



‘TRAPPED IN IMPERMANENCE’: MAKING ARCHITECTURAL MODIFICATIONS TO IDP CAMP SHELTERS AS A SELF-SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

Warebi Gabriel Brisibe¹

Abstract

This paper is based on a longitudinal study of self-settlement strategies developed by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), mostly fishermen from the Bakassi Peninsula in Cameroon to Yenagoa town, the capital of Bayelsa State in Nigeria. The Government of Bayelsa State moved the IDPs into a makeshift camp facility with promises of immediate permanent resettlement, in form of housing. Ten years on, and what was intended as a temporary facility to shelter the displaced fishermen, is fast becoming a permanent squatter settlement in the heart of the city, as families continually adapt the dwellings to suit their needs. This paper examines the architectural modifications that have been made to these temporary shelters over time. A combined qualitative method approach was used, including interviews, freehand drawings and photographic survey. It investigates the way alterations and extensions have been made to these shelters in chronological layers and analyses the impact on the culture, livelihood and the change influencing the layers of architectural modifications due to relocation.

Keywords: IDP Camp, Resettlement, Modifications, Ijo Fishermen

The Journal of Internal Displacement (JID), established July 2009, is the only scholarly journal committed to all displacement concerns worldwide. Thanks to the generous voluntary contribution from the advisory board and editorial team - manuscript submission, peer-review and publication of the JID is **FREE OF CHARGE**. The JID does not charge authors to submit articles.

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Submission (January 2017 Edition): <http://journalofinternaldisplacement.com>

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DISCLOSURE: Opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Journal of Internal Displacement and its editorial team.

DATE of ACCEPTANCE: This manuscript was first submitted on 27 September 2016 and accepted for publication on 14 December 2016.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The author has indicated that he has no conflict of interest or financial relationship related to this article.

Citation: Warebi Gabriel Brisibe, ‘Trapped in Impermanence’: Making Architectural Modifications to IDP Camp Shelters as a Self-Settlement Strategy, Journal of Internal Displacement, 7(1), 2017, pp. 4-15.

‘Trapped in Impermanence’: Making Architectural Modifications to IDP Camp Shelters as a Self-settlement Strategy

Warebi Gabriel Brisibe

Introduction

The phrase "Trapped in Impermanence" is borrowed from Goswani's (2006) study on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living along the national highway 31, in Western Assam, India. It aptly described the state of limbo in which IDPs live, between the event of displacement and permanent resettlement. A similar scenario exists with the IDPs that currently live in a government-built IDP camp in Yenagoa, Nigeria. These IDPs are mostly migrant fishermen of the Ijo ethnic group, one of 10 prominent migrant fishing tribes in the West and Central African coastline (Haakonsen 1992) and part of the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. This paper forms part of a broader research, aimed at examining variations in the architecture of these migrant fishing group. It focuses on investigating architectural variations between members of the group in the ethnic homeland in Bayelsa, Nigeria and other members of the group that reside in Bakassi Peninsula, Cameroon. The latter are the same group of people who now live in the IDP camp in Yenagoa, having been forced to migrate from their homes in Cameroon as a result of conflict.

The resettlement housing scheme earlier proposed by the Government has been abandoned and the option of monetary compensation is locked in bureaucratic stalemate. With no foreseeable resettlement plan, the IDPs have developed several self-settlement strategies to cope with the challenges of living in limbo amidst growing families. One of such strategies involves making alterations to the camp shelters to improve the liveability of the environment and the impermanent dwellings, which they now occupy.

The way, in which these alterations and extensions are made to the buildings in the IDP camp, will be examined and compared with dwellings in the migrant fishing camps in Bakassi, for corresponding patterns. The focus here is not merely the physical addition of new spaces or the modification of existing ones, but the cultural and ideological influences that have fostered these modifications.

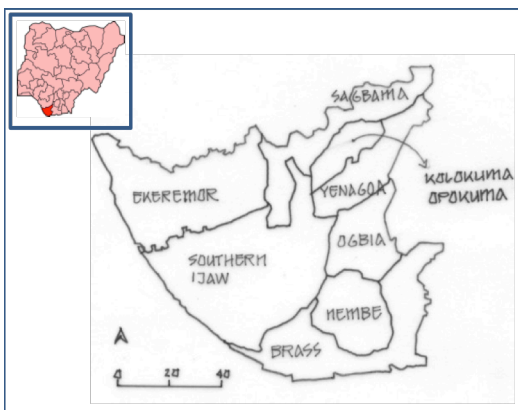


Fig 1 Map of Bayelsa State showing the eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) and map of Nigeria (inset)

Literature Review

Living in limbo or a state of impermanence by IDPs and refugees appears to exist as long as the issue of forced migration continues. Disasters and conflicts are two of the main causes of forced migration and the length of time the displaced persons continue to live in limbo is often determined by the severity of the causative factor and the time taken for permanent resettlement. More often shelters in camps originally intended as temporary accommodation become long-term

limbo dwellings. The term Protracted Refugee Situation also known as PRS created by the UNHCR describes the situation of those for whom a durable resettlement solution is yet to be implemented. Although this term refers mainly to refugees, it also covers IDPs (Merheb and

Loughna 2006). Perouse de Montclos and Kwajanga (2000) examined why many refugee camps last longer than the transient settlements they were created to be. They looked at factors such as size, population density, trading activities amongst other things developed within it that allow the camp to continue even after humanitarian aid and relief have stopped. Some studies estimate that two-thirds of the world's refugees live in never ending exile with the average length of these states of limbo reaching 20 years (Milner and Loescher 2011). Sayigh (2005) observed in his work that some Palestinian expellees in Lebanon have been in temporary camps even after 50 years of exile.

Scholars have over the years examined how continuously staying in structures like camps designed to manage particular types of human movement or transition lead to states of higher uncertainty. The term 'Limbo' has increasingly become used to describe situations of protracted displacement for refugees and IDPs. It is the existence between a previous social setting and a receiving society and connotes inherent geographical and temporal transition. Another term more recently used to describe this situation is 'Liminality'. Turner (1995) suggests that since certain forms of transformation can occur while in protracted displacement, Liminality is apt. The concept suggests marginalisation, control and stasis as well as transformation and flow. It emanates from social rituals of going through a process and the rites of passage with the idea that there is movement into another phase of life and belonging. Bousquet (1987) describes the state of limbo in holding camps and the experience of neglect it engenders. Similarly, Ellis and Baraket (1996) examined the long term psychological and physical impact of temporary accommodation and relief on IDPs in Croatia.

Refugees and IDPs have come up with several ways to create some semblance of normalcy under these conditions. Brun and Fabos (2015) studied people's experiences of protracted displacement and how they make home under those conditions. They recreate familiarity, improve material conditions, while imagining and hoping for a better future. Others use impermanent housing to shelter objects and practices that remind them of home (Sayigh 2005). However, this study examines not imagined settings or practices that people in limbo use to make a home in exile but actual modifications made to the camp dwellings or shelters reminiscent of their home or previous social settings. Brun (2015) conducted studies along this line when he analysed practices such as transforming temporary shelters to places of homely meaning in Georgia. It involved a detailed examination of the adjustment and adaptation of block houses made by refugees in protracted displacement to suit social and cultural needs reminiscent of home. Also Skotte (2004) had earlier examined housing provided for refugees and IDPs which were subsequently modified by inhabitants in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This study is similar in context to that of Brun and Skotte in that it examines architectural modifications made to the IDP camp shelters in Yenagoa that accommodate displaced persons in limbo for the past ten years.

Out-Migration Pattern of Ijo Fishermen

To obtain a proper understanding of the context behind the displacement and temporary resettlement of the IDPs, a description of the mobile lifestyle of ethnic Ijo fishermen is required. As such, the migration wave from the South-eastern regions of Nigeria to the Sud-Ouest province of Cameroon is a good place to start. The initial west-east migration has been traced back to 1920 when the borders between both countries were devoid of clear-cut demarcations (Agoro, Asuk, Olali and Etekpe, 2009). Successive migration waves occurred in the 1940s and again in the 1960s after the 'Northern Cameroons' and the 'Southern Cameroons' were merged

following the 1958 votings. Bakassi Peninsula was part of the Southern Cameroons territory which was attached to the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria until 1954 (De Koning, 2008). A vast number of people who moved from the Southeast and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria into Southern Cameroons in the 1940s took up job opportunities in agriculture, industry, local trading and the fishing industry in the coastal regions especially the Bakassi Peninsula. In addition to dominating the work force in the area of blue-collar jobs, there was a simultaneous migration flow and consequent domination of the fishing industry in the coastal regions. Fishing was extensively practiced by settlers such as the Ijos and the indigenous Efik people. De Konings states that “They also dominate the fish industry: the majority of the fish sold in Anglophone Cameroon are caught by Nigerians living in the regions’ coastal areas, including Bakassi peninsula” (2005:284).

Large numbers of Ijo fishermen migrated to the Cameroons during this period and settled in the Bakassi peninsula. Most of the current population of Ijo fishermen are descendants of these early migrant fishers and were either born or raised in Bakassi or other regions in the Sud Owest province of Cameroon. The fishing camps which were established by these early Ijo migrant fishers still bear their names and are still being used by their children or grandchildren as base camps until the forced migration.

Uprooting the Migrant Fishing Population: Planned Relocation or Forced Migration

Since 1954, the ownership of this region known as the Bakassi peninsula had been in contention resulting in conflicts between the Nigerian and Cameroonian Governments. A protracted court battle ensued at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) from March 1994 and on the 10th of October 2002; the ICJ ruled in favour of Cameroon prompted the signing of the ‘Green Tree Agreement’ on the 12th of June 2006 (Mbuh 2004). But with the ceding of the territory came the unprecedented displacement of several thousands of Bakassi residents most of which were migrant fishermen of the Ijo ethnic group. The resettlement of the resulting IDPs is a direct responsibility of the Federal government but with support from the various state governments whose indigenes were affected. Repatriation of IDPs from Bakassi Peninsula and other regions of Cameroon to Yenagoa in Bayelsa State occurred in two phases. The first phase was in 2005 with an estimated figure of 2000 persons. That figure was expected to reach 2186 persons by 2008 (State Emergency Management Agency 2008). An estimated figure of 10,000 persons returned in the second phase in 2006, with an anticipated increase by about 6% in two years (Ajibola 2006). Of the total number of IDPs that were relocated to Yenagoa, over 75% were migrant fishermen with fishing as their main source of livelihood and income.

Accounts of those repatriated have been cited below;

“I had just come into my one room house to unload my stock of fish and prepare for sale when I heard everyone was leaving and it was the last day of the ultimatum. I did not want to be left behind so I took only my bag and abandoned every other thing including my fish and left. I have not been able to go back since and I don’t know what happened to my property” (Interview 15: March 2008 Nsake-ere Gladys Abgaiko, 35 - fishmonger)

“They packed us like sardines on the ship from Cameroon to Calabar. When we reached Calabar it was raining heavily...there was no proper arrangement to move what little priced possessions we came with so they just off-loaded everything unto the jetty. The rain damaged a lot of property and many items were missing...including my 15hp Yamaha outboard boat engine” (Interview 2: March 2007 Godpower Singer - Artisanal fisherman)

Methodology

For the study conducted amongst displaced persons in the IDP camp in Yenagoa, a combined methods approach was employed. Firstly, a one-to-one interview with about 60 household heads designed in a semi-structured format was used. This semi-structured format was chosen mainly to create room for open-ended and follow-up questions, usually asked after the core information on the interview agenda had been completed. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 20 – 75 years and both male and female household heads were interviewed.

Secondly, in order to capture different aspects of the IDP environment from different views and showing different details that can be further analysed required the use of drawings and photographs. Especially since architectural ideas are represented through drawings, measured drawings, schematic sketches, details and other related diagrams were used. Drawings of different aspects of the IDP camp shelters produced during fieldwork were expected to cover three main areas of interest:

- **Camp layout and planning pattern** – In this aspect the layout of the various buildings that make up the camp was drawn to ascertain details such as; proximity of various functional spaces, connectivity between various units in the camp, pedestrian circulation and orientation for airflow maximisation.
- **Design of dwellings** – Detailed annotated sketches were made of the shelter types within the IDP camp during a period of two years when modifications in design of the camp shelters were effected. The arrangement of functional spaces within the shelter, placement of fenestration and spaces allocated for specific activities were recorded.

All the on-site sketches were made on grid paper in scale of 1:200 and reproduced in a larger scale of 1:100 for clarity.

Photography was also used to provide support for ethnographic reports and this added to its authentication. However, photography in this study goes beyond the use of visual data as illustrative resources to becoming actual tools that enhance how the IDPs make sense of their situation and adapt to life in limbo.

The photographic survey was aimed at:

- Capturing activities that show use of space, especially where sketches could not be made due to interview time constraints.
- Showing certain details of the dwelling.

Ethical issues in social science research pertaining to victims of forced migration were also taken into consideration during fieldwork.

Findings: Initial Planning and Design of IDP Camp, Yenagoa

The first sign of response to the plight of the IDPs by the government was the provision of a temporary camp along the Azikoro road at Ekeki in Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital. The camp is located on a government owned land that can be accessed from the Azikoro road in the heart of the city by either of three routes; these include two pathways and an untarred driveway. The camp originally consisted of eight rows of buildings, with each row made up of four large open plan dormitory units, built out of timber frames and clad with timber planks. Six of the eight rows lie parallel to each other, with the last two rows lying end-to-end, adjacent to the other six. A space of about 4 meters was maintained between the rows of buildings to serve as pedestrian access.

The original number of families allocated to each dormitory unit was six, bringing the average number of occupants per dormitory to 25-30 persons, depending on the size of each family. Functional spaces such as sleeping, circulation and storage areas in the open plan unit were demarcated using curtains made of blankets, mosquito nets and/or recycled grain sacks. These demarcations of functional spaces also serve as a way of creating partitions between the several households that were made to live together. Spaces for other essential services such as kitchen and toilet facilities were not provided, just as all other forms of basic infrastructure in the camp are lacking. The cluster arrangement and subsequent overcrowding of the facility makes it a breeding ground for communicable diseases and prone to disease spread in the case of an outbreak. Based on the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) report (2006), an estimated 103 people had died in this camp out of communicable disease related ailments in the space of three years. The most vulnerable being the infant population.

Additions and Modifications to IDP Camp Buildings

In the SEMA report, the projected population increase of IDPs would have been by 6% at the end of 2008. The population was expected to maintain a steady increase by that same percentage by the end of 2010. In addition to that, the final forced migration of Nigerian citizens from Bakassi took place on August 2008 and with that development, more IDPs arrived at the state capital and the already congested camp. With the increase of the number of people in the camp, the most logical modifications being carried out by the inhabitants should bother on building extensions to accommodate the increased numbers. However, the alterations to the timber dwellings, observed in this study was not focused on extension works to create more sleeping or living areas, but on other aspects. This part of the paper examines the forms of alterations made to the buildings and the areas in which they were made. In the course of this study, five areas where modifications were made to the initial camp structures have been identified, these are;

- Bathing facilities
- Hearth space were cooking and fish drying activities take place
- Use of raised walkways
- Inclusion of a space for religious communal activities
- Land reclamation

As stated earlier, the focus here is not merely the addition of these new spaces or the modification of existing ones but the cultural and ideological influences that have fostered these modifications.

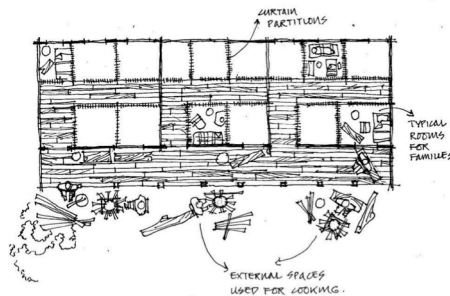


Fig 2 Initial plan of dormitory styled IDP camp dwelling showing each family space partitioned using curtains and external cooking area

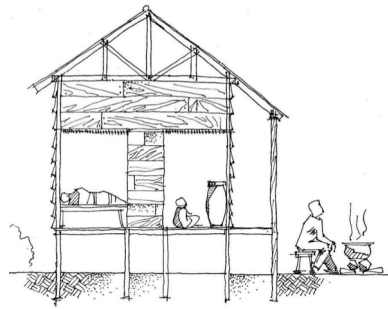


Fig 3 Section showing initial IDP camp dwelling with cooking done outside

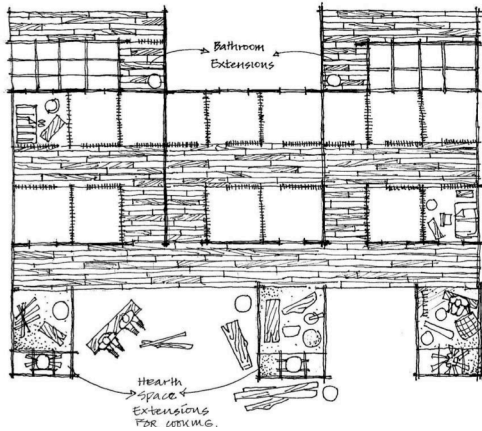


Fig 4 Plan showing modified IDP camp dwelling with hearth and bathing space extensions

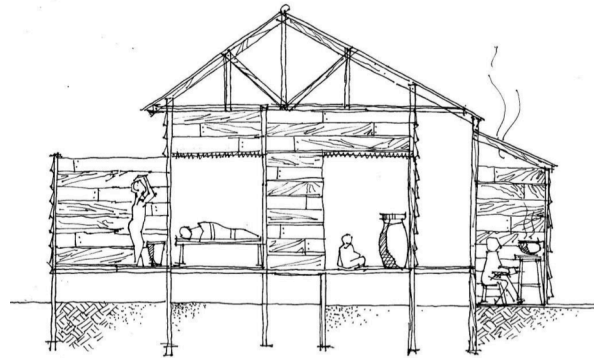


Fig 5 Section of modified IDP camp dwelling showing added hearth and bathing area

Bathing Area

In the initial design of the dormitory units in the IDP camp, no bathrooms, toilets or laundry facilities were provided along with the dwelling units. Bathing areas were eventually built by the IDPs and these spaces were sited at the back of each row of building. The bathing areas were designed as open roofed structures with raised floors. Timber planks laid up to five layers high horizontally, provide protective screen walls for the facility. Even with all the extensions being made to the buildings, toilet and laundry spaces were not created, only bathing areas were built. Families used surrounding bushes as areas to defecate, while the veranda of the buildings served as spaces for carrying out laundry activities. This supports the findings, which shows that the only space created for dirt removal in the migrant fishing camps was the bathing space, which had to be located at the private area behind the dwelling. The cultural ideology expressed in the migrant fisher architecture has been replicated in the IDP camp where the migrant fishermen now reside.

Hearth Space

This is one of the core facilities in any fishing camp and serves as an area for the processing and drying of fish as well as preparation of food. Like the bathing space, this facility was not included in the open plan units of the IDP camp. Fish is one of the main staple diets of the Ijos and in the first few months of their arrival at the camp, all forms of cooking and fish drying processes were conducted outside on the pedestrian area between the rows of buildings. With time each household created extensions in front of their shared units to carry out cooking and fish drying activities. The improvised hearth spaces measured about 1.0 - 1.2metres in depth x 1.5 - 2.0metres in width. They were fitted with lean-to roofs and clad in timber planks, zinc sheets and/or recycled sacks from food aid or Portland cement bags from nearby construction sites. What is being emphasized here is



Fig 6 Showing bathing space behind the building

that the hearth spaces have been constructed in front of the rows of buildings, right on the pedestrian access ways.



Fig 7 Hearth space early weeks of arrival



Fig 8 Hearth spaces as observed recently

Raised Walkways

Although the IDP camp is located in the heart of the State capital, the area often experience heavy rainfall and the grounds around the camp become water logged or muddy during the rainy seasons. During the rest of the year the land is dry and suitable for pedestrian use as well as cycling. Raised walkways connecting the entire row of buildings in the camp were constructed by the IDPs using communal effort. They were designed according to the pattern of walkways used in the fishing camps. Although in the original context, they serve as a means of maintaining proximity between kinsmen, yet in the IDP camp, they act as means of connecting the different rows of buildings in the camp.

Spaces for Religious Communal Activities

A number of migrant fishing communities are founded on beliefs similar to those of the Aladura movement, which is an independent African church organisation popular amongst the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Communities in the Niger Delta region, which is south of Nigeria, have adopted these beliefs mainly through ethnogenesis or geographical diffusion. The branch of this religious group that is popular amongst Ijo communities in the Niger Delta creeks is known as the Zionist religious movement. Some multi-homestead fishing camps that are founded on the Zionists principles only admit members who practice these beliefs. The Zion communities as they are known are recognised with a characteristic white flag hanging over their individual huts in the fishing camp and their communal worship halls are usually located at the centre of the camp. Such camps built on Zionists beliefs are very common in the Bakassi Peninsula. Zionists form a substantial amount of the population in the IDP camp at Yenagoa. Since the IDP camp was not planned based on Zionists beliefs, it means no communal hall was created for purposes of worship. If this had been factored into the design of the IDP camp, it would have been placed right at the centre of the



Fig 9 Raised walkway running the entire length of the IDP camp

camp as their beliefs dictate. But to still incorporate this aspect of their culture into the planning of the IDP camp, the most central pedestrian access was blocked off and covered with a roof to create a central worship hall, as the Zionists require.

Land Reclamation Techniques

Due to the scarcity of dry elevated land in the mangrove swamps where the fishing camps are located, methods have been developed to claim much needed extra square metres of space, from the marshland and surrounding water. A form of mud known locally as Chikoko, which is resilient to the wearing effects of flowing water is gathered into the selected area and stamped down for compression. The mud is however kept within the designated space and the water kept out, by means of timber stakes and crossbars that serve as embankments. Although the terrain in which the IDP camp is located at the heart of the city, can be water logged during the rainy seasons of the year, it is however not flooded to the extent where embankments are required to keep rising flood waters out. However, this system of creating embankments in the fishing camps have also been adopted by some households in the IDP camp, to gain extra square metres of space from the pedestrian space at the front of the buildings.



Fig 10 Covered pedestrian route in the centre of the camp used as worship ground for Zionists

Although the terrain in which the IDP camp is located at the heart of the city, can be water logged during the rainy seasons of the year, it is however not flooded to the extent where embankments are required to keep rising flood waters out. However, this system of creating embankments in the fishing camps have also been adopted by some households in the IDP camp, to gain extra square metres of space from the pedestrian space at the front of the buildings.

Discussions

In the course of this study, five areas where major modifications have been made to the IDP camp buildings were identified and possible explanations as to why these modifications have been made are offered below.

Firstly, raised walkways are originally used in fishing camps as a means of accessibility, proximity to kin. But their current use in the IDP camp is mainly as a means of access during muddy conditions. However the terrain where the camp is located is dry compared to the marshy areas of the mangrove swamp. But their inclusion in the modification process appears to be inspired more by socio-cultural issues than by practical solutions to existing environmental problems. This is because the respondents described themselves as being regarded as outsiders by the host population even though they share the same ethnic roots. This non readiness by the host population to assimilate them into the society, made the IDPs to create a bond of support around each other, hence they consider themselves to be more of kinsmen in this new society and this has been expressed in the use of connecting walkways between household units.

Secondly, land reclamation methods are used as a form of defence against rising tide in the original camp settings and to claim extra square metres of utility high ground space. The same principles have been used in the IDP camp setting but mainly as a means of creating spatial territory in the camp. The most logical explanation as to why this structure has been included in the camp modification process is the use of the stakes and crossbars as the main form of territorial marking known to the fishermen. Especially since the open aquatic range where the fishing camps are located is regarded as a common resource pool without territorial markings except for the immediate area the camp structures are built on.

Thirdly, the results from the spatial classification analysis revealed that one of the reasons why the hearth space was regarded as a public space was because of its use as an area for home-based enterprise. This explains why it is located in the front of the camp and often the first space one encounters when approaching the dwelling from the boat stop. It is where all the negotiations are made with the fish mongers for the sale of the catch, yet it still doubles as space for the preparation of food. In the IDP camp, the extension created for the hearth space is in front of the building, directly on the pedestrian path. Although it is not used as a form of home-based enterprise in this case, yet it still retains its pride of place in the front stage of the homestead.

Fourthly, this same principle applies to the bathing space situated behind the dwelling units. The essence of keeping the bathing space a bit more distanced from the main building in the migrant fishing camps is to avoid all unpleasant odours it may generate. However, the positioning of the bathing space behind the main building units in the IDP camp would clearly encourage generation of smells from stale bath water rather than getting rid of it. Notwithstanding, the extensions creating the bathing areas are still positioned as they would be in the fishing camps regardless of the impracticality of the location.

Lastly, pertaining to the communal worship hall for religious activities, an entirely new facility could have easily been built for worship by the Zionists population, outside the row of existing buildings but that would have gone against the dictates of the group. Creating a shade by partially roofing the central pedestrian pathway was adopted as an architectural solution to this religious/cultural problem.

Conclusions

With the delay in the housing resettlement process, most of the IDPs began to consider renting houses and settling within the state capital but with the high cost of urban housing, many opted to stay rent free in the IDP camp while working to earn enough to own their own homes. The delay being experienced in the resettlement process has contributed in extending the state of limbo indefinitely. Different households have attempted to address this state of uncertainty in different ways. Some on one hand still regard themselves as being in a state of transience and as such, invest neither time nor effort in creating a more liveable environment, in anticipation that the government may soon fulfil their proposed permanent housing resettlement plan. Others on the other hand, are mentally resigned to the possibility that no better resettlement plan is imminent, thereby proceeding to remodel their built environment as a self-settlement strategy.

What may be the most obvious need for modification of the existing structures is as a result of growing families, especially with an increase in the number of single young mothers within the camp. But from the cases of alteration discussed above, it is evident that the pattern by which the IDP camp environment is being modified follows the design of the vernacular environment the IDPs have been displaced from. In some areas, the imported ideas are not practicable in the new location as the structures are not originally intended for the type of terrain they have been erected in. But their inclusion as features in the modification process suggests that the ideology behind the building alterations was more of recreating the concept of the home that accommodates their socio-cultural lifestyles within their new found environment, than solving the actual problems or challenges associated with upland urban environments.

Initially the IDP camp could be easily spotted in its location along the Azikoro road in Yenagoa but over the years new buildings have been developed around the camp shelters masking it from view along the road. It appears that as the IDP camp becomes increasingly

masked, so have the IDPs themselves become increasingly forgotten, voiceless and trapped in the impermanence of limbo.

In the 5-year development plan of 1979-1984, the Nigerian Government had proposed the design and construction of a fishermen village to accommodate 6,000 artisanal and migrant fishermen in the Niger Delta regions. However that plan was never actualized due in part to the non-availability of ready data on the vernacular architecture of migrant and artisanal fishermen. Although that housing plan is yet to be revived, the main objective of the broader study was to obtain more policy relevant information on migrant fishermen that could be used as basis for reviving the defunct fishermen village initiative, as well as providing resettlement housing for the displaced fishermen.

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