

**First about my title, what is Transitional Justice?** is a scholarly field that studies the long-term effects of human rights violations and instruments to deal with them, such as criminal trials, apologies, historical commissions, and reparations. All instruments that should help to transform autocratic states into democratic societies. My research *Narrated Injustice* examines those instruments, do they deliver what they promise to do, namely providing recognition, dignity, and a better life to formerly victimised people.

1) What we see here is the **cemetery of Rawagede**, one of the places of my research, a village in West-Java, in Indonesia, where 70 years ago, 1947, a massacre from the Dutch military happened. Here hundreds of men were killed as alleged resistance fighters. There the Dutch fought to keep their colony, the Dutch Indies, while Indonesia has already in 1945, directly after World War II, announced its independence.

2) The **so-called widows from Rawagede**, became the image of the colonial disaster, 7 years ago, when they won in the Civil Court in The Hague against the Dutch state. They asked recognition for their men, innocent civilians, that had been unlawfully killed. The judge decided: the state has to apologize and to pay compensation, 20.000 Euro to each.

What we see here is the Court in The Hague and the Dutch ambassador in Rawagede, participating at the commemoration ceremony, apologizing in the name of the Dutch government and shaking hands. This symbolic gesture is followed few weeks later by the compensation payments. When seeing this on TV it looked good, I thought, justice has been done.

3) However, soon we could read in the NRC '**widows geplukked**', parts of the money had been robbed. What has happened? In NL we heard accusations of corruptions, while the village head stated that just the larger victim community has demanded and received their share. What we see since then are more court cases in the making, widows from Sulawesi, and also children who lost their fathers in colonial violence. They thought it's unfair that just the widows received acknowledgment, as with their father they also lost many opportunities in life.

4) Seeing those images in the media, **I wondered, what are the local consequences of such compensations?** Since years I work on World War II and the Holocaust, and the afterlife of recognition and reparation measures. From this research I know that *doing justice* that is *felt as justice* is a difficult process; moreover when it is a trans-generational process. Thus, I wanted to know, do the widows really feel acknowledged, does it deliver anything for them and their families in terms of dignity or a better life?

**Together with photographer SL I travelled** to Indonesia to see what has happened. We portrayed and interviewed more than 20 families in different villages, documenting their life-stories and the effects of the Dutch measures. Coming back our aim was to make an exhibition to initiate a dialogue.

5) **Because, it is not just about there but also about here.** This experience is alive in the Netherlands, with veterans, their families, but also Indonesians living here. What looks like a debate on the colonial past is also one about present-day Dutch society.

**It's not the widows who made the legal claims, but their representative,** and this is an Indonesian living here in the Netherlands - whom you see here in the picture. He has also his personal motives for the court cases: he wants a debate on the colonial past in the Netherlands, for him it is a shared history that from the Dutch side is not felt as shared.

6) **We wanted to support this dialogue and thought:** No better place for this as the National Military Museum in Soest, where we got a chance to make the exhibition. I will show you a few photos from the exhibit and illustrate therewith also some of the dilemmas, all around questions of dignity.

**7/8) Entering the exhibit, one sees** a row of black boards on the right and left, while on the background at the end, a huge landscape photograph displays the cemetery of Rawagede. Only when turning around, one can see the portraits of the widows, those who were the left-overs from the massacre.

9) **Below the portraits** you find quotes from the widows about what had happened in 1947:

*"I found my husband's body at the water pond. He had been lined up. There were three lines, each line was twenty people. ... He was shot through his head and back. He used to work on his own rice field. I did not receive anything, so I went to live with my parents again." (Ibu Wanti)*

10) **Key challenge is the relation individual/collective:** you have seen the cemetery with 181 graves – opposite the 8 widows still alive: here we see a friction between the many victims and the few that now get recognition. It's a challenge photo wise, as well as for the legal. How to portray structural violence? How to acknowledge structural violence, individual experiences that are also collective experiences?

**Another challenge, what is meant by justice?** I asked an old woman *'what do you expect from the Dutch?'*, and had to repeat my question several times until a response came. Later when reading the interview's transcript I realize that my translator filled in the answers by providing two possible options. She asked: *'You want an apology or compensation?'* I criticised her later for filling in the answers and she defends herself that this was a too abstract question for the old woman; she would not know what to answer. And the translator used those options presently available via the court decision. Since the court has established

a standard of what justice means, it is difficult to get to know whether there were different ideas about justice on the local level beforehand.

**Is it felt as justice has been done?** Depends to whom you talk: While the widows seem to be happy with the recognition as such (they invested e.g. in property for their family), the children are much more critical. They describe the fears and the helplessness they felt during the sharing process enforced by village authorities. A use of force actually without need. All families were willing to share, as the community is most important, but would have preferred to decide upon themselves with whom to share and what amount. Moreover, the children hoped to see their life's transformed, but perceive themselves still as poor.

->**Thus, one research question is, how can we improve** such compensation processes that no *secondary victimisations* during the process take place. But it's more complicated than that:

**11) There are also the ones who reject those gestures; it is** the pride of those, who felt their fathers have struggled for the liberation of their country. They would prefer instead a political dialogue on eye's level: what means the recognition of 1945 (not 1949) as independence year. -> Thus, one has to be aware that acknowledging victims at the same time undermines a political agency and dignity their countryman had fought for. Dignity means different things to different people.

To show the complexities of this, **the museum is maybe the wrong place.** As **Susan Legene has rightly observed,** the museum is a space where human suffering caused by the decolonisation is hard to experience as a shared heritage. After decolonisation "imperial narratives on colonialism were 'nationalised' [...] Those who died there belong to Indonesian history, those who migrated are now part of Dutch history". And both belong to different memory regimes. In the Netherlands the widows are the symbol of victimhood, in Indonesia the symbol for a heroic victory over the Dutch – both versions are celebrated at the same cemetery.

**12) To conclude:** what looks like a debate on the colonial past in Indonesia is also one about the feeling of failed pluralism in the NL: Those court cases on colonial massacres – we see them now at several places in Europe (also in the UK and in Germany) – are initiated by people living in Europe but with roots in the former colonies. For them it is not just about *injured citizens* during colonialism, but also about themselves, feeling oneself still not accepted as *equal citizens* in Dutch society today. (See quote from Pondaag.)

**13) As a last photo I show you, what you all of course want to know: What did the court cases deliver?** In NL a debate about the colonial past; a mayor research project was just funded by the government. In Indonesia: some clear material gains.