Narratives of injustice

A study in the Netherlands examined how post-war and post-colonial memories affected each other in the last decade and developed into a new form of claim culture.

Since the end of the Cold War, acknowledging historical injustice is a major issue in Europe. As a result, it is common practice for states to make payments to victims of World War II and dictatorships. The issue of victims of colonialism, however, has been in public debate only recently.

Transitional justice is a new field of research and practice that has been established. It involves studying the long-term effects of human rights violations and the means to deal with past atrocities, including criminal trials, apologies, historical commissions and reparations. The EU-funded project NARRATED INJUSTICE (Narrated injustice compensation claims and transgenerational narratives of injustice) looked at three case studies.

Work involved examining the payments made to Dutch Jewish victims since 2000. It specifically looked at how these payments became a reference point in legal cases, which legitimised claims from victims of the Dutch decolonisation war in Indonesia.
Victims won several consecutive court cases. This meant that the Dutch government was obligated to pay financial compensation to victims of colonial policy in Indonesia for the first time.

Reports were analysed in order to establish public discourses on the reparation issue. Additionally, interviews were conducted with members of the various communities to examine their desires or experiences. The exploration of numerous compensation cases in the same country offered the ability to see similarities and differences between groups. This helped to reveal general patterns.

It was found that members of the diaspora play a key role in compensation claims and identify themselves through claims. Often, people within the countries either have other priorities or lack the means. This relates to an increasing desire of individuals to be acknowledged with their own cultural, religious, ethnic and (post)colonial background.

NARRATED INJUSTICE findings provide insight into the consequences of compensation policies on individuals and the community, as well as how to improve such future policies and their results.

Keywords

Narratives of injustice, post-colonial, historical injustice, NARRATED INJUSTICE, compensation claims

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