12 Multi-lingual but mono-national

Exploring and explaining Switzerland's exceptionalism

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This chapter explores how statehood and patterns of collective identity have historically evolved in Switzerland and how they interact in the contemporary Swiss system. It shows that a sense of Swiss nationhood emerged before the creation of a Swiss federal state in 1848 and that it survived the pressures of 'linguistic nationalism' in the latter part of the 'long' nineteenth century to become fully consolidated in the twentieth. While many features of the Swiss system today reflect the multi-lingual nature of its society, they also show rather clearly that Switzerland is not a multi-national federation. Subsequently, the chapter offers an explanation of why Switzerland, despite being multi-lingual and multi-cultural, has not become multi-national, by arguing that this is best explained by a complex interaction over a long period of time of a unique set of factors, both internal and external. The chapter then considers the challenges likely to face the Swiss system in the medium term and concludes by arguing that the characteristics of Swiss society and the strengths of its federal political architecture are likely to enable it to remain mono-national in the foreseeable future. I wish to thank Ferran Requejo for his constructive help in finalising this chapter and Clive Church for his very helpful comments on a previous draft of the chapter.

1 Introduction

Within the growing literature on multi-national democracy and multi-national federations over the last decade or so, it has become widespread to present Switzerland as a multi-national state[1] and to use the country to claim empirical support for the thesis that multi-national democracies can be peaceful, stable and successful.[2] However, it is rarely if ever made clear which 'nations' Switzerland is meant to be composed of and the characterisation appears simply to be based on the uncritical assumption that language is the 'natural' basis for national identity hence if a country is multi-lingual it must *ipso facto* also be multi-national.[3] A related, though distinct, argument is that Switzerland came late to nationalism – because it was more backward than its neighbours – and, only from the 1890s onwards, a state-led 'thin' civic nationalism was superimposed in top-down fashion on the pre-existing and much 'thicker' ethnic nationalisms.[4]

However, since uncritical assumptions and superficial analyses do not usually produce sound scholarship, it is worthwhile, in the context of this edited work on plurinational federations, to explore whether it is indeed correct to characterise Switzerland as multi-national and a case of 'late nationalism'. This chapter has thus two main objectives. First, to explore the historical evolution of the Swiss state and of Swiss nationality(ies) to shed light on the question of whether the country is multi-national or not and whether it came late to nationalism. The chapter's answer to the first question is that Switzerland is unambiguously not multi-national and should thus be characterised as mono-national. While this is hardly an original claim,[5] it clearly needs to be restated and corroborated with the detailed empirical evidence that is now available. Moreover, the chapter shows that the evolution of Swiss national identity was entirely in line with wider European trends if not ahead of them. The second objective is then to explain why this is so, why the country has not become multi-national in spite of its multi-lingualism. In other words, to turn around an oft-asked question, what needs to be explained is not why Switzerland has been peaceful and stable despite being multi-national, but why, despite being multi-lingual, has not become multi-national.

The starting point for this investigation is Tully's definition of multinational democracies as 'constitutional associations that contain two or more nations or peoples. The members of the nations are, or aspire to be, recognized as self-governing peoples with the right of self-determination as this is understood in international law and democratic theory',[6] as well as Seton-Watson's conceptual distinction between state and nation and the related distinction, also employed by Kriesi, between state-building and nation-building.[7] The chapter then proceeds as follows. The Section 2 briefly outlines the historical evolution of the Swiss political system with the crucial transition from confederation to federation in 1848. The following section explores the emergence and the development of the idea of Swiss nationality and it shows that its historical sequencing was very much in line with – if not ahead of – contemporaneous European trends and that, right from the beginning, its character was 'mono' not 'multi'. Section 4 moves to the present day and presents a concise description of the main features of the contemporary Swiss state while Section 5 investigates whether Switzerland is still a mono-national country today and answers the question in the affirmative. The sixth section turns to the future and tries to estimate the likelihood that Switzerland will remain mono-national in the foreseeable future. Despite some reasonable doubts, the answer is, again, by and large yes. Lastly, the concluding section argues that, because the country is mono-national, genuine multi-national federations can learn little from Switzerland. On the other hand, the Swiss experience is richly instructive with regard to the factors and the circumstances that can make a multi-lingual country mono-national as opposed to multi-national.

2 The historical evolution of the Swiss political system

The origins of the Swiss political system are traditionally traced back to 1291[8] when an oath of mutual support and defence between representatives of the three

valley communities of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, *de jure* subject to the German emperor but de facto enjoying considerable autonomy, was sworn in order to preserve such status from imperial encroachment. After the battle of Morgarten in 1315, when the 'confederates' defeated the Habsburg army, the initial alliance attracted other members and slowly acquired a more permanent character. By the mid-fourteenth century, five other *Orte*, or localities – Lucerne, Zurich, Glarus, Zug and Berne – joined the alliance. The arrival of powerful cities such as Berne and Zurich greatly strengthened the nascent confederation and at the same time introduced a cleavage between rural and urban areas that would be an enduring feature of Swiss politics down to the present day.[9] In the subsequent century or so, the *Orte* embarked on aggressive territorial expansion sustained by their military prowess and consolidated their autonomy within the Empire. Over the same period, a series of new treaties were signed and the *Tagsatzung*, or confederal Diet, made up of two representatives per *Ort*, which first gathered in 1353, became more frequent and acquired the status of core institution of the confederation.[10] The conclusion of the Swabian War in 1499 saw the confederation gaining de facto independence within the Empire. By 1515, five other members had joined – Fribourg, Solothurn, Basle, Schaffausen and Appenzell – bringing the number of confederated units to 13. In the same year, the defeat at Marignano brought the phase of military conquest to an end and led to the adoption of a policy of neutrality.

After Marignano, no new members were admitted with full rights although nine surrounding polities became associated units. Some of these polities, such as St Gallen, had right of representation in the Diet while others, such as Geneva, had not.[11] The territories conquered during the expansion of the fifteenth century, such as what is now the Ticino, had the status of subject territories governed individually or collectively by the *Orte* with no right of representation in the Diet but a substantial degree of local autonomy.[12] This institutional asymmetry was to a large extent replicated within the *Orte* themselves, notably the city-dominated ones, between city dwellers, who enjoyed political rights, and the inhabitants of the countryside, who where largely excluded.[13] By this time, the confederation was widely seen as a 'distinct political unit within the German Empire'[14] and had acquired a relative stability both internally and externally. However, the Reformation, which was adopted in a patchwork fashion, introduced a second deep cleavage, that between Protestants and Catholics, which would be a source of recurrent conflicts down to the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, while the confederates stuck to their neutrality and kept out of the Thirty Years War, they could not avoid a series of internecine religious wars. With the Treaty of Westphalia, the sovereignty of the Swiss *Orte* and their independence from the Holy Roman Empire received official recognition and their neutrality was confirmed. Over the following one hundred years, the confederation enjoyed a period of renewed stability which saw the oligarchic nature of government in most of its urban *Orte* such as Berne deepening considerably. From the early days up to the late eighteenth century, the full members of the confederation were all, with the partial exception of Fribourg, German-speaking

and German was the sole 'official' language in use. However, both associated areas and subject ones, as seen above, comprised large French- and Italian-speaking populations.[15]

It was in one of these subject areas, the Vaud, that the French revolution had the greatest impact and fuelled demands for emancipation vis-à-vis Berne and Fribourg. The radicalisation of such demands led to the outbreak of the so-called Helvetic Revolution in 1798 and intervention by France.[16] With the co-operation of a number of Swiss pro-revolution sympathisers, France invaded the confederation, defeated Berne, its military bulwark, and imposed a radically new political system, named Helvetic Republic. This was a unitary republic modelled on the French constitution of 1795, in which the old *Orte* lost their independence and became, on a re-organised basis, mere administrative districts.[17] Although a fair number of Swiss had initially welcomed the French revolution and supported the principles of the Helvetic Republic – representative democracy, equality of rights, official status for French and Italian, uniform and secular education, and freedom of settlement – the Republic was never truly accepted, most notably in central Switzerland, and suffered four coups in three years.[18] Although the wiping out of the centuries-old sovereignty of the cantons was of course a major determinant of the Republic's unpopularity, opposition was also rooted in the defence of communal autonomy and of its sources of revenue, which were under threat from the introduction of freedom of settlement.[19] Somewhat in contrast, what is now a defining characteristic of Switzerland, direct democracy through popular *votations*, appeared for the first time in this period. The chronic instability of the Helvetic Republic led to a partial return to the cantonal system, through personal intervention by Napoleon, under a system known as the Mediation. Although the system did not outlast its architect, its innovative territorial order is still at the base of the Swiss federation today. To the old 13 cantons[20] were then added the former associated or subject territories of Argovia, Grisons, St Gallen, Ticino and the Vaud with full cantonal status. Geneva, the Valais, what is now the Jura canton and Neuchâtel had in the meantime been annexed by France and remained in French hands until 1814. After the fall of Napoleon, the cantons regained their sovereignty and re-established a confederation among themselves under the terms of the Federal Treaty signed in 1815. The confederation now included Geneva, Neuchâtel and the Valais as full members and its borders would not change thereafter.[21]

Although this 'new' confederation constituted an explicit attempt to recreate the pre-1798 institutional order, it did retain a number of principles and features introduced under French hegemony, notably with regard to equality among the cantons. It was not long, though, before the rising Liberal movement put pressure on the system for major reforms at both the cantonal and the confederal levels. Starting in 1830, a broad reform movement dubbed 'Regeneration' gathered momentum.[22] The Regeneration had two sides to it. On one hand, it was directed towards constitutional change at the cantonal level – centred on citizen equality, universal male suffrage and clearer limits on government – submitted to popular approval in a referendum. Second, but of no less importance, the

'regenerated' cantons in turn became increasingly vocal in pushing for more responsibilities of government to be exercised at the central level – especially defence and economic affairs – and a stronger institutional infrastructure to carry them out.[23] The radical wing of the movement demanded no less than the creation of a central government and a central parliament in what would have amounted to a transition from a confederation of states to a federal state.[24] In 1832 the drafting of a new treaty attempting to strike a middle ground between the demands for a strong central government and the desire to preserve cantonal sovereignties satisfied neither side and came to nothing. The building up of pressures for the creation of a Swiss state alarmed several conservative Catholic cantons to the point where seven of them – the three original *Waldstätte* of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden plus Lucerne, Zug, Fribourg and the Valais – signed a secret defensive pact known as the *Sonderbund*.[25] In the 1840s, the radical wing of the liberal movement became dominant and several cantons – notably Berne – were taken over by Radical forces. The change of camp by the leading canton in the confederation decisively tilted the balance of forces in the Diet and consolidated the Radical ascendancy, which by now also enjoyed mass support.[26] The clash between the opposing sides came to a head in 1847 when a dispute nominally concerning religious orders but clearly rooted in constitutional issues triggered a short and almost bloodless civil war.[27] Following the victory of the Radical forces, a constitutional commission was formed and charged with a revision of the 1815 treaty. Remarkably, although Neuchâtel and Appenzell-Inner Rhodes refused to take part, the defeated cantons were all represented. While opinions were still rather divided on how far to go in revising the treaty in a centralist direction[28] the commission ultimately decided to replace the treaty-based confederation with a constitution-based federation. The victorious Radicals, however, clearly exercised a great deal of moderation in drafting the 1848 constitution and while they secured their core demand for a Swiss state, they made major concessions to the former *Sonderbund* cantons in keeping centralisation to a bare minimum.[29] The constitution thus provided for a bicameral parliament and a federal executive but made constitutional amendments dependent on a referendum vote subject to a majority of the cantons and left ample autonomy to the latter. Sixteen cantons voted in favour of the proposed constitution in the Diet and, after a majority of the cantons ratified it, on 12 September 1848 the Diet declared the constitution adopted with a unanimous vote and the abstention of the former *Sonderbund* cantons.[30]

The new federal state had a much more developed institutional architecture than the confederation and it possessed for the first time its own sources of income but was otherwise still extremely decentralised. So the Radicals – who dominated the parliament and monopolised the executive – were still pressing for more centralisation. From the 1860s onwards the democratic movement spread across Switzerland demanding popular sovereignty be put into practice through institutions of direct democracy.[31] As always, this movement first produced its effects in the cantons but later spilled over to the federal level. Proposals to reform the constitution were put forward as early as 1866 and a full

revision went to a referendum in 1872, but was rejected. A watered-down version, more acceptable to Catholics and French speakers, who largely voted against the 1872 proposals, was accepted in 1874. A key innovation was the introduction of the optional referendum, whereby citizens can challenge any law passed by parliament, which would have profound consequences for the nature of the Swiss political system. The popularity of the new instrument – with frequent government defeats at the hands of the informal alliance between Catholics and French speakers – led to the acceptance for the first time, in 1891, of a Catholic Conservative into the federal executive, the first instance of executive power-sharing. The same year also saw the introduction of the other major instrument of direct democracy: the legislative initiative.

Pressure from the democratic movement also led in the course of the 1890s to the adoption in many cantons of electoral systems based on proportional representation (PR). Over the same period, as in the rest of Europe, the rise of socialism and the labour movement in the wake of rapid industralisation led to the emergence of the class cleavage as a fundamental feature of Swiss politics. This culminated in a general strike in 1918 and in the introduction a year later – following a successful popular initiative – of PR for the election of the lower house with the cantons being used as constituencies. The moderation of the class conflict, which was still precarious in the mid-1930s, was finally secured in 1937 when a 'Labour Peace' agreement between employers and the unions was reached. The post-war period saw full integration of the socialist party in the executive since 1959 and the building of an extensive welfare state. From the 1960s onwards, a movement for constitutional renewal gathered pace affecting first, in the time-honoured Swiss tradition, the cantons and then generating pressure for a revision of the federal constitution. After a protracted debate, a new constitution was adopted by parliament and the people in 1999 and came into force in 2000.

In the meantime, women had obtained the right to vote in federal elections in 1971. By the time it was replaced, the 1874 constitution had been amended around 140 times.[32] This is a reflection of one of the major trends that has changed the Swiss federation in the century and a half since 1848: namely, centralisation. A wide range of competences that had been left in the hands of the cantons in the first constitution have progressively come under the control of the federal level.[33] However, centralisation has essentially been confined to legislation while implementation has been left to the cantons and the communes. Likewise, the bulk of the public sector payroll and of tax-raising capacities has remained at the cantonal and communal level. Two other fundamental trends worth mentioning are the expansion and the intensification in the use of direct democracy and the progressive 'inclusiveness' of the system. The expansion of direct democracy turned Switzerland into the world's only semi-direct democracy with consequences of enormous importance for the Swiss polity. Partially as a response, Swiss institutions have also become more consensual, as signalled by the progressive inclusion in the executive of the four main political parties and the development of extensive pre-parliamentary consultations on draft legislation.

3 The historical development of the Swiss nation

A sense of Swiss political identity began to emerge in the fifteenth century in the writings of humanist chroniclers who produced the first histories of Switzerland from what may be called a proto-national perspective.[34] Zimmer identifies two factors in the emergence of such an identity, one internal and one external. The first was the development of the confederal system through successive alliances and treaties and its corresponding institutional 'thickening' which produced a sense that a distinct political system was being built. The second was the external aspect of the same process, i.e. the cantons' struggle against the Habsburg Empire and the growing perception of the latter as Switzerland's 'other' which contributed to building a sense of Swiss 'uniqueness'.[35] In the course of the eighteenth century, Swiss identity started to acquire a national character and to fuel a nationalist movement. In the 1730s, university chairs in 'patriotic history' began to be set up, notably in Zurich, and in 1762 the Helvetic Society – which, according to Zimmer, was 'the first patriotic association in Europe devoted to an exclusively national agenda'[36] – was founded. Like its pre-national ancestor, this early national identity was based on the cantons' common past and on the myths of the foundation of the confederation in the Middle Ages.[37] Nationalism was the driving force for the members of the Helvetic Society and the confederates' past was used to legitimise their new demands and aspirations.[38] The nationalism of the Helvetic Society was naturally a privileged minority affair and was predominantly Protestant and German-speaking but not exclusively so. As Zimmer points out, 'by the late 1770s, the Society's annual meetings had effectively become get-togethers for Switzerland's political and economic elites'.[39] Kohn was thus substantially correct in arguing that 'such a feeling of Swiss patriotism existed not only among the German-Swiss in the ruling and sovereign 13 cantons but also in the subject lands of the Vaud and the Ticino'.[40] As had been the case in the past and would continue to be for a long time, the religious divide was much deeper and politically salient than the linguistic one and influenced attitudes to the nationality question accordingly.

This emergent Swiss nationalism found its first institutional framework in the Helvetic Republic, which was explicitly based on the idea of a single and multilingual Swiss nation, and manifested itself most clearly in the field of education.[41] While it may be tempting to interpret the failure of the Helvetic Republic as a rejection of the Swiss nationalism it voiced, this would be profoundly misguided. First, it is essential to bear in mind, as Zimmer reminds us, that 'both support for and opposition to the Helvetic Republic cut across linguistic affiliation'.[42] Hence, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the multilingual 'civic' Swiss nationalism was not contested by mono-lingual 'ethnic' nationalisms. Eloquent demonstration is provided by the behaviour of the formerly subject territories of French- and Italian speakers which, given the choice between joining either the French or the Cisalpine republics, respectively, and becoming equal members of a Swiss state chose the latter.[43] Second, popular identification with the cantons should also not be overestimated. For most

ordinary people, especially outside the *Landsgemeinde*[44] cantons, their homeland was the local commune, on which their life was centred and citizenship rights based, rather than the canton and, as seen above, resistance against the Helvetic Republic was rooted in a defence of local autonomy as much as, if not more than, cantonal sovereignty and such defence cut across religious and linguistic differences.[45]

Swiss nationalism did not go away with the restoration of 1815. On the contrary, though deprived of its institutional apparatus, it dominated the entire 1815–48 period. Not only did the period see a proliferation of national societies and festivals,[46] but, as seen in the previous section, a core objective of the Regeneration movement was the creation of a Swiss national state, and Radicalism was an unmistakeably nationalist movement.[47] With the accession of the former allied and subject territories to full cantonal status, French- and Italian speakers were fully represented in this state-seeking nationalism.[48]

Remarkably, although the 'national' conflict of the first half of the nineteenth century was shaped by a combination of the political, religious and urban-rural divides, it was *not* a conflict defined by the linguistic cleavage.[49] Moreover, to a large extent the conflict was not between rival nationalisms but between competing interpretations of the same 'national' past and the diverging conclusions the two camps derived in terms of the constitutional form the Swiss political system ought to have.[50] Those who rejected the notion of a Swiss nationality did not oppose to it a notion of cantonal nationality but rejected the very idea of nationhood as the legitimating basis for a polity, be it cantonal or federal. This was partly due to the fact that the face-to-face meetings of the *Landsgemeinden* – and, of course, of their local equivalent, the *Gemeindeversammlungen* – had fostered a *Gemeinschaft* conception of the body politic that clashed with the notion of a national *Gesellschaft*.[51] Perhaps the clearest rejection of the idea of Swiss nationhood was voiced by Philip Anton von Segesser, a leader of the Lucerne canton, who in February 1848 wrote:

> Switzerland interests me only because the canton of Lucerne, which is my fatherland, lies there. Should the canton of Lucerne no longer exist as a free and sovereign member of the Confederation, then the latter is to me of as little importance as the Great or Little Tartary.[52]

Although some did conceive of their canton in quasi-national terms, most of the conservative voices of central Switzerland who rose against the idea of Swiss nationalism subscribed to pre-modern ideas of political legitimacy and rejected the modern idea of national sovereignty *tout court*.[53] Hence, once the Liberals and Radicals had imposed the 'nation' as the framework for constitutional discourse, the conservatives had no choice but to accept it and act within it.[54] The mono-national character of Switzerland was already clearly on display in the mid-nineteenth century, in the spirit of the 1848 constitution and in the manner in which it was adopted. It is important not to let ourselves be misled by the letter of Article 1 of the constitution –'the peoples of the twenty-two sovereign cantons' –

for the document was clearly the act of a single sovereign people not a compact between states or between 22 sovereign peoples.[55] As Bonjour *et al.* put it 'the decisive factor, however, was now the people and not the states. For it was not the cantons which had founded the new federal state; it was a national act which had the people behind it'.[56] As seen in the previous section, a significant number of cantons voted against the new constitution both in the Diet and in the ratification process yet ultimately accepted it as the expression of the 'national will'.

Although the conflict between the nationalist forces and their opponents had effectively been settled in the civil war and its constitutional aftermath, relations between the two sides remained frosty after 1848 and only began to thaw in the 1870s. Switzerland had to wait until 1891 for the idea of a nation-legitimated Swiss state to be fully accepted in the *Waldstätte*.[57] External pressure on the young federal state – in the form of disputes with Prussia and Germany[58] and, more fundamentally, from the tidal wave of ethno-linguistic nationalisms – obviously contributed to widening and deepening collective identification with Switzerland but the state-led nationalism pursued by the federal authorities was also decisive. This policy was under way from the early 1870s and was most clearly on display in the celebrations for the 600th anniversary of the confederation in 1891.[59] An 1887 law authorised the federal government to subsidise monuments and works of art of national significance; in 1889 the flag was finally 'codified'; in 1891 the government commissioned an 'official history' of the country; a national library and a national museum opened in 1894 and 1898, respectively; and, in 1899, 1 August was institutionalised as Switzerland's national day.[60] The combined effect of external pressures and internal, state-led nationalism succeeded in making the nation 'the most potent source of collective identification', entirely in line with simultaneous trends elsewhere in Europe.[61]

The latter, especially in the form of the ethno-linguistic nationalism represented by Germany and Italy, also presented a mounting challenge to the multilingual nationalism of the Swiss towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.[62] This came to a head in the First World War and its aftermath when significant tensions emerged between the language communities, notably with regard to relations with the belligerent powers.[63] The campaign for the ratification of the League of Nations treaty and the subsequent referendum exposed them to the full.[64] Luckily for Switzerland, the crisis did not last long as the linguistic cleavage, emphasised by the First World War, was overshadowed by the class cleavage, brought to the fore by the 1918 general strike, and later by external pressure from fascist Italy and nazi Germany.[65] In contrast to the Great War, the Second World War had a powerful unifying effect on the country[66] and even caused a considerable degree of cultural alienation vis-à-vis Germany among German speakers, which manifested itself in a revalorisation of the *Schwyzerdütsch* dialects and whose effects are still being felt today.[67] In the post-war period, concerns about a Swiss *malaise* were voiced by some intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s and the Jura conflict[68] gave a sharper, though largely localised, edge to the linguistic cleavage but no serious threats to the mono-nationality of Switzerland emerged.

As this brief outline has shown, Swiss nationalism was not a post-1848, let alone post-1891, creation of the federal state. Borrowing Tilly's terminology, Swiss nationalism was 'state-seeking' up to 1848 – and, arguably, even up to 1874 – and 'state-led' afterwards.[69] As Zimmer points out, 'the fact that from the late eighteenth century "the nation" had begun to furnish a decisive moral and ideological frame of reference was decisive.[70] Anderson was thus wrong in interpreting Hughes as meaning that before 1891 one cannot speak of a sense of Swiss nationhood and that Switzerland is best understood as part of the 'last wave' of nationalism.[71] And he was doubly wrong in interpreting Switzerland's supposedly late nationalism as a result of its backwardness. On the contrary, in terms of levels of industrialisation, literacy and political rights, Switzerland was one of the most advanced areas in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century.[72] Nationalism did not come late to Switzerland and, if one wants to apply Andersonian categories to it, the country would be best placed in the 'first wave' of the 'creole pioneers' rather than in the last wave of post-colonial nationalism. Nor was Switzerland at any time, either in the nineteenth or in the twentieth centuries, multi-national. Right from the start, Swiss nationality was resolutely 'mono' and its rivals were forms of non-nationalist conservatism rather than ethno-linguistic or cantonal nationalisms.

What explains this peculiar evolution? Five major factors can be identified. First, as frequently pointed out by observers, societal cleavages in Switzerland cross-cut each other. This was particularly the case for the two most powerful ones – language and religion – but it is equally true of the urban-rural and the class cleavages as well as of cantonal borders.[73] The religious division and cantonal borders thus fragmented the language communities and contributed to the non-politicisation of linguistic identities.[74] In a very real sense, they also prevented the emergence of a clear majority. What could be called the hegemonic group – German-speaking, Protestant, and urban – was (and is) not a numerical majority. While this is of course of central importance, it is not the only factor that produced mono-nationality in spite of multi-lingualism. A second essential element was the way multi-lingualism emerged and developed. As McRae pointed out, the decisive factor was that language equality 'never had to be fought for'[75] and, moreover, that by the time nationalism became a powerful force in politics the country had already become officially multi-lingual.[76] While this, in turn, was a result of several factors, a key one was that, at the dawn of the national era, no significant language stratification by class existed,[77] unlike for instance in Belgium and in much of east-central Europe.[78] Another was the informal balance of forces between the language groups with larger, but more fragmented, numbers on the German side being balanced by less fragmentation and higher prestige on the French side.[79] However, while these factors help explain why French-speaking nationalism did not develop, they find it more difficult to explain why its Italian-speaking cousin did not do so either. After all, in Italian-speaking Switzerland the religious and linguistic cleavages as well as political borders largely overlap and the minority status of the language in numerical terms is not compensated by higher prestige. A further factor that

therefore needs to be added to the equation is that the existence of confederalism before 1848 and of decentralised federalism afterwards gave a large degree of cultural and political autonomy to the language communities, preventing their nationalist mobilisation. Due to its high decentralisation, the system never produced the pressures, coming especially from centralised political parties and a powerful central bureaucracy, that have generated language-based regional nationalisms elsewhere.[80] Moreover, the long-term territorial stability of the language communities and the lack of expansionism on the part of the largest one meant that the smaller communities had no reason to fear for the survival of their language and their culture.[81] A fourth central factor is the connection between the historical evolution of the Swiss political system and the emergence of nationalism. The fact that by the turn of the nineteenth century, Switzerland already had five centuries of history as a political system, albeit a confederal one, was absolutely crucial.[82] In addition to providing a powerful historical memory ready to be exploited for nationalist ends, this also meant that the foundation myths of the cantons were *collective* rather than individual and thus did not easily lend themselves to exploitation for the purpose of building cantonal nationalisms. The last but not the least important factor was that being surrounded by ethno-linguistic states culturally linked to the domestic language groups meant that secessionist aspirations fuelled by linguistic factors would have almost certainly implied joining either Germany, France or Italy rather than creating independent states out of the *Deutsche Schweiz*, the *Suisse romande* and the *Svizzera italiana*. However, joining either Germany, France or Italy would have meant not only a repudiation of Swiss history, it would have also implied turning the back to a great deal of cultural heritage,[83] to say nothing of crucial political values such as cantonal autonomy, direct democracy, etc. Linguistic nationalisms would have thus had to trade history, culture and political values for linguistic unity. Yet because cultural interactions and linguistic *républiques des lettres* were largely unimpeded by political borders whereas distinctively Swiss historical, cultural and political features would have been lost as part of a neighbouring ethno-linguistic state, the terms of the linguistic unity/Swiss values trade-off were heavily stacked against the irredentist mobilisation of the language communities.

4 The Swiss state today

The Swiss state has three main levels of government: the federation, the cantons and the communes.[84] At all levels, representative institutions co-exist with instruments of direct democracy so that the system is truly a semi-direct democracy.

The federal level is characterised by perfect bicameralism and semi-presidentialism. The 200-seat lower house of parliament, the National Council, represents the Swiss people as a whole, while the 46-seat upper house, the Council of States, represents the cantons. Both are directly elected on a cantonal basis, so the only real difference between them is that National Council seats are allocated to cantons in proportion to population size, whereas each canton has

two seats in the Council of States regardless of its population.[85] The electoral system for the lower house is an open list PR system which allows for an ample degree of preferential voting. There is no uniform electoral system for the Council of States, as this is a matter of cantonal law, but all cantons bar one use a two-round majority system. The passage of all legislation requires the approval of both chambers and bills can be first introduced in either. The two houses of parliament jointly elect the Federal Council, the seven-member collegial executive. Once elected, federal councillors cannot be brought down either individually or collectively by parliament. The absence of a confidence link between the executive and the legislature thus makes the system a form of semi-presidentialism. By long-standing convention, the seven seats are filled by representatives of the four largest parties, in rough proportion to their strength in parliament.[86] The four parties are the Swiss People's Party, now a right-wing populist party, the Socialist Party, a fairly traditional social-democratic party, the Radical party, a liberal party, and the Christian-Democratic party. The Federal Tribunal is the highest judicial authority of the federation but has no powers of constitutional review on federal legislation and has a marginal role in regulating federal-cantonal relations. Three main instruments of direct democracy are used at the federal level: the mandatory referendum for all constitutional changes, the constitutional initiative and the optional referendum on ordinary legislation. Their use has intensified over time to the point where virtually all key decisions now require a popular vote.

The 26 cantons[87] are the intermediate level of government. As seen above, they predate the federation and still retain some vestigial elements of their former statehood. More importantly, they possess residual powers, are almost free to determine their own revenues, implement the vast majority of federal laws and policies and employ over half of all civil servants. Although their legislative autonomy has been severely eroded over time, they are still in many ways the main level of government in Switzerland. In institutional terms, most of the cantons replicate the system existing at the federal level, though with three main differences: legislatures are all monocameral, executives are directly elected and direct democracy is even more widely used. Cantonal constitutions are subject to vetting by the federal parliament and cantonal legislation can be judicially reviewed by the Federal Tribunal. Federal parties are federations of cantonal parties and significant diversity among the latter exist.

The 2,600 communes should not be overlooked. They enjoy considerable autonomy from both the federation and the cantons including in tax-raising matters, carry out their fair share of policy implementation, employ about 30 per cent of civil servants and command fierce citizen loyalty. Above all, they are still the bodies conferring citizenship as Swiss citizenship depends on cantonal citizenship which, in turn, depends on obtaining citizenship of a commune. Direct democracy is also widely used at this level and *Gemeindeversammlungen* are still in existence in the smaller communes.

The division of competences between the federation and the cantons is governed by the federal constitution while communal responsibilities are regulated

by cantonal law. Residual powers, as noted above, rest with the cantons and each new transfer of powers to the central level – taxation included – requires a constitutional amendment endorsed in a referendum by a majority of the people and of the cantons. The progressive centralisation of legislation has produced a largely 'functional' division of labour whereby legislative responsibilities are carried out centrally and implementation is left to the cantons and the communes. Cantons enjoy considerable discretion in implementation as the federal government has both limited administrative resources and legal powers to monitor it. Education, culture and policing are the main policy areas still under full cantonal control. In the fiscal sphere, although each level has tax-raising powers and aims in principle at financial self-sufficiency, there is considerable transfer between levels, notably from the federation to the cantons. A recently reformed system of fiscal equalisation aims to reduce fiscal imbalances between cantons. Vertical intergovernmental relations are increasingly carried out through the Conference of Cantonal Governments, the collective voice of the cantons. Very important intergovernmental relations also exist on both horizontal levels, i.e. among cantons and among communes. Such relations take the form of inter-cantonal 'treaties' or their functional equivalent at the communal level. The vast majority of inter-cantonal 'treaties' are regional in scope[88] and inter-communal co-operation, by its very nature, is highly localised.

'Established' minorities are accommodated within this system in two main ways: cantonal autonomy and central representation. Autonomy is arguably the core principle of the Swiss political system, as shown by the large degree of self-government accorded to the cantons and the communes. Through such self-government linguistic and religious communities enjoy substantial autonomy and escape a minority status. Most cantons are unilingual and their language policy is based on the territorial principle.[89] At the federal level, where the autonomy device is not available, representation, often on a disproportional basis favouring the minorities, is employed. Three key aspects are worth noting. French and Italian enjoy official language status on an equal footing with German.[90] Informal conventions stipulate that at least two federal councillors should be non-German speakers and that the language communities should be represented in a roughly proportional way in the federal civil service. The French- and Italian-language communities also benefit from generously funded television channels in their respective language. Small cantons, which in several cases are also overwhelmingly Catholic, are favoured by over-representation in the Council of States, by the cantonal majority rule in the constitutional referendums and by the convention that federal councillors should come from different cantons.

5 National identity in today's Switzerland

I argued in Section 3 that Switzerland was mono-national in the post-war period. But is this still true? The proliferation of categorisations of the country as multinational might suggest otherwise. Ascertaining whether Switzerland is mono- or

multi-national today logically requires identifying how many nations there are in the country. Intriguingly enough, those who apply the multi-national label to Switzerland rarely, if ever, perform such exercise. Keeping matters relatively simple for the sake of tractability, the question can be answered in at least five different ways:

N there is a single Swiss nation
A there are three – or four – nations as each language community is a nation
B there are 26 nations as each canton is a nation
C there are approximately 2,600 nations as each commune is a nation
D there are no nations, just three *irredenta* portions of the German, French and Italian nations, respectively.

Leaving aside for the time being hypothesis N – i.e. the 'null hypothesis' that Switzerland is still mono-national – this section will consider the others in turn and will evaluate the empirical evidence supporting them. A and D will be considered together and the Italian-speaking community will be considered as coinciding with the Ticino. Six criteria – i.e. indicators of nationhood – will be employed to ascertain whether a community is a nation, as follows:

1 the community is the primary framework of political identification for its members
2 there is widespread use of the terms 'nation' and 'national' with reference to the community
3 it is widely accepted within the community that ultimate sovereignty – i.e. sovereign constituent power – rests with the community rather than with sub-divisions of it or with larger units of which it may be a part
4 there are widespread demands for official recognition of the community as a nation and for giving it a formal or informal veto on constitutional matters and key legislation
5 there are widespread demands for a special constitutional status for the region/s where the community lives; in other words to make the federation asymmetrical
6 there is a secessionist or at least a regionalist movement – typically a political party – with significant mass support.

Have the language communities become nations? A view often held is that language has replaced religion as the fundamental cleavage in the Swiss political system.[91] Up to a point this is true but the picture does need to be nuanced. While it is clear that between 1848 and, say, 1920, the religious cleavage declined and the linguistic one rose,[92] after around 1920 *both* cleavages declined though the sharper decline of religious allegiances has given a greater visibility to the linguistic ones.[93] Hence, the rise of the linguistic cleavage is only in *relative* as opposed to *absolute* terms. In other words, it is not at all clear that the linguistic cleavage is more salient in 2011 than it was in 1992 or indeed in 1920. If

anything, the opposite is probably true as, for instance, its impact on voting behaviour in federal votations *declined* between 1872 and 1994.[94] To take one of the clearest examples, the famous vote on the EEA in 1992, which generated a great deal of discussion on the widening chasm between French speakers and German speakers, actually saw a *smaller* gap between the two communities than did the equally famous, albeit more distant in memory, vote on the League of Nations in 1920.[95] Even what appears to casual external observers the most clear-cut case of language conflict, the Jura conflict, was not primarily determined by linguistic identities. The religious factor – both directly and, especially, indirectly – was by far the most powerful predictor of support for separation from Berne.[96] Moreover, there is a high degree of homogeneity of political culture and relations between the communities are perceived as non-problematic by an overwhelming majority of the population.[97] Above all, political identification with the language communities is actually rather weak and is overwhelmed by identification with Switzerland.[98] Among German speakers, not only is identification with the language community weaker than identification with the country as a whole but it is actually weaker than identification with both the canton and the commune. Even among French speakers, supposedly the chief suspects of regional nationalism, identification with the *Suisse romande* is clearly subordinate to identification with Switzerland and is no stronger than identification with the canton and the commune.[99] Furthermore, a clear majority in all three language communities, with minimum variation between them, feel 'strongly attached' or 'very strongly attached' to Switzerland.[100] Given this pattern of identities and attitudes, it should not be surprising that no community either possesses or has ever demanded a veto on ordinary legislation or even on constitutional change[101] nor ever demanded recognition as a nation. Indeed, the terms 'nation' and 'national' are virtually never used with reference to a language community.[102] Nor should it be surprising that no language community-based secessionist movement of any significance exists,[103] no language community-based regionalist movement does either[104] and that not even a political party of any description representing a language community is active. The last piece of evidence is that by and large, cross-language bonds – i.e. between the language communities within Switzerland – are stronger than cross-border bonds – i.e. between the Swiss language communities and their larger 'sisters' across the border.[105] In light of the above, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that if the Swiss language communities are nations they are very peculiar nations indeed, unlike any other in the world. A fortiori, there is no evidence whatsoever that they perceive themselves as *irredenta* portions of the neighbouring nations.[106] We can thus reject hypotheses A and D and proceed to consider hypothesis B.

I noted above that the terms 'nation' and 'national' were often used with reference to a canton in the nineteenth century. Does that mean that cantons are nations and thus that there are 26 nations in Switzerland? While diversity among the cantons is still very significant[107] and influences a great many aspects of Swiss political life, it would be difficult to identify a genuine cantonal cleavage,

independent of linguistic, religious and urban/rural factors, none of which of course is canton-specific. Analysing the extent to which cantonal identities shape political behaviour is thus unlikely to be a fruitful line of enquiry. However, cantonal identities themselves – like the linguistic identities discussed above – are rather far from what we understand today to be a national identity. Among French- and, especially, German speakers, identification with the cantons is vastly overshadowed by identification with Switzerland and is no stronger than identification with the communes.[108] Only in the Ticino, identification with the canton appears to be as strong as identification with Switzerland but this is clearly, as argued below, a case of nested rather than rival identities.[109] Like its language counterpart, cantonal secessionism is conspicuous by its absence.[110] Even the Jura movement, in spite of its ethno-linguistic discourse, stood for separation from Berne but not for secession from Switzerland. Cantonal regionalism, notably demands for asymmetry in the federal system, is absent too. What may superficially appear as indeed a case of canton-based regionalism – the *Lega dei Ticinesi* – is in fact a phenomenon of cantonal populism, with no significant autonomist demands vis-à-vis Berne.[111] It is not, of course, a coincidence that the Ticino, of all the cantons, is the one that comes closest to being the primary identification referent for its people, for in the Ticino the cantonal and linguistic boundaries overlap almost perfectly and the canton *cumulates* a minority/peripheral condition across three categories: language (Italian-speaking),[112] religion (Catholic) and geography (south-of-the-Alps periphery).[113] Furthermore, the canton – and Italian-speakers more generally – has not been represented in the Federal Council for almost half of the time since 1848.[114] Yet, it is precisely the fact that even the Ticinese neither think of themselves as a nation nor as an *irredenta* portion of Italy that powerfully testifies to Switzerland's mononational character. To take another example, canton Uri, widely seen as the cradle of the Swiss confederation, has consistently voted down all total, and most partial, constitutional reforms since 1848 and has never been represented in the Federal Council yet it has never questioned the legitimacy of the Swiss state.[115] Moreover, as seen above, although several cantons are very ancient, a fair number are nineteenth-century creations. In this respect, Hughes slightly overstated the point when he argued that 'each canton has become almost an ethnicity in its own right'.[116] While cantonal identities are certainly deeply rooted and politically relevant, it is clear that cantons are not nations as we understand the word today and so hypothesis B should be rejected too.

If the language communities and the cantons, even by considerably stretching the imagination, hardly qualify as nations, what about the communes? Could they perhaps fit the bill? The hypothesis is less preposterous than it might seem at first glance. Switzerland is still in a very real sense a 'conglomerate of communes'[117] for, as Fleiner argues, 'the small democracy in the local municipal area is the fundamental element of Swiss federalism'.[118] Moreover, several cantonal constitutions leave residual powers to their communes so that in practice residual powers rest in many cases at the lowest level of the Swiss federal system.[119] As seen above, identification with the commune is only second to identification with

Switzerland among German speakers and is no weaker than identification with the canton and the language community among French speakers. Participation in local elections is also higher than that in cantonal elections, which is in turn higher than turnout in federal elections.[120] Above all, as already noted, communes are the citizenship-granting bodies so they are the true *Heimaten* of the Swiss. Yet, once again, it is clear that identification with the communes is dwarfed by identification with the country as a whole and that communal identities, even more so than the cantonal and linguistic ones, are very far from being national identities. It almost goes without saying that the typical manifestations of sub-state nationalism, from demand for recognition to regionalist/secessionist movements are nowhere to be found at the communal level. Let alone the fact that, due to the large number of mergers between communes in the recent past, treating them as nations would mean that around 400 nations have disappeared in Switzerland over the last 20 years or so. ... Hypothesis C thus also fails the empirical test.

The review of the evidence conducted in this section has indicated that there is no empirical support at all for the thesis that Switzerland is a multi-national federation. Not a single one of the phenomena typically present in genuine multi-national states is present in Switzerland and it is clear that neither the language communities, nor the cantons, nor the communes are nations in any meaningful sense of the word. The only nation to be found in Switzerland is the single Swiss nation. Hence, while Switzerland is certainly a case of nested identities, it is not a case of 'nested nationalities'[121] because no other identity has developed into a *national* identity. The country is a mono-national federation today as it has always been since 1848. Moreover, since the dawn of the idea of nationalism, the latter has always been interpreted in the singular in Switzerland.

As regards the nature of Swiss national identity, presenting it as a case of 'constitutional patriotism'[122] is misleading in several respects. To begin with, while civic and ethnic nationalisms are theoretical ideal types, real world nations almost always contain a mix of the two types, albeit in different 'weightings', and Switzerland is no exception. As Zimmer has showed, it is a *Wesensnation*, or nation of character, as much as it is a *Willensnation*, or nation by will.[123] Indeed, a primarily 'civic' understanding of nationhood at the federal level co-exists with a primarily 'ethnic' understanding of it at the cantonal and the communal levels, which are, as seen above, the agencies conferring citizenship and granting naturalization.[124] Furthermore, political identification in Switzerland is not really with the constitution as such – as it might be in the USA[125] – but with what could be called the meta-constitutional institutions of federalism, direct democracy and neutrality and, at an even deeper level, with a much wider set of politico-cultural values that are *reflected* in the constitution rather than *generated* by it.

6 Challenges and prospects

Since cantons and communes are highly unlikely in the twenty-first century ever to be able to generate forms of sub-state nationalism, the language communities

are the only 'actors' who could conceivably do so and turn Switzerland multinational. What are the odds of this happening? While, as seen above, the linguistic dimension is certainly an important feature of Swiss politics today, there is no evidence of its saliency having increased recently and no indication that it might do so in the near future either. Even the question of the country's openness vis-à-vis the rest of the world and its participation in the process of European integration, which exposed sharp divergences between German- and French speakers in the 1990s and attracted a lot of attention, seems to be less divisive at the time of writing and there is evidence that attitudes have converged somewhat.[126] Likewise, tensions generated by many German-speaking cantons' decision to give priority to English over French in primary school have now abated following a series of cantonal referendums. Moreover, it is remarkable that even after the considerable reduction in cantonal autonomy brought about by a century and a half of centralisation, the French- and Italian-speaking cantons are not more alienated from the federation in 2011 than they were in 1848.[127] Further centralisation – notably in the area of education, the last bastion of the cantons' legislative competences – is thus unlikely to fuel nationalist feelings in the language communities. The high degree of stability of the Swiss institutions as well as of linguistic boundaries also militates against relations between the language communities significantly deteriorating in the next few decades. The very fact that the proposals put forward to deal with the issue of cantonal fragmentation advocate reform in a functional, rather than 'ethno-linguistic', direction speaks volumes about the unlikely emergence of linguistic – and cantonal – nationalisms in the foreseeable future.[128]

Some scholars see the end of the Cold War and European integration as threatening Swiss identity and, potentially, the survival of the country by removing its *raison d'être* as a neutral state.[129] However, this view of the post-Cold War is only partly correct from a historical perspective. It would be more accurate to say that traditional Swiss neutrality already lost its *raison d'être* after the Second World War with the end of the Europe-centred international system. Moreover, if we understand the Cold War as a struggle between two politico-economic systems, capitalist democracy vs communism, rather than between two military alliances, NATO vs the Warsaw Pact, then Switzerland was not neutral at all during the Cold War: it was a full member of the capitalist democracy camp.[130] At a deeper level, the causal link between external neutrality and the peaceful preservation of internal diversity is often misinterpreted. As seen in Section 2, the Swiss confederation adopted neutrality well before the system became multi-lingual so, while it is true that neutrality helped to keep the confederation together, for a long time this was in relation to religion, not language. Only between roughly 1870 and 1920 did neutrality play an important role in preserving national cohesion between the language communities. This shows that external neutrality and internal unity are only linked if external conflicts are structured by the *same issues* that structure internal cleavages; i.e. in Switzerland's case primarily religion and language. However, as international conflicts have long ceased to be structured by religion, in the sense of intra-Western

Christianity divisions, and language, in the sense of struggles between linguistically homogenous mono-national European states, one could argue that the link between Switzerland's neutrality and its internal diversity is weaker now than at any time in the last 500 years.

It is often argued that primarily 'civic' nationalities – such as the Swiss one – are more fragile than ethno-linguistic ones because they are to a degree 'artificial' rather than natural. Yet this vision is problematic in several respects. To begin with, nations are not 'natural' in any way, they are always socially and politically constructed 'imaginary communities'.[131] Moreover, all nations are intrinsically political because nationalism – i.e. the idea that political systems should be legitimised by collective identities – is, by definition, a political concept. If anything, because primarily civic nations cannot be based on shared ethnicity and language, their 'construction' has to be stronger and, as a result, citizen identification with them is likely to be more intense.[132] Likewise, the fact that primarily civic identities are often more discussed and contested than primarily ethno-linguistic ones does not mean that they are necessarily weaker. As Zimmer put it: 'because its polyethnic composition deviated so obviously from the nationalist norm and had its legitimacy periodically contested both domestically and abroad, it was never self-evident but had to be constantly reasserted and redefined'.[133] On the other hand, it may be true that primarily political nations depend to a greater extent on the 'performance' of their political and economic system than do those based more on ethno-linguistic unity.[134] After all regional nationalisms – and their accompanying demands for secession – would hardly arise if independence or joining another state were not perceived to be more attractive than the status quo. From this perspective, Switzerland seems safe enough for the time being as comparisons with its neighbours in the political and economic fields are almost invariably to its advantage.[135]

Therefore, if it may be plausible to argue that linguistic conflict is not absent in Switzerland but merely dormant,[136] the likelihood that it may acquire sufficient saliency to generate linguistic nationalisms and threaten the unity of the country – a Belgian or Canadian scenario, so to speak – still seems to be dwarfed by the extremely solid factors of unity discussed above. Thus worries that the nineteenth century thinker Keller's prediction, that Switzerland would become redundant once its neighbours became democratic,[137] might materialise soon appear to be as unfounded now as they ever were. Thus, McRae's observations that 'in broad perspective, language frictions have been minimal throughout Swiss history' and 'language divisions have never constituted the dominant line of cleavage'[138] are still very much valid today and all the evidence reviewed in this chapter points to a very low probability indeed that Switzerland will become multi-national in the foreseeable future.

7 Conclusions

As Switzerland is often portrayed as a multi-national federation, this chapter has sought to investigate such a claim and expose its fallacy. The core contention

advanced here is that not only is Switzerland not a multi-national state today but it has never been such. Since the birth of the modern idea of nationalism in the eighteenth century, national identification in Switzerland, with a few minor exceptions, has been with the country as a whole – even before it became a single state – rather than with the cantons or the language communities. Its being mono-national in spite of being multi-lingual can be explained by the combined effect of several factors at play throughout its history. Although some of these factors are almost purely 'structural', a crucial role has clearly been played by what McRae called 'attitudinal predispositions'.[139] Most of these factors still play a role today and indicate that Switzerland is highly unlikely to become multi-national in the foreseeable future. The political architecture of the Swiss federation reflects this mono-national character and its fundamental features – which have been exceptionally stable since 1848 – are likely to endure well into the twenty-first century.

What has the Swiss case to say for the debate on multi-national federations? The answer essentially depends on what specific question is asked. Two main ones can be identified. The first is how can multi-national societies be successfully accommodated within a single, albeit federal, state? The second is rather how can multi-lingual countries avoid becoming multi-national and thus be subject to secessionist threats and possibly civil strife? If the debate is framed by the first question, it should not be surprising that there is little multi-national federations can learn from the Swiss case both in constitutional-institutional terms and in broader political cultural ones. As shown above, Swiss society is not multi-national and Switzerland's institutions are not designed to accommodate multi-nationalism. Attempts to identify features of the Swiss model that could be applied in conflict-torn countries, without taking into account the crucial factor of Switzerland's mono-nationalism, are thus profoundly misguided. Moreover, while there appear to be cases of previously largely mono-national states becoming multi-national, I am not aware of any empirical examples of the opposite process, from multi- to mono-nationalism. Once a community is sufficiently mobilised to acquire a sense of national identity, 'reversing' it looks extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible.

If the debate is rather framed by the second question, then Switzerland can legitimately be seen as a model. Perhaps the most fundamental, yet rather obvious point, is that it is not 'objective' diversity – be it linguistic, religious or whatever – that makes a country multi-national but how such diversity is politically 'constructed' and perceived. Because of this socially constructed nature, attitudes and values are absolutely crucial in determining whether language divisions are politicised and exploited for nationalist mobilisation or not. However, without going into a deeper discussion of structure and agency – which would, of course, be well beyond the scope of this chapter – it is clear that a great deal of the 'agency' displayed throughout Swiss history in the direction of mono-nationality was also shaped by the given 'structure' of cleavages, the balance of power between them, etc. and that it was contingent on the particular historical phase in which it took place. What was possible in the 1760s or in the 1840s

would not necessarily be so in the 2010s. As so often when concluding analyses of Swiss politics, one is thus led to argue that the fascinating exceptionalism of Switzerland – so rewarding to scholarly investigation – makes it also exceedingly difficult to use the country as a model that could be imitated elsewhere.

Notes

1 To give just a few examples: Kellas (1991: 3), Kymlicka (1995: esp. 18; 2001: esp. 96), Abizadeh (2002: 498), McGarry and O'Leary (2007: 181, 197), Bhattacharya (2007) and Ipperciel (2007) explicitly present Switzerland as multi-national while Gagnon (2001: 322–3; 2007: 17), Erk (2003: 68), Swenden (2006: 244), Pinder (2007: 7) and Watts (2007: 246) are more circumspect but reject the notion of the country being mono-national.

2 See McGarry and O'Leary (2007: 189) for a list of advocates of multinational federalism.

3 The Swiss themselves are not immune from this bias: in 1875 Bluntschli (quoted in Brühlmeier, 1992: 28) referred to the 'international Swiss nation' while Kriesi (1999: 18) still argues that it is really a 'federation of nations'. Hughes (1993: 156) also referred to the country as a '*confederacy* of ethnicities' (emphasis in original).

4 See Anderson (1991: 136–9) and Bhattacharyya (2007: 221–2) although they do not specify whether the alleged 'ethnic nationalisms' should be understood as canton-based or language-based.

5 See, among others, Dalberg-Acton (1907[1862]: 294–5), Mill (1977[1865]: 546), Renan (1947[1882]: 893), Seton-Watson (1977: 75), Hobsbawn (1992: 65), Stojanovic (2000) and Grin (2002). Although in less clear terms, also Linz (1997: 15) and Burgess (2006: 120) accept that the country is not multi-national.

6 Tully (2001: 2).

7 See Seton-Watson (1977: 1) and Kriesi (1999: 13–14).

8 On the choice of 1291 as the founding date of Switzerland, see Zimmer (2003: 209–36).

9 On the tensions between the cities and the valley communities before the Reformation, see Kohn (1956: 20).

10 See Zimmer (2003: 24–5).

11 See Capitani (1983: 130–1).

12 See Hughes (1975: 90–2) and Capitani (1983: 137).

13 See Capitani (1983: 137).

14 Sablonier, quoted in Zimmer (2003: 21).

15 Thus, while at the official level Switzerland became multi-lingual only in 1798 at the societal level multi-lingualism had been present for much longer.

16 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: esp. 211).

17 See Zimmer (2003: 85).

18 See Lerner (2004: 74–5) and Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 224).

19 See Zimmer (2003: 102–10).

20 By then the old *Orte* were commonly referred to as cantons, see Germann and Klöti (2004: 318).

21 What is now the Jura canton was incorporated into Berne canton and only acquired cantonal status in 1979.

22 A crucial role was played by the expansion of the press, which led to Switzerland having one of the highest newspaper densities in the world; see Zimmer (2003: 126).

23 See Tilly (2004: 184–7).

24 See Zimmer (2003: 120–2); also Aubert (1974: esp. 20) and Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 249–58).

25 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 262).
26 Berne was the largest canton and the strongest military power and had been the leader of the conservative reaction in 1815; see Kohn (1956: 68).
27 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 263), Kohn (1956: 106) and Remak (1993).
28 Even leading liberal voices such as the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* had doubts on whether the people were ready to accept a national parliament, see Zimmer (2003: 136).
29 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 267–9) and Kohn (1956: 110); external pressures probably had an effect too, see Stojanovic (2000: 45).
30 See Zimmer (2003: 135).
31 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 299).
32 Fleiner (2002: 98).
33 The two most emblematic examples are probably defence and the legal codes.
34 See Capitani (1983: 153) and Zimmer (2003: 19).
35 Zimmer (2003: 20–1).
36 Zimmer (2003: 42; more widely, pp. 41–79) and Capitani (1983: 153). Moreover, Zimmer argues (2003: 50) that the Helvetic Society had 'no counterpart in Europe in the late eighteenth century' and that, in guise of comparison, up to 1800 there was virtually no 'German' nationalist activity.
37 See Frei (1983) and Zimmer (2003: esp. 55–65); the myth of the Alps and of their 'role' in shaping the Swiss character was also prominent, see de Capitani (1983: 154–5) and Zimmer (2003: 205–6).
38 See Zimmer (2003: 41, 69, 71, 78).
39 Zimmer (2003: 49; more widely pp. 47–49) and Capitani (1983: 153–5).
40 See Kohn (1956: 26).
41 French and Italian were made official languages of the Republic on an equal footing with German, see McRae (1983: 40) and Zimmer (2003: 87). More widely on the idea of the Swiss nation under the Helvetic Republic, see Kohn (1956: 45) and Lerner (2004: 74). On education in particular, see Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 226–7) and Capitani (1983: 162–3).
42 Zimmer (2003: 89).
43 Already pointed out long ago by Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 229) and Kohn (1956: 36).
44 Open air popular assembly of all citizens.
45 Zimmer (2003: 102–10).
46 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 237–9), Andrey (1983: 21–3) and Bendix (1992: 768–9, 774–5, 783).
47 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 257), Kohn (1956: 67–74), Zimmer (2003: esp. 21, 28–32, 130, 139)
48 See Zimmer (2003: esp. 152).
49 See, among others, Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 260), Kriesi (1999: 14) and Zimmer (2003: 149).
50 See Zimmer (2003: 11, 15).
51 See Zimmer (2003: 148–51; also 104–8) and Kohn (1956: 59). Lerner also points out that, in the 1790s, representative democracy was perceived as antithetical to true democracy in the *Landsgemeinde* cantons of central Switzerland. For them, 'any taint of representation was equivalent to aristocracy' (2004: 69).
52 Quoted in Kohn (1956: 100).
53 Although the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism', in the loose usage characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century, were sometimes applied to a canton as well as to Switzerland as a whole – see Andrey (1983: 246), Brühlmeier (1992: 24) and Zimmer (2003: 112) – this should not be understood as signalling the existence of cantonal 'nationalisms' as we understand the word today.
54 Zimmer (2003: 150).

55 The anachronistic language was part of the strategy of 'appeasement' vis-à-vis the losers of the civil war. The continued use of the term confederation in the official designation of the state as well as a host of other elements – such as the national day – should, be understood in the same light, i.e. intended to stress symbolic continuity rather than rupture with the pre-1848 past.
56 Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 269). See also Brühlmeier (1992: 25), Hughes (1993: 157) and Zimmer (2003: 135).
57 Not by coincidence, 1891 marked the first official celebration of the pact of 1291 – thus also celebrating the *Waldstätte* as the cradle of the Swiss nation – and saw the first Catholic Conservative minister accepted into the Federal Council. On the Catholics' acceptance of Swiss nationalism in this period, see also Kriesi (1999: 15).
58 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 277–80 and 309–11), Kohn (1956: 120) and McRae (1983: 44).
59 These were centred on the myths of the Forest Cantons and the Tell legend and, appropriately enough, the central festivities took place in Schwyz and Uri, see Zimmer (2003: 163).
60 See Zimmer (2003: 175, 177, 209, 219, 198); on the national holiday see also Bendix (1992: 776–9).
61 Zimmer (2003: 167, 195).
62 Some German-speaking Swiss – most notably the great historian Jacob Burckhardt – rejected the notion of a Swiss nation and subscribed to the idea of a pan-German ethno-linguistic nation, see Kohn (1956: 81, 89–95, 121–6), yet this remained a very marginal view; see also Zimmer (2003: 198–203).
63 See, among others, Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 344–5) and Jost (1983: 94–5, 122–4).
64 It was the first time the Swiss electorate voted on a treaty. The League was endorsed by 85.3 per cent of French speakers and rejected by 54.1 per cent among German speakers.
65 See McRae (1983: 232).
66 Revealingly, the national day celebrations of 1941 were the most grandiose and passionately felt ever, see Bendix (1992: 779–80).
67 See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 366), Schmid (1981: 31, 122) and McRae (1983: 45, 69); see also Schmid (1981: 85, 90) on the difficult relationship between German-speaking Swiss and the Germans.
68 On the Jura conflict see, among others, McRae (1983: 201–8) and Pichard (2004).
69 Tilly (1993: 47).
70 Zimmer (2003: 245).
71 See Anderson (1991: 136–9). And so, of course, is Bhattacharyya (2007: 221–2) whose argument is based on Anderson's. Bendix (1992: 786), Stojanovic (2000: 58) and Zimmer (2003: xiv) are also critical of Anderson's characterisation.
72 Zimmer (2003: 131, 166).
73 See for instance McRae (1983: 74–92; 114–17).
74 For instance, Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 29) stress that at the time of the French – and Helvetic – revolution, French-speaking Protestants did not identify with traditionally Catholic France.
75 McRae (1983: 41).
76 Ibid., 232.
77 Although with some exceptions, see Kohn (1956: 17), McRae (1983: 139, 174) and Capitani (1983: 119–20); in all likelihood, this was due to all three languages being major literary languages of high culture.
78 Hence, nationalist politics focussed on '"reconquering" the urban metropolis', as Arel (2001: 77) put it, had no *raison d'être* in Switzerland.
79 See Schmid (1981: 29) and McRae (1983: 62–7, 70–4, 96); also Arel (2001: 78). It is important to bear in mind that in most everyday life situations, 'German speakers' do not actually speak standard German, or *Hochdeutsch*, but a variety of Alemannic dialects.

80 See Dunn (1972: 18).
81 With the exception of the Romansch-speaking community, of course, whose fate is probably largely due to the absence, until very recently, of a standardised, written form of the language.
82 See also Kohn (1956: 15).
83 As Grin points out (2002: 271–2), the French-speaking and Italian-speaking areas of Switzerland have never been part of France or Italy and possess a distinct *cultural* heritage from that of their neighbours.
84 For a general introduction to the Swiss political system see Church (2004), for more detailed analysis see Klöti *et al.* (2007).
85 Six cantons, which are called half-cantons, have one seat only.
86 This consensual feature of the Swiss political system is often misinterpreted as a response to the country's linguistic divisions. In fact, it is primarily a response to the introduction of the optional referendum and the effects the latter had on representative politics, see Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 39).
87 Twenty full and six half cantons. Half cantons have the same status as full cantons save halved representation in the Council of States and halved weighting in the calculation of the cantonal majority in some referendums.
88 See Armingeon (2000: 115).
89 See, among others, Schmid (1981: 21).
90 Romansch is also an official language where relations with Romansch-speaking citizens are concerned.
91 See Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 27, 45–8).
92 See Kohn (1956: 127).
93 See Steiner (2002: 108–10). However, in the 1970s religion was still a more powerful determinant of voting patterns than either language or class, see Lijphart (1979: 447).
94 See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 28); though Steiner (2002: 112) reports some contrasting evidence for the more recent period.
95 See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 31). Kriesi and his collaborators also found (pp. 46, 67–75) that foreign policy and institutional reform as the two areas most likely to witness divergent preferences between the language communities.
96 See references at footnote 68 above.
97 Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 53, 76, 15–19) and Fleiner (2002: 102). Schmid (1981: 111) had already found very similar perceptions among young people in the mid-1970s. However, Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 46) report that French and Italian speakers' attachment to Switzerland declined in the 1990s.
98 The data reported in Kriesi *et al.* (1996) are now more than ten years old but are still the most comprehensive available.
99 See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 55–7); also Schmid (1981: 96–8).
100 Ibid. See also Schmid (1981: 71–82) on the fact that German and French speakers largely share the same interpretation of Swiss history and its accompanying 'myths'.
101 See also Froidevaux (1997: 41).
102 See also Stojanovic (2000: 66).
103 One could go even further and say that – with the very minor exception of a small Ticinese movement advocating union with Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, see Kohn (1956: 122) and McRae (1983: 214) – there has never been a language community-based secessionist movement in Switzerland. Even the *Rassemblement Jurassien*, despite their leader's rhetorical emphasis on the *ethnie française* and occasional toying with the idea of independence, never seriously contemplated a secession of the *Suisse romande* to join France or become independent, see McRae (1983: esp. 169) and Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 6).
104 Defined here as a movement aiming to give institutional form to the language communities and demanding a degree of 'repatriation' of powers from the federal level

to the latter. It is worth bearing in mind that, as McRae (1983: 55) pointed out: 'Linguistic regions ... are only a statistical concept in Switzerland, having no administrative or legal consequences'. Between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, *Suisse romande*-wide regionalist parties appeared but quickly faded away due to lack of support; see Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 8).

105 See McRae (1983: 96) and Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 58–62).

106 See also Grin (2002: 274–5).

107 See Armingeon (2000: 120).

108 See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 55–7).

109 Ibid. See also Schmid (1981: 79–80) on how the nested nature of the relationship between identification with the cantons and with the federation transpires from history schoolbooks and Miller (2001: 301–7) for the distinction between rival and nested identities.

110 Given the confederal character of the system prior to 1848, separation from Switzerland before that date would not have amounted to a secession. Even so, no significant cantonal movements advocating withdrawal from the Confederation prior to the foundation of the federal state emerged. Even La Harpe, for instance, the inspirator of the Vaudois revolution of 1798, advocated for Vaud the status of 'independent republic' within the Swiss confederation rather than annexation to France, see Lerner (2004: 60). In the 1980s, two movements advocating independence were active in Geneva but their following was minimal, see Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 7, 9).

111 See Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: esp. 26–31) and Albertazzi (2006). A *Bernische Volkspartei* was active in the 1880s, see Kohn (1956: 127).

112 Despite its *de jure* parity with German and French, Italian is de facto very much marginalised in Swiss public life to an enormously larger extent than French is, see McRae (1983: esp. 128–38).

113 Moreover, whereas in German- and French-speaking Switzerland the impact of television has strengthened the visibility of the language communities as opposed to the cantonal ones, in Ticino it has naturally cemented their fusion, hence, indirectly the strength of the canton as the only *political* entity able to speak for the cantonal-cum-language community. Yet, identification with the canton has not replaced identification with the linguistic community: it is instructive that the Italian-language university recently set up in the Ticino is called *Università della Svizzera Italiana* not *Università del Ticino* or similar.

114 A total of 78 out of 162 years; see Index of Federal Councillors since 1848 (2010).

115 Apart from a very early episode, see Friedman Goldstein (2001: 101).

116 Hughes (1993: 156), though he also stressed that "national Swiss patriotism in all circumstances prevails over the cantonal" (ibid).

117 As Friedrich List famously called it in the nineteenth century, see Kohn (1956: 57).

118 Fleiner (2002: 111); on the communes in general see Horber-Papazian (2007).

119 Fleiner (2002: 116).

120 Armingeon (2000: 114).

121 Miller (2001: 304) is thus misguided in placing Switzerland in the same category as Belgium, Canada, Spain and the UK.

122 As Sciarini *et al.* (2002: 79–80), among others, do.

123 Zimmer (2003: esp. 10, 78); see also Miller (2001: 306–7).

124 See Centlivres and Schnapper (1991).

125 Neither the 1874 constitution nor, a fortiori, the 1848 one ever achieved anything remotely resembling the status of the constitution in the United States. In the referendum called to approve the current constitution, only 36 per cent of the electorate bothered to vote.

126 See concerns voiced by Kriesi (1999: 20–1), Sciarini *et al.* (2002: 75–6) and Steiner (2002: 114–19). For a more recent and more optimistic assessment, see Dardanelli (2006: 24).

127 An interesting comparator here is Canada, where the process of centralisation is said to have significantly contributed to Quebeckers' alienation from the Canadian federation hence fuelling support for secession, see Gagnon (2007: esp. 24).
128 On the question of cantonal fragmentation see Kriesi (1999: 19) and Armingeon (2000: 117). For an example of the proposed reforms, see Blöchliger (2005) and Frey *et al.* (2006).
129 See, among others, Sciarini *et al.* (2002: 74).
130 Nor were such feelings absent during the Cold War, when the idea of a *malaise helvétique* was voiced by some intellectuals, see Kriesi (1999: 13).
131 See, among others, Gellner (1997).
132 This had already been observed in the 1870s and 1880s by Carl Hilty and Ernest Renan, see Brühlmeier (1992: 26).
133 Zimmer (2003: 10).
134 On this point, see, among others, Sciarini *et al.* (2002: 59) and Seton-Watson (1977: 77).
135 On the basis of the latest available data, Switzerland has higher satisfaction with democracy, higher GDP per capita, lower public deficit, lower public debt, lower interest rates, lower taxes, lower unemployment, lower inflation and lower corruption than either Germany, France or Italy while Zurich and Geneva regularly top the rankings for the cities with the highest quality of life worldwide.
136 See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 77) and Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 27).
137 Cited in Sciarini *et al.* (2002: 80). Bluntschli also voiced a very similar prophecy, see Brühlmeier (1992: 28). More recently, both Hughes (1993: 156) and Fleiner (2002: 103) expressed veiled doubts about whether Swiss identity will prevail over linguistic and religious allegiances forever.
138 McRae (1983: 46 and 111).
139 Ibid., p. 239; see also Fleiner (2002: 105).

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