Dispute settlement among the Nigerian Igbo in Antwerp

Filip Reyntjens

Introduction

I owe the idea for this research to my Nigerian cleaning lady whom I sometimes help with minor administrative or legal issues. One day she had a quarrel with a man who refused to repay a small debt. I drafted the typical European lawyer's letter: a stiff reminder and a threat that he would be sued with all the costs that would entail. When I asked her a couple of weeks later whether he had reacted, she said he told her: 'Sister, that is not how we do things among Igbo.' Not more was needed to awaken the legal pluralist in me.

This paper studies dispute settlement among the Nigerian Igbo in Antwerp, Belgium. Like other groups in society, be they autochthonous or immigrant, they are a semi-autonomous social field[1] able to apply their own law and to negotiate with official state law. As this relates to both substance and procedure, it is a case of legal and judicial pluralism. In its original setting, a striking characteristic of the Igbo political and legal system is the virtual absence of centralised authority. This is mirrored in the proverb '*Igbo enweghi eze*' (The Igbo have no kings/chiefs).[2] However these strongly decentralised modes of dispute settlement are somewhat attenuated by the prominent role played by the Igbo Unions put in place by villagers who have emigrated to other places in Nigeria and across the world. This is also the case in Antwerp.

This study inscribes itself in what Sally Merry has called 'new legal pluralism', a research line that, beginning in the 1970s, has taken an interest in applying the concept of legal pluralism to non-colonised societies, particularly to the advanced industrial countries of Europe and the United States. This has meant the expansion from a concept that refers to the relation between colonised and coloniser to relations between the state and nonstate groups and to unofficial forms of ordering anywhere in the world.[3] As these nonstate forms are more difficult to see in Western societies, to recognise legal pluralism there requires rejecting the 'ideology of legal centralism',[4] the notion that the state and the system of lawyers, courts, and prisons is the only form of ordering.[5] That ideology doesn't hold empirically: as legal pluralism is a universal phenomenon, articulations between

1 Moore 1973.
2 Uwazie 1994, p. 89.
3 Merry 1988, p. 872. It is somewhat confusing that the term 'new legal pluralism' has later been used to apply pluralist insights to international and transnational contexts (see e.g. Berman 2009). It would be better to refer to this emerging field of study as 'global legal pluralism', as Berman (2014) later did.
4 Griffiths 1986.
5 Merry 1988, p. 873-874.

official and non-official normative orderings can be found everywhere, if one cares to look.

The ambition here is not to contribute much to theory building.[6] This is a case study that adds to others published before. Examples include the work on the Moluccan community in The Netherlands (Strijbosch), local justice in a religious community in Staphorst, The Netherlands (Van den Bergh), legal practices in communities of Maghribian origin in Brussels (Foblets), dispute settlement in the US (Galanter), young people in Paris suburbs (Le Roy), community justice in Britain (Henry), or the garment industry in New York City (Moore), to name but a few.[7] However, adding another case is useful in itself. Flyvbjerg has published a strong defence of case study research, arguing that a scientific discipline without a large number of case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one.[8]

The methodology used is mainstream, and I have operated in pretty much the same vein as one would do in an African village. I have first approached the 'village chief', in this case the president and the executive committee of the Igbo Union (see below). I have interviewed a number of Igbo leaders, as well as 'elders' who settle disputes, and I have held four focus group discussions, one mixed, one with male participants, one with female participants, and one with community leaders. I have also talked to a 'diversity officer' of the Antwerp police department. As the risk of idealised, uniform and 'correct' responses became clear during the course of my research, I have checked my data with an Igbo scholar working in Belgium, who has put the results in context by suggesting some critical notes. I have finally consulted the little published research available on dispute settlement among the Igbo in their area of origin, elsewhere in Nigeria and abroad. The difference with doing this kind of research in an Igbo village in Nigeria is that Igbo live more scattered in Antwerp, albeit predominantly in the same area, which has made data collection difficult and certainly incomplete.[9] Therefore, the description presented here is probably too monolithic, overly informed as it is by the Union and the participants seeking to project an image of uniformity and coherence. The reality is probably more messy.

This article is organised as follows. I first present the Antwerp Igbo community and its organisation. Next, in order to see what norms and procedures were transferred, I present the situation in the Igbo's area of origin. I then look into procedures and actors of dispute settlement, and I examine the types of litigation and the outcomes of settlement procedures. Five examples of cases show how disputes are dealt with concretely. I end with a discussion and a brief conclusion.

6 Griffiths 1986 and Merry 1988 remain seminal references. A more recent survey can be found in Von Benda-Beckmann & Turner 2018.

7 For more references to older research see Merry 1988, p. 872.

8 Flyvbjerg 2006.

9 In addition, the data are mostly metadata, largely based on what research participants said about how disputes are resolved. For instance, I have not observed actual settlement processes as my presence in encounters involving just a couple of persons would inevitably have influenced the proceedings, thus skewing and probably invalidating the findings.

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The Antwerp Igbo community and its organisation

A precise number of Igbo living in Antwerp is not known. Among the 1,053 Nigerians registered in the city's register of foreigners, 212 could be identified as Igbo on the basis of their names (the city registers on the basis of nationality but does not profile ethnically). As Igbo having acquired Belgian citizenship are not in the foreigners' register, the number of Igbo living in Antwerp is higher. Community leaders estimate them to number between 500 and 1,000.

The Igbo are well organised. There is an 'Igbo Union' which is registered as a not for profit organisation enjoying legal personality under Belgian law and which is run under a 17 page constitution.[10] It contains detailed provisions on aims and objectives, membership, structure, finance, meeting procedures, discipline, and social activities. Membership is open to all Igbo, although the 'women's wing (…) meets or operates separately in alliance with the men's body'. Members pay an initial registration fee of € 25 and a monthly fee of € 5. The general assembly, comprised of all registered members, is the supreme body. It elects an executive committee of around 15 members in charge of running daily affairs, chaired by the Union's president. Offices can be held for a maximum of two consecutive periods of four years. Proper conduct during meetings is enforced by an elaborate system of fines for lateness, absence, speaking without permission, abusive language, drinking alcohol or smoking etc.

The provisions on discipline and social activities are particularly relevant for this article, as a few examples show. Fighting attracts a fine of € 125 from both parties, € 75 of which is refunded to the innocent party. Any aggressive act on a member with the intent to cause injury or damage is punished by a fine of € 125 and six months suspension from the Union. Other punishable offences include blackmail and conspiracy, as well as spreading false information or gossip. A member calling the police against another member as a result of a misunderstanding or quarrel without first reporting to the Union is fined € 250 and suspended for six months. However, '[t]he union shall not intervene, involve [sic] or defend any member involved in drugs, fraud, robbery, prostitution, pimping, rape, impersonation and other crimes'. Members must also 'adhere strictly to the laws of the host country (Belgium)'. Indeed, one of the aims and objectives of the Union is to 'bring members to the knowledge [sic] of the country in which we reside and to respect and abide by these laws'.

The Union's social activities are at the same time an important base for the sanctions regime. For instance, a wedding comes with a gift of € 200, a birth with one of € 100. In case of hospitalisation members must 'monitor the patient's condition of health (…) and render assistance where necessary'. Terminally ill patients are advised to return home, for which the Union pays € 1,000 and a plane ticket to Nigeria. Extensive provisions cater for burial rights. A condolence visit comes with a sum of € 125, while burial costs are met by an amount of € 250. The Union

10 There is also a registered 'Igbo Community' which is much smaller and doesn't seem to have much of a following. After an initial contact with its leader, I have decided not to include the 'Community' in this research.

bears all the costs involved in repatriating a body to Nigeria. These expenses are considerable: in addition to the cost of repatriation, a plane ticket and a sum of € 500 is given to the person escorting the coffin, and € 1,000 is given to the spouse or family of the deceased. The Union also organises the wake-keeping. Funeral arrangements like these are common among Igbo across Nigeria and elsewhere in the world, and they are necessitated by the huge expenses involved as a consequence of traditional burial requirements.[11] Given this much needed support, ostracism – in this case expulsion from the Union – is a serious sanction allowing to impose compliance with the Union's norms.

From Nigeria to Antwerp

The British 'take English law with them',[12] and so do Igbo with their law. I first have a brief look at justice in Igboland, thus allowing to see how principles and practices have been brought to Antwerp. Mirroring the non-centralised nature of the Igbo political system, legislative authority rests with the *Oha*, the village general assembly, 'from which the legitimacy of any human law derives'[13] (cf. the general assembly as the supreme body among the Antwerp Igbo). Like elsewhere in Africa, in their home region arbitration is the most common means of dispute resolution. Igbo proverbs emphasise justice as co-responsibility within the community, and the justice system is premised on values of reconciliation and peacemaking. Rituals, festivals and ceremonies celebrate life. Reality is viewed in a non-compartmentalised manner, where political, social, economic, cultural, moral, legal and religious aspects of life form a continuum.[14]

All cases must be brought to the attention of the village head before a complaint is filed with the police or an official court. Violating this rule attracts severe sanctions, ranging from stiff fines to a conditional period of ostracism.[15] However, serious crimes are likely to be deferred to the police or an official court, but the indigenous system maintains its authority to resolve civil aspects of these cases.[16] Disputes are dealt with at the level where they occur. This is the family head for litigation within the extended family and the village tribunal (*amala*), which includes the family heads, for intra-village disputes.[17] Arbitration is the common means of dispute resolution. The village elders follow the 'hear-both-sides' rule of natural justice. At the end, the panel comes up with a solution which is binding on the parties. Failure to abide may again lead to ostracism.[18]

In order to provide assistance, Igbos living far from their traditional communities usually form clubs or unions, which are common among them across Nigeria.

11 An adult who dies outside the home community must be brought home for burial, and a body cannot be carried by a single person (Ibe 1992, p. 185).
12 Roberts-Wray 1966, p. 540.
13 Oraegbunam 2010, p. 11.
14 Oraegbunam 2009.
15 Uwazie 2005, p. 19.
16 Uwazie 1994, p. 100.
17 Uwazie 1994, p. 89-91.
18 Oraegbunam 2009; Okereafoezeke 2003.

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These clubs or unions perform functions similar to the *amala* and are organised and normatively ordered by rather detailed constitutions. In Nigeria, they have an average of 107 members.[19]

Organisation of dispute resolution in Antwerp

The characteristics of dispute settlement in Igboland can also be found among the Igbo in Antwerp. All participants in the research agreed that Igbos don't take other Igbos to court or file a complaint with the police, except in the case of serious criminal offenses. Some expressed this by saying 'I'm my brother's keeper' or 'you protect your brother'. Others stated it is 'in their DNA' or 'in their blood' to keep their disputes within the community. Although the Union's constitution doesn't address this issue, recourse to official courts is strongly discouraged and accepted only as a last resort. No penalties are attached to such a move, but the rare Igbo who do so are considered 'not a true son of Igboland' or 'having lost Igbo culture'.

Disputes within the community can be settled in different ways. Parties first attempt to find an amicable solution between them. When they need the help of a third party, several mechanisms are in place. There appears to be a great deal of flexibility and even uncertainty as to which apply and in what order. The description that follows probably suffers from the uniformity bias mentioned earlier.

Parties can take the case to a pastor, an elder or directly to the Union through its president. Anyone can solve disputes, provided he (always a man, see below) is older and was married earlier than the parties. Many elders are pastors but not all are. In case a pastor is approached, this would normally be by members of his church, but parties of other denominations occasionally do so too. Elders were generally described as 'honest, truth-seeking and not corrupt'. There is no list of elders, but Igbo know who they are and how to find them.

If a case is solved by a pastor or elder but the parties or one of them are not satisfied with the proposed outcome, they appeal to the Union where the welfare committee deals with the dispute and reports to the executive committee. This procedure also applies when parties address their problem directly to the Union, without first submitting it to a pastor or elder. A last appeal is then possible to the 'general house', which is the assembly of all members. Matters arising within Union activities, for instance in the case of unbecoming behaviour during meetings, are adjudicated directly by the executive committee.

There are no clear signs of 'forum shopping'.[20] Igbo seem to first turn to the closest conflict solver. This closeness may be spatial, kin-based, church-based or social. There appears not to be a set of rules that determine who to approach. I also found no indications of 'shopping forums'. The different types of conflict solvers seem to consider this as a duty and perhaps as a recognition of their integrity.

19 Ibe 1992.

20 On which see Von Benda-Beckmann 1981.

Table 1 Types of disputes settled by pastors/elders

Marital problems	19
Financial disputes	7
Slander	5
Domestic violence	3
Problems with in-laws	2
Fighting	2
Intra-Union issues	2
Child abuse	1
Intention to commit suicide	1
Drug/alcohol addiction	1

Just like in the Igbos' region of origin, the cola nut ceremony is part of the process. The nut is broken and shared before the start of the proceedings to implore success. Only men are allowed to break the nut, a fact that was not contested by my female participants.[21]
The sanctions regime is run by the Union. They range from a fine to a temporary suspension of membership, up to exclusion. Exclusions are very rare (less than one per year) and are considered very severe as they put an end to the solidarity mechanisms mentioned earlier.

Types of cases

Participants agreed that litigation is rare, a fact they explain by pointing at the 'peaceful nature' of Igbo. However, this is not the only reason: there is a stigma attached to individuals seeking redress outside the group because of the implications for the other party, such as having a police record.[22] Therefore, disputes submitted to third party arbitration generally occur within the community. In line with the constitution, serious offenses are however left to the police and the prosecutor's office. The same applies to civil matters that cannot be dealt with internally. Divorce is such a matter, but my participants insist this is a rare occurrence, except in the case of 'dishonest marriages', for instance those contracted to obtain immigration or residence papers.
In order to gather insights into the types of litigation, I have asked five elders/pastors to keep a log of cases processed during a three month period. This gives the following statistics.

Of these 43 cases, 31 were resolved at the time of reporting, 12 were not. Table 1 shows that the issues are generally relatively minor, and therefore well suited for

21 Also see Duru 2005.
22 Personal communication Maureen Duru, 2 June 2020.

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arbitration. As they do not involve major breaches of public order, these cases can be settled without involving official bodies like the courts, the police or the public prosecution office.

Examples of dispute resolution[23]

Unpaid debt
Daniel[24] had a pressing financial need and asked his friend James to bail him out. He would repay the sum later. James gave € 300 to Daniel under the clear understanding that this was a loan, not a gift. The transaction was based on trust, and no document was signed. When the agreed time for repayment came, Daniel was unable to reimburse. After he insisted a couple of times, James realised that Daniel was not going to pay him back, perhaps because there was no proof of the loan. He approached pastor John who first talked to the parties separately and then met James and Daniel together. The pastor found that Daniel effectively received the money from James as a loan and that he did not meet the deadline for repayment. He also found that, although Daniel did not have a steady job at the time, he did not show enough effort to pay back. Based on Daniel's income, he proposed an instalment payment plan of € 100 per month. The pastor would receive the money from Daniel and transfer it to James. Both parties agreed, and the settlement was duly executed.

Gossip, libel or slander
Christine and Deborah were good friends until a common friend of them, Victory, started gossiping. Victory told Christine that Deborah said she was going out with a married man, while Victory told Deborah that Christine said she was engaged in prostitution. When matters escalated, a friend brought them into contact with pastor Kenneth in the hope that he could advise them. After discussing with Christine and Deborah individually and with both of them together, pastor Kenneth realised they didn't have any personal problem between them. When he talked to Victory, she denied being at the origin of the gossip. Pastor Kenneth then met Christine and Deborah again and advised them that, rather than believing the gossip, they should openly address the information, check it, and correct it if necessary. If they were serious about their good relationship, they should confront each other anytime they heard rumours and deal with them immediately. This was agreed to, and the ladies resumed their friendship.

Wrongful accusation
Lewis promised his friend Nathan he would try and find him a job by introducing him to his boss. Instead he got the employment offered to someone else. Nathan was furious, and accused Lewis of reneging on the Union's ethical norm of 'being your brother's keeper'. On the same evening of this incident, Lewis was stopped

23 These cases were collected during interviews with elders/pastors and members of the Union's executive committee.
24 All names in these stories are fictitious.

and controlled by the police. He was briefly detained for the violation of immigration laws. After his release, he accused Nathan of having informed the police of his illegal residence status, and thus of being responsible for his ordeal. The Union's welfare committee took notice of section 7.2.5 of the constitution that states that '[a]ny member that calls the police for another member as a result of misunderstanding/quarrel without first reporting to the union shall pay a fine of € 250 and six months suspension'. However the committee found Nathan not guilty of reporting to the police and reprimanded Lewis for making a false accusation, assuring him that it was a mere coincidence that both incidents took place on the same day. It added that 'police here unlike those back home works in a systematic way that does not include helping one to achieve personal vendetta'. The two friends were reconciled.

High water bill

Leonard moved into an apartment owned by Christopher about a year ago. According to Leonard, the water bill was included in the rent. Some months later, to his surprise he received a letter from Christopher's lawyer summoning him to pay € 965 for water used. When challenged by Leonard, Christopher explained that he received a bill of € 5,000 which he divided over all the flats, and that Leonard had to pay his share despite the earlier understanding. Leonard referred the case to the Union's president, who formed a special committee comprising some elders and house owners with experience in landlord-tenant relations. Since the agreement was not in writing, Leonard proposed that the bill be split among the two parties. After long discussions, the committee proposed that Christopher ends the involvement of the lawyer and that Leonard pays € 600. Behind the committee's reasoning were the fact that a misunderstanding left Leonard unprepared to foot the entire bill and letting the men go to court would be against the Union's tenets. The two parties agreed with this settlement.

Scuffle at the Union

During the preparations for the football tournament in memory of Igbo hero Chief Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, some members had a drink too many. One of them was David who engaged Richard, a member of the executive committee, on the choice of events to be organised. The altercation escalated to the point that David physically assaulted Richard and tore his clothing. Other members separated the two men, and David left the scene. The case was picked up by the welfare committee which considered section 7.2.3 of the constitution that states: 'Fighting by the members attracts a fine of € 125 from both parties. Whoever is found guilty by the disciplinary committee shall forfeit his money, while the other party shall be refunded the sum of € 75.' Section 7.2.4 holds that 'Any aggressive act on a member with intent to cause or inflict injury, or damage another member shall attract a fine of € 125 and six months suspension'. The committee considered that David's drunkenness was a mitigating factor, and 'in the interest of our unity and brotherly love', asked Richard to forgive David as he acted under the influence of alcohol. After the committee proposed that the

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Union would pay to replace his torn clothing, Richard agreed to let the matter rest. David was cautioned against the reoccurrence of such incidents.

Discussion

As can be seen from the statistics and the selection of cases, disputes settled in the Igbo community are mostly not of a grave nature. This is generally minor litigation that one would expect to occur in small-scale groups and that is very suitable for internal resolution. The outcome of civil litigation is generally not contrary to Belgian official law, which allows arbitration and compromise between parties. For instance, in the case of the unpaid debt, official courts also often reschedule payments to be made in instalments. Even the Antwerp police says it sometimes refers civil cases to 'key figures within the community'. Only in a limited number of cases, in matters considered of public necessity (for instance when minors could be affected), can official organs of law enforcement decide to seize a case, even in the absence of a claim by an involved party.

As far as criminal cases are concerned, the official legal system does not compel victims of offences to file complaints, although the police and, in a later stage, the public prosecutor can seize cases *ex officio*. However lodging complaints is strongly discouraged in the Igbo community, and the Antwerp police indeed notes 'a low willingness to report' among the Igbo, as it does among other immigrant communities in the city. Nevertheless, the police sometimes intervenes in case of intra-family violence. Solutions in the community may be contrary to official law. For instance, under official law, the gossip, libel and slander case might have ended with a penal suit against Victory for libel or slander, and possibly a criminal condemnation.

The case of the Igbo therefore shows that legal pluralism does not *per se* suppose differences and contradictions between state and nonstate law. Norms can be similar and even identical in both systems. What makes them plural in substance and procedure is that they emanate from different registers and sources, the ones being generated by Igbo law and procedure, the others by the Belgian official legal, judicial and police system.

The way in which the Antwerp Igbo settle their disputes internally has many advantages. Conflict settlement is fast, cheap, understood by all, conducted in the Igbo language, and it clearly enjoys more legitimacy than official law enforcement and justice. Conversely, the official system, at least the police, appears to accept the complementarity of groups dealing with litigation in their midst. Of course this has the added advantage of 'subcontracting' for the state prosecutorial and justice system without cost. Although this comes at the expense of the monopoly of the state in the normative ordering and its application, the empirical reality is that this creates a win-win situation. An author noted in the Nigerian context that 'traditional Igbo law enforcement and social control methods are effective

and efficient' and he pleaded for 'deserved appreciation and recognition of this fact by Nigeria's official justice system'.[25] This plea could also apply in Belgium.

However there are also drawbacks. Some Igbo having lost sizeable amounts of money or having been otherwise harmed are discouraged from seeking redress through the official justice system where they might have prevailed. As the system encourages informal agreements, for instance without proof in writing, people can be subject to exploitation. Some Igbo intentionally abuse the plural situation, knowing that the other party will be unable to claim the rights they are entitled to in the official legal system.[26] Interestingly, this was not said or confirmed by any of my participants, thus showing their loyalty to the system or their reluctance to criticise it in the presence of others. This also reinforces the uniformity bias mentioned earlier.

As in many unofficial legal systems, in Africa and elsewhere, there is a deficit in terms of human rights, and of women's rights in particular. This is the situation in Igboland,[27] and it continues to prevail in Antwerp. Although there is an 'Igbo women wing' in the Union, men and women meet separately. All elders and pastors are men, and so are the members of the Union's welfare and executive committees. My women participants stated that this is 'part of our culture', that they 'liked it', and that they 'respect their husbands, and give in more than them'. This confirms the observations of Duru, who found that, while women are among the most active members of the Igbo Union in Brussels, 'no woman (…) was included in any of the activities that, in Igboland, are exclusively for men'.[28] For instance, 'none of them was bothered by the obvious gender bias inherent in the cola nut rites'.[29] Similarly, the Antwerp police realises that women are discouraged from lodging complaints for domestic violence, an issue where the 'reluctance to report' is considerable. Therefore, it will be up to Igbo women to decide if, when and how they will struggle to change a patriarchal society, just like many European women have done during the last century.

The case of the Antwerp Igbo shows plurality within a plural setup. Not only is there straddling between official (Belgian state) law and unofficial (Igbo) law, but also within the latter there are several avenues for dispute settlement. Third party adjudicators can be the Union and elders or pastors. Where disputes are submitted to the Union, they end there. But if pastors or other elders are involved, the case may go 'on appeal' to the Union. Even within the Union, there is not one single procedure. The Union's president may act alone, as an elder would, but cases may also be referred to the welfare committee, and from there to the executive committee and even to the general assembly. As seen in the case of the water bill, a special committee may even be set up. There appears to be considerable procedural flexibility as to which body is competent and what procedure is used. This accords with the observation made in Nigeria that, contrary to

25 Okereafoezeke 2003, p. 32.
26 Personal communication Maureen Duru, 2 June 2020.
27 Chika & Nneka 2014.
28 Duru 2005, p. 212.
29 Duru 2005, p. 213.

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Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba justice, the Igbo legal arrangements are 'highly decentralised'.[30] Nevertheless, the prominent role played by the Union and its sanctions regime seems to make the system more centralised in Antwerp than in Igboland.

Finally, the case of the Antwerp Igbo shows that unofficial dispute settlement can go with a great deal of institutionalisation and formalisation. It is to a large extent steered by the Union, which is strictly organised and possesses a set of detailed norms. Formal sanctions underpin these norms and their application. Despite the flexibility mentioned earlier, both the organisation and its norms are strongly interiorised. Like in Nigeria, Igbo Unions exist in many towns and cities in Belgium and beyond. According to my participants, other – mainly West African – communities in Antwerp have similar organisational and normative registers.

Conclusion

Although most research has focused on the global South, legal pluralism is a universal phenomenon. Both historically and spatially, it is a normal state of affairs. Semi-autonomous social fields[31] exist everywhere, and no state is fully autonomous, although of course its normative capacity is challenged more in some countries than in others. Therefore, the data coming from this brief study on dispute settlement among the Antwerp Igbo are not surprising. Had my cleaning lady come from elsewhere in Africa or the world, the outcome of this research would probably have been similar. In addition, instances of legal pluralism in Antwerp are not only 'imported', as other strong autochthonous semi-autonomous fields can be found there, for instance in the diamond sector, the Jewish community or the port world.[32] This is therefore a plea for more research on cases of new legal pluralism as an antidote to the ideology of legal centralism and a more complete and empirically grounded look at law in action.

This study not only confirms that strong non-state legal and judicial production is at work, but also shows that even within unofficial registers, there is plurality. Several avenues to settle disputes exist in the Igbo community, and procedures are flexible and diverse. The effectiveness and legitimacy of Igbo ways appear to be considerable, even among those – in particular the women – whose voice counts less. This is understandable in a diasporic environment, where there is a need to maintain identity, as well as to ensure support and solidarity. Like language and ceremonies, dispute settlement is part of a culture that aims to survive and remain distinct from other communities.

30 Uwazie 2005, p. 28.

31 Moore 1973.

32 As far as I'm aware, of these only the Jewish community has been researched from a legal pluralist angle, see Custers 2009.

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