Since the disintegration of the socialist camp and the Soviet Union, which triggered a new wave of state reorganization, nationalist mobilization, and minority conflict in Europe, possible alternatives to the homogeneous nation-state have once again become a major focus of attention for politicians and political scientists. Unquestionably, there are other instances of the successful "civilization" of linguistic strife and nationality conflicts; but the Swiss Confederation is rightly seen as an outstanding example of the successful political integration of differing ethnic affiliations. 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." Whether modern Switzerland is described as a multilingual "nation by will" or a multicultural polity, the fact is that suggestions about using the Swiss "model" to settle violent nationality-conflicts have been a recurrent phenomenon since 1848 – most recently, for example, in the proposals for bringing peace to Cyprus and Bosnia. However, remedies such as this are flawed by their erroneous belief that the confederate cantons are ethnic entities. All in all, the interest in "applying" the pattern appears to stand in gross disproportion to the exiguous knowledge about the political system and history of Switzerland. But you have to know and understand what you want to apply. That is why I begin by explaining how and why the political integration of the disparate parts of Switzerland works. 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.

The birth of Swiss quadrilingualism can be dated precisely. It began with the Helvetic Republic in 1798. The process of state-formation, which began much earlier, has exclusively German origins. The fact that the confederates launched out over the Gotthard Pass in the late Middle Ages, and that mighty Bern in particular penetrated deep into French-speaking territory, in no way contradicts this. These areas were either allies with lesser rights, or else subject territories – perhaps belonging to a canton, as was the case with Bernese-ruled Vaud, or being ruled as "joint dominions" by the all the confederates in rotation, as were Ticino and the Aargau. Only when the French revolutionary troops marched into the country did the principles of modern democracy triumph over the ancient republican oligarchies. Switzerland entered an age of political upheavals which was to last for fifty years, ending only with the adoption of the modern-day constitution in 1848. One peculiarity of Swiss development is that the revolutionary principles of popular sovereignty and political equality did not have to battle it out with divine right or the institution of bondage. As a result, they were able in many respects to link back into the traditions of the old confederation and republics, ignoring the patrician overlords of the ancien régime. III III Apart from the tussles over political equality and universal (male) suffrage, the prime aims of the decades of contention between the forces of revolution and the forces of Restoration in Switzerland were the emancipation of the allies and subject territories and their promotion to the status of sovereign and equal cantons, and the creation of a centralized executive. The true act of constitution of the modern, multilingual nation came in the early stages of the half home-grown, half imposed revolution: the élites in the French- and Italian-speaking areas opposed annexation to, respectively, the French and Cisalpine republics and determined to stay within the confederation. Specifically, Ticino and Valais decided against the nationality principle and in favour of Switzerland. They reckoned that, as sovereign and equal cantons, they would enjoy a greater measure of political participation than they would as outlying districts of homogeneous, hypercentralistic nation-states. Democratic self-government was still distinct from the narrow ethnically based right to self-determination that emerged later on. In the Sonderbund war of 1847, the radical and liberal cantons, having triumphed over the traditional-cum-Catholic forces who sought to hold on to their old particularist sovereignties and privileges and opposed any kind of standardization, went on to found the modern federal state. This anticipated
development in Europe’s Year of Revolutions: with the creation of its federal state in 1848, Switzerland, as is well known, won itself a place in the vanguard of the democratic advance in Europe. The equal status of French and Italian as national languages has been constitutionally recognized since that date. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the ethnically diverse composition of Switzerland played a remarkably minor political role. It was only after the formation of the Italian and German nation-states that multilingualism began to be depicted as an intrinsic and almost sacred attribute. As a counter to the power of ethno-nationalism, which was then mushrooming all over Europe, attempts began to be made to portray the political “nation by will”, transcending language and nationality, as an antithesis, or even to recast the lack of an “objective nation” as a virtue, as a specifically European, civilizational “mission” entrusted to Switzerland. What has probably always been the problem of Switzerland’s linguistic-cultural differences – the contrast between the Alemannic majority and French minority – has, naturally, always come under the greatest strain when Germany and France have gone to war with one another. For, though it may be natural for most Swiss to understand nationally simply to mean their shared citizenship, it is equally natural for the French Swiss to look culturally and intellectually to Paris, and for the German Swiss to look to Germany – though this link has always had many more facets to it, and has always been more tense, particularly in this century. Whereas the Franco- Prussian War produced only rudimentary antagonisms in Switzerland – ultimately assuaged by pan-Swiss irritation at the triumphalist German Reich – the four-year struggle between Germany and France after 1914 tore open the “rift” between French-speaking Switzerland and German-speaking Switzerland to a perilous degree, at least within the political and military elite. According to many historians, the internal split during the First World War, when the military threat IV to Switzerland was not so great, was immeasurably more dangerous than in the Franco-Prussian War, which posed the greatest-ever military threat to its existence. In 1839, under the banner of the so-called “intellectual defence of the country”, Raeto- Romansch, then still not a standardized language, was solemnly elevated to the status of fourth national language, as a deliberate attempt to distance Switzerland from ethnicist and nationalistic currents. Since Raeto-Romansch is spoken only in Graubünden, and is one of three languages used there, the number of official languages at federal level was left at three, for practical reasons. However important the equality of all four languages in Switzerland is, the answer to the puzzle does not lie – as is often claimed in the specialist literature on nationality and minority conflicts – in the relationship between the country’s different ethno-national parts. There is no mention in the constitution either of the latter’s autonomy or of any guarantees or safeguards for minorities. If, as is often claimed in Swiss self-portrayals, special provisions are unnecessary because the language and minority issues were settled before ever they could become a problem, this points to the real key to an understanding of Switzerland: the cantons. From this point on, they cannot be seen as out of the framework of the federative association of independent states and groups (depending on the constellation) in a minority in the political decision-making process; it creates the following: – Where religious, territorial-cum-cantonal, and ethnic affiliations are not congruent, but cut the Swiss people of differing language-groups who had only rudimentary knowledge of another national language besides their own. However, the extensive debates and parliamentary deliberations about the language clause in the revisions of the constitution have also exposed that the idea of a multilingual Switzerland was in its death-throes and that even the Italian language was not beyond the negative. None the less, study of Switzerland, and a knowledge of the country, will provide some helpful pointers for the international debate about nationalism. The most important of these are probably multi-lingualism in Switzerland. These were examined from every angle by a committee of experts. It concluded that Raeto- Romansch was in its death-throes and that even the Italian language was not beyond danger. In addition, the experts claimed that the rapid advance of English and also the Mundartwelle – the penetration of the media, and to some extent also the domain of the written word, by Swiss German dialect – marked a trend that put the Swiss national identity in jeopardy: four-language Switzerland was in danger of becoming two-and-a-half language Switzerland. This may have meant the reduction of Italian to internal use, alongside German and French, or the prospect of English becoming the language of V communication between Swiss people of differing language-groups who had only rudimentary knowledge of another national language besides their own. However, the extensive debates and parliamentary deliberations about the language clause in the revisions of the constitution have also exposed that the idea of a multilingual Switzerland was in its death-throes; it creates the following: – Indeed, opposing – principles for preserving linguistic harmony in Switzerland. Anyone who is familiar with this great national challenge – which is far from being finally resolved – will take care not to go around hawking multilingual Switzerland as a ready-made blueprint for solving nationality conflicts. The revised language clause, which was eventually adopted in a referendum in 1996, leaves almost everything as it was. Since it is impossible to ignore the way in which Switzerland came into being, or its democratic institutions, or its political culture, geared to compromise and balance, any attempt to distil a few “inexpensive” remedies from it, for use on differently configured situations, is precluded. To this extent, the question in my title must be answered in the negative. None the less, study of Switzerland, and a knowledge of the country, will provide some helpful stimuli and pointers for the international debate about nationalism. The most important of these are probably the following: – Where religious, territorial-cum-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 group (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. – 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 neighbouring nation-states are extremely centralistically structured. – Combined with extensive power-sharing, the very marked ideological handing-down of historical particularisms and heterogeneous peculiarities within the framework of the whole helps prevent democracy from being reduced to the majority principle, and the majority culture from being asserted to the detriment of the others. Switzerland has developed numerous forms of over-representation and active economic and cultural support for minorities as a way of ensuring their integration. – Switzerland’s concordance-based democracy differs not just from the Westminster model of parliamentary rule, but from many others too, by virtue of 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,
The study develops a model that views intercultural conflict as a stressor and found international students’ conflicts are directly related to decreased work satisfaction, increased stress and decreased psychological wellbeing. Similarly, Babiker et al. (1980) theorised that cultural differences were the main cause of stress experienced by sojourners. This is further suggested in Shupe’s (2007) study that states the more different people are in terms of cultural background, the more likely their interactions will result in damaging misunderstandings. The results of these studies theorise that...