

The Dynamics of Change in Migrant Architecture: A Case Study of Ijo Fisher Dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon 2011

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Abstract

Longitudinal studies of change in the architecture of a particular culture are common, but an area still open to further research is change across cultures, especially those stemming from the same ethnic source split between their homeland and other Diasporas. This change may range from minor deviations to drastic shifts away from an architectural norm and the accumulation of these shifts within a time frame constitutes variations. This research focuses on the effects and causes of cross-cultural variation between base camp dwellings of Ijo migrant fishermen, in the Bakassi Peninsula in Cameroon and Bayelsa State in Nigeria. The study draws on the idea of the inevitability of cultural and social change over time as proposed in the theories of cultural dynamism and evolution. It not only explores cultural dynamism as a justification of variation but also tests aspects of cultural transmission theory as possible causes of variation.

The research requires a socio-cultural, comparative case study approach to investigate the specifics of base camp dwelling designs. This approach gives opportunities to explore a number of issues, such as: the correlation between architecture and mobility; dwelling temporality and rate of change; and the extent of the variations between the built forms in response to internal and external forces of cultural dynamism. In addition, the study addresses two research questions: What are the significant variations between the architecture of Ijo migrant fishermen in Bayelsa State and Bakassi Peninsula? What are the causes of these variations?

The research draws on fieldwork data obtained from 33 migrant fishing base camps in Bayelsa and Bakassi. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed in analysing this data. The qualitative methodology focused on ascertaining variations through exterior evaluation of the base camp dwellings and spatial classification analysis of measured drawings. Other qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, observations, photography and mapping were also used. Finally the causes of these variations were identified using statistical Principal Co-ordinates Analysis.

From the findings, this research argues that although this is a case of the same ethnic group living in two different countries for long periods, the effects of cultural dynamism have resulted in significant variations in the architecture between the groups. The study offers empirical contributions to research on changes in social and cultural organisation reflected in dwellings, and its implications for policy formation and implementation.