

I know why they cried, my mother was there.

As a young child I heard my mother talk about how her mother, brother and younger sister spent two weeks on the quay of Smyrna eating quince and cheese during the massacre of 1922 and how at midnight the lights were turned off and the Turkish soldiers moved in to rape and loot. “We would scream and the Western warships in the harbor would throw their searchlights on them to quiet them”.

Years later when this horrible tale had withdrawn into the back of my memory, I randomly picked up a book at the bookstore and opened it to a page, which described the scene. But the writer did not know why they screamed. It all CAME BACK to me.

In 1922 while the Western Powers were disputing among themselves how to divide the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish soldiers under the command of Mustafa Kemal (later known as Ataturk), entered the city of Smyrna (later renamed Izmir) and, after a few days of ominous quiet, began killing, looting and finally putting the City on fire. Over 272,000 Greeks, Armenians and Jews were massacred during the three weeks that followed. My mother was lucky! Through an aunt married to a Frenchman, she and her mother, brother and sister were handed French papers and were able to leave on a small private power boat with the French flag at the mast, and taken out of the gulf to international waters where they were picked up by a ship which took them to the island of Sira (or Siros).

It is important that this episode of history be brought to light. In term of numbers killed in three weeks, it ranks among the worst massacres in history. This is another massacre for which all humanity must bear the guilt. The degradation to which humans fall in a massacre should arouse all of us - witnesses or viewers in remote comfort zones – to take action to stop it. Failing to do so, the massacres will continue!