

Bio

I am a law professor at the International and European Law Section of Utrecht University. I specialise in cross-cultural law, comparative law and human rights.

In the area of cross-cultural law my aim is to bring state law and the norms and values of minority groups closer together. Consequently, I encourage minority groups to use the opportunities offered by democracy and the rule of law more effectively to represent their interests. I also stimulate state organs to be more open to the norms and values of minority groups to make the law more inclusive. Within international law I draw attention to the importance of culture. Thus, I argue for the recognition of a 'cultural defence' in international criminal law as a result of which more weight will be accorded to the cultural motives of the defendant.

As part of my work in comparative law I study how different legal systems deal with similar questions. While doing so, I take the context into account: at first sight all legal institutions look alike, but there are considerable cultural differences. Thus, judges in the US and the UK are being held in very high esteem, but this is not the case in Continental Europe. When comparing, I do not only pay attention to the usual - Western - jurisdictions, such as the US, the UK, France and Germany, but also to other systems, such as those of African countries and China. I am a member of the 'Lawyers for Upholding International Law' think tank which is aimed at protecting the practice of law against political interference. The strength of legal arguments should be decisive, rather than the power held by the parties. The think tank has issued several *amicus briefs* at the invitation of (constitutional) courts in various countries.

I support formerly colonised communities in the Global South and minority groups in The Netherlands in realising their human rights. This I do with the help of the receptor approach that relies on the resilience, knowledge and capabilities of those communities. This approach opposes the Eurocentrism which still dominates this field: scientific arguments should be decisive rather than positions of power.

My research is aimed at finding solutions for societal problems. This I do as much as possible together with the communities concerned, which is called *community based participatory research*. This means that the community has an important say in the design of the project, supplies knowledge which is not available in the scientific literature, and is involved in guarding the quality of the research. Thus, together with the Dutch Muslim community I have developed a plan to combat terrorism with the help of Islam and the Muslim community. With the Dutch government we are exploring how this plan can be implemented.

During the past decades I have been a visiting professor at approximately 25 universities, including the University of Cambridge, Sciences-Po and Tsinghua University. Before taking up my position at Utrecht University I served as the head of the European and Legal Affairs Division of the Coordination of Minority Policy Directorate of the Dutch Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations.