

Examining the role of Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and Russian Empire in 1917-1919 famine from the legal viewpoint for residing in Iranian collective memory

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Article Info	Abstract
Original Article Main Object: Multidisciplinary Scope: Iran, Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and Russian Empire Received: 20 February 2023 Revised: 05 March 2023 Accepted: 06 March 2023 Published online: 11 April 2023 Keywords: 1917-1919 famine, crime against humanity, genocide, Iranians' Collective Memory, war crimes.	During the WWI and after violating the neutrality of Iran by hostile powers, Iranians experienced horrible consequences of war and after several years of drought and food shortcomings, famine and pandemics killed millions of Iranians. Total occupation and overt violation of neutrality by foreigners gradually resulted in a huge number of casualties that would not happen in peace conditions and undoubtedly the foreigners' operations were among the causes of the 1917-1919 famine in Iran. Surprisingly, there is almost no trace of the horrible event in Iranians' collective memory. The main question of this research is how we can compensate for this matter by using the standard definitions of war crimes available in international law and in this way help to reside this bitter experience in the collective memory of Iranians and the people of the world. This paper, examining the documents and memoirs of that period, shows many of those events, based on present international regulations and even of that time being "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity". It concludes that although filing an international lawsuit to pursue is actually impossible because of political exigencies, using the legal terminology is necessary to register this historic catastrophe in the collective memory of Iranians and humanity as a whole.

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Extended Abstract

WWI was a catastrophic event for many countries in the world including neutral Iran. Directly violating the neutrality of Iran, the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and Russian Empire were involved in a harsh war in some big parts the Iranian territory. During the years before WWI, Iranians had passed through a big revolution and a catastrophic civil war. Many few-months governments had come and gone without any great achievement, despite having great ideals in mind. The central government had almost no control over the country while having almost no income or money in hand. As a result, when the Great War began, Iranian government could not impede foreigners from violating its neutrality. Years of instability, war conditions, drought and chaos resulted in horrible consequences such as food shortcomings, famine and pandemics that killed millions of Iranians. Some scholars believe the great famine of 1917-1919 wiped out half of the Iranian population while others consider it about 2 million lives. Anyhow, it can be surely admitted that there has been a great tragic event. These casualties would not happen in peace conditions and undoubtedly the foreigners' military operations, plunders, and exploitations were among the causes of the 1917-1919 famine in Iran. Based on international regulations of that time, such as 1899 and 1907 Conventions and also later regulations we have at hand now, i.e. Rome Statute 2002, those happenings can be considered as "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity". However, when the war was over, because of the political conditions in Iran and lack of effective power in the international arena, and undoubtedly the role that the great powers like Great Britain had in Iran, the Iranian government could not achieve any success for compensating its losses in Versailles or any other international court. Those losses were about to be forgotten for about 9 decades.

The Iranian nation survived out of those heavy burdens of devastations, deaths and depredations. However, Iranian collective memory is almost empty of those catastrophic years. Collective memory of a nation can be substantiated and transmitted through a wide array of practices of commemoration involving, for example, various ceremonies, monuments, museums, national holidays, textbooks, naming streets or the mass media. There is a permanent link between mass media and the tribunals; particularly the international ones for war crimes. International law occasionally affects the memories of various social groups, including national, regional and global communities. In some cases, international legal doctrines and decisions of international institutions (such as tribunals or the Security Council) function as carriers of collective memory, particularly among professional groups. Decisions of international tribunals regularly include a description of the relevant historical events. Nuremberg or Tokyo trials after WWII are good examples in

this regard.

The main question of this research is how we can use crime definitions available in international law and its capability to help residing the bitter experience of great famine of 1917-1919 in the collective memory of Iranians and the people of the world. In this regard, for this paper, domestic documents and the elites' memoirs of WWI period have been used. These documents include the published documentary books about WWI events in Iranian territory and unpublished ones which are available at Iranian National Archive. Memoirs of the people who have lived in those years and witnessed some of the events are complementary sources along with the mentioned documents. It is shown that many of WWI events in Iran, based on present international regulations and even of that time, are "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity" committed by foreign armies or their domestic allies such as Iranian Christians or rebels affiliated to the Ottoman Empire. This paper concludes, as other nations like Armenia or Poland have used international legal terminology or rhetoric to remind their historical rights, Iranians should follow this path. Although filing an international lawsuit to pursue is actually impossible because of political exigencies, using the legal terminology is necessary to register this historic catastrophe in the collective memory of Iranians and humanity as a whole.

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