilingual Education / 18

### **3. Putting Multicultural Theories into Context / 20**

#### 3.1 Current Issues in the Multicultural Debate / 22

### **4. The Case of Switzerland / 25**

#### 4.1. General Overview / 25

#### 4.2. Historical Background / 29

#### 4.3. Specific Issues in Swiss Multiculturalism / 36

### **5. Is Switzerland a Viable Multicultural Model for Other Nations? / 48**

## **Conclusions / 55**

## **References / 57**

# 1. Introduction

Switzerland is a country of great diversity. What seems like a common statement, and somewhat a truism, is in fact hiding many facts and even more misconception about a nation deemed by many eclectic in terms of multicultural communication and coexistence.

Moreover, Switzerland seems to defy every rule regarding state cohesion. When in 1857, the Italian democrat Giuseppe Mazzini<sup>1</sup> presented his version of the map of Europe, Switzerland was left out, mainly because it seemed to function against every state norm that was governing general 19<sup>th</sup> century belief according to which nations, in order to be considered as such, should have a shared culture and preferably a single, official language. Long term survival of the nation state was in many ways directly linked to this. The Swiss, therefore, according to this particular theory should never have formed a nation because it was obvious that they lacked some of the elementary factors many deemed essential to national cohesion – a shared national identity and a sense of belonging which a state so obviously diverse and only apparently separated could not have offered.

Of course, if we apply the 19<sup>th</sup> century school of thought to this particular example, we may conclude that Switzerland represents an unmatched case and to a certain extent even an anomaly among other nation states, in that it is a vivid example that nations are not primarily language communities. The factors that have led to this particular situation are analyzed in depth in the chapters 3 and 4.

Rightfully so, what seems like an almost perfect description of multicultural conviviality is in fact the very root of several debates on whether Switzerland has indeed offered a fertile ground for a multicultural exchange, that would go beyond mere toleration and would encourage a trade of values allowing for a complete unification of this particular geographical space.

---

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761-1891*, Past & Present Publications, 2003, Preface (xiii).

Furthermore, considering Switzerland's seemingly outstanding development, the question of whether it can in fact represent a role model for other nations is another important point which will be discussed in chapter 5 of the paper. This is an idea that has been tossed around and appeared unequivocally in debates regarding the very poignant issue of multicultural communication (expanded to the point of addressing other related issues – like inter-ethnic conflicts, for instance). I will be discussing whether or not we can consider Switzerland a viable model<sup>2</sup> and if so, how can this model or pattern be applied – if possible – to a number of countries in Europe, the Eastern European region in particular - a rather turbulent area with a history of inter-ethnic conflicts, some of which have led to rather extreme consequences (e.g. nations being divided along the ethnic or language fissure).

But in order to find answers and draw conclusions, we must first take a look at several historical facts and also get an overview of the multicultural theories applicable today. As a general statement – I chose to use the term *muticultural* throughout the paper, even though *intercultural* is often preferred. Christian Giordano draws a very accurate line between them by explaining how the suffixes affect the general understanding of these terms<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, he states, while *multi* has a more descriptive and somewhat discriminative approach, *inter* focuses more on the inclusion and exchange. However, my choice of the term *muticultural* comes to underline the fact that all the proposed aspects that come into discussion throughout the paper are not always the result of a successful process of inclusion and exchange, thus rendering the term *muticultural* more neutral, hence more accurate.

The structure of the paper will bring into focus the main aspects to be discussed, after having looked at the general, big picture. Thus, I will start with a broader view on *multiculturalism* after discussing the definitions, approaches and implications of what *cultural* means. In the chapters 2 and 3 the focus will be placed on existing issues in

---

<sup>2</sup> Some theorists will accept this, while others will dismiss the idea that any nation can be considered a model as being presumptuous and somewhat sustaining an arrogant approach. This will be discussed at large in chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Apud.* Christian Giordano, „De la criza reprezentarilor la triumful prefixurilor”, published in *Interculturalitate. Cercetari si perspective românești*.

multicultural debate, drawing us closer to the proposed case study – Switzerland, which will be discussed from a historical standpoint that will put into perspective its evolution, while also taking a closer look at the specific issues that render it such a particular case. In the following chapter I will aim to show how, in spite of potential historical, social and economical differences, the Swiss model can be replicated and applied to other nations – namely those in the CEE region, a region that has oftentimes been torn apart along the cultural fissure. As a general note – the potential parallel drawn will by no means imply a common background or a being-alike type of approach but it will, however, try to exemplify how one successful case can in fact prove useful *in spite of* all potential differences and historical backgrounds (actually, these differences may be exactly what can render this type of approach interesting and motivating).

## 2. Overview Of Multicultural Theories

### 2.1 Definitions of Culture

Throughout the years, Culture has been given a wide range of definitions. Some of them have focused on the symbolic and intangible aspects of human societies, such as the one given by James.A. Banks and Cherry.A. McGee Banks who stated that: “The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.”<sup>4</sup>

Other definitions focus on the learned human patterns that define a society, as stated by L. Damen, who said that culture consists of a series of “day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism”<sup>5</sup>.

Yet another (rather early) definition takes into account the historical aspect. According to C. Kluckhohn, culture comprises all the “historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men.”<sup>6</sup> Kluckhohn goes on to say that “the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas

---

<sup>4</sup> James.A. Banks, Cherry.A. McGee Banks, *Multicultural Education*, Needham Heights, 1989, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> L. Damen, *Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension on the Language Classroom*, Reading, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> C. Kluckhohn, W.H. Kelly, *The Concept of Culture*, published in *The Science of Man in the World Culture*, New York, 1962, p. 125.

and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action.”<sup>7</sup>

From all these we can draw several conclusions. First, we can safely assume that Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, and notions of time, roles, relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations. We can also assume that culture is communication and communication is culture. In a very broad perspective, there is an inextricable link between the two, as communication, as symbolic as it may sometimes be perceived, is one of the main carriers of cultural symbols. And, of course, Culture is a way of life of a group of people - the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

### **2.1.1 Manifestations of Culture**

If Culture is symbolic communication<sup>8</sup>, then cultural differences manifest themselves in different ways and differing levels of depth.<sup>9</sup> Among the symbols, there are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognized by those who share a particular culture. New symbols easily develop, old ones disappear. Symbols from one particular group are regularly copied by others. This is why symbols represent the outermost layer of a culture and the one which we usually interact with the easiest. Also, there are rituals that are collective activities, sometimes superfluous in reaching desired objectives, but are considered as being socially essential<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> C. Kluckhohn, W.H. Kelly, *The Concept of Culture*, published in *The Science of Man in the World Culture*, New York, 1962, p. 398.

<sup>8</sup> Some of these symbols may consist of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values – learnt and shared.

<sup>9</sup> Usually, Symbols represent the most superficial and Values represent the deepest manifestations of culture.

<sup>10</sup> Examples include ways of greetings, paying respect to others, religious and social ceremonies etc.

However, the core of a culture is mainly formed by values. They are broad tendencies for preferences of certain state of affairs to others (good-evil, right-wrong, natural-unnatural). Many values remain unconscious to those who hold them. Therefore they often cannot be discussed, nor be directly observed by others. Values can only be inferred from the way people act under different circumstances.

Therefore, symbols and rituals represent the tangible or visual aspects of the practices of a culture. The true cultural meaning of the practices remains intangible and it remains to be revealed only when analyzed and carefully looked into.

### **2.1.2 Layers of Culture**

Different levels of culture exist within a so-called (perceived) main culture. We all relate to these levels independently or not, depending on our own attachment or adherence to a certain layer. Generally there are several known and accepted cultural layers and their definition will allow us to understand the following concepts when diving deeper into multicultural issues to be analyzed. These levels are<sup>11</sup>:

- The national level - associated with the nation as a whole.
- The regional level - associated with ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level - associated with gender differences (female vs. male).
- The generation level - associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level - associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation.

Starting from this, we can move on to defining what exactly multiculturalism has been understood as defining and how the working concepts that refer back to it are in themselves functional.

---

<sup>11</sup> According to Robert Anthony, *Education and Levels of Culture*, Clearing House, 1984, pp. 80-81 and *Levels of Culture and Individual Behavior: An Investigative Perspective*, by E. Krahana, Robert Evristo, published in *Journal of Global Information Management*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, pp. 18-20.

## 2.2. From Cultural to Multicultural – Key Issues in Multicultural Communication

Nations of this world have witnessed an evolution from agrarian society concerned with conformity, through an industrial society concerned with nationalism and uniformity, to our present information society concerned with diversity within a global context, on our way to the Global Society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has therefore become important to analyze what culture represents, how culturally diverse we have become and how this affects us. Demographics are a living proof of this mix-and-match type of culture that is ever so present and, more than ever before, diversity seems to be “in”, as discussions of cultural inclusion and acceptance make their way into public discourse.

So, what then is Multiculturalism?

Definitions of Multiculturalism have ranged from metaphorical (and rather simplistic) connotations – such as *melting pot*, *mosaic* or *patchwork*, to more academically structured versions. The internet based encyclopedia Wikipedia defines multiculturalism as a sociological- and culture-philosophical reasoning that claims clear instructions for the cultural policy of a country.<sup>12</sup> However, this seems to be a rather one-sided definition and, in all fairness, an all-encompassing one would be hard to find.

Generally speaking, multicultural communication can be reduced to one simple question – as Milton Bennet concisely puts it “How do people understand one another when they do not share a cultural experience?”<sup>13</sup> The possible answers to this apparently easy question may hide many stereotypes and even more misconceptions which, in turn, can lead to more questions: What type of communication is more suitable? Are there any rules to be followed? Can there be certain signs that tell us when we are doing the right thing? And what exactly is ‘the right thing’ in terms of multicultural communication?

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism> accessed April 2009

<sup>13</sup> Milton Bennett, *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Intercultural Press, 1998, p. 1.

This leads us to the above mentioned need for a clearly structured definition, except there isn't a single one that is unanimously accepted. In general, multiculturalism accepts the cultural differences in a pluralistic society originating from three principles: Every person has an ethnic origin (equality). Every culture earns respect (dignity). Cultural pluralism needs official support (community).<sup>14</sup> Multiculturalism opposes the idea of a 'lead culture' because that would offer the basis for potential conflicts starting from assumed supremacy and it also opposes the idea of an existing *melting pot* as in this particular case it seeks a *becoming alike* type of approach.

Furthermore, there are the so-called politically-derived definitions of multiculturalism. The liberal version of multiculturalism<sup>15</sup> claims a common political culture as a base of a functioning society, whereas the radical version of multiculturalism<sup>16</sup> does not accept a common political culture. The identity of each culture is of essence and the exercising of each culture in the society has to be guaranteed. So, in a more activist context, we could say that multiculturalism stands for a left-radicalist attempt to overturn dominant, monocultural conceptions of history and society, which were considered ethnocentric or even racist.

Left-radical critics have found fault in the above-mentioned liberal approach to multiculturalism because it allegedly depoliticizes or aestheticizes difference by emphasizing the cosmetic celebration of cultural diversity, rather than the socially transformative struggle against racism or any type of assumed supremacy. For them, multiculturalism stands for a strategy of containment of resistance and revolt rather than for a true desire for the elimination of racial/ethnic oppression.

Either way, most definitions of (or attempts at defining) multiculturalism signal a heightened awareness of and concern with the increasingly problematic and disjunctive relationship between race, ethnicity, and national identity.

---

<sup>14</sup> Milton Bennett, *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Intercultural Press, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Levente Salat, *Multiculturalismul liberal. Bazele normative ale existenței minoritare autentice*, Editura Mentor, Targu Mures, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Dusche, *Radical Multiculturalism versus Liberal Pluralism*, the online version at <http://www.ethical-perspectives.be> accessed May 2009.

### **2.2.1 Multiculturalism and Reconciling Cultural Differences**

A general interest in cultural differences may mark a very important first step in understanding how multicultural paradigms work. Therefore, practical approaches such as discussions and getting information about other cultures help build a solid baggage of cultural awareness, but conclusions must be drawn sparingly and carefully. Sometimes they may represent unwarranted stereotypes, an assessment of only a subgroup of a particular group of people, or a situation that has since undergone drastic changes. So, while it sounds good in theory, this is a rather slippery slope when put into practice.

It has been stated many times that multiculturalism deals with difference. This is a fact. Today's efforts to understand and integrate difference mark a more constructive approach to the former one, which referred back to a closed up view of the world – if someone's views were different than yours (mainly as a result of culturally-engraved patterns), then you would either try to change them, convert them to your system of reference or, more simply, ignore them. Of course, there was also the case in which violence was based on exactly this type of rejection.

This type of belief has been, over time, replaced with what was deemed a culturally sensitive approach, one based on understanding, toleration and acceptance. This is, in essence, what multicultural theories are trying to convey.

During the past decades a multicultural perspective has been adopted by public policy framework in many countries in order to deal with cultural diversity. The idea of multicultural society has its roots in nation-states, throughout their histories, when confronted with international migration such as Canada, The United States and Australia. These states are conventionally referred to as examples of various forms of multicultural society, accommodated through nation states public policies.

As a general framework for the following case study, we must make note of the fact the Western European countries have recognized the need to react to the cultural diversity brought in by immigrants as a consequence of their immigration and integration policies.

This issue was brought up, for instance, by ethnic clashes in Yugoslavia and East Europe after the fall of communism, and by the crisis of the traditional nation-state in Western Europe, determined by non-European immigration into this area. Due to these and other events, multiculturalism has been seen as the root of possible intra-national ethnic conflicts and discords. Most of the scientist and researchers identified the problem of multiculturalism as a challenge to liberal democratic system and to civil society.

Furthermore, the cultural aspects of international migration have been studied in the light of several thematic issues, starting from religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity, in order to describe case studies and specific issues on a local level. This cultural turn in social research restored the period when culture, in its variety of elements, did not gain the researchers attention in processes such as state formation and political legitimacy.

### **2.2.2 Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition**

The right for culture and the so called right for recognition (where individuals are recognized as members of groups through which their rights are applied) appear to constitute the basis for the liberal forms of pluralism and multiculturalism<sup>17</sup>. Following these ideas, it appears that multiculturalism deliberates over two interconnected issues in contemporary society: *cultural diversity* and the *politics of recognition*.

Cultural diversity is often taken for granted, in order to give an answer to ethnic conflicts or clashes. On the other hand, political movements fighting for recognition of their cultural identities are often justified in the optics of multiculturalism and should be taken into consideration from that perspective.

One of the main issues constantly brought into debate is that of the politics of recognition, setting the basis for social inclusion. There have been many attempts in democratic societies to reduce whatever gaps may have existed between their citizens and

---

<sup>17</sup> Michael Dusche, *Radical Multiculturalism versus Liberal Pluralism*, the online version at <http://www.ethical-perspectives.be>, accessed May 2009.

promote the idea of equality among all. This was done through the law, through various governmental programs and also with the help of NGOs willing to support the issues, by bringing it into the attention of the media, the public figures and ultimately the so-called “oppressors”.

The gaps however could not reduce the differences in political terms on all levels. A true politics of recognition will operate on all levels – whether the basis for a potential discrimination were social, racial, gender-based, etc. However there can be other sources of inequality, more subtle and far more difficult to identify and control - those based on identity.<sup>18</sup> Therefore a broader defined concept of inclusion is needed, because to operate on a surface level regarding issues so poignant and so far-reaching, would perhaps equal painting a pretty picture of a reality that is far from being dealt with.

The basic premises of multiculturalism, discussed by Will Kymlicka, are that membership in a cultural community is essential to our personal identity and provides individuals with the necessary framework to exercise their true liberty<sup>19</sup>. In Kymlicka’s theory cultural recognition and identity are values belonging to all human beings, and they are also a premise for our individual autonomy. The attempts of multiculturalism to guarantee individuals’ rights, mainly consisting in the possibility to change their own cultural identity, lead to the conclusion that these rights are embodied in internal principles holding for any community.

Also Charles Taylor’s theory on the politics of recognition has its roots in *communitarian liberalism*.<sup>20</sup> Its central notion - the recognition of cultural rights of groups - should be guaranteed equally to each group, because all cultures have an equal value. The concept of ‘recognition’, firstly used in the philosophy of German Idealism to reflect upon the inter-subjective formation of individual identities, through confrontation

---

<sup>18</sup> Kymlicka calls these “status groups”.

<sup>19</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> A comprehensible resource on communitarian liberalism can be provided by Amitai Etzioni’s *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities*, University of Virginia Press, 1995, pp. 41-47.

and interaction with others has now become the key concept for the consideration on what appeared to be a series of socio-cultural movements and struggles.<sup>21</sup>

Such politics of recognition appears to not be interested in affirmative action, reducing the inequalities and redefining equal opportunities for all; its goal is rather the formation of a state structure with sensibility for a difference. The main issue of policies designed under the influence of the politics of recognition is that they seemingly lead to divisions among citizens. But it is important to realize that in any case the result is a reaction, where discriminated groups claim the same advantages given to other (majoritary, favored) groups, while those groups with strong cultural identity claim for more privileges at the expenses of non supported cultural groups. This type of discriminative behaviour is induced by the perceived gap as well as the assumed “innate” rights which may on the longer term keep alive a discriminative behavior of disadvantaged groups or groups which are not accepted, or which are denied by a community.

As Gerd Baumann shows<sup>22</sup>, multiculturalism cannot ask individuals whether they perceive themselves to be identified enough with their culture, in order to be recognized as politically or socially equal. The question of the moral relevance for the cultural rights observed in multicultural theories of Will Kymlicka or Charles Taylor presented above, in order to justify other political or social actions, makes out of cultural recognition a matter of universal human rights and, consequently, the possible goal of political struggle for reaching equal representation.

Nevertheless, the politics of recognition by defending the recognition of cultural rights of groups as a matter of fact creates spaces for producing and sharpening differences and their establishment in a community’s social and political dimensions. A simple, straightforward solution to eliminating gaps in order to fully integrate all group categories is yet to be found.

---

<sup>21</sup> Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 173-187.

One such solution has been – perhaps confusingly given – that of the economic development that would help liberate individuals from their fixed roles and identities. This could explain why modern liberal theory, has been inclined to ignore the question of cultural diversity. Still, nowadays neo-liberal economists express a certain degree of confidence when promoting the thesis according to which markets are gradually going to weaken particular forms of identity. Such a view bears some resemblance to past modernization theories; dominant liberal tradition downplayed the relevance of cultural diversity, in order to treat this issue as an irrelevant element, without any effect on the normative condition of social justice.

A plural society should therefore be promoted, but how to build its social unity, when dealing with different identities is a question that needs yet to be answered. The general presuppositions are that the principle of citizenship will guarantee the equality among citizens, both in civil rights and duties, while also expecting the state to show neutrality towards cultural and ethnic differences. However flawless in theory, this presupposition lacks applicability in practice. Under the influence of the latest developments, especially during the nineties, related to an increasingly visible cultural diversification and shift from national to multinational and from local to global the above mentioned premises were adjusted in order to fit the new scenario. The thesis of an equal citizenship has been adjusted to the new character of nation states, by recognizing new national minorities and cultural groups.

However, the danger in integration of citizens who do not see this responsibility towards a state and towards other citizens implies that we can create differentiated citizenship based on a refusal of a state, which does not recognize cultural or ethnic differences. Such an idea of a “differentiated citizenship”<sup>23</sup> states that citizenship is less a system for attributing rights and more a political ground, meant to redefine the symbolic boundary markers for national identity. As a consequence, different symbolic labels that a

---

<sup>23</sup> This notion was widely used during the nineties by the liberal multicultural theorists such as Will Kymlicka and Iris Young .

nation attributes to immigrants directly influence the distribution of material sources towards them and their potential for mobilization and participation.

So, to conclude this section, we can safely state that cultural diversity is directly linked to a certain type of politics of recognition and renders the efforts of integration useful. However, we can ask ourselves whether all the political and social movements really aim for socio-cultural recognition. This is an issue that needs yet to be debated.

### **2.2.3. The Linguistic Matter – A Central Issue in Multicultural Studies**

The qualification *language* is almost entirely political rather than linguistic.<sup>24</sup> Official recognition - such as its use as a teaching language, its use in mass media and in contacts with authorities, as well as its use in writing and as a literary expression – often give a language its so called prestige. In Switzerland's case, as we will later see, there are three major languages that make up most of its culturally-ecclectic status. These languages are undeniably some of the most culturally representative languages of Europe and this fact alone forces Switzerland to somewhat look out for inspiration and influence rather than focus inwards. This can be seen as a good thing – pertaining to the nation's openness and diversity – as well as a not-so-good thing – projecting the image of a country of a rather scattered culture. But all this along with further examples will be analyzed in the following chapters. For now, the focus will remain on the basic theoretical facts that will allow for a clear background.

So, in taking the discussion even further, we come across two main working concepts: the *minority* and *majority languages*. These apparently obvious concepts are far more controversial and unclear than one might initially think. First of all, both concepts are relative. *Majority* normally refers to the most spoken language in the country and the one that has official recognition. The *minority* can still be in the majority in one or more

---

<sup>24</sup> The Online Encyclopedia Britannica - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/329791/language> accessed April 2009.

regions or just the majority in certain towns or villages, but the minority language might also be in a minority situation everywhere, which in itself indicates a poor survival perspective for that language. Also important for the survival of the minority language is whether it is spoken in the local capital or spoken by a leading group in the region or town. This is, for example, the case in Catalonia, where half of the population speaks Catalan and half Spanish. Still, the predominant bourgeoisie uses Catalan and is apparently promoted to a degree that seems to have lowered the Spanish competence of the younger generation, causing distress in at least some influential circles in Spain.<sup>25</sup>

More examples are necessary at this point - Swiss German varieties are hardly intelligible for a German, but they are still one language and the written German language is fairly unified, whether it is written in Germany, Switzerland, or Austria. English and Spanish are surprisingly unified for languages spoken across such vast territories, and the same holds true for Russian. Norwegian and Swedish are considered two different languages and have established different literary traditions and official usages although from an entirely linguistic standpoint they originally could have easily and with good reason been considered one language, and they still have more resemblances between them than certain dialects have with the standard varieties.

On a purely theoretical level and in the broadest possible definition, a multilingual state is any state where more than one language is used by people who have citizenship of that specific state in their relations with groups of other citizens of the same state. In this sense, a large number of states are currently considered multilingual states. Apart from the indigenous citizens, with generations of ancestors in their particular state, in most European states today live substantial groups of people who have immigrated over the course of the 20th century and who have acquired full citizenship, but who, nevertheless, still use the language of their countries of origin in their relations with other citizens of the same ethnic origin living in the same European country.<sup>26</sup> One example would be the Hungarian minority in Romania, in itself a seeker or territorial autonomy (a fact which

---

<sup>25</sup> The Online Encyclopedia Britannica - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/329791/language> accessed April 2009.

says a lot of its constant grip on its own cultural background), but we might also encounter situations where some of these languages are of non-European origin (Hindi, Arabic or Turkish, spoken in an increasingly larger number of European countries). However, this argument does not impede the current discussion; it may in fact be adding to the need of a multicultural approach at the basis of all communication given the very large cultural (and even religious) gap there might exist.

### **2.2.3.1. Multilingual education**

Another contentious issue in the multicultural debate, which has been very divisive and difficult to solve even in very organized and open societies, is that of multilingual education. In Switzerland also, this has been a debated issue and the outcome<sup>27</sup> eventually appears to be in favor of all multicultural principles discussed.

The opponents of multiculturalism argue that bilingual education and communication is confusing, reduces people's ability to adjust, and leads to discussions that only start with the bilingual aspect but further lead to heavier issues.<sup>28</sup> But arguments as such ignore the bulk of research which has consistently shown that multilingualism is accompanied by better communication, better ability to understand and relate to one another and ultimately better educational achievement. Language is an important carrier of cultural values and therefore an important tool in learning to adjust to various types of culture (as we are in fact discussing about an adjustment process on many counts) providing the necessary, unambiguous points of reference by which we scale human communication at large.

Multicultural societies require multicultural education and multicultural education requires the ability to communicate in multiple languages and perspectives. This leads us to the concept of *bilingualism*. One could, as is usually the case, view it as a phenomenon that occurs on the individual level. This is often the situation when it comes to describing immigrants or speakers of a minority language and children with parents who have

---

<sup>27</sup> A good overview of the current situation Swiss education is given on <http://www.educa.ch/dyn/129983.asp> accessed May 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Similar claims can be found in *The Politics of Language: Conflict, Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective* by Carol L. Schmid, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 110-147.

different first languages (mother tongues), but bilingualism is also used metaphorically and on a territorial level indicating something completely different, with the coexistence of two languages in one region often and incorrectly interpreted as a sign of individual bilingualism.

Without going into deeper debates, unnecessary at this point, the fact remains that while multiculturalism generally advocates multilingualism and encourages learning as many languages as possible in order to be able to face with an open, unprejudiced mind all potential challenges in this area, it should avoid making demands which may be either unrealistic or unnecessary. Undoubtedly, the current context which forces us to be exposed to a diversified and ever-changing 'global village'<sup>29</sup> has a great importance in this.

---

<sup>29</sup> A term first introduced by Marshall McLuhan in *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

### 3. Putting Multicultural Theories into Context

Diversity in the world today has been an issue often presented in relation to multiculturalism. It has, in fact, many times been intricately linked to it, but it would be important to underline that diversity per se is not the main engine of multicultural theories, but rather the way in which we deal with diversity and how we make it work, so that we can find a common ground for communication and shared experience. Will Kymlicka paints a vast picture of what diversity has come to represent: 184 independent states, more than 600 living language groups and more than 5000 different ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> This should offer a good starting point for the following chapter.

As seen previously, the challenges of multicultural co-existence are perhaps best analyzed in a context that has made it possible for several nations to emphasize the need to put this issue into question. Traditionally, discussions on multiculturalism began around 1980<sup>31</sup>, although accompanied by very heated debates over whether college curricula should emphasize the intellectual traditions of Western civilization, or whether they should adopt a more multicultural approach to literature and history<sup>32</sup>. At this level, multiculturalism was a reaction to the Eurocentric “mono-culturalism”<sup>33</sup> which assumed the universality of Western civilization, and represented it as the only culture worthy of being learned, transmitted, and reproduced.

Later, the multicultural discussion became more general, and a substitute for broad anti-racial policies and tendencies. The American society may have been among the first

---

<sup>30</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multicultural> accessed May 2009.

<sup>32</sup> B. Harold Chetkow-Yanoov, *Celebrating Diversity: Coexisting in a Multicultural Society*, Routledge, 1999, pp. 49-53.

<sup>33</sup> Murray Goot, *Multiculturalists, Monoculturalists and the many in between: Attitudes to Cultural Diversity and their Correlates*, published in *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 29, 1993.

to initiate such discussions<sup>34</sup>, but the pattern was soon spreading all over the world, with the good examples of multicultural views having emerged in order to deal with the ever changing aspects of the struggle for recognition, dignity, and justice.

Some of these discussions have come across in the form of a recognized need or a resolution, which validates up to a point the thesis of this present paper that multicultural good practices can be used as a model for other nations; in this particular case, the United States have long represented such a model, without delving deeper into more political and socio-economical aspects. But to what extent Switzerland can be considered a model for multicultural best practices will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Obviously, there are no clearly set patterns. While some might conclude that multiculturalism is at the root of all things good happening to the evolution of society today, pertaining to even more intricate and much debated concepts such as globalization and freedom of speech, there are some still who view it as having more negative effects than positive.

On one hand, we have theorists declaring that multiculturalism means an emphasis on diversity, an elimination of ethnocentrism and the integration of the histories of both genders and people of all classes and racial or ethnic groups. It involves achieving a positive sense of self and self-worth in a person's own culture while not diminishing or denigrating any other cultural form.<sup>35</sup> In this particular view, it revolves around such concepts as tolerance, gaining contact, and sharing with others. And for this argument, this definition is quite revealing. However, the fact remains that, in order for multiculturalism to be discussed in accordance with its effects we must analyze how communities *interact* with each other and *react* to one another. So, in this respect, we must discuss several challenges of multicultural conditions. The examples will only prove relevant to the point of suggesting a similar pattern, while also not taking the focus off the main case-study of this paper.

---

<sup>34</sup> Discussions on multiculturalism in America took on a more practical note, referring directly to what could be done specifically to reduce cultural gaps and continue as one nation – an idea (and ideal) supported heavily by political speech among other things.

<sup>35</sup> Wendy Freedman Katkin, Ned C. Landsman, Andrea Tyree (Editors), *Beyond pluralism: the conception of groups and group identities in America*, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 49.

### 3.1 Current Issues in the Multicultural Debate

Various efforts have been made over the years to determine the otherwise academically accepted theories of multiculturalism to work. This has been most obvious in areas where cultural clashes gave rise to upheavals and even led to political fissures that have caused nations to become internally divided. Those were the worst case scenarios.

As we will later see, nations confronting these issues – and failing at making them work – have suffered the rather drastic consequences of their failure to find the sought after middle ground. Others (Switzerland's case is only one of them) have been considered successful case studies. What has set these two categories apart? Where are some countries going right and where are others failing? These are questions that need to be answered with concrete examples, as they serve as a starting point for what we will later discuss – Switzerland's case (as we will see, somewhat independent from them and rather atypical).

There are certain multicultural experiences – for example, those of New Zealand (Maori people, the Pakeha - British and Dutch, and Pacific Islanders)<sup>36</sup> and Canada (separate areas - French in Quebec and New Brunswick; The Native American in British Columbia and western provinces) – which show that multiculturalism can work. Switzerland, under this particular argument, would undoubtedly make no exception. Each one of these countries has several ethnic groups with different values, languages, and aspirations. Recognition of these groups and efforts to promote a general understanding of their way of life has resulted in considerable cooperation. All these countries have had their share of ethnic conflicts, and there are still lingering inequities to be dealt with, but each nation can point to progress and an extended period of peace and harmony.

---

<sup>36</sup> Mervin Singham, *Multiculturalism in New Zealand – the need for a new paradigm*, published in Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2006.

However, these challenges may be seen as a common concern for both multiculturalists as well as their opponents. It is easy to hear the voices of those who do not wish multiculturalism to even be considered as a functioning option. However, it should not be a surprise to us that the divisions among those who truly desire a multicultural world have not helped its cause. Therefore, a critical approach to both of these traditions is necessary. It would thus be necessary to underline at least several aspects that have rendered (and in many ways still continue to do so) multiculturalism quite difficult to accept and perhaps, even internalize.

The economic challenges, rather than cultural ones, would perhaps be at the top of the list of anyone contesting its functioning principles. In all fairness, most cultural and ethnic conflicts all over the world, where there is such a case for this type of approach, result from the inequalities in the economic and political status of various groups which may somewhat feel forced to cohabitate, share, relate to and integrate each other's differences. While having its own dynamics and autonomous influence, culture is a forum in which we present our cases and give expression to our frustrations and angers.

Much of the conflict and controversy is caused by the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots." The differences are also, to some extent, insurmountable, although if portrayed correctly may encourage freedom of expression to such an extent that perhaps these issues would not even have to arise. But no matter how cultural dissimilarities are resolved and how novel the solutions may appear to be, progress will not be possible unless the economic inequalities are eliminated, for they often are at the base of other forms of inequality.

Of course, in all fairness, equality should not be a mere ideological claim, but rather it should be implemented in all spheres apart from the economic one: social, racial, political, and cultural. While there is a need to have a policy that demands equal rather than special treatment of particular ethnic groups, we must not assume that the inequalities of the past have no effect on the status and capabilities of those groups in the present or future times. These inequalities demand special attention, special laws, and special efforts in order to reach a solid and sound conclusion.

But, however politically correct and somewhat suitable these initiatives may sound, I do not believe that they can be completely functional. One of the arguments is that they seemingly deal with what has previously been perceived as being difunctional – namely, putting a stop, or trying to put a stop, to discrimination and oppression. Those type of approaches, while supporting the right causes, cannot on the short term change mentalities and behaviours, which are at the core of discriminative and non-inclusive behaviour. Coercion of law is a powerful engine, but it is not sufficiently powerful to target a significant change in mentality for both sides of the barricade – the oppressor and the oppressed. For that, a more far-reaching approach is needed, one that would take into account the existing preconceptions and fears in order to transform obtrusive behaviour and attitudes into constructive and functional acceptance and inclusion which can manifest freely not only in private life but also at a public level.

## 4. The Case of Switzerland

### 4.1 General Overview

We have seen in the previous chapters that multiculturalism's functionality is not always a given, not even in the case of pre-existing political frameworks that encourage it. Since the functioning multicultural paradigms are the theoretical backbone of this paper, with Switzerland's case being the practical example of well designed, well implemented and coherent multicultural practices, it is important to understand the historical, social, political factors that have led to the current status quo.

Switzerland is no doubt a nation that is significant economically and holding a certain prominence among other (especially European) nations, but at the same time there is a permanent fixture of its political status having been deemed by many rather unusual<sup>37</sup>. While certain facts about it may seem largely unquestionable, there are also some specifics about its politics, economy and social positioning that may be erroneous or simply mechanically interpreted; this is why we must take a clear look at what Switzerland's status actually is.

A quick glance at the myths surrounding this country will reveal one such assumption – that Switzerland is generally torn apart from Europe, as it is considered a nation on its own terms neutral and a singular case among the other European nations. This conviction may also be encouraged by the way Switzerland has handled many domestic issues –

---

<sup>37</sup> This term is only applicable in regard to the standard views of nation-building that have dominated the European school of thought throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

from the official languages spoken to religious division and also national policies. The latter especially has been the subject of many not so accurate theories.<sup>38</sup>

For example, one of these political beliefs<sup>39</sup> was that Switzerland was held together by certain federal forces that also gave the country this aura of being a federal state. This theory would explain how different cantons can coexist within the same political structure thanks to the existence of cantonal autonomy. While this is true, it is also a superficial view of a more complex type of political organization. It is, however, not singular. Another rather common belief takes a more corporate turn<sup>40</sup> stating that outside pressure placed on a small, exposed economy has imposed some sort of a unity, leading to a tight collaboration between the government and the companies. This has been proven advantageous to the companies as well as to the nation which was, in turn, helped in overcoming its potential economic weaknesses. Yet, this theory has never been largely promoted, proven or even sustained.

And while the Swiss politics may be seen as static (especially from the outside, where no major conflict, change or shift seems to be leaking out causing debate) it has in reality altered significantly over the past years. But there is however a great deal of misconception regarding its politics, most of it simplified to the point of only being seen as an example of federalism and given as a case study example on the weak implication of the public sector. This has done nothing but encourage simplistic views, sometimes full of clichés, that Switzerland itself is a nation living in a somewhat parallel dimension.

As the case is, nothing can be further from the truth. Switzerland, while being less than the common example of any western nation, it has however evolved on its own path mainly shaped by the powers of circumstance. As a case-study it is just as important as other European states, given its rather atypical status. As Jonathan Steinberg said, it is important to look into because it offers a “bottom-up perspective on democracy” as well

---

<sup>38</sup> Michael Butler, Malcolm Pender, Joy Charnley (Editors), *The Making of Modern Switzerland, 1848-1998 (New Perspectives in German Studies)*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 133.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Katzenstein, *Corporatism and Change: Austria, Switzerland and the Politics of Industry*, Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 178.

as offering a new set of ideas on how to treat the rights of minorities and multicultural cohabitation.

So, how should Switzerland be seen? Or, rather, how is it really structured that it became over time so different and atypical? When trying to look at all the things that define it, one thing is striking – the fact that, regardless of what the general, objective criteria is, Switzerland is undoubtedly a successful country by most standards, democratic, prosperous and stable. This is because – or in spite of the fact that – it is divided in cantons and has a plurality of religions and languages accepted as official. What is interesting to analyze and should be at the core of this paper is that its division and plurality has not only not offered a basis for potential conflict, but it has in fact led to cooperation and mutual support, which further set the basis for a largely successful form of direct democracy.

The social factors along with the geographical setting may be considered favorable factors that have led to the situation as we now know it, but we should also keep in mind that the framework of a flexible constitution has also led to the current status quo.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, another important aspect that has been analyzed in regard to Switzerland's Special status among other European nations has been its openness towards welcoming people of various nationalities that manifested the desire to integrate and become a part of what is now a pluralistic nation. And this process continues to the day. According to the Swiss Federal Statistics office<sup>42</sup> the number of immigrants currently active on the labor market in Switzerland is 21.6 percent, which is significantly larger (sometimes even double) than the average number of immigrants in other European nations.

But while it is at the moment the nation with highest rate of foreigners on its territory, Switzerland does not consider itself an immigrant country, especially since we are discussing a nation so different from what the rest of Europe depicts in terms of not only state affairs but also other state-related matters. However, Switzerland regards its

---

<sup>41</sup> Clive H. Church, *The Politics and Government of Switzerland*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/infothek.html> accessed May 2009.

citizenship rather highly and it does not come at a bargain price. Switzerland has the toughest naturalization rules in Europe - if you want to become Swiss you must live in the country legally for at least 12 years - and pay taxes, and have no criminal record - before you can apply for citizenship. It still does not mean that your wish will be granted, however, and the fact that you were born in Zurich or Lugano does not make any difference. There are no amnesties and those proven illegal are deported if caught. Even if an applicant satisfies all other conditions, the local community in which he resides has the final say: it can interview the applicant and hold a public vote before naturalization is approved. If rejected he can apply again, but only after ten years.<sup>43</sup>

The reverse side of the coin, perhaps unanticipated by many, is that the cultural, linguistic and confessional differences have been instilling in Swiss people a sense of citizenship that cannot be seen in many nations. So regardless of whether the citizenship is obtained or inherited, the outcome appears to be making no difference. This may seem somewhat paradoxical given the fact that we have all been taught that differences usually generate conflict. In Switzerland's case, though, it appears to have had the exact opposite effect.

Therefore, there is now talk about Swiss nationalism, especially after the Second World War when Switzerland noticed a shift from the existing form of national consciousness to an even more powerful type of unconcealed patriotism.<sup>44</sup> The self-consciousness seems to be rather poignant among the Swiss people who are defining themselves primarily not through the language they speak or their religion, but through the fact that their nationality is Swiss and shared with other co-citizens even if they do not share a similar cultural or religious background.

There is some sort of an innate feeling that the national identity resides in common will, that every citizen should stick together not in spite of their cultural differences but because of them, as these differences and the way their nation has handled them are

---

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.bfm.admin.ch/bfm/en/home/themen/buergerrecht/einbuengerungen/ordentliche\\_einbuengerung.html](http://www.bfm.admin.ch/bfm/en/home/themen/buergerrecht/einbuengerungen/ordentliche_einbuengerung.html) accessed May 2009

<sup>44</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi, Alexander H. Trechsel, *The Politics of Switzerland: Continuity and Change in a Consensus Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 13.

exactly what makes it – and them – so unique. However, the historical factors should not be neglected, since historical development is what has made this nation be considered such a particular case among nations.

## **4.2. Historical Background**

Historically, the construction of the nation lasted no less than six centuries, after the original oath in 1291, when the cantons of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwald made an alliance which, we can conclude, was one of the early precursors of modern-day Switzerland. Although this alliance started out with only three cantons, it later grew as other cantons and rural communes joined. Thus, the 1386 and 1388 victories against the Habsburgs reinforce the cantonal's growing domination, which by that point was comprising also Lucerne, Zurich, Berne as well as the cantons of Zug and Glarus.

For a short period of time, in 1440, Zurich abandoned the alliance, causing the cantonal armies to be defeated, but it later returned, leading to one of the most important events in the history of Switzerland – the recognition of its political independence in 1501 by the emperor Maximilian I, after the cantonal armies' success in the so-called Swabian War. This particular victory also brought to the existing alliance several more cantons and cities, among which Basel and Schaffhausen, and also Appenzell. Thus, the alliance was now comprising 13 cantons, which constituted the so-called Old Confederacy.

However, this confederation itself was not initially perceived by its members as a unified entity; this process was longer and it developed over a period of continuous peace, which allowed the member cantons to focus more on their internal welfare. The Swiss plurilinguism can be traced back approximately to this period, when several languages were subsequently incorporated into general use, as a result of the inclusion of populations that were speaking Italian, French and Romansh.

The different circumstances under which the cantons joined the confederation account for differences in the degree of attachment to the *nation*, a term rarely used in relation to Switzerland. The model of a united nation was tested by the Helvetian Republic (1798–1803) imposed by Napoleon Bonaparte, in an attempt to make Switzerland a centralized nation. The republic abolished the domination of some cantons by others, all cantons became full partners in the confederation, and the first democratic parliament was established.

Thus, this nation, so obviously unsubmitive to 19<sup>th</sup> century state-formation and general rules, did not from the beginning acquire the somewhat privileged status it came to hold among other nations. The federal organization was soon to be established (in 1803) after the centralized model became obviously inadequate. Neutrality, which would over time become one of Switzerland's trademarks, was recognized by the European powers only after the twenty two cantons signed a federal pact in 1815.<sup>45</sup>

Tension among the cantons often resulted in an open conflict between the liberals and conservatives, as well as between the industrialized and rural cantons and between the Protestant and Catholic cantons.<sup>46</sup> The liberals struggled for popular political rights and the creation of federal institutions that would allow Switzerland to become a modern state. The conservative cantons refused to revise the 1815 Pact, which guaranteed their sovereignty and gave them more power within the confederation than their population and economy warranted. This tension resulted in the civil war of the Sonderbund (1847), in which the seven Catholic cantons were defeated by federal troops. The constitution of the federal state provided a better means of integration for the cantons. The constitution of 1848 gave the country its present shape except for the creation of the canton of Jura, which separated from the canton of Bern in 1978.

The linguistic matter seemed at first to pose little problems. The basis, culture-wise, was as it was often stated German, while important French influences kept making their

---

<sup>45</sup> John Wilson, *The History of Switzerland*, Cosimo Classics, 2007, pp. 62-63.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 240.

way into the Swiss nation. The use of the German language goes back to the early Middle Ages, when the Alamans invaded lands where Romansh languages were just developing. The dominance of German in Switzerland has been lessened by the bilingualism of the German-speaking regions, where both standard German and Swiss German dialects are used. These dialects have a high social prestige among Swiss Germans regardless of education level or social class because they differentiate Swiss Germans from Germans. Swiss Germans often do not feel comfortable speaking standard German; they often prefer to speak French when interacting with members of the French-speaking minority. This too might mark a turning point in the way the Swiss relate to what they perceive to be their own – nation, language, etc.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, in the French-speaking regions, the original Franco-Provencal dialects have almost disappeared in favor of standard French, with regional accents and some lexical features.<sup>48</sup>

The Italian-speaking region is bilingual, and people speak standard Italian as well as different regional dialects, although the social status of the dialects is low. Romansh, a Romance language of the Rhaetian group, is the only language specific to Switzerland except for two parent languages spoken in southeastern Italy. Very few people speak Romansh, and many of those people live outside the Romansh linguistic area in parts of the alpine canton of Graubünden. Cantonal and federal authorities have taken measures to preserve this language but success in the long term is threatened by the vitality of Romansh speakers.<sup>49</sup>

There are still voices that consider nationalism to be one of the world's worst solutions to state evolution and development, as well as to a peaceful cohabitation. While there is undoubtedly a strong line of theorists that would put national values above individual ones in declaring that nation states hold crucial benefits for the citizens, there are some who believe that nationalism is at the root of most of the atrocities happening at a global level. The Swiss artist Jean Tinguely is one of these people. He openly stated that nationalism never brought anything good to the world and quite the opposite

---

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Zschokke, *The History of Switzerland*, BiblioLife, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Idem.

happened - it ended up dividing nations and people, bringing atrocities that left Europe crippled. A sense of freedom, he stated, was to be found elsewhere.<sup>50</sup>

This type of approach was somewhat symbolic of what Switzerland would come to represent; in 1848, the federal constitution stated: "German, French, Italian and Romansh are the national languages of Switzerland. German, French and Italian are the official languages of the Confederation." But it wasn't until 1998 did the confederation establish a linguistic policy, reaffirming the principle of quadrilinguism and the need to promote Romansh and Italian.

Despite the cantonal differences in the educational system, all students learn at least one of the other national languages. Many would see in this an attempt to formally oppose the existing nation-state rules a silent revolution in itself. It was, after all, rather unprecedented. But to believe that Switzerland would adopt such measures for the sake of mere rebellion would be an inaccurate and simplistic view on what the nation came to represent.

Furthermore, throughout the years Switzerland became the host country of many refugees seeking asylum, which would later come to reinforce its culturally-open approach. This started as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by numerous conflicts in Europe, which determined a large number of foreigners (from artists to revolutionaries) to seek refuge in a nation that was far from being oppressive and in which many of them found the freedom to share and express their political, ideological and artistic views. Switzerland has, since then, become a sought-after country renowned for the rather open and tolerant position, which was reinforced during the two World Wars. By that time, the number of refugees was constantly increasing, largely due to the fact that Switzerland officially declared its neutrality, a state which was mainly respected by the countries at war and which it managed to maintain however difficult this must have been, considering its neighbouring countries.

Apart from keeping its citizens safe, Switzerland's declared neutrality had several side-effects. First, it allowed the country to become a safe destination for the refugees,

---

<sup>50</sup> Jean Tinguely, *Sunt un artist al mișcării*, published in "Elveția. O țară în Europa, Secolul 21", no. 5, 2004.

which were coming in mainly from France, Germany and Austria, but also from Poland and Italy. Its main cities – Zurich, Berne, Geneva, thus became the host locations of discussions, debates, political and artistic manifestations, mostly directed at the on-going war and would soon gain a rather liberal and free-minded reputation.

Second, with its army uninvolved, Switzerland had at its disposal the funds and energy to focus inward, on growing and developing as a nation and thus became more prosperous during a time when the European nations at War were constantly focusing their funds on military support. However open it may have seemed, though, Swiss refugee laws were not so lenient; in short, asylum could be granted to anyone who could prove they were in some sort of a state of threat due to their political views only.

This was a law that came into force during World War II and restricted the refugee status in a way that made it difficult for those that were being discriminated based on race or religion to seek any form of protection inside Switzerland. So while welcoming a large number of refugees, Switzerland also turned its back on a large number of aspirants.<sup>51</sup> Racial discrimination apparently remained an issue in Switzerland with Amnesty International criticizing the treatment of asylum seekers in one of its reports claiming “ill-treatment, use of excessive force and racist abuse”<sup>52</sup>. The current state of refugees in Switzerland will be looked upon in the following section.

Another important issue in discussing Switzerland’s historical background is the Religion issue. A central issue in Swiss religion, with implications that span the Church sector, is the confessional division which appeared to be the result of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Although initially a source of conflict, it ended up bringing out one of the Swiss traditional features – its willingness to compromise. As a result of the Reformation, seven cantons remained Catholic while the rest were mainly Protestant, even though there were cantons where both Churches coexisted. Although allegedly influenced by the Reformation process in Germany initiated by Martin Luther, the Reformation in Switzerland did have its very own particularities. Some of the reasons that led to this

---

<sup>51</sup> Klaus Bade, Allison Brown, *Migration in European History*, Blackwell, 2003, pp. 40-41.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher.AMNESTY.,CHE,447ff7a21a,0.html> accessed June 2009.

schism were pertaining to the general disapproval of and discontentment with the state of the Church at that particular time. As with Germany, the Reformation in Switzerland was rather radical and was seen as some sort of a process of renewal. This would soon become emblematic of everything that was to happen. Unsurprisingly, what initially started out as a religious reformation led to deeper consequences in the political sector and this was symbolic of the general state of affairs not only in Switzerland, but throughout the entire continent. There was, consequently, a general context that prevented the Church from continuing to be held in the high esteem it previously did, as more and more church representatives were becoming corrupt, had illegitimate relationships and were blinded by the promise of wealth, which in turn led to a shallow approach to faith and church<sup>53</sup>.

Swiss Reformation started a few years after Martin Luther made public his beliefs in Germany. By 1525, the Reformation was firmly established in Zurich and Martin Luther's teachings were heard through the voice of Huldrych Zwingli who, even if agreeing with some of Luther's major points of argument, turned out to be even more radical in his approach. One example would be Zwingli's denial of every ritual that was not specifically stated and described in the Bible. This left room only for Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The latter also marked a major starting point in disseminating between John Calvin and Zwingli, who had different views on its symbolic meaning. While Calvin strived to maintain the representational meaning of Christ's real presence in the bread and wine, Zwingli could not accept this, as his orientation was rather intellectual, sharply arguing that one must make a distinction between the physical and the spiritual. However, Calvin and Henry Bullinger (Zwingli's successor) came to a common interpretation of this symbolic process in 1549.<sup>54</sup>

In the French speaking part of Switzerland, Guillaume Farel was the Reformation voice, preaching in Aigle, Neuchâtel, Morat, Grandson, Orbe and finally in Geneva where, in 1536, he met John Calvin, who would soon become more influential, especially

---

<sup>53</sup> Pamela Johnston, Bob Scribner, *The Reformation in Germany and Switzerland*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm> accessed June 2009.

in matters regarding Church organization which would soon be taken over in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Scotland.<sup>55</sup>

The focus on the current state of the Church critique by the Reformists would spread on other areas as well. For example, Zwingli resentfully opposed the practice of mercenary troops which, in fact, were extremely lucrative; this fact alone caused the theories he preached to not gain in popularity, as most of central Switzerland continued to remain Catholic, although the reformed areas of Switzerland would soon witness an upheaval on the part of the Reformation supporters, which went as far as destroying churches and painting over frescoes.

Among the ideas encouraged by the Reformists, which brought a newer perspective as opposed to previously-held Catholic one, was that everyone should read the Bible individually instead of passively receiving information from the sermons. The free-will and one's own judgement were thus encouraged. This idea went as far as creating a sort of religious sub-group that would be called Anabaptists (founded in Zurich). The Anabaptists took the privilege to decide and make up one's own mind about religion to a different level that would affect their approval of one of Bible's most basic and intensely-practiced acts – the Baptism. Thus, they did not accept baptism in children but encouraged the adult members to decide on their own if they are going to do it. This practice was eventually rejected by Zwingli and its members banned.<sup>56</sup>

As anticipated, the Reformation echoed in other areas of life, leading also to a political division: the progressive cities (Zurich, Basel, Berne, Geneva, Neuchâtel) turned towards the new confession and enforced conversion also in their subjected territories, while conservative central Switzerland (including Lucerne) remained Catholic.

To this day, in Switzerland, the predominant religion is Christianity, divided between the Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations, while migration has brought about Orthodox Christianity as well as a small Jewish community.

---

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm> accessed June 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, The Pelican History of the Church, vol. 3. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964, pp. 277-278.

### 4.3 Specific Issues in Swiss Multiculturalism

As we have seen previously, a rather simplistic (but nonetheless correct) view on Switzerland would depict it as a conglomerate of contradictions which, up to a certain degree, can guarantee peace and cohesion. It is, as some have stated, a paradox, a nation that has managed to not only function but also thrive in spite or even because of these seemingly conflicting contradictions. What has been deemed by many *multicultural* has become one of the most recognized labels of Switzerland. But in reality there are only a handful of factors that are defining in the generally accepted view when relating to this nation.

a) First of all, there is its **inherent plurality**. To some extent, cultural pluralism can be considered as an alternative to multiculturalism, as it offers the premises for diversity, but a diversity that is bound to norms and values that are valid for all members of the society, that is to say, for initial citizens as well as for immigrants.<sup>57</sup> Switzerland does not have a sole cultural and political center.<sup>58</sup> The core seems to be divided between the many cantons and the many cultural enclaves and a seemingly well functioning decentralization is taking place. The federal government and administration reside in Berne (which doesn't happen to be also the country's economic centre – and that is by no means a singular case), whereas the federal court has two main headquarters - in Lucerne and Lausanne.

At the same time, many Swiss citizens do not conceal the fact that they are looking towards other big cultural hubs – like Paris (for those residing in the French speaking areas) or Milan (for the Italian speakers). This has been a fixture of Switzerland for centuries and it can also be considered an important part of the multicultural puzzle that accepts influences from the outside not as a sign of threat but as an opportunity for cultural enrichment. A very important aspect in this seemingly mix-and-match type of

---

<sup>57</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 17-21.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.about.ch/administration/index.html> accessed May 2009.

culture is that regardless of their size and prominence, no group is willing to take on the preponderant cultural role. As such, the smaller French speaking faction might look upon the Helvet-Germans with a sense of inequity, if only the latter community would assume and manifest their dominant role, but this has not yet happened. If it had, we would probably be assisting today at the dismissal of everything Switzerland seemed to stand for (or against) in the past.

b) A second factor might be considered as residing at the root of what Switzerland has become over the years, but to give it the dominant role would be unjust. It is however a very important aspect of the entire mix we are now discussing. **Federalism per se** does not guarantee any legitimate form of multicultural manifestation.

There are some theoreticians<sup>59</sup> who do not consider federalism as the main force but rather as the driving force of what we now define as a multicultural state. Federalism in Switzerland is an intrinsic part of its definition as a nation. Although a confederation by name, Switzerland appears to have all the attributes of a federation.

Regardless of all the things and aspects we might consider to be holding Switzerland together, none of them would be validated without the existence of some sort of a general political background. Thus, we can assume that federalism is the driving force that keeps everything close to its core. The cantons, while protecting their residents up to a certain extent, are also at the root of all their political sensibilities and that may prove beneficial on the long term. For example, a Swiss discussing his/her nation might no doubt be referring initially to their canton and only later to the federal state. This type of approach is also symbolic from a cultural perspective – there is no standard Swiss (culturally speaking); they all seem to be the result, the product, of their cantons which provide a legal, political and cultural backbone to their everyday existence and public manifestations.

Local patriotism is not a singular manifestation attributed only to Switzerland; it does exist in other nations, too. But in Switzerland it constitutes the grounds for national

---

<sup>59</sup> Sergio Fabbrini, *Democracy and Federalism in the European Union and the United States: Exploring Post-National Governance*, Routledge, 2005, pp. 51-58.

identity. So, this sort of a preliminary self-definition is precisely what makes Switzerland unique - in this light, the Swiss state is not multicultural because of its federal organization; rather, the cultural is determining the political and so we can conclude that it is federal because of its multiculturalism.

The federal political system is at large one of the main stepping stone in understanding why multiculturalism can and does function based on a system so diverse and so seemingly tolerant. The political divisions (the cantons) do not necessarily correspond to a common ethnic, religious or language area division and that would be an interesting aspect to analyze, for in many cases the language may not be assimilated completely based on religious fellowship (and that would only be a starting example of how and where cultural differences may be divided even in a seemingly heterogeneous nation).

If we go further down this line we might conclude that this is a nation where ethnicity and culture (and subsequently language and religion) are secondary to citizenship. We can thus conclude that the federal efforts of keeping the status quo, proclaiming cultural and religious equality without discrimination is continually seeking to overcome the otherwise inevitable clashes.

Even though potential internal conflicts cannot be completely foreseen or eliminated, when we are discussing multiculturalism we must recognize that the federal state – and political factors in general – play an important role in keeping with the status quo. What this leads to, subsequently, is that ethnic, cultural and religious differences, if they are to coexist in a peaceful and productive manner, need to benefit from a strong governing grip, one that would legally guarantee and protect the preservation of cultural authenticity and provide the necessary framework for its potential development.

In maintaining that argument we must be aware of the fact – and make the necessary distinctions – that there are certain types of governing that favor a multicultural coexistence. While there is no perfect formula, some types of governing may be more suitable than others in this matter – for instance a federal state may be considered more favorable and permissive than an authoritarian political regime.

The Swiss have kept a parallel concept that was functioning at cantonal level, emphasizing the integrity of cultural and ethnic elements and allowing for preservation of cultural integrity while guaranteeing legal citizenship rights. The French state model did not have the same success in other multicultural states – such as Belgium, which faced internal tensions or the former Czechoslovakia which ended up disintegrating. Where Switzerland went successful and the other states seemed to have failed was the political decentralization that was especially noticeable in the Swiss case, allowing for a political and cultural autonomy that made it possible for various cultural, linguistic and religious groups to coexist in a common, shared space.

There is, however idyllic this situation appears to be, a thin line between autonomy and integration; slipping on one side or the other would result in either total assimilation or complete disintegration, which in turn would ruin the seemingly perfect balance of the Swiss model.

This brings about more complex discussions regarding the founding principles of these so-called permissive political regimes and how, for instance, individualism – as opposed to collectivism – has left a deep mark on the further development of what we now define as federal state.<sup>60</sup>

On all these counts, multination federalism must surely be judged as a success, which may be deemed truly remarkable when one considers the immense power of nationalism in the past hundred years. Nationalism has torn apart colonial empires and Communist dictatorships, and redefined boundaries all over the world. Yet democratic multination federations have succeeded in taming the force of nationalism. Democratic federalism has domesticated and pacified nationalism, while respecting individual rights and freedoms. It is difficult to imagine any other political system that can make the same claim.

This is why, as mentioned earlier, certain political principles are more auspicious for the development of multiculturalism. Others – communism, for instance – with collectivism as one of its founding principles, are not, because instead of placing the

---

<sup>60</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/federalism> accessed April 2009.

individual at the core of most public policy purposes, thus encouraging freedom and the respect for one's individuality and free will, the grouping of individuals claims political priority.

Nevertheless, Swiss federalism has experienced a new orientation in the last few years. Some reasons for this change are to be found, among other things, in a general internationalization, in a growing European regionalism and in a new system of sharing financial or economic burdens among the federation, cantons and cities<sup>61</sup>. Thus, it is not surprising that cultural policy is also affected by these tendencies. On a larger level, Kymlicka sees several advantages to a federal political system from a multicultural communication point of view.<sup>62</sup>

First, he states that federalism has been successful in promoting peace and individuality. Arguably, these may be considered among the founding principles of a democratic state and the very premises of multicultural cohesion. But in a federal system, the nations seem to take this one step further, managing to deal with their competing national identities and nationalist projects with an almost complete absence of violence or terrorism by either the state or the minority.

The second factor is that of a working democracy - somehow, the federalist state has managed to make it work. Ethnic politics, he states, is now a matter of ballots not bullets, with no actual threat of military coups and a generally viable guarantee of internal security.

Next, the federalist state, Kymlicka argues, has been a very successful promoter of individual rights, allowing for both space and freedom of their expression. This is not just a matter of political correctness but an actual working practice. The move to multinational federalism has also been achieved without jeopardizing the economic well-being of citizens. Indeed, the countries that have adopted multinational federalism are amongst the wealthiest in the world.

---

<sup>61</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/federalism> accessed April 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 28-33.

Last but not least, multination federalism has promoted equality between majority and minority groups. Equality openly opposes domination, so that one group is not systematically vulnerable to the domination of another group. Multination federalism has helped create greater economic equality between majority and minority; greater equality of political influence, so that minorities are not continually outvoted on all issues; and greater equality in the social and cultural fields, as reflected for example in reduced levels of prejudice and discrimination between groups. So far, all the arguments seem to recognize federalism as being largely appropriate for a nation that seeks to accommodate a plurality of cultures, customs and religions.

c) The third point to be considered when discussing Switzerland's particular case is its **cultural tolerance**. In many ways, tolerance at large has been accompanying all the above mentioned principles and may be considered to be a defining part of what Switzerland has become over decades. We might even conclude that none of this would have been possible without the existence in some sort of form of tolerance, meaning of course that no particular culture or group would assume a dominant position or role. The fact that the law provides these guarantees is a further argument reinforcing this state of the matter. The diversity of cultures is thus provided with a legal background for their expression, guaranteed by the federal state. Apart from the main cultural groups recognized by the law there are also certain minority groups that have been offered protective circumstances.

While undoubtedly having grown organically into its multicultural condition, Switzerland did approach the problem of migration as a part of its defining multicultural status. The case of asylum seekers is, thus, revealing. As we have seen in the previous section, Switzerland acted as a hub for most politically-abused refugees coming from the European nations largely affected by the World War.

It ended up welcoming asylum-seekers from Germany, Italy, Poland and even Romania and these people would eventually use the newfound freedom of speech to react in whatever way they could to the ongoing war. But even with the granted asylum

Switzerland imposed some rather strict rules that would allow it to revoke it if there was any interference with Swiss external affairs.<sup>63</sup>

Nowadays, the situation looks like this: Switzerland has the largest number of asylum seekers in Europe. In 1999, there was an estimated 583 applicants for each 100.000 residents.<sup>64</sup> Applicants are nowadays, as opposed to during the war, not seeking refuge based on political discrimination, but most of them do appear to come from turbulent areas and, if acknowledged as refugees, they obtain legal work permits and, in time, may form into what has been considered a *cultural minority*.

Terminology-wise, the terms *minority group* and its opposite, *majority group* have been widely used both among social scientists and the general public in recent decades. In social scientific (and often popular) use of these terms, they do not usually refer per se to a numerical minority or majority. Rather, the social-scientific meaning of a minority group is a group that is assigned an inferior status in society, one that enjoys less than its proportionate share of scarce resources.

In the Swiss case, cultural tolerance has moved from mere lenience towards a more practical and efficient result, preventing the country from disintegrating at a time when such a threat existed.

The integration of cultural minorities plays, even to this day, a very important role in the Swiss internal affairs. Nowadays, The Federal Office of Cultural Affairs plays an important part in doing just that; for this reason, it played an instrumental role in developing a new *Language Law* which is to give precedence to the fact that Switzerland is a multilingual and multiethnic society.

Furthermore, cultural minorities are given a special importance. In most cantons and larger cities, there are specific departments and public-private initiatives which are dealing with cultural minorities in a variety of ways. The Department for "Soziokultur" in the city of Zurich, for example, defines its mission as enabling the "culture of living

---

<sup>63</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> Numbers published in Migration News Online - [http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=1855\\_0\\_4\\_0](http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=1855_0_4_0) accessed May 2009.

together" and offers support in the form of e.g., sports infrastructure, parties, education, consulting services, specific youth offers, etc.<sup>65</sup> So with all these efforts seemingly continuous, it would be easy to understand why Switzerland does not seem to have encountered major inner conflicts without successfully resolving them.

Moreover, when looking at the bigger picture, we see that the notion of ethnic groups is rarely used in any nation where the concept of a linguistic or cultural group is preferred. Reference to ethnicity in Switzerland is very rare, indeed, in regard to the four national linguistic groups.

Ethnicity thus emphasizes a sense of a common identity that is based on a shared history and shared roots transmitted from generation to generation. In Switzerland, membership in a linguistic group depends as much on the establishment in a linguistically defined territory as on the cultural and linguistic heritage of the individual.

According to the principle of the territoriality of languages<sup>66</sup>, internal migrants are forced to use the language of the new territory in their contacts with the authorities, and there are no public schools where their children can receive an education in the parents' original language. The composition of the population in the different linguistic regions is a result of a long history of intermarriage and internal migrations, and it would be difficult to determine the inhabitants' exact ethnicity. But many Swiss would probably not feel that ethnic differences pose a real threat to national unity. As oftentimes, differences between regions are presented as being only linguistic in nature, culture is not offered the chance to play a major role in tearing apart the nation.

However, certain tensions between the linguistic, cultural, and religious groups have been known to generate a certain fear that intergroup differences would endanger the national unity. This is an almost timeless concern. In Switzerland's case, the most

---

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/switzerland.php?aid=421> accessed May 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Will Kymlicka, Alan Patten, *Language Rights and the Political Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 29-30.

difficult relations seem to be those between the German-speaking majority and the French-speaking minority.<sup>67</sup>

But fortunately, in Switzerland the religious dimension crosses the linguistic dimension; for example, areas of Catholic tradition exist in the German-speaking region as well as the French-speaking region. And also the notion of citizenship seems to have acquired a far greater importance over time in regard to the way inhabitants relate to one another.

Linked to the **cultural tolerance** issue is the **politics of inclusion**, an aspect discussed in an earlier chapter. Many countries facing the issue of accommodating several different religions and cultures have perhaps been confronted with the problem of determining the amount of control to be held by the central authority regulating all communication and exchanges that might take place. In Switzerland's case however this so-called central authority which has often times been considered by many as oppressing and dominating the cultural minorities<sup>68</sup> seems to be taking a step back allowing for the mutual cooperation of its constituent entities to have supremacy.

Switzerland's multicultural policies place it among the nations that are making a continuous effort to keep the cultural and ethnic differences of its citizens at bay. But doesn't a truly inclusive nation – or at least one that is constantly trying to adjust its policies in accordance with this manifesto – operate on more than a cultural and ethnic level? Should we only consider ethnicity as the only criteria based on whose regulation a nation can be considered truly multicultural?

The UNESCO-initiated research project “Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities”<sup>69</sup>, which focused on the presence and activity of immigrant and ethnic minority groups in various cities around Europe, has tried to discover how these groups are involved (if at all) in decision-making processes at a

---

<sup>67</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi, Alexander H. Trechsel, *The Politics of Switzerland: Continuity and Change in a Consensus Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 177-182.

<sup>68</sup> This is mainly visible in countries and regions where slavery was highly prized; in most of these cases, the end of slavery did not mean the end of racism.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/most/> accessed June 2009.

community level and if they are active in the public sector (with a focus on what the authors have deemed the “channels of activation and mobilization”).

Some of the key issues of this report emphasize the social and political processes that shape both the success or absence of success, the ethnic minorities’ roles in electoral competitions, the factors that determine the response of local authorities to the settlement of migrants and the general characteristics of migrant populations and the local political opportunity structures. But, however important, the public implication of immigrant or ethnic minority groups is not the only factor determining their acceptance and, ultimately, inclusion.

In regard to minorities of any kind (ethnic, religious, sexual, etc) Takashi Kibe uses the term “differentiated citizenship”<sup>70</sup> thus emphasizing the intrinsic *different-ness* of these groups because, no matter how societies may regulate their inclusion there will always be something too strongly entrenched in their identity that will set them apart on various levels.

Taking the discussion a little further, Charles Taylor said “Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people it is a vital human need”.<sup>71</sup> This is a pivotal turning point in the argument as we take a step further from discussing equality based on any set of norms that are politically regulated. Inequality is by no means caused by economic factors, as the Marxists and egalitarian liberals believed. The politics of multiculturalism is one aspect of the wider debate about the politics of recognition or what is sometimes called identity politics.<sup>72</sup> In all cases the demands for differentiated citizenship are extremely controversial – it seems to contradict the deeply held view that a liberal democratic citizenship requires that we treat people the same, as individuals with equal rights under the law.

Different solutions may be required for different minorities depending on the impact of the dominant culture on their lives, which may also determine up to a certain degree

---

<sup>70</sup> Takashi Kibe, *Differentiated Citizenship and Ethnocultural Groups*, International Christian University, Tokyo, Published in *Citizenship Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 4, September 2006, pp. 413 – 430.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 25-26.

<sup>72</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, in Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, et al., editors, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 357.

their opportunities. In the past, we have noticed that most nation state have emphasised the importance of assimilation and have often quite ruthlessly suppressed minority languages or other types of cultural expression, perhaps out of a sense of threat towards the dominant culture. But to what degree the minority cultures represent a real threat towards a nation's central culture is an issue that needs to be analysed keeping a constant focus on all the various case studies.

d) The forth point, closely linked to the one above, is **the linguistic issue**, namely the **multilingual communication issue**, which in Switzerland seems to hold a rather unprecedented status, strengthening its multicultural status. A very important aspect that has been noticed over the years and has proven pivotal for Switzerland's reaching its current status and even reputation is that there appears to be a common sense of understanding, generally oriented towards peaceful conflict solving and a higher sense of community at large that transcends differences. This can be perfectly exemplified through the use of language – language itself being a very important identity issue that has been debated many times in regard to multicultural conventions. In Switzerland, the official languages do not seem to interfere or clash and there are some general rules for what/where languages are being used. In the National Council a translation system exists whereas in the State Council and in all commissions and committees all members speak their own language and in the Federal Administration all employees speak their own language without interpretation.

Though seemingly not a debatable issue, some general data regarding languages in Switzerland do exist - German 71.8%; French 20.4%, Italian 6.7%; Romansh: 0.5%; 8.9% of the population speak another language (like Serbian, Croatian, Albanian, etc). German still prevails in the federal administration.<sup>73</sup>

The multilingual communication in Switzerland can be seen as a sign of cultural freedom; the fact that one can continue speaking their own language without impeachment is, indeed, a sign that multicultural communication works at its best, maintaining the strong cultural links that each region may have.

---

<sup>73</sup> Jan-Erik Lane, *The Swiss Labyrinth: Institutions, Outcomes and Redesign*, Routledge 2001, pp. 170-171.

The linguistic issue may seem initially unimportant, but analyzed properly may lead to revealing facts. Certain European nations, for instance, have failed to integrate the linguistic division in a manner that would permit peaceful cohabitation.

The problems seem to have been going much deeper than the languages of course, but it was a very significant starting point in discussing matters of intercultural communication. The above-mentioned Czechoslovakian case is revealing; it has been divided in 1993 in two separate regions (now two independent nations) along the linguistic line.

On the other hand, Switzerland has managed quite successfully so far to avoid this discrepancy mainly because its political borders do not coincide with the linguistic, religious and cultural ones and this is a convention seemingly understood and respected by all. What results is a mix-and-match at several levels, meaning that the religious, linguistic and cultural aspects do not necessarily coincide<sup>74</sup>, which in turn leads to some sort of a linguistic amnesty and the state unity that is not threatened in any way. And, after all, this appears to be the ultimate success story for nations aspiring to successfully adopt the multicultural model.

So, in the light of all the above mentioned key issues, which do seem to be followed rightfully, can we conclude that Switzerland constitutes a model of multicultural communication and conviviality? And if so, is there a clear set of rules or principles that can be summed up, after having analyzed the case studies, and shared or used if not as an example at least as a starting point for other nations aiming at a similar status? In the next chapter I will try to analyze whether or not we can consider Switzerland's case a viable model and how/if it can be borrowed to solve certain issues regarding multicultural communication in other nations – especially in the CEE region.

---

<sup>74</sup> For example, there may be German-speaking Catholics and French-speaking Catholics and German-speaking Protestants and so on.

## 5. Is Switzerland a Viable Multicultural Model for Other Nations?

We have seen that Switzerland appears to be a functioning case study and even a success story, at least from a theoretical perspective. It does seem to have had the right premises, followed the right steps, made the right decisions and found that ever sought-after middle ground, devoid of extremist measures. Switzerland indeed seems to have learnt a lot of lessons from a multicultural communication perspective over the years. But are these lessons replicable?

In order to find suitable answers, we must start by analyzing whether or not Switzerland possesses the ability to morph into a manageable model-nation, which would rightfully serve other nations if not for imitation, then at least for inspiration. The debate on whether or not a nation – any nation – can represent a model in itself is long standing. There are theorists who believe that this idea is not only impossible but also presumptuous and conceited. However, history has shown us that states and cultures can and do influence each other – with examples ranging from adopting a certain cultural dynamics to adopting in part legal or administrative systems.

In all rightfulness, Switzerland holds what has often been deemed a “Western model of multiculturalism”<sup>75</sup>, but ‘western’ in this context may prove an inexact term, as it not only involves a geographically recognized pattern, reproduced at will, but it also drives Switzerland away from the intricate factors that have shaped its outcome and have given the above-mentioned model the status of being unique.

On the other hand, there are certain emerging trends in certain European countries regarding various forms of multiculturalism as well as minority rights, which rightfully oppose Switzerland’s. And the question that was asked was - why have so many countries moved in this direction? What prompted them to pay closer attention and

---

<sup>75</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Clarendon Press, 1989. pp. 135-136.

eventually take measures that would affect their political course? And should we view these models also as a ‘best practice’ to be exported to other regions, such as the ECE? These questions force us to take a step back in order to see the bigger picture.

Firstly, we must take note of all the efforts made by international organizations to develop a set of minority rights and intercultural practices that would set a formal basis for all future developments. Some of these efforts included the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages<sup>76</sup> and the 1995 Framework Convention of the Council of Europe<sup>77</sup>, and various Recommendations of the OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities (1996, 1998, 1999).<sup>78</sup>

While undoubtedly important, Kymlicka believes these documents to be misleading and rather vague regarding the real understanding of the minority situation and what we have deemed multiculturalism. Among the recognized flaws he stated that they often assert broad principles of respect and recognition for minority groups, but then evade them with multiple qualifiers about ‘where appropriate’ and ‘within the framework of national law’. What this means is that these regulations fail to set a standard but rather stop at merely stating a minimum set of requirements.

Also, these formal declarations are continually evolving, most recently in efforts to include minority rights in proposals for a new Constitution of the European Union. In other words, in order to fully understand the forces at work in current processes of internationalizing and exporting minority rights, we need to look below these formal documents to the underlying social trends.

And further on, in understanding the trends, Kymlicka comes up with several factors he believes to be crucial in understanding how Western democracies have reached this state.

First of all, he discusses the issue of demographics, specifically the situation of immigrant groups, as one of the main factors contributing to the current state. While a

---

<sup>76</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/languages/langmin/files/charter\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/languages/langmin/files/charter_en.pdf) accessed May 2009.

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.ena.lu/framework-convention-protection-national-minorities-strasbourg-february-1995-020302507.html> accessed May 2009.

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/> accessed May 2009.

non-dominant group, they have managed to contribute greatly not only to the rising of the local demographics<sup>79</sup> but also to the shaping of the local cultures.

Secondly, the human rights factor plays a very important role. Initially, the world was confronted with various discrimination issues but while some of them still are present, we have noticed during the past decades an increase in the general fight for human rights with a focus on specific cases of discrimination – ranging from racial to ethnic or sexual. Kymlicka discusses this aspect as being pivotal in understanding how the nations have shifted from a generally closed standing regarding national and ethnic groups towards a more open and lenient approach. This has in turn led to a wider acceptance of human rights, repudiating all former ideas based on which a social or ethnical hierarchy can be constructed or accepted.

While in the past decades there have been numerous examples of such hierarchies – ranging from the European colonialism which was premised on the assumption of a hierarchy of peoples to the atrocities that have happened during the World War II, which were initially based on the obsessive idea of ethnic cleansing, today the approach is much more lenient and resolution-oriented.

However, a real difference will be made when the human rights statements will actually be put into practice, allowing for an equal treatment, equal access to decision making processes and an overall equal amount of freedom of speech, also drawing a tighter line with the Swiss case. Kymlicka goes even further in stating that this is one of the principles of a democratic state: “This is what democracy is all about: multiple and shifting points of access to power.”<sup>80</sup>

To draw an early parallel, Switzerland is already known for being a best-practice case in this particular issue. Therefore, if the EU states will move from the otherwise correctly stated facts and on to developing actual, concrete programs, prospects will undoubtedly look brighter.

---

<sup>79</sup> Kymlicka cites experts saying that in the future immigrant groups will be needed in order to balance the decrease of population numbers due to low birth rates and ageing.

<sup>80</sup>Will Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism and liberal democracy*, Online version at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-25-kymlicka-en.html>, accessed May 2009.

But there is also a rather obvious fact that transcends all politically-correct discussions on equal rights; therefore, there are several situations in which the majority's welfare and security is more important than these theoretical discourses that, in many ways, only seem to work in a context of general peace, harmony and welfare.

For example, there are certain situations that may require focus on the state's welfare and security, to the detriment of the so-called minority groups. Kymlicka calls them a "disruption in the general trend"<sup>81</sup>. September 11, for example, has reconfigured debates about the accommodation of Arab and Muslim immigrants in many Western countries. But inside Europe, such economic or geopolitical crises have been relatively rare, and led only to temporary deviations in the underlying trend towards accommodation.

Generally speaking, whether or not Switzerland is fit for becoming a model-country for other nations is still debatable. As far back as 1991 there have been made several official attempts to foster the stereotype of the well-ordered model-state may have elicited disapproval and even rejection. Specifically, discussing the Eastern-European nations' case and looking into what can be taken from the Swiss model to be transmitted and applied locally, we must take into account several historical facts.

First of all, the historical backgrounds differ greatly, but this should not be seen as an impediment, but rather as a challenge, meaning that if the Swiss model is to be adopted or at least used as influence, this should be done *in spite* of all the existing differences, adding more to the value and significance of the process.

However, with all the existing differences, we must also realize that there is a general apprehension towards the mere idea of federalism or regional autonomy in the CEE and both discourse and practice regarding the minority rights in this region are very different than the Swiss. For example, Serbia revoked the autonomy of Kosovo/Vojvodina; Georgia revoked the autonomy of Abkhazia and Ossetia; Azerbaijan revoked the autonomy of Ngorno-Karabakh.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the revoking of minority autonomy was often one of the first things that these countries chose to do with their newfound freedom after

---

<sup>81</sup>Will Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism and liberal democracy*, Online version at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-25-kymlicka-en.html>, accessed May 2009.

<sup>82</sup> John E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 128.

the collapse of communism. In other cases, requests to restore historic forms of autonomy were rejected.<sup>83</sup> In yet other cases, requests to create new forms of autonomy were dismissed.<sup>84</sup> And in yet other cases, countries have redrawn boundaries to make it impossible for autonomy to be adopted in the future.<sup>85</sup>

The only cases in ECE where territorial autonomy has been accepted are cases where the national minority simply grabbed political power extra-constitutionally, and established *de facto* autonomy without the consent of the central government. In these situations, the only alternative to recognizing *de facto* autonomy was military intervention and potential civil war. This was the situation in Transnistria in Moldova; Abkhazia in Georgia; Krajina in Croatia; Crimea in Ukraine; and Ngorno-Karabakh in Armenia. Even here, most countries preferred civil war to negotiating autonomy, and only accepted autonomy if and when they were not able to win militarily. (Russia and Ukraine are the two exceptions.)

In short, we see a dramatic difference between Eastern European countries and the Swiss case proposed for discussion. What explains these differences? According to Kymlicka, one very common explanation refers to a difference in homogeneity – the ethnonational groups in the EEC are somewhat dispersed and inter-mingled and so we can assume that territorial solutions that have worked in Switzerland may perhaps not work so well, if at all, in the EEC.

In the EEC case, we are dealing with a region in which the substate national group is particularly concentrated, but there are both ‘internal minorities’ (e.g. people living in that region who do not belong to the substate national group) and a ‘minority diaspora’ (i.e. members of the substate national group who live outside the region). The size of these internal minorities and minority diasporas in many Eastern European countries is somewhat incomparable to Switzerland’s case.

---

<sup>83</sup> One example is Romania’s refusal to restore the autonomy to Transylvania which had been revoked in 1968.

<sup>84</sup> Examples include: Estonia’s rejection of a referendum supporting autonomy for Russian-dominated Narva; Kazakhstan’s rejection of the autonomy for ethnic Russians in the north and Ukraine’s rejection of a referendum supporting autonomy for ethnic Romanian areas.

<sup>85</sup> For example, Slovakia redrew its internal boundaries so that ethnic Hungarians would not form a majority within any of the internal administrative districts, and hence would have no platform to claim autonomy.

On the other hand, if we only looked at the broader picture, the Swiss model may seem at a first glance not only appealing but somewhat simple to reproduce; no doubt the ultra independent, ultra autonomous - and at the same time culturally open - system is alluring. But to what extent it is feasible and ready to be applied to nations that have had a politically different path and have made strikingly dissimilar choices in the past is still debatable because solely appeal is not necessarily the deciding factor; being appealing is not as important in this context as being relevant and so, in that regard the Swiss model – whether it be that of federalism, plurality or neutrality – cannot be mechanically copied, as it is the result of both history and context and also of a series of diligent choices that have marked this nation’s outcome.

Whether modern Switzerland is described as a multilingual or a multicultural, the fact remains that suggestions about using the Swiss model to settle violent nationality-led conflicts have been a recurrent phenomenon since 1848 – most recently, for example, in the proposals for bringing peace to Cyprus and Bosnia.

However, solutions such as this are undeniably flawed by their erroneous belief that the confederate cantons are in themselves ethnic entities. We would perhaps arrive at better answers if we go further down the line of finding out why patterns in general are reproduced – what drives this type of approach and is it always the best solution?

Generally speaking, patterns (in most areas) have been looked upon from either a discouraging perspective as well as from a somewhat positive one. There appears to be no middle ground. The despiriting perspective traces back situations when imitation and reproduction of an existing succesful model only marked the imitator’s lack of ingenuity, depth and intelligence, producing a somewhat lazyer version of the orginal. The positive viewpoint on the other hand takes no such ‘emotional’ approaches. It strictly reffers to the functionality and applicablity of an already tested model, which, if reproduced correctly and taking into account certain particularities, can prove beneficial on the long term. It is simply a matter of analysing one’s options and looking into potential best and worst case scenarios.

In the EEC case, the interest in applying the pattern, when present, appears to stand in gross disproportion to the knowledge about the political system and history of Switzerland and that may only go on to prove that any shown interest in the Swiss model will almost always be directly linked to its obvious functionality and success on the shorter term. Despite many internal tensions in the age of nationalism and during the two world wars, linguistic strife and ethnic hatred remained unknown in Switzerland. This has to do not only with the specific conditions out of which Switzerland developed, but also with the complex institutional apparatus and political culture of the modern federal state. What this means for nations aspiring to adopt or borrow elements from the Swiss model is that no single-sided rule will do. This may turn out in fact to be not such a good news, as Eastern European history has proven on more than one occasion that conflict resolution, commitment to democracy, accepting cultural diversity while working towards a common goal are yet to be learnt and applied, and this may not be an easy task after all.

## Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the Swiss Confederation is rightly seen as an outstanding example of the successful political integration of differing ethnic affinities. In his oft-quoted address of 1882, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", Ernest Renan had already cited the confederation as political proof that the nationality principle was far from being the quasi-natural primal ground of the modern nation, as a growing number of his contemporaries in Europe were beginning to believe: "Language", said Renan, "is an invitation to union, not a compulsion to it. Switzerland, which came into being by the consent of its different parts, has three or four languages. There is in man something that ranks above language, and that is will."<sup>86</sup>

The federal system, at large, seems to work in different ways for different nations. This not only refers to the cultural and ethnic background of the countries adopting it, but also to their specific political context. Thus, a comparatively well-developed form of federalism, which guarantees a high degree of individual self-government and democratic participation, can weaken the pull of the nationality-principle, especially when the neighboring nation-states are extremely centrally structured.

Furthermore, the general freedom of speech may seem reinforced by accepting the ethnic diversity. However, where religious, territorial/cantonal, and ethnic affiliations are not congruent, but cut across each other in multiple ways, the ethnic majority–minority dividing-line is broken; this puts almost every grouping (depending on the constellation) in a minority in the political decision-making process; it creates pressure to enter into comparatively flexible compromises and coalitions and arouses the expectation that the majority – which the party concerned may well form part of on the next occasion – will take political account of others.

---

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what/renan.htm> accessed May 2009.

Also, Switzerland has developed numerous forms of over-representation and active economic and cultural support for minorities as a way of ensuring their integration. This is not likely to occur in other nations mainly because Switzerland's democracy differs from many other nations through its extensive and much-used instruments of direct democracy. The way in which the federal state came into being, the federalist institutions, and the constraints of concordance democracy have generated a political culture which, on every issue, aims at power-sharing. This is articulated not only in the territorial, religious, and ethnic differences; it also shows in the balance of power between cantons, federation, government, and people, which is exactly what makes this model unique.

The territoriality principle, discussed at large in a previous chapter, which defines the limits of linguistic freedom in Switzerland, has been one of the major methods by which linguistic harmony has been preserved. But this does not mean it can be successfully replicated by other nations; where the survival of minorities is under threat, the territoriality principle has to be applied in a flexible way, meaning that Switzerland offers a model but that does not also implicate the means.

Thus, all the issues stated above and throughout this paper are all coming into question. This only reinforces the thesis that, while a working system, Switzerland does not and cannot offer a complete model to be adopted one hundred percent by any aspiring nation, regardless of its cultural, ethnic or political background, but can very well set a good example and prove an efficient starting point in discussing all potential changes that might occur. As Pierre L. van den Berghe wrote in his book, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*: "Switzerland, in short, is a very special case."<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Pierre L. van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Praeger Paperback, 1987, p. 194.

## References :

Afonso, Alexandre, *Immigration and Its Impacts in Switzerland*, Mediterranean Quarterly, 2004

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton University Press, 2007

Barilier, Etienne, Carol Volk, *Switzerland and the World*, published in The Literary Review, 1993

Barry, Brian, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Culture University Press, 2002

Baumann, Gerd, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*, Cambridge University Press, 1996

Benhabib, Seyla, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton University Press, 2002

Butler, Michael; Pender, Malcolm; Charnley, Joy, *The Making of Modern Switzerland, 1848-1998*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000

Chetkow-Yanoov, B. Harold, *Celebrating Diversity: Coexisting in a Multicultural Society*, Routledge, 1999

Church, Clive H., *The Politics and Government of Switzerland*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

de Sousa Santos, Boaventura; Rodríguez Garavito, César A., *Law and globalization from below*, Cambridge University Press, 2005

Dobrescu, Ion Florentin, *Relatia dintre politica, cultura si religie in Elvetia si Romania. O comparatie*, Published in Comunicare & Management Intercultural - Revista de Cercetare, Departament-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase, Universitatea din București, Nr. 1-2, 2006

Dobrescu, Nicoletta Laura, *Problema metodologiei in dialogul intercultural. Situatia Elvetiei si a Romaniei*, Published in Comunicare & Management Intercultural - Revista de Cercetare, Departament-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase, Universitatea din București, Nr. 1-2, 2006

Duffy Toft, Monica, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*, Princeton University Press, 2003

Featherstone, Mike, *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, Sage Publications, 1990

Habermas, Jürgen, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalization of society*, Beacon Press, 1987

Haugen, Einar, *Blessings of Babel: Bilingualism and Language Planning: Problems and Pleasures*, Mouton de Gruyter, 1987

Joseph, John E., *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

Katzenstein, Peter, *Corporatism and Change: Austria, Switzerland and the Politics of Industry*, Cornell University Press, 1987

Kieser, Rolf (Editor); Spillmann, Kurt R. (Editor); Koppel, Thomas (Editor), *The New Switzerland: Problems and Policies*, 1996

Kriesi, Hanspeter; Trechsel, Alexander H., *The Politics of Switzerland: Continuity and Change in a Consensus Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 2008

Kymlicka, Will, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1996

Kymlicka, Will, *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2009

Lane, Jan-Erik, *The Swiss Labyrinth: Institutions, Outcomes and Redesign*, Routledge 2001

Lijphart, Arend, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press, 1999

Márkus, György, *The Hegelian Concept of Culture*, PRAXIS International Journal, issue 2 / 1986

McGrew, Anthony; Goldblatt, David; Perraton, Jonathan, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture*, Stanford University Press, 1999

Mittelman, James H., *The Globalization Syndrome*, Princeton University Press, 2000

Morris, Colin, *The Discovery of the Individual*, Harper & Row, 1972

Moses, Bernard, *The Federal Government of Switzerland: An Essay on the Constitution*, BookSurge Publishing, 2001

Nash, Gary B.; Weiss, Richard, *The great fear: race in the mind of America*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970

Parekh, Bhikhu, *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Parekh, Bhikhu, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

Phillips, Anne, *Multiculturalism without Culture*, Princeton University Press, 2009

Retegan, Marius Maftai, *Elvetia, Elemente de Analiza Interculturala*, Published in *Comunicare & Management Intercultural - Revista de Cercetare*, Departament-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase, Universitatea din București, Nr. 2 (4) , 2007

Retegan, Marius Maftai, *Interculturalitatea: demers imprecis si irealizabil*, Published in *Comunicare & Management Intercultural - Revista de Cercetare*, Departament-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase, Universitatea din București, Nr. 1 (3) , 2007

Schmid, Carol L., *The Politics of Language: Conflict, Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 2008

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove, *Language in Human Rights*, published in *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 1998

Steinberg, Jonathan, *Why Switzerland*, Cambridge University Press, 1976

Taylor, Charles, *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1994

Therborn, Goran, *Inequalities of the World: New Theoretical Frameworks, Multiple Empirical Approaches*, Verso, 2006

Tilly, Charles; McAdam, Douglas; Farrow, Sidney, *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

Tomlinson, John, *Globalization and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, 1999

van den Berghe, Pierre L., *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Praeger Paperback, 1987

Wilson, John, *The History of Switzerland*, Cosimo Classics, 2007

Zimmer, Oliver, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761-1891*, Cambridge University Press, 2002

Zschokke, Heinrich, *The History of Switzerland*, BiblioLife, 2008

## **Web References**

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

<http://www.ethical-perspectives.be>

<http://www.britannica.com/>

<http://www.educa.ch/>

<http://www.bfm.admin.ch>

<http://ec.europa.eu/>

<http://www.ena.lu>

<http://www.osce.org/hcnm/>

<http://www.unesco.org>

<http://plato.stanford.edu>