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Istanbul's Italian Levantines among the Other Non-Muslims: a Community's Fortune and Dissolution Despite Identity Preservation

"We have behaved very well with foreigners.
This is the cause of all our misfortunes."
Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842-1919)

Abstract:

The Italian Levantine community has been living in Istanbul without mixing with the ruling majorities for almost a millennium. Now it is on the threshold of dissolution despite its still preserved unique civilization. How could identity be kept for such a long time? What was the role of the mid-19th century revitalized minority environment? How did Turkish republican xenophobic nationalism affect this environment? What is the real state of the Levantine's identity preservation? How can their lack of integration into Turkish society – rather than any compelled mass exodus – endanger their civilization in a context where the minority environment has vanished?

Introduction

Some lands and cities seem to owe to their very geography the fate of an imperial position. These are centres of convergence, knots of far-reaching webs, places of recurring migrations and settlements over the centuries, such that the distinction between migrant and minority communities becomes quite pointless. The consciousness and will to keep taking on an imperial role imply both a political, sociological, juridical set of rules and a social outlook not only based on tolerance but even on the positive endeavour to encourage immigration and the peaceful coexistence of migrant/minority communities, i.e. to endorse and enforce multi-ethnicity and a cosmopolitan culture.

The opposite of such a framework is of course the ideal nation-state, aiming at its ethnic, “national” homogeneity as best as it can. In particular, the building process of a nation-state from an empire is necessarily characterized by the implementation of nationalism, which in case of the presence of numerous, strong and ancient non-native communities can easily turn into xenophobia.

Indeed Constantinople/Istanbul has experienced, perhaps at their pinnacle, both of these features. Ever since the Romans, imperial Byzantium has been a crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, Europe and the Levant, the Balkans and the Arabic-Persian-Central Asian (Turkic) cultural trilateral area; from the Byzantine era, Constantinople has been the principal Port of the Levant trading with the Italian Maritime Republics (“*Repubbliche Marinare*”); and the 1453 Ottoman conquest of the city was certainly not a breaking point along this line: thence came the first Italian merchant settlements in the city, their continuity under Ottoman rule and thereafter.

On the contrary, the breaking point was the building of the Turkish Republic in 1923, from the ruins of an empire whose disintegration had been hurried by several wars of independence and secessionist movements throughout the 19th century, urged by the post-World War I military occupation by the European powers aiming at its final dismemberment. The new born Turkish Republic was a threatened state, in many ways distrusting its resilience due to a lengthy decline. Turkish nationalism has taken many different forms during its nation-state building, just as it is now under the pressure of the post-modern decline of the nation-state¹; most of these resulted in xenophobic acts, from the 1928 linguistic restrictions on foreign languages till the 1955 anti-Greek riots known as the “6-7th September Events”.

Across the breadth of the Byzantine-Ottoman-Turkish Istanbul’s ethnic mosaic, we have only investigated the Italian Levantines and Italian Jews, who are amongst the smallest communities of non-Muslims in number, well below the *Rum* or non-Hellenic Greeks (whose name recalls the Eastern *Roman* Empire, they have never migrated from), the Armenians (among the first Christianised nations in history, who have periodically migrated westwards from their native area between Mesopotamia and the Caucasus, which they have always shared with the Kurds among others), the Ottoman Jews (mostly Sephardic exiled from 15th century Spain).

Levantines is the name given to European descendents of the Levant Ports settlers², whenever they have settled: among those the Italians (or Italics) have always been the most numerous, although never exceeding 12,000 to 14,000 people, a peak reached around the end of the

¹ Murat BELGE is one of the foremost Turkish scholars on nationalism. On his link between nationalism and the different stages of the nation-state, see Belge 2006.

² Some scholars, such as Livio MISSIR di LUSIGNANO and Rinaldo MARMARA discredit the term and prefer talking about « Latins », but this latter name can only be referred to the members of catholic families who were already present on the empire territories before the Ottoman conquest, and therefore became Ottoman subjects. Some of them eventually acquired a European citizenship, often not related with their original provenance.

1920's³. A conventional dating of the Constantinople Levantine community's birth is 1204, i.e. the date of the Latins' conquest of the city during the 4th Crusade and their fortification of the Genoese district of Galata, whose tower is still visible and visited today. This makes it the oldest European colony in the world. Ever since then, the Italian presence has been uninterrupted and new migration flows have followed from various parts of Europe, at different times.

As the title of this paper indicates, however, the analysis of the Italian Levantines is to be understood as non-exclusive of other communities, for the Levantine community has been developing inside the wider environment that used to include the whole of non-Muslim minorities. It is important to underline that the Levantine community has perpetuated itself and moreover has been able to create an original, unprecedented and unrepeatable civilization thanks to the existence of this unique social environment. Rather than being assimilated by, and instead of integrating themselves into the ruling majority, the Levantines have been given the chance not only to preserve their collective identity – that is their faith and traditions, languages, institutions, habits including laws, ways of life, inside their relatively closed urban frame – but also, across the centuries, to give birth to a huge civilization. This civilization had the capability and the momentum to feed itself, i.e. to produce new works, discourse, literature, myths and to “civilize” the newcomers from Europe, who ended up being “levantinised” in their culture and even in the languages they were able to speak, after just one generation⁴.

Unfortunately, the Levantine community is now on the threshold of disappearance. We were lucky enough to meet the last “levantinised” generation, who are well over seventy years of age and whose valuable testimonies we have gathered. The younger generation has mostly deserted Turkey and migrated like many Turks have or dream to. Since post-World War 2, Turkey's migration balance is in the negative. The newcomers transit rather than settle, and they certainly don't get “levantinised”. There have been emigration flows of minority members due to a hostile political climate, but this has not been the case for Levantines. The unfavourable climate for some minorities can and possibly should be charged with destroying the minority environment.

This is why, rather than talking about disappearance of the Levantine community, we have chosen to call it “dissolution”: we are going to demonstrate that if its foreseeable imminent death is the result of the environment as its necessary condition, the sufficient condition of its death is demography, by no means related to Turkish policies. As for the Levantine civilization, it now kept alive in the memories of only a handful of precious elderly people, and just as few good-willing researchers' works.

³ The question of population counting is always quite hard in the Ottoman Empire since no census existed. As for the censuses of the Turkish Republic, they are quite unreliable insofar as linguistic and ethnic minorities are concerned, for ideological reasons. As far as Consulate registers are concerned, which we have been thoroughly analysed in our doctoral work, they only used to register new entries, and were very inaccurate about departures or deaths, so that in no given moment a computation is possible. Not to mention, as for the Italian citizens, that the Consulate of the Sardinian Kingdom, later Italian Kingdom, only opened its residence in Constantinople a few decades before Italy's unification.

The earliest population estimations come from Pontifical delegates, including Mgr. Cedulini sent by Gregory XII in 1580, quoted by MARMARA (2003); some more recent ones are given by European visitors of the mid-19th century such as Baratta (1840) and Bessé (1854), both of whom are quoted by Sergio LA SALVIA (2007). For calculations during the 20th century until the year 2000 see the abridged divulgation version of our thesis, Pannuti 2006, *passim* but especially chapter V, or now the non-abridged version, Pannuti 2008, ch. III.

⁴ Civilizational, cultural, literary and mythological aspects of « Levantinité » have been for many years the axis of my research. See, besides Pannuti 2006 and Pannuti 2008 above-mentioned, Pannuti 2004, Pannuti 2006b and Pannuti 2007.

We shall therefore structure this paper into three parts: the first will examine the conditions for the Levantine community's existence and perpetuation, followed by the its regeneration in the 19th century; the second part will deal with the Turkish republican nationalism and its consequences in terms of xenophobic acts which caused the disappearance of the minority environment; the third part will concern the Levantines' proper "dissolution", a mixture of identity preservation and lack of integration. This latter has led to the end of "levantinisation", in the context of an absent environment and of their subjective (mythological) self-representation as a community in decline, and thereby, almost to the Levantine civilization's death.

I. Community's perpetuation and regeneration

Byzantine-Ottoman juridical bases

Ottoman Empire historians well know the meaning and implications of the word 'Capitulations': the treaties granted by the Ottoman sultans to Christian nations, conferring rights and privileges to their subjects residing in the imperial territories. Capitulations are the juridical framework of the existence and perpetuation of the Levantine community. What is not always remembered, however, is that of the first attribution of a district Constantinople to a foreign community, granting a wide range of liberties and autonomies, especially to monastic orders around which the first colonies developed, dates back May 1082, when the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos issued them in favour of the Venetians⁵. On June 2nd 1453, just four days after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, under the condition of the surrender of their district and of personal subjection to Sultan Mehmet II, the Latins of Pera, mostly Genoese by then, obtained the same privileges, which would be renewed by all subsequent sultans to all Europeans: Levantine community was thereafter set under Ottoman rule⁶.

Practically, Capitulation privileges can thus be enumerated: freedom of entry, transit and residence; freedom of faith and trade; freedom of estate purchase and property (at least by individuals); autonomous jurisdiction in both civil and penal affairs between non-Muslims; right of a dragoman (official interpreter)'s presence in the affairs including both Muslims and non-Muslims; domicile inviolability; wide liberties in succession and testamentary matters⁷. The Ottoman mark of this juridical system, in conformity with the Empire's theocratic nature, was to distinguish people – which, as we have pointed out, were presently still entirely formed of Ottoman *subjects* – according to their religious identity, into '*Millet*', commonly translated

⁵ Rinaldo MARMARA, (2007) p. 219.

⁶ The original text of the "*Capitulazioni di Sultan Mehmet con li Perotti*", written in Greek, was long kept in the aristocratic Levantine family, the Testas' archives. A manuscript of the first half of the 17th century, *Relazione dello stato della cristianità di Pera e Costantinopoli obediante al Sommo Pontefice Romano*, commented and published by the Italian Levantine historian Eugenio Dalleggio D'Alessio, contains an Italian translation of it, whose first paragraph is quoted hereunder:

"Essendo al presente comparsi gl'Ambasciatori Ballatan Pallavicino e Marchio de Franco con l'interprete loro Patritio per parte del Popolo e della Nobiltà di Pera, et in segno d'amicitia mi presentano la chiavi della terra loro, e fattisi sudditi e sottoposti a me, così ancora io con tal conditione gl'accetto che possino vivere, reggersi e governarsi sì come per il passato hanno fatto, senza ch'io vadi con l'esercito mio ad occupare in rovina loro la terra"

⁷ MORI (1906).

as ‘Nations’, among which the “*Millet-i Lâtin*” that characterised the Levantines⁸. Also, it was the highest religious authorities – the archbishop, the chief rabbi, the Greek/orthodox and Armenian/Gregorian patriarchs, etc. – who were given the charge of administrating justice inside their respective *Millet*, bearing the very rank of the Sublime Porte’s ministers. European migrants thereafter came with their own “foreign” subjection which they kept; they were referred to as ‘*Frenk*’ and benefited from the same legal status, thus *de facto* joining the Latin *Millet* and moreover mixing up by marriage, so that gradually an increasing number of Levantines became foreign subjects.

From the 15th until the mid-17th century, the sociological results of this system were: the utmost importance of religious institutions and of collective religious identity rather than any national one – unlike in Europe where national divisions were more and more enhanced by wars –, and the development of a sort of aristocracy not by land possession but often by the inherited dragoman function, i.e. an “aristocracy of clergymen and civil servants”. These features also applied to the other minorities, for instance the Greek/Orthodox so-called Phanar aristocracy.

In particular, the Levantine community was organised around the “*Magnifica Comunità di Pera*”, whose merchant families managed the monastic resources and estates. However a long period of decadence of these patricians, despite the struggles to keep their social status through marital alliances⁹, symbolised by the papal abrogation of the “*Magnifica Comunità*” in 1669, also influenced the community altogether. Meanwhile, the growing might of European states, their rivalries (particularly of France vs. the Central Empire) inside the diplomatic chessboard where the Ottomans had also entered, implied the rising influence of consulates – instead of the Catholic hierarchy – including in justice administration inside the *Millet-i Lâtin*. An extended agony would have awaited the Levantine community, despite its privileges, had a major revitalizing change not taken place in the mid-19th century, which boosted it to its apogee.

The mid-19th century turning point

The Ottomans had granted the Levantines the for-requisites for survival as a community: sufficient autonomy to keep their faith, their laws, their languages and their urban anchorage. Nevertheless they lacked the communitarian institutions to reach the degree of organization necessary to form an organic community. This came mainly from the outside, i.e. from the fresh migration waves coming from Italy during this period¹⁰. A whole set of circumstances help explain Constantinople’s regained attractiveness for Italians and their consequent migrations. On the Ottoman side, there was obviously the promulgation of the Gülhane Edict (or *Hatt-ı Şerif* of 1839), the first act of the Reform period (*Tanzimat*) which proclaimed equality before law for all Ottoman subjects, irrespective of their religion or any other distinction. This constitutional act had a strong symbolic importance in terms of guaranteeing

⁸ Having agreed on this terminology, we shall be very careful not to confuse “nationality” with “subjection”, later to become “citizenship” after the French Revolution. One could be “Ottoman subject of Greek/orthodox nationality” and most Levantines were, at least at the beginning of this historical process, “Ottoman subjects of Latin nationality”. Livio MISSIR di LUSIGNANO is rightfully very keen in pointing out these juridical aspects. See in particular, MISSIR (1976).

⁹ On this point see Nora ŞENI (2007).

¹⁰ For our doctoral research, we have interviewed 70 Levantines of different families, and one of our questions concerned their ancestor’s date of arrival in Turkey. The results were the following: 14 % were Latins’ descendents, 21 % emigrated in the first half of the 19th century, 31 % emigrated between 1850 and 1880, 22 % emigrated between 1880 and 1900, 12 % emigrated in the first decades of the 20th century.

religious freedom, although it had little momentum on Levantines, who were increasingly and rapidly becoming foreign citizens¹¹, and none at all on newcomers.

Besides, the economic environment of the empire's last decades was characterised by a profusion of Court expenditures in a struggling attempt to catch up with modernity: railways, transport, service supply infrastructures, the army's modernisation, new royal palace constructions and decoration; all those buildings and works appealed to European, mostly Italian engineers, craftsmen, artists and even simple workmen¹². The debts thus contracted – through the Imperial Ottoman Bank –, as well as the principal export monopolies were also directly managed by Levantines and Ottoman Jews (mostly Protégés). In this period, new typically Levantine professions were thus born or developed to unprecedented extents: ship-brokers, insurers, bankers, import-export agents, specialised technicians becoming industrialists, and all the lower workers of these sectors, new for Turkey, slightly late undergoing the well-known industrial revolution¹³.

On the Italian side, besides the commonplace reasons for mass emigration, which in that period still had a wider range of directions than it took later on, in particular around the Mediterranean (Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Malta, the Aegean islands), a post-Vienna Congress (1815) consequence has to be taken into account: Genoa was annexed to the Sardinian Kingdom, Venice to Austria. Both of these states were eager to implement a maritime policy towards the East, trying to get their share of the decaying Ottoman Empire¹⁴. The Sardinian Kingdom sent Count Ludovico Sauli to Constantinople in 1822, with the mission of negotiating the opening of a Consulate there; he actually did much more: he made a survey of the pitiful, lawless and rather wicked state of the community he found, and set the bases of its disciplining under the future consular authority¹⁵. The Austrians, rather than Venice, used

¹¹ In the 19th century, there already existed a new juridical status: the “Foreign Protégé”, given to Ottoman subjects somehow at the service of, or in relation with a European Consulate and sometimes also to citizens of a European state without consular representation at the Sublime Porte. With time, and for almost everybody after the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, the “Protégé” status turned into full foreign citizenship. Therefore some Levantine families, whose different members had worked for various European Consulates, had frequently come up to be awarded different citizenships and sometimes had genealogical links with different European aristocracies: ex. the Testas, lately made barons, having links with Holland, Austria, Prussia etc. See *inter alia* Livio MISSIR (1981).

¹² Many studies exist on the more or less lengthy stays of Italian architects and artists in Constantinople, in relation or not with some works commissioned by the Sultans. Actually it is a very widespread mythological theme in the Levantine literature to identify the reason of the first ancestor's immigration with a “call from the Sultan” to work as an artist or craftsman or military reformer. In documented history, obviously, such peoples' number is lower than what is reported in a mythological way in our interviews to their descendents. Nevertheless the phenomenon is assessed. Among the most famous artists, both Levantines (or ‘levantinised’) and non-settled Italians, we can quote: Raimondo D’Aronco, Giulio Mongeri, Fausto Zonaro, Leonardo De Mango; and as musicians: Giuseppe Donizetti Pacha, and Arturo Stravolo.

¹³ The most reliable source on Levantine professions is the Constantinople Italian Chamber of Trade's magazine *La Rassegna Italiana*, published from 1896 to 1971, thoroughly analyzed in chapter II of Pannuti 2006; some other data about all Italian residents' jobs can be drawn from the Consulate's archives, *Registro dei Nazionali*, also analyzed in Pannuti 2006.

¹⁴ A great number of Italian geopolitical studies on the Levant were published from the mid-19th century until the 1930's. Most of these “monografie coloniali”, which would deserve a semiological analysis, re-discovering old Italic settlements, consider them as “colonies”, with the more or less admitted goal of taking profit of them as bridgeheads for future colonization, like other European countries were doing. This point of view begot the Levantines' first disappointments towards their mythical motherland Italy, from which, after mutual recognition and in return of human sacrifices in the Crimean, Libyan and especially 1914-18 wars, they expected some material and organizational help for the existing communities as such, particularly concerning the implementation of State schools.

¹⁵ Sauli is also the author of the historical essay: SAULI (1831). In his report of the work done during his diplomatic mission, he referred to the Levantines he found in 1822 in the following terms:

“[La colonia] consisteva in sei o settecento Genovesi del volgo, facchini, mezzani, intromettentisi in qualsivoglia pasticcio, uomini sfuggiti alla galera, soliti a vivere nelle osterie, nelle bische, ad aggirarsi

Trieste as their main port towards Constantinople, and they instituted a regular navigation line connecting the two cities in 1835: the famous “*Austrian Lloyd*”¹⁶.

Secondly, educated Italians got influenced by the cultural trend of Levant attraction: there were some expectations that the Empire would westernize itself, and in parallel literary and artistic Orientalism, reported for instance in the literary journey diaries from the East, sustained the fascination for the Levant¹⁷. Undoubtedly several educated would-be-Levantines migrated to the city seduced by Orientalism.

Thirdly and most importantly, a significant proportion of the 19th century Italian migration to Constantinople consisted of political exiles, in connection with ‘*carbonarismo*’ and the *Risorgimento* wars. According to Sergio La Salvia, the first-arrival *carbonari*’s aim was to conspire in favour of the phil-hellenic cause¹⁸. Especially after the 1848 events, the exiles’ number certainly increased considerably, and probably their plots were more oriented against the Habsburg Empire, the antagonist of the Ottomans in the Balkans. Garibaldi himself went several times to Constantinople, united a group of friends who would become of utmost importance for the Levantine community’s future institutional organization, since they later founded the “*Società Operaia Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso di Costantinopoli*” we shall now look at. In *Risorgimento* ideals we find the convergence point between three aspirations: the Ottoman modernist, reformist, westernizing spirit of the *Tanzimat*; some fresh political ideals of unity and solidarity (and to a certain extent republicanism) coming from Italy and spreading at first semi-clandestinely through such foreign social clubs or associations as well as through freemasonry¹⁹; a means of national based organization for the Levantine community, benefiting moreover from the identity cement of patriotism.

The organizational framework and community’s revitalization

At the beginning of the 1860’s, almost all minority communities tended to be metamorphosed through an organizational framework, based on clubs and associations or

di giorno e di notte con fine per l’ordinario perverso, né alieni dal mettere la mano nel sangue per rubacchiare e compiere ogni maniera di delitti. Erano il terrore dei quartieri franchi di Galata e di Pera.”

Quoted by Claudio MASI (1935), p. 11.

¹⁶ We obviously cannot tell how much this navigation line did contribute to the new migration flow from Italy to Turkey. Still, from our set of interviewees, we have learned which of the Italian areas their ancestor came from: the great majority came from middle-large maritime towns: 33 from Northern Italy, 24 from the South, 14 from the Centre; out of the former group: 12 were Genoese and 15 came from the whole of *Triveneto* (including 6 Venetians, 4 Triestines and some Istrians); from the Centre, most were Livornese, a majority of whom Jews; from the South, the majority came from Sicily. Therefore the above-mentioned maritime policies indeed were successful.

¹⁷ For instance the above-mentioned painter Leonardo De Mango acknowledged that he had come to Constantinople under the inspiration of the journey diary by our famous Edmondo DE AMICIS (1877). In turn, Levantine mythology and literature has paid much attention to and has been influenced a lot by this Western (especially French) journey literature: for example the Levantine writer Willy SPERCO published an essay (SPERCO 1955) whereby he collected biographical data of all the French writers’ journey to Turkey from Chateaubriand until that day adding an anthology from their descriptions, and in various other works he recalls some journey diaries dating as far back from the 16th century, such as the one by Ghislain de Busbecq. Contemporary Levantine writers share the same interest: Livio MISSIR (1979); also Giovanni SCOGNAMILLO has long been working on an essay on the Levantine neighbourhood of Beyoğlu, still unpublished, whose third part will include a 360 reference Istanbul bibliography, divided between works published in Turkey and abroad, and subdivided between essays, researches and theses, novels, short stories, poetry.

¹⁸ LA SALVIA (2007).

¹⁹ The specialist of freemasonry in 19th century Constantinople is Angelo IACOVELLA. See IACOVELLA (1997).

institutions which, for the first time, had a national rather than religious connotation. Their foundation was usually endogenous, therefore unrelated to consulates or government authorities. They had mainly three functions: socialization – i.e. creating opportunities for gathering in recreational and/or patriotic contexts, philanthropy – which is the Enlightenment inherited step from regular clergy's charity towards modern States' public policies, and culture – both in terms of the working class's cultural enhancement, and the awakening or rebirth of national feelings through culture and indeed language in a minority environment.

For the Italian Levantines, the most important association taking on these functions was the *Società Operaia*, founded in 1863 by a small group of Garibaldi's close friends, in direct contact with the Italian hero who was appointed as their President. Besides the above-mentioned functions, it is likely that its solidarity including financial aid was primarily directed towards political exiles and the *Risorgimento* campaigns. However by the 1870's the *Operaia* had opened up to the whole of the Italian-Levantine community, irrespective of social class or profile, political belief (the monarchists' vs. republicans' dispute had also been overcome...), closeness or dissent with the Consulate etc. It mostly organized balls, fund raising parties for charities, it had a library, and became very active and combative in the opening of Italian High School (1888) and *Giuseppe Garibaldi* State primary school whose building was also erected partly thanks to it²⁰. Later on, it also contributed to the opening of the Constantinople branch of the *Dante Alighieri* cultural association.

A more typically Levantine, religious, multinational and purely philanthropic institution is the *Associazione Commerciale Artigiana di Pietà in Costantinopoli*²¹, founded in 1837, whose 42 little houses were used as a home for the poor and a shelter for widows and orphans of whatever Christian nation. In 1888 the Consulate also promoted a charity purposed *Società di Beneficenza* specifically for the Italians.

The State schools were also coupled by some other Italian religious schools, as the famous Suore di Ivrea's girl primary school (still existing) and the Salesiani Fathers' craft school (also existing as a private Turkish school partly instructing in the Italian language), competing but not reaching the same popularity as the French religious ones.

The already existing Italian Hospital took a modern shape and constantly employed Italian medical and nurse staff since 1856. Later a paediatric hospital was also founded and managed by Italian doctors.

Thanks to these associations, besides the official institutions such as the Consulate and the Italian Chamber of Trade, the Italian-Levantine community both acquired a national identity aimed by a very patriotic spirit, and shaped its very famous, mythological way of life, which has continuously been described with nostalgia and self-contempt in Levantine literature²². A historical account of the community's social life chronicle, at least until 1925, can also be inferred through the magazine published by the Chamber of Trade, *La Rassegna italiana*, but it should not be forgotten that those accounts always kept in the shadow the Levantines' majority life: that of workers, craftsmen, even unemployed who, having failed in Istanbul, eventually had to be repatriated at the Consulate's or the *Operaia*'s charge²³...

²⁰ The two prime sources on the *Società Operaia* are: GOSLINO – PROVIDENTI (1906) and MARINOVICH (1995). The former mentions at length how hard it had been to have the Italian government play its role on the foundation of this school.

²¹ See PALMIERI (1902).

²² See PANNUTI (2004).

²³ From Scognamillo's Memories we can also read old Triestine *Tata Caterina*'s anecdote, who also entered Turkish literature. This humble Caterina, who could only speak her half-Venetian half-Slovenian dialect, lived in miserable conditions surrounded by cats and by Italian magazines which she couldn't read, but whose photos helped her overcome nostalgia. A cold winter morning she was found dead, covered by her magazines.

II. *Towards the disappearance of the minority environment*

The Turkish republican nationalism

The evolution from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic is tantamount to the issue of a Turkish nationalist ideology and its endeavour to achieve a national state, just like the Greeks, the Armenians, the Bulgarians, the Arabs and many other minorities had achieved or were in the process of claiming theirs. Xenophobia was latent then, as a reaction to the more and more colonialist-like features of the Capitulation regime. One of the first and most important Turkish sociologists of the time, Ziya Gökalp (1875-1924), pointed out the lack of a common collective consciousness between the Turks and non-Muslims and claimed that both groups were “one another’s parasites”²⁴. Contemporary historian Ayhan Aktar, making a sociological analysis of the Turkish leadership of the 30’s, thus explains its own xenophobic nationalism:

“this group [...] we can agree to consider as middle-aged in the 30’s, had studied in the relatively modern schools opened by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and had actively participated into the 1908 revolution or at least had lived that period as adults. In the following years, such is the chain of events that determined the development of minority hostile behaviours: Albania’s insurrection, the Balkan wars, World War I and the Armenian genocide, Istanbul’s and Smyrna’s military occupation following the armistice; all of these episodes had been lived by the Kemalist leadership as chapters of the national independence struggle. [...] Nothing else could be expected from them under those circumstances”²⁵.

However, the *Jeunes Turcs*’-Kemalist nationalism was rather more complex than simple xenophobia, since its prime concern was modernization which was synonymous with westernisation, and as Cossuto rightfully writes:

“For all Ottomans, the most evident mirror of modernity was also the one closest to them, that is of Levantines’ modernity, whose way of life thus became the instantaneous representation of an Ottoman Empire in process”²⁶.

Therefore Kemalist xenophobic nationalism was not one of minority community persecution or destruction or expulsion, but rather of imitation, assimilation and absorption (just the opposite of the Ottoman model). When that was not possible, at least it tried to minimize and even deny their existence. This is the reason for which the Republic’s censuses have systematically been prepared and carried out so as to minimize the non-native groups’ size, so as to become political instruments of homogeneity propaganda²⁷.

²⁴ Gökalp was Durkheim’s disciple, whom he had translated into Turkish, and his nationalism was based not on ‘race’ or ethnicity but on culture. His idea of Turkish culture had much to do with Islam, and therefore he was much against the *Jeunes Turcs* and later the Kemalist ideology, inspired by massive westernisation. Unfairly to him, he is now only remembered in Turkey as the author of the ultra-nationalist and rather populist pamphlet *The Foundations of Turkism*, much praised by nowadays hyper-nationalists and neo-fascist tenants, although his most important scientific works, now almost forgotten, were *Nationalisation, Islamisation, Westernisation* (1918) and *History of the Turkish Civilization* (posthumous, 1926).

²⁵ AKTAR (2000), p. 87-88.

²⁶ COSSUTO (2007), p. 337.

²⁷ Our analysis of the published Turkish censuses of 1927, 1935, 1945, 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, in ch. III of PANNUTI 2008, owes a lot to DÜNDAR (2000). He gives as much political importance to censuses as to see them as the motive of minority persecutions, which we don’t agree with.

Actually this ‘reassuring’ form of existence negation, besides being a reaction to the initial territorial claims by some minorities and Western powers in the first years of the Republic²⁸, had also the effect of showing to a lesser extent the rate of decline of all minority communities. In particular, no spectacular exodus wave by any minority at any time and as a consequence of any given xenophobic act can be noticed, but rather a smooth decline towards some values which are closer and closer to what can be expected to be almost reliable²⁹.

Xenophobic events affecting the minority environment

Having posed these two beginnings, we can rapidly quote the xenophobic events that, although not having demographically undermined any minority community, still have severely wounded the minority environment as a whole.

The first was the 1928 linguistic repression campaign called after its slogan “Citizen, speak Turkish!”. Actually it was not government initiated; it was the Turkish Students’ National Union’s decision to put into the political agenda the issue of minority communities speaking other languages than Turkish. Being a non institutional act, no data is available nowadays insofar as the force (or violence) of its implementation. However it is likely that a certain inhibition about talking foreign languages in the street was felt for some time, as some posters bearing the slogan were seen in different cities; moreover a rumour spread that whoever could not speak Turkish would be expelled from Turkey. The Istanbul Jew Avram Galanti (or Galante) published a little pamphlet just around that time, in which on the one hand he tried to explain the historical reasons for some Jews not to have learnt Turkish, on the other hand he urged them to do so as soon as possible³⁰. This campaign lasted almost a decade, and for reasons probably related to the European anti-Semitism of the 30’s, it involved the Jews more than anyone else³¹.

We can observe, however, that before the 1927 census, Atatürk himself, conditioned by Greek and Western claims, thought that the whole of the Turk population of Anatolia counted no more than 8 million people, while afterwards it was claimed, not without a nationalist pomp which now sounds rather preposterous:

“Non-Turks are almost as few as coming and going tourists in other countries. [... On the contrary] 13,648,270 people belong to one species, one blood, one seed”.

²⁸ One of the US President Wilson’s famous “14 points” was about self-determination of minority populations “living under the Ottoman yoke”...

²⁹ Let us report the following demographic table taken from Turkish censuses, noting that for some years we have been able to prove that the given number was lesser than our estimations by up to 60%:

Distribution of the Istanbul population according to the mother tongue

	1927	1935	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965
<i>Turkish</i>	574.592	692.460	898.841	1.001.625	1.366.077	1.744.452	2.185.741
<i>Greek</i>	91.902	79.920	6.978	67.593	65.108	49.081	35.097
<i>Armenian</i>	45.255	39.831	738	42.652	46.683	37.280	29.479
<i>Hebrew</i>	39.199	26.335	31.777	28.172	26.853	16.754	8.608
ITALIAN	4.890	3.550	2.076	2.060	2.323	2.150	1.895
<i>French</i>	6.021	3.827	3.811	2.687	3.406	2.549	2.106
<i>English</i>	1.327	954	890	NC	1.781	3.477	4.389
<i>German</i>	NC	3.670	1.139	1.379	2.706	2.761	2.640
<i>Spanish</i>	NC	8.210	8.249	NC	NC	2.777	2.236
<i>Bulgarian</i>	4.985	4.321	1.619	2.051	1.374	1.187	1.168

³⁰ GALANTI (2000).

³¹ On March 4th 1937, the issue was still alive and echoed in the press, by an article on the daily paper *Tan* titled “Turkish language in public places”, signed Ahmet Emin Yalman. Two days later, the same paper published a reply: “Marsel’s open letter”, signed Mr. Marsel Franko (Marcel Franco), the Jewish Community’s and the Grand Rabbinate’s Laic Council’s President.

The xenophobic act remembered by the Levantine community as having had the most catastrophic consequences is the 11th June 1932 law (N° 2007) on the banning of certain jobs on foreign citizens³². Levantine memory and mythology recall 7,000 departures to Italy thereafter, i.e. about half of the community. However no archive or other available data confirms such an exodus, nor do the Consulate registers show any decrease in the number of new arrivals around that time. Actually some interviews report of changes of job or unofficial practise of the formers. Moreover, most Levantines had some ascendant of Greek (or Armenian or Jewish) nationality, and therefore were also Turkish citizens in virtue of a law dating 1928. Nevertheless, it is likely that the new Italian immigrants' professional profile did change as a consequence of this law.

The next act was much more severe, but specifically anti-Semite: it was the 1942 "*Tax on Fortune*". In the context of World War 2 implying possibly Nazi occupation of Turkey from Bulgaria or Greece³³, widespread anti-Semitism charged the Jews of war speculation. The Ministry of budget asked its local fiscal offices for an unofficial assessment of minority members' revenues and fortunes and then published completely arbitrarily exaggerated fiscal charges lists. These were often such as to oblige the Jews to sell all their goods, and still not extinguishing their fiscal debts. The Turkish citizen Jews who still had some debts were sent to forced work camps in inner Anatolia, on railway building sites until their debt was paid³⁴.

The last such event was the 6-7th September 1955 riots. Scognamillo wrote at length what he saw of the destroyed Beyoğlu shops and houses the day after the facts³⁵. In a context of Turkish-Greek political tension about the Cyprus affair, the news of a bomb attack on Atatürk's childhood house in Salonica had provoked an outburst of popular rage against the Greeks' shops and houses in Istanbul and Smyrna. Thousands of shops were turned upside down, many houses were looted and their inhabitants beaten. Because of the Levantine interbreeding, some Levantines also lost all their goods on that night, save a few who were protected by brave and friendly Turkish neighbours or by hanging the Turkish flag at their windows. All this was done before the eyes of completely inactive, sometimes even implicated police and military forces. In the following days, the official explanation was an unbelievable theory including communist provocation and spontaneous patriotic uprising.

³² These were mostly humble jobs, but traditionally done by foreigners (some were even quite typical Levantine professions). Below is the list of such jobs:

"Hawkers' trade, musical activities, photography, hairdressing, typography, tailoring and hat and shoe manufacturing, brokering, raw materials sale in State monopolies, translation, tourist guiding, workers activities in building, iron and steel industry, joinery, any permanent or temporary activity in public transport, water supply, electricity, press sectors, land transport driving, supervising and caretaking in residential buildings, offices, shops, commercial centres, hotels and enterprises, men's and women's services (waiters and waitresses) in hotels, public baths, cafes, casinos, dancing places, pubs, including compering and singing in bars". Also medicine, veterinary and chemistry were banned for foreigners.

³³ It is reported that the German Reich's Istanbul Consulate had already prepared the maps of a Jewish ghetto to be built in Beyoğlu, in case the city was occupied.

³⁴ This event was so traumatic that it is well known and studied in Turkey. A Minister's high civil servant, Faik Ökte, perhaps conscience-stricken, publish a pamphlet in 1951 under the title *The Tragedy of the Tax on Fortune (Varlık Vergisi Faciası)* which started a public debate still quite alive since, a much awarded film was made on the subject in 1999: *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, by Tomris Giritlioğlu, starring Hülya Avşar.

Ayhan Aktar, whose above-mentioned essay is primarily based on this dramatic event, even claims there was a more general intention of redistributing most of the Jews' and other minority member's properties and enterprises to Turkish owners: a sort of "ethnic transfer inside the economy". At any rate the Fascist party's Secretary General for Turkey, Marcello Campaner, in his 1943 report *Colonia Italiana di Istanbul. Realzione anno XX* exactly quantifies how much the Italian Jews and the Italian "Arians" had paid because of the Tax on Fortune, he makes some commentaries on how much more unfair it had been to the former than to the latter, considering however that Italian Jews had been considerably luckier than Turkish Jews, for their citizenship had prevented their deportation to forced-labour camps.

³⁵ See SCOGNAMILLO (2002), p. 135-139.

Some Levantines and indeed some Greeks must have left Istanbul as a result of this and of fear, but our interviewees who were directly involved generally said they had lost everything and therefore could not even afford any trip abroad³⁶.

As a conclusion of this rapid series of tragic xenophobic acts, we can first of all notice that none of them provoked any exodus, therefore the disappearance of the Levantine environment that we have claimed as being their consequence was not an instantaneous result of a single trauma. Nevertheless we notice that a constant and generalised intolerant outlook has been present in republican Turkey as a result of nationalism. The resident foreigners, rather than benefiting from admiration in proportion with their privileges, had now to hide their particularities or else to be replaced by locals, in their social and economic positions. Murat Belge underlines how much this outlook has to be considered as a process, also in relation with the changing population of Istanbul due to the constant inner migration flows of Anatolians³⁷. The minorities' outlook has also changed, from one of arrogance to a widespread distrust and bitterness against the Turks³⁸. As we shall see this outlook metamorphosis, this widespread distrust made the Levantines huddle. This bore two consequences: preserving their identity in the short term, but also refusing to share it or transmit it within any social environment whatsoever, out of a self-perception of social death, which in the long run did lead to social death.

III. The Levantines' "dissolution"

By the year 2000, nothing of the Levantine environment was left, except a few churches and other buildings: Greek is not spoken in the street, Levantines are not recognizable from their European dresses or hats, the *Società Operaia* – last of the original Levantine national clubs alive – is becoming an archive research centre, the *Artigiana* is logically an elderly's home, the *Casa d'Italia* is mostly used as a cultural institute for Italian language teaching and for some odd lectures, the *IMI* (Italian High School) and the former Italian Hospital have been undergoing "multiculturalism" for so long that almost all their users are Turks, in the churches Masses are occasionally said in Turkish (and still Italian and French), there are no more Levantine newspapers or bookshops or theatres or charity balls. Most importantly, if asked about their community or their culture/civilization, the Levantines will invariably answer that it died long ago, after a lengthy agony³⁹.

³⁶ This is also a very much discussed event in recent Turkish history. The most complete and critical essay on the topic is DOSDOĞRU (1993), which openly holds the militaries and secret services responsible for a "systematically programmed and carried out guerrilla action by the MIT" [the Turkish intelligence agency] which later on somehow claimed the paternity of what had been "one of the most brilliant applications of [their] techniques".

³⁷ Murat Belge's point is that people cannot 'forget' all of a sudden how to live with 'others' with whom they have been sharing a city and hundred year long history. About the 6-7th September Events he writes: "An Istanbul's citizen, used to do his shopping at Amiralis' or at Mayer's, couldn't possibly get up one morning and brake down all their shop windows on a fit of rage". But obviously a class frustrated, fortune seeking, the constantly run down Anatolian newcomer, brainwashed by nationalism, eager to take by any means the place of the "foreigner" could. See Murat BELGE (1992).

³⁸ This may also be due to a sort of perceived betrayal, since the whole of the Levantine intelligentsia during the Turkish Republic's first years had been unconditionally supporting Atatürk and his doctrines.

³⁹ But we well know that the "decline of the Levantine world" is itself a Levantine myth, which has been around ever since the 1930's, when the community was almost at its numerical apex. See the Italian-Levantine poet, journalist and novelist Angèle Loreley (alias Angela Ruta Karasu)'s unpublished novel *Les derniers levantins*, dating back to 1935...

However, our interviews with Levantines, carried out between November 2000 and April 2001, definitely prove that, at the individuals' level, their identity preservation is intact, although such identity may not be transmitted to the following generation anymore⁴⁰. To demonstrate this preservation, the Levantine identity (rather than any national one) has to be borne in mind, and therefore three specific criteria were chosen: the Levantines' command of their four languages; a compound criterion for nationality belonging including the Levantines' everlasting interbreeding and their national self-perception rather than simply the circumstance of holding one passport (or a few); their lack of insertion in the Turkish majority environment.

Levantine identity preservation and language command

The Levantine civilization was quadrilingual: modern Greek was the most widespread, working class, daily-life language, Italian was the business and trade language, and that of sociability until around the 1870's, when French became more dominant, a social marker of higher education and status, also the language of culture and literary production⁴¹; Turkish was widely ignored, at least until it became a compulsory subject at school in 1928, but still today Levantines prefer not to admit that they can speak it, although they generally do so, with a slight Greek accent⁴². This is the result of a sociolinguistic hierarchy of values between these languages which are still in vigour.

Our interviews were carried out in Italian in 80% of the cases, in French otherwise, but no interviewee claimed not to understand Italian at all. Even in fewer cases (around 10%) did we come across Levantines who could not speak French or Greek: most of them were too young (at any rate born after the 1950's) to have learnt these languages either at school or in their neighbourhood if not home environment.

The language presently most spoken at home is French, not Italian and certainly not Turkish. We gave a psychological interpretation for this fact – which obviously has nothing to do either with communication purposes or with social distinction, no more than with patriotism – : their home is probably perceived by the Levantines as a rampart of their identity peculiarity, perhaps also as a temple of their affectivity. Multilingual practice at home is systematically underestimated with respect to both the commonsense and to the admitted practice in the earlier generations' household. This is a clear sign that admitting to speak Turkish at home is considered as an identity threat of assimilation⁴³.

⁴⁰ It must be underlined that the average age of our 70 interviewees was 68.3 at that time, with a mode value above 75. The distribution of age groups well reflected the community altogether, characterized by a very severe demographic unbalance.

⁴¹ This is why we consider Levantine literature not as being part of the Italian migrant literature, but of French expression.

⁴² In the past, the knowledge of Turkish was really an exception, almost limited to the dragomans with their administrative court Ottoman language, which was quite incomprehensible for ordinary Turks anyway. The legal obligation of Turkish learning in all schools – including foreign ones – was obviously no guarantee of a perfect command, especially for a language learnt for the first time as a pupil. Actually we have noticed systematically that middle-aged (and above) women tended to speak Turkish far worse than men, for they usually were housewives, therefore not needing Turkish for working. However, it is getting almost impossible to have a social life whatsoever without speaking Turkish. Therefore the younger and/or active generation, even when working in a still Levantine or foreign environment thus using other working languages, is now fluent in Turkish.

⁴³ Only 7% of our interviewees, all ages included, “acknowledged” they spoke a mix of languages including Turkish at home. Also the question about the languages spoken at their parents' home, which produced different answers than that about the present situation, reveals a constant inequality, or maybe a deliberate distinction, between the languages spoken in the domestic *inside* and those spoken in the social *outside*.

In the absence of the Levantine cultural environment, present day stimuli in Italian are mostly confined to the (widespread) parabolic aerial picked up Italian television channels, much more rarely by written or oral sources. These are satisfactory and efficient to preserve the command of Italian for the present generation, but insufficient to produce it for the next one, since daily family conversation and school tuition lack sufficient exposure.

Besides, only 35% of the interviewees' children still live in Istanbul, i.e. the community has decreased by nearly 2/3 in only one generation. Migrations have very seldom been directed towards Italy⁴⁴, sometimes they have been imposed by professional reasons, and their directions indicate the new commercial flows concerning Turkey.

Additionally, a surprisingly low number of Levantine children applied to the Italian high school, whose number of Levantine pupils irreversibly decreased following the fall of the Fascist regime which had almost compelled Italian pupils to attend it⁴⁵.

The Levantines' national identity

Another historical (also literary and mythological) distinctive mark of the Levantine civilization is interbreeding. The starting point here is not the chancy if not random obtaining of the Italian (or other European) citizenship, but the increasing social value implied by obtaining or keeping it, since the modern era onwards. Long-living patriotism, alongside with the sociological prestige of a foreign citizenship in Turkey despite Turkish hyper-nationalism, begot a strong habit of marriages of convenience and a "good match hierarchy" just like the sociolinguistic hierarchy we have just mentioned. Besides, endogamous wedding meant a marriage between Christians irrespective of their citizenship; for unclear reasons, the most frequent lower class interbreeding was with Greeks, and only concerned Orthodox brides, not husbands. Finally, one of the most taboo issues of Levantine civilization, i.e. the wedding with a Turk of either gender, which by now is quite frequent indeed, has always existed although it was rare in the past, and often has not impeded to give Christian first-names and a non-Muslim upbringing to mixed couples' children⁴⁶. Interviews also testify that the overall tendency of Levantine interbreeding has not considerably increased in time, even compared to the times when the community's size in Istanbul was sufficient to allow a stricter application of endogamy.

Concerning the Levantines' national self-perception, it should be pointed out that their refusal of integration into the Turkish majority society – not incompatible with their full integration into the minorities' micro-society – has generated an emphasis of their identity particularity in terms of their own nationalism. Their "Italianness" is associated with a nostalgic idealization of their imagined motherland, strongly nationalistic, often identified with Fascism, which some of them have lived (or heard of) from the outside, only in terms of

⁴⁴ Furthermore, a non-negligible number of would-be permanent repatriations have ended up back in Istanbul, after a negative experience had been experienced in Italy.

⁴⁵ Some families we have been talking to justify this choice by arguing that a recent Turkish law applying also to double nationality holders (which is the case of most Levantines nowadays) compels their children to attend Turkish State primary schools for 8 years, and thereafter it would be hard to learn Italian to a sufficient level. But this is an inconsistent argument, since Turkish pupils also enter the Italian High School at that age. Financial reasons, or the choice of other foreign high schools, in order to learn more "useful" languages, are more plausible arguments.

⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the Levantine mythology utterly rejects the existence of Levantine-Turk weddings in the past, even exceptionally, totally reprobates the nowadays practice, of which the common Turk and Levantine university education seem to be designated as the prime responsible, and it is also full of mythical narrations of forced migrations to Europe in order to prevent young girls from the risk of contracting a marriage beneath their station (!), of community excommunication threats towards "renegades" and also of pre-marital abductions...

an instrument to increase the prestige of Italian identity abroad. This is one of the reasons why Levantines feel an ambivalent superiority/inferiority complex towards motherland Italians, based on exclusion or estrangement feelings, all the more difficult to bare since they realize that the patriotic spirit they are driven by is now absent in Italy⁴⁷. This over-stressed nationalism implies the denial of any affinity whatsoever with the Turks and some contempt for them; but surprisingly the Levantine interbreeding does not seem incompatible with nationalism, since it is indeed a sign of an identity otherness.

Lack of integration

Rather than citing our interview data on the Levantines' everlasting urban preference for their old, traditionally European neighbourhoods as residence places, on their non-integration through education for choosing foreign schools, on their practicing typically Levantine jobs and their reluctance to consider their working place and lesser still the hobby environment as an opportunity for integration, it looks more interesting to evoke the controversy on integration that is presently existing inside the community. Levantine contemporary essayist and novelist Giovanni Scognamillo, who is the only Levantine author to have written almost all his works in Turkish and whose personality has made him perfectly integrated, has on many occasions harshly criticized the community's attitude⁴⁸. His criticisms can be summarised into four points: - the grievances against the Turks by the three Lausanne minorities are fair and justified, particularly the Armenians' and Greeks', but he summons the Levantines to draw up an honest assessment of their centuries long presence in Turkey, in order at least to free themselves of their scorn towards a country where they have been living out of habit or profit; - he appeals to them to give up their "colonialist outlook" and their nostalgia of unduly and undeserved Capitulation privileges which is the real un-avowed cause of their refusal to integrate themselves; - he points out the need to demystify the Levantine world and civilization, to clean it up from nostalgia, as he has done in his essays and *Memories*, demystification including the Levantines' fictitious identification with Italians or Europeans⁴⁹; - he underlines that, besides ethics, Levantines themselves are the very victims of their integration refusal: especially their disregard for the Turkish language condemns them to loneliness, cultural aridity, collective disappearance within general ignorance.

No written answer to these accusations has ever come from the community, which however sarcastically refers to Scognamillo as to "the Turk" and generally ignores him and keeps him in the background from its now rare social events. However we have asked an influential, well representative, notable member of the community how he reacted to Scognamillo's position. Dr. Marinovich's answer reversed completely the perspective, in terms of the Turks' acceptance of the minorities. According to him, despite nowadays generalised tolerant climate, no non-Muslim subject has ever been considered the equal to a Turk, even those whose particular talents and merits had boosted him to the highest spheres of the Court; again it is the Turks who wouldn't give any bride to a non-Muslim; the Jews' much

⁴⁷ A wise old Levantine answered this question of national self-perception: "I'm more Italian than the Italians, for when one hasn't got something, it's it he wants to have!"...

⁴⁸ Scognamillo's bibliography consists of about 50 books and more than 700 articles, mostly about the cinema, which has been his main subject of interest ever since the 1930's. His other topic is the Levantine neighbourhood of Beyoğlu. We have been devoting chapter VII of Pannuti (2008) to his production on Levantine civilization, which includes two different editions of his *Memories*: one of 1990, and SCOGNAMILLO (2002), and several essays on Beyoğlu, including one on prostitution in the neighbourhood, for which a great scandal arose...

⁴⁹ On this topic he once publicly said: "It's pointless to deceive ourselves with delusive stories: all of us well know how much Oriental we are, how much mixed-raced and how much different from the Europeans!" See Pannuti 2006, p. 197.

further integration in Turkish society than the Levantines' is due to their lack of a referent country until recently; the Levantines' endeavour to preserve their isolation is tantamount to a struggle to save Christianity and their language despite a Turkish hyper-nationalism which even enforced linguistic restrictions in the 1930's and proclaimed the juridical offence called "*attentat au turquisme*", causing long-lived feelings of distrust upon the Levantines.

One straightforward observation is that, considering nowadays the marginality of the Levantine minority, not to say the almost total oblivion of its very existence by ordinary contemporary Turks, a Levantine's social and professional life confined to its own community never allows his reaching of any particular achievement anymore. Scognamillo's example, although very rare and "publicized" by his writings – therefore his public fame – is not absolutely unique: very successful careers belong to fully integrated Levantines or depend on their becoming so: a typical such example is the multinational chemical holding's owner Aldo Kaslowski who is also vice-president of Turkey's national employers syndicate *Tüsiad*⁵⁰.

Obviously, this rather typical dissymmetry of perspective between minorities' and majorities' responsibilities, which we tend to find in all similar non-homogeneous national societies, makes compromise or even dialogue rather vain. Perhaps the only meaningful attempt to make a synthesis of these irreconcilable positions is to explore to what extent and in what ways lack of integration bares consequences on the minority's destiny.

Conclusion: how can huddling produce "dissolution"?

The whole concept of dissolution is a paradox. One expects a minority community to be dissolved into the majority by a compelled or strongly encouraged assimilation, or by a voluntary integration: neither happened to the Levantines. One could understand "dissolution" as the loss of original identity features: after all, since the Middle-Ages, the Levantines were also called by the Turks "*Tatlı Su Frenği*", "*Fresh Water Frenk*" to signify they had lost some of the true (maritime) spirit of their Crusaders' ancestors. Some (usually not very benevolent) European 19th century writers may have found this, when they came in contact with the Levantines. So did Zaccagnini⁵¹ who used for the minority communities in the city the metaphor of carpet colours which have been running into one another by washing over the centuries. This is obviously a literal sense of the word "dissolution"... But how irrelevant is the dissolution of the original identity with respect to the magnitude of the wide-horizon, original, unique Levantine culture and civilization!

However, the dissolution we are talking about is that of the Levantine civilization. Without the creative power of "levantinization", without any environmental frame, wilted by a lengthy self-perception of social death and by distrust, the Levantine civilization has been refusing to be shared. Levantines generally adopted the dictum "to live happy, live hidden!" Thus dissolutions means for civilization to be confined to people's memory, to be allowed to dissolve into oblivion, to let places of socialization become memorial places, and eventually places of the mind...

⁵⁰ Going into as detailed a level as to quote individuals wouldn't really have made sense if the very well known public personality we are talking about had not made a point himself about his integration into Turkish society, in the informal present-day Italian community magazine, *La Gazzetta di Istanbul*, November 2000, p. 5.

⁵¹ ZACCAGNINI (1909).

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View Levantines Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. The absence of a monolithic national consciousness and the use of several languages among these families have led writers, travellers and diplomats to identify them as Levantines (Levantini). The Italian novelist Edmondo De Amicis illustrated in his book Constantinople (1877) the intercultural space wherein his fellow countrymen were living and remarked with huff their "Levantinization" in regard to their language: "It is a bastard Italian, corrupted by four or five other languages which were corrupted before as well". There are many non-Muslim communities in the Islamic world. In the 12th century, the Crusaders dreamed of occupying Jerusalem and bringing the wealth of Eastern cities to Europe from Syria and Palestine. Trade activities in the eastern Mediterranean started to flourish. At the time of Byzantine Empire, there were locals from some Italian cities, including Venice, Geneva, Amalfi and Pisa. In 991, the Byzantine Empire granted trade concessions to foreign populations fighting for their interests tooth and nail. Furthermore, Istanbul's Galata district, where these people lived, had some autonomy. As a cosmopolitan, isolated community, the Levantines continued their life with their unique traditions. Some of them assimilated with local non-Muslims through marriage.