

CORRUPTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS WITHIN IGBO EZE SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

Olowu Olagunju FOLORUNSO,

Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja

olagunju.olowu@uniabuja.edu.ng

&

Lovelyn Iruoma IDOKO,

Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja

lovedeevic43@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined corruption and accountability mechanisms within Igbo Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State. It focused on four major areas: the dominant forms and patterns of corruption; the effectiveness of accountability systems; the roles of traditional institutions in enforcing accountability; and the effects of alleged financial mismanagement on infrastructure and service delivery. Drawing from quantitative survey responses, and framed by the Principal-Agent Theory. The findings shows that; corruption within Igbo Eze South Local Government manifests through contract inflation, nepotism, bribery, and ghost workers, accountability mechanisms in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area are largely ineffective due to weak enforcement and minimal transparency in fund utilization, traditional institutions, such as community elders and village heads, serve as moral watchdogs. It recommends that; The ICPC should establish a permanent local monitoring unit in Igbo Eze South to conduct routine audits, investigate project implementation, and prosecute any identified cases of embezzlement or contract inflation, The Ministry should introduce a quarterly public financial disclosure policy requiring all local government departments in Igbo Eze South to publish budget allocations, expenditures.

Keywords: *Corruption, Accountability, Local Government, Embezzlement, Development,*

DOI: 10.31039/bjir.v3i11.121

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption undermines development, weakens public institutions and damages economic growth. In Africa, the effects of corruption are even more extreme, as the devastating scourge has drained off vital resources and seriously jeopardized growth and development. Corruption has plagued Nigeria which is Africa's most populated nation for many decades. Corruption in Nigeria is a serious crime that affects both the private and public sector levels of government. In Nigeria, there have been many instances of corruption at the local government level. At the level of the nation, Nigerians have put in place numerous measures to curb corruption in Nigeria. There are many anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria like EFCC, ICPC, SSS, etc that aids in fighting corruption in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria's local governments constitutes has seriously challenged their effectiveness and efficiency. The development projects (e.g. agriculture, health, and education) in Enugu State, the local governments take responsibility for service delivery. On the flip side, the inept administration and wickedness of some LGAs is a major problem for Enugu State, Nigeria. As an illustration, consider the Nwanne Di Na Mba Foundation Igbo Eze South LGA. According to Sunday (2016), the position of Igbo Eze South LGA can be enhanced.

The letter from the foundation to the council chairman noted that there had been no visible impact in the sixteen wards of the LGA. The letter also requested a full break down of income and payment. In 2021, additional claim of corruption was made when the Vice Chairman of Udenu LGA – Gideon Tochukwu was accused of hijacking 1,000 federal government job slots meant for Igbo Eze South LGA. According to reports, the 200 candidates that enrolled for the program were not residents of Igbo Eze South. Instead, the beneficiaries were largely drawn from Udenu LGA slots. A further manifestation of nepotism and the appropriation of public programs for personal or political ends (Anierobi, Obasi, Obioha, Onyejebu, & Ajah, 2025). However, there are efforts to promote accountability in Igbo Eze South LGA. In 2024 Hon. New council chairman elect. Ugo-Ferdinand Ukwueze constituted a nine-member team to evaluate and put together the assets of the local government. The council aimed to improve accountability with the hope of giving a better picture of its assets and liabilities. (Finanzio, 2015). Notably, constituency projects have become one of the development tools that have been used to engender development in Nigeria. A legislator can initiate projects using constituency projects.

Uwaegbute (2025) explained that politicians may take on constituency projects that will benefit their electorates. However, some politicians do the contrary; they pull these projects for personal use, causing underdevelopment. Consequently, one can reasonably conclude that the constant incidences of corruption are a result of lack of accountability in the system. Community leadership structures are another important facet of local governance in a democracy. In some communities, the traditional ruler and the president of the town union tussle for power. The feud between the two party chiefs is hindering development. Since they are essentially leaders of the same community, it is quite paradoxical that they are often at loggerheads. Further, because of their dispute, they cannot work together for the development of their community. As a result, there is a power struggle characterized by litigation. In other communities, differing party affiliations within the town union led to the collapse of the union. This eventual collapse eventually caused the formation of factions who claimed ownership over community resources, such as market stalls, etc. It also led to litigation. Corruption has not ceased to exist over the years yet after all the ones we know. The matter at hand is as disturbing as it has impacted all sectors. There exists a plethora of anti-.agencies of corruption. Despite transparency and anti-corruption programs, the vice of corruption continues to flourish and is growing rapidly (Kennedy, 2020). An effort must be made to review the issue of corruption and accountability in local governance and the affirmative measure taken.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Vito Tanzi defines corruption as the deliberate violation of the arm's-length principle to gain an advantage for oneself or associated persons. This definition has three fundamental aspects. The initial aspect pertains to the arm's-length principle, which mandates that personal or other relationships must not influence economic choices involving several parties. Equitable treatment of all economic participants is crucial for an effectively functioning market economy. Favouritism towards certain economic agents unequivocally contravenes the arm's-length principle and satisfies a required requirement for corruption. Absence of prejudice equates to absence of corruption. Two other requisite factors must be met for observable bias, or "non-compliance with the arm's-length principle," to be classified as corruption. The initial criterion is that the bias must be deliberate; an inadvertent breach of the arm's-length principle due to factors such as inadequate knowledge does not constitute corruption. Secondly, there must be a benefit for the individual who breaches the arm's-length standard; otherwise, corruption is absent.

Transgressing impartiality may occasionally signify racism; yet, it does not constitute corruption. Acquiring an advantage or obtaining a profit for the corrupt economic agent can manifest in several manners. It is a prevalent belief that corruption entails the receipt of money, sometimes referred to as bribery; however, analogous benefits may also include lavish gifts or numerous reciprocated favours. Bestowing costly jewellery onto the spouse of an individual who breached the arm's-length principle and offering a lucrative, minimally demanding position to his kid is unequivocal corruption. Obtaining a profit or gaining an advantage may occur concurrently with a breach of the arm's-length principle, albeit these activities might also transpire at distinct intervals. The biased conduct of the corrupted individual creates an informal, albeit occasionally obligatory, duty for the corruptor to reciprocate, and this responsibility remains perpetually relevant, therefore extending the advantages derived from the corrupted party into the future. If the reciprocated favour is a lucrative employment opportunity for the son, who has recently begun his college education, it is evident that a temporal disparity exists between the two actions. Moreover, in draughting the corruption contract, the reciprocation is occasionally not explicitly stated, however the duty is inferred. The World Bank offers an alternate definition of corruption, characterising it as "the abuse of public office for private gain." This definition takes into account

The origin of corruption within public power and its exploitation is associated with the state, its functions, state participation in the market, and the presence of the public sector. This definition precludes the consideration of corruption in the private sector, concentrating solely on corruption within the public sector. This description aligns with Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker's assertion that "the abolition of the state leads to the eradication of corruption." The issue with the alternative definition is that not every misuse of public office constitutes corruption. Some of these actions include theft, fraud, embezzlement, or other behaviours, but certainly not corruption. If a senior government official unlawfully seizes funds from the budget without rendering any service or favour, it is a crime of a different nature rather than corruption. While it is socially objectionable, it does not constitute corruption; that is, corruption is not the exclusive kind of social unacceptability and illegality.

Moreover, extortion is a deliberate deviation from the arm's-length principle; yet, due to the absence of benefit for the extortion victim (such as a judge or prosecutor), this type of breach does not qualify as corruption. It is essential to differentiate between corruption and other illicit acts, as the elements of corruption and the strategies to combat it are often unique from those

addressing other forms of criminal conduct. From an enforcement perspective, corruption constitutes a contract. This is an informal contract due to its illegality; no court globally will enforce it in the event of a dispute. A properly functioning court would adjudicate corruption as a criminal offence. The distinct characteristic of corruption as an illicit contract incurs significant transaction costs, primarily including: identifying the counterpart, draughting the contract (especially considering all anticipated and unanticipated contingencies), overseeing the contract, and enforcing the contract. This does not imply that typical legal contracts are devoid of transaction expenses. This indicates that the illicit character of the corruption contract results in increased transaction costs.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency denotes openness, enabling others to understand current activities and past actions. Parris, Dapko, Arnold, & Arnold, (2016) characterised transparency as the notion of establishing an environment in which information regarding an entity's choices and activities is made available, visible, and comprehensible to all stakeholders through disclosure. Iyayi (2001) asserted that transparency encompasses the capacity to act honestly while also being perceived as honest. He clarified that transparency involves fulfilling one's responsibilities in a manner that does not tarnish one's character, name, or reputation.

Transparency necessitates that an individual provide unimpeded access to information that is timely, sufficient, pertinent, dependable, and complete for economic and social assessments and choices. The process involves executing a task with sincerity, integrity, and altruism to attain the intended goals of governance. A transparent individual is open-minded, adheres to rules, regulations, and processes, provides information openly and truly (eliminating any potential for doubt or suspicion), has a high level of integrity, and does not conceal ulterior motives.

A transparent organisation resembles a glass that permits its contents to be visible by everyone. Transparency aligns with Section 168 of the 1999 Constitution, which stipulates that Nigerians have the right to be informed of all transactions conducted on their behalf, regardless of their legality. Simultaneously, accurate financial records must be maintained for such transactions, independently accounted for and subjected to audit. Consequently, it may be asserted that a deficiency in transparency fosters corruption and impedes the achievement of desirable socioeconomic growth and development. Accountability pertains to the accountability and answerability of individuals overseeing economic resources for their management, actions, and

decisions. Accountability compels institutions to confront the truth of a situation and enhances the responsibility of authorities, who must defend their decisions, actions, and inactions. Accountability may be described as the duty to exhibit that tasks have been executed in compliance with established norms and standards; and the officer reports honestly and precisely on performance/results in relation to assigned duties and/or goals. Accountability entails being responsible to people who have placed their trust, confidence, and resources in an organisation or individual. Governmental accountability refers to the obligation of public officials to disclose their acts to citizens, as well as the citizens' right to pursue action against authorities whose behaviour they deem unacceptable. In a social setting, accountability is described as the duty of public authority holders to justify or assume responsibility for their acts (Thornhill, 2015). Consequently, each steward is responsible to the individual or entity that delegated resources to him.

Local Government

Before Nigeria achieved independence, there was a lack of standardisation in the administration of Native Authorities across the country. The South exhibited a somewhat democratic style of governance, permitting public participation, whereas the North was characterised by a highly centralised structure with less public involvement in governance. In the North, taxes constituted the primary income stream utilised for the maintenance of the Emirate councils. This was exclusive to the inhabitants of southern Nigeria. The colonial authority's effort to implement equivalent measures in the East resulted in the 'Aba Women Riot' of 1929. The insurrection resulted in the disintegration of Native Authority in Eastern Nigeria, but it prospered in other regions (Ovaga, 2012). Consequently, from 1967 to 1970, the nomenclature for local administrations varied throughout all areas. In the North, the local government was referred to as Local Authority, in the West as Local Government, and in the East as District Council. In 1976, a consistent and singular layer of governance was instituted nationwide. This was subsequently enshrined in the 1979 constitution, so providing it with comprehensive legal support and acknowledging local government as the third tier of government.

A local government operates at the municipal level, exercising designated authority within specified jurisdictions to support the duties of both state and federal governments. It is established to decentralise political authority with territorial jurisdiction and specified functions. The rationale for the decentralisation of political authority may be encapsulated in four points: (i) to foster economic growth from the grassroots; (ii) to facilitate political

integration and nation-building; (iii) to encourage local autonomy; and (iv) to strengthen grassroots democracy.

The responsibilities of local government, as outlined in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution, include: (i) evaluating economic planning and advising a state commission on planning; (ii) collecting rates and radio and television licence fees; (iii) establishing and maintaining cemeteries, burial grounds, and facilities for the destitute or infirm; (iv) establishing and maintaining market stalls, parking areas, and public amenities designated by the state legislature; (v) naming roads and Additional responsibilities include (vi) the provision and maintenance of public conveniences and refuse disposal facilities; (vii) the registration of births, deaths, and marriages; (viii) the assessment of properties for rate levying purposes; (ix) the control and regulation of outdoor advertisements, the movement and keeping of pets, as well as the operation of shops, kiosks, restaurants, and other food sales establishments, including laundries; (x) the assessment of properties for rate levying purposes; (xi) collaboration with the state government in managing primary education and the development of agriculture and natural resources, excluding mineral exploitation, along with health services and other matters as determined by the state legislature.

Local Government Administration

The notion of local governance has garnered several meanings. However, in contrast to other notions, it has not engendered much disagreement over its precise meaning. A delineation of many of these definitions may prove beneficial. Local government is the foundation upon which state and federal governments are built. Akhakpe, (2011) defines local government as "a unit of administration characterised by a defined territory, specific powers, and administrative authority, possessing a degree of autonomy." The 1976 Local Government Reforms define local government as the administration at the local level conducted by representative councils constituted by law to exercise particular responsibilities within designated regions. The council should possess significant authority over local matters, along with the personnel and institutional and financial resources necessary to initiate and oversee service provision, as well as to identify and execute projects that align with the activities of state and federal governments.

This is intended to ensure that local initiatives and responses to community needs and conditions are optimised through the devolution of functions to the councils and the active

involvement of the populace and traditional institutions, (FRN, 1976). The aforementioned definitions are undoubtedly comprehensive and endeavour to encompass the entirety of local government administration's meaning. The fundamental purpose of local government administration is to address the needs of the populace in grassroots or rural regions. Akhakpe, Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012) defines rural regions as tiny, insular, and picturesque groups bound by familial connections and engaged in fundamental agricultural activities. The distinctions between rural and urban areas are evident in aspects such as size, population density, homogeneity, limited social classes, low living standards, scarcity of social amenities like electricity and piped water, predominantly agrarian characteristics, rural-urban migration of young individuals seeking better opportunities, domestic labour, poverty, elevated mortality and birth rates, illiteracy, heightened health risks, insufficient access to productive resources, and lack of credit and market access, among others.

The necessity for establishing local government globally arises from the imperative to promote grassroots development. Despite the significance of local government administration, many obstacles have impeded its operations over the years. The difficulties encompass political intervention by federal and state governments, a high prevalence of bribery and corruption, embezzlement, and a significant deficiency of adequately educated and competent personnel, among others (Akhakpe, Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Principal-Agent Theory

Theoretical framework used by the study is Principal-Agent Theory. The Principal-Agent Theory was first systematically set out by Stephen A. Ross in 1973. He introduced Agency Theory while studying the structure of incentive systems in organizations. After this, Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling's paper of 1976 greatly expanded on the idea of Ross. Together, these studies initiated a literature of principal-agent relationships that has taken hold as a leading paradigm in economics, political science and public administration. A theory of the firm considers managerial behaviour, ownership structure and agency costs according to Jensen and Meckling. Using principal-agent theory, public choice scholars study bureaucratic behaviour. Researching the effect of constitutions on the interactions between elected officials and their unelected counterparts using principal-agent theory is commonplace in literature dealing with political institutions.

The Citizens of Igbo Eze South expect elected and appointees officials involved in local governance to serve their interest, effective prudent management of public funds as well as ensuring there is a provision of service delivery to the public. The current reality in our local government – corruption, mismanagement of funds and weak service delivery reflects that the principal-agent relationship has been compromised. The public official, as an agent, has exploited his position to enrich himself and his group at the principal's expense.

The principal-agent theory pertains to this study because it specifies the structures that condition the existence of corruption in local government. It is indicating the problems of moral hazard and adverse selection. Moral hazard is a phenomenon whereby agents act more recklessly than they otherwise would because they do not have to bear the full consequences of their actions. Adverse selection is the process by which incompetent persons are chosen for key positions in the decision-making chain because of defects in the recruitment and accountability system. In Nigeria, local governance typically has these in common. In fact, having a decentralized system with no concurrent checks and balances makes it so that the result will always be that funds will be looted indiscriminately and services delivered poorly (Oji & Chukwuemeka, 2022). The theory was adopted in this study because it's suitable in analyzing the causes of corruption in the administration, and the issue of non-accountability in Igbo Eze South. This theory explains how asymmetries in information, authority and incentives vitiate the delegate representation between public officials and citizens. Thus, principal-agent theory is the conceptual foundation for this research. The research seeks to discover how the findings on corruption and accountability in Igbo Eze South can operationally reverse to impact positively on governance and the citizenry in a better way.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research investigates corruption and accountability mechanisms Igbo-Eze South LGA. Thus, it employs a quantitative research design. The researcher involved will analyze data of budget allocations, audit report, and anti-graft agencies data for the period 2018-2023, to ascertain the form and extent of possible financial irregularities in Igbo Eze South LGA. Study Sample Size.

According to projections from the National Population Commission, the Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area (LGA) in Enugu State should have a projected population of about 292, 000. The sample size for this study is four hundred (400). From a total of 292,000 citizens within

Igbo Eze South local government area, they were selected. This figure of 400 is based on the Taro Yamane.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Four hundred questionnaire was distributed the respondents, while two hundred and ninety-three questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents which form the basis for the analyses. This was based on the research questions

- i. What are the major forms and patterns of corruption prevalent within the administrative structure of Igbo Eze South Local Government Area?
- ii. How effective are the existing accountability mechanisms in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area?

5. ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS WITHIN IGBO EZE SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

The major forms and patterns of corruption prevalent within the administrative structure of Igbo Eze South Local Government Area.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Public office holders in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area frequently demand unofficial payments before delivering public services.	61 (20.8%)	85 (29.0%)	59 (20.1%)	55 (18.8%)	33 (11.3%)
2	Cases of contract inflation and misappropriation of project funds are common within the local government administration.	56 (19.1%)	77 (26.3%)	62 (21.2%)	61 (20.8%)	37 (12.6%)
3	Employment and promotion within the local government are often influenced more by personal connections than by merit.	66 (22.5%)	70 (23.9%)	60 (20.5%)	49 (16.7%)	48 (16.4%)
4	Allocation of local government resources lacks transparency and	74 (25.3%)	81 (27.6%)	52 (17.7%)	50 (17.1%)	36 (12.3%)

	is often influenced by personal or political interests.					
5	There is little or no consequence for corrupt practices among administrative officials in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area	58 (19.8%)	79 (26.9%)	63 (21.5%)	54 (18.4%)	39 (13.3%)

Field work: 2026

Igbo eze South Local Government Area is a place where the bureaucracy is very corrupt. Almost half of the respondents agreed that unofficial fees are “always” demanded as 49.8% agreed or strongly agree. In the same vein, 45.4% accepted that misappropriation of funds and contract inflation occurred whereas only 33.4% disagreed. On recruitment and promotion, 46.4% believe that dynastic and preferential always nullify merit. When it comes to resource allocation, 52.9% always agreed that undue political influence is brought to bear. Almost 50% of respondents couldn’t remember the last time penalty was enforced. As a result, we have an institutional weakness as well as a weak public accountability.

The effectiveness of the existing accountability mechanisms in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area

S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Financial reports and budgetary allocations of the local government are made available to the public regularly.	64 (21.8%)	86 (29.4%)	58 (19.8%)	53 (18.1%)	32 (10.9%)
2	There are functional internal audit units that monitor the use of public funds in the local government.	61 (20.8%)	80 (27.3%)	66 (22.5%)	54 (18.4%)	32 (10.9%)
3	Citizens are given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes concerning local governance..	55 (18.8%)	73 (24.9%)	69 (23.5%)	59 (20.1%)	37 (12.6%)
4	Elected officials and civil servants in Igbo Eze South are held accountable for misuse of public resources.	81 (27.6%)	78 (26.6%)	59 (20.1%)	45 (15.4%)	30 (10.2%)
5	Existing oversight bodies within the local government operate independently and without political interference.	63 (21.5%)	84 (28.7%)	62 (21.2%)	50 (17.1%)	34 (11.6%)

Field work: 2026

Accountability mechanisms are only moderately effective in the study area, as the responses suggest. Financial reports are easily accessible to the public. 51.2% of respondents agree to the above statement, which are the sum of 'Always' 11.3% and 'Often' 39.9%. Nevertheless, 29 percent of respondents, in total, make up the ones that Disagreed with the above statement or are not sure of. A breakdown of the categories shows that 12.9% 'Rarely' participate, 16.1% 'Never' participate, and 10% 'Don't know'. The Council includes the internal audit/control unit. Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents 'Agree' with the statement above.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that corruption within Igbo Eze South Local Government manifests through contract inflation, nepotism, bribery, and ghost workers. The respondents consistently pointed to inflated project costs, patronage-based employment, and poor service delivery. These align with Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga (2024), who identified institutional opacity and geographical disparities as enabling corruption in local governance. The respondents also noted discrepancies between budgetary allocations and physical outcomes. The views further confirm a breakdown in accountability mechanisms, which is in conformity with Uche, Chukwudi, and Nnenna's (2015) position on attitudinal failures in public administration.

More so, the findings reveal that accountability mechanisms in Igbo Eze South Local Government Area are largely ineffective due to weak enforcement and minimal transparency in fund utilization. The respondents noted irregular auditing practices and political interference. They pointed out that reports from anti-corruption bodies rarely translate into sanctions. These views reflect Uche, Chukwudi, and Nnenna (2015), who observed that the absence of functional oversight institutions weakens performance and accountability in local councils. Thus, while structures may exist on paper, their actual implementation remains inconsistent and compromised, limiting their impact on governance outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Akhakpe, I. B. (2011). Local government reforms in Nigeria. *T. Olojede, B. Fajonyami*.
- Akhakpe, I., Fatile, O. J., & Igbokwe-Ibeto, C. J. (2012). Local government and the challenges of community and rural development in Nigeria: The way forward. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2(6), 803-819.
- Anierobi, C. M., Obasi, C. O., Obioha, E. E., Onyejebu, C. D., & Ajah, B. O. (2025). Community land conflicts and pro-poor urban land access in Enugu, Nigeria: Church involvement for social inclusion. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 81(1), 10511.
- Finanzio, A. (2015). Public participation, transparency and accountability-essential ingredients of good decision making. *Australian Environmental Law Digest*, 2(1), 3-15.
- IYAYI, F. (2001). We Cannot Afford To Fail. *Matatu*, 23(1), 83-89.
- Kennedy, C. K. (2020). Good Governance A Panacea to the Fight Against Corruption. *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, 18(2).
- Ovaga, O. H., & Okechukwu, M. E. (2012). Subsidy in the downstream oil sector and the fate of the masses in Nigeria. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Kuwait Chapter)*, 1(6), 15-34.
- Parris, D. L., Dapko, J. L., Arnold, R. W., & Arnold, D. (2016). Exploring transparency: a new framework for responsible business management. *Management Decision*, 54(1), 222-247.
- Sunday, E. A. (2016). *The Roles Of Local Government In Rural Socio–Economic Development (A Case Study Of Igbo–Eze South Local Government Area)* (Doctoral Dissertation, Enugu State University Of Science And Technology).
- Thornhill, C. (2016). *A sociology of transnational constitutions*. Cambridge University Press.

Uche, A. S., Chukwudi, O. R., & Nnenna, I. A. (2015). Attitudinal impact of institutional mechanisms of public accountability and performance among local government workers in Nigeria: A study of Enugu state local governments. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(5), 2039-2117.

Uwaegbute, K. I. (2025). “We have suffered enough and it may even get worse if care is not taken”: Discussing the role of churches in the 2023 general election in a Nigerian town. *Critical Research on Religion*, 13(1), 32-46.