



Safeguarding and Preserving Africa's Ritual Objects in the Face of Modernity: The Mwaghavul Case

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to study ritual objects among the Mwaghavul people and their preservation as heritage materials for posterity. The paper looks into the ritual objects of the Mwaghavul and the challenges facing their preservation. In doing this study, primary and secondary sources of data were used. While rituals and ritual objects represent a major defining attribute of the Mwaghavul people, most of these objects are now abandoned on hilltops or caves, forest and rock shelters, and at the mercy of bad weather conditions and agents of destruction like termite, fire, and other things that can destroy them naturally. The paper admonishes that these materials are the people's heritage that deserve preservation. The paper identifies globalization, stereotype, migration of young people into the cities, human and natural factors, and activities of heritage looters as some of the contributory factors. The paper however argues that the challenges can be addressed through public enlightenment, provision of conducive worship environments for adherents of traditional Mwaghavul religion, introduction of traditional religion into our school curriculum and provision of good places for the preservation of ritual objects. The paper concludes that as an important aspect of their culture, the Mwaghavul people should ensure that their ritual objects are safeguarded and preserved for posterity.

Keywords: Ritual, Ritual Objects, Heritage, Modernity, Mwaghavul, Nigeria, #SDG15.

Introduction

In all African societies, virtually all ethnic groups recognize the reality of the 'sacred'. Sacred places have been identified by men to commune with their gods, offer sacrifices, and seek help or receive favours. Ritual is a phenomenon that covers a wide range of African spirituality. It is a religious practice and expression that has existed from time immemorial in the entire continent (Azunwo and Chigozirim, 2017; Nomishan, 2021). In the Mwaghavul traditional religion, ritual

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plays an important role in different aspects such that it is manifested in virtually all the activities of the people. Their traditional religion is called *Kum* and the chief priest that superintend over *Kum* is referred to as *Mishkaham Kum*.

The ritual priests who are answerable to the *Mishkaham Kum*, on the other hand, control rituals. Here, some objects are used for performing rituals and with which the ritual priests either conciliate between the people and the ancestors or the gods or appease God on behalf of the people (Nomishan, 2021). For this reason, the people's heritage in relation to rituals is connected to some superstitious and mythical beliefs. The implication is that this connection may conjure bad meaning among the people and make ritual objects to be seen as untouchable by an ordinary Mwaghavul person. This has adversely affected their preservation.

However, in recent times, the Mwaghavul understanding of their traditional religion has been influenced by Western thought. From this perspective, any religion that could not be subjected to Western rationality is regarded as superstitious. Therefore, materials that are related to traditional worship are regarded as having some mysterious powers and should be destroyed. Although crusades were not organised to destroy them as obtainable in some parts of the country, some adherents of foreign religions or converts destroyed them secretly (Soyinka, 2006). This paper therefore focuses on the need to pay attention to the preservation of the ritual objects of the Mwaghavul people in Plateau State, North-Central, Nigeria considering their importance in traditional religion. These materials are being threatened by both natural and human agents and are at the verge of extinction.

Statement of Research Problem

Many scholarly works have been done on Mwaghavul history covering such important areas as origin, migration, settlement, economy, and religion. In these works, the Mwaghavul heritage has received wide attention, thereby presenting Mwaghavul land as one of the African societies with rich cultural heritage and endowments (Lere, 1996; Danfulani and Haggai, 2011; Gubam, 2014; 2021). Despite the fact that traditional religion is a major aspect of the cultural heritage of the people, the subject of ritual and ritual objects, which form the fulcrum of the Mwaghavul traditional religion, is yet to be given the desired attention in the literature.

Apart from being an important process in the Mwaghavul traditional religion, the ability of rituals and ritual objects to solve problems (efficacy) is also something that is worthy of note. Although a few of them like those related to traditional healing and divination are still being used by traditional worshipers in the area, the exposure of the other objects of religious worship of the Mwaghavul man to agents of destruction in recent times has stimulated this research.

There are different superstitious beliefs and myths attached to these objects, which have created fear in the minds of families that may have interest in preserving them. The pictures presented of these materials is that they are deadly and that they will bring bad omen or calamity to anyone that keep them in the home or close to the home. Instead of protecting them, the people prefer to throw them where they can be destroyed naturally or unconsciously by human beings. With this development, most of them have been abandoned at different places on the hilltops and forests, which have exposed them to bad environmental conditions as well as human activities. The few that are available are in bad conditions. The poor state of preservation of these aspects of cultural heritage in Mwaghavul land have called for this research.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research is a multidimensional approach, which involved the use of both the primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were generated through oral interviews with some ritual priests, knowledgeable elders, youth leaders, and a number of other Mwaghavul people. These key-informants were selected through a purposive random sampling technique. Information from oral history helped in tracing the origin of the people, locating repositories of ritual objects on hilltops and shrines, and understanding the functions of some ritual objects. The secondary sources of data were general library materials such as textbooks and journals. The data generated were interpreted and analysed thematically.

The Mwaghavul People, Geography and Culture

The Mwaghavul people are found about 60km South-West of Jos in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, North Central Nigeria. The area lies between Latitude 9° 28' 10" 00' North and Longitude 8° 38' 9" 10' East (Dazyam, 2005). They are bordered to the North by the Berom and Pyem, to the East by the Mupun and Ngas, to the South by the Kofyar groups and to the West by the Mushere people.

The Mwaghavul land is hilly and characterized in some places by a few volcanoes and flat topped hills and granite inselbergs. Most of these hills have accommodated this group of people in the recent and ancient past (Morrison, 1976). While the Northern Mwaghavul is characteristically a plain area with the exception of a few isolated hills around Panyam, Pushit, and Mangu, the Southern Mwaghavul is rocky. This area is made up of previously autonomous communities that speak the same language called Mwaghavul and with similar cultural practices until the early part of the Twentieth Century when they were officially brought together by the colonial imperialists. These autonomous communities only came into contact through trade, marriage, and religious festivals.

Figure 1: Location Map of Study Area

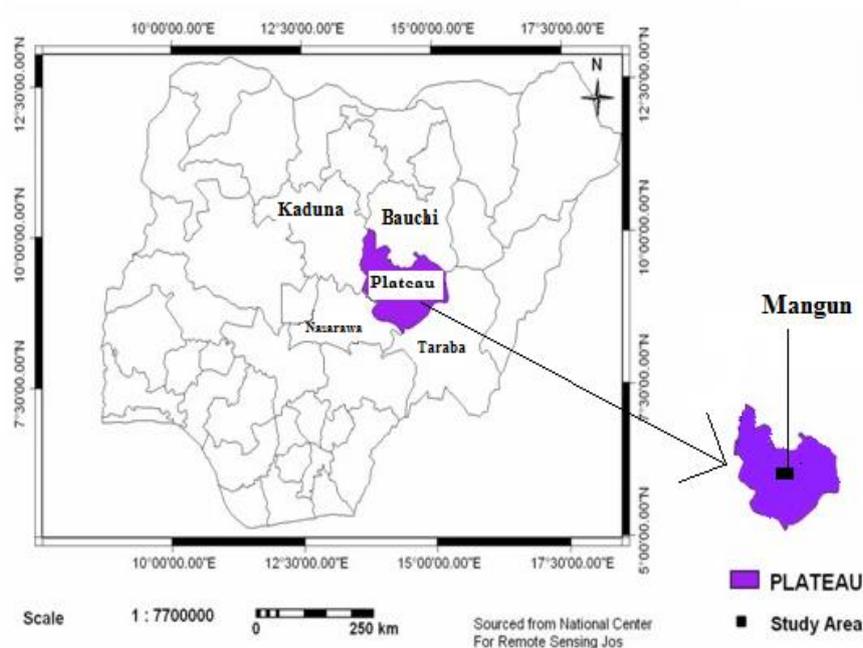


Figure 1 : Location Map Of Study Area

Source: Researcher (2023)

Their administrative systems were similar, with the *Mishkaham Kum* as the head. The *Mishkaham Kum* was the religious as well as political leader. With the advent of colonialism, the functions of the political and religious leadership were separated and performed by different individuals. Under colonialism, the confederal entities were unified under a traditional leadership referred to as *Mishkaham Mwaghavul*, which was created by the Whiteman for administrative convenience. The independently existing village heads were called *Mishkaham* and are under the leadership of the *Mishkaham Mwaghavul*.

According to their tradition, they migrated around the Lake Chad area along with other ethnic groups such as Ngas, Ngoemai, Kofyar groups, Mushere, Mishiip, Montol, Mupun and other Chadic group of languages found on the Jos Plateau. They however, separated as they arrived the Jos Plateau hills (Milaham, 2005). On reaching Jos Plateau hills, the Mwaghavul settled temporarily at Ngung and Diffiri and later migrated through different routes to their present place of settlement. Although the people were divided into separate polities, the Mwaghavul people were never engaged in any serious feuds against one another.

The Mwaghavul developed cultures and traditions, which are deeply entrenched in the people and in their ways of life. To make life meaningful and sustain themselves, the people developed an economy that principally comprises agriculture and crafts (Gubam, 2021). With the articles of trade and crafts emerged exchange involving short and long distance trade. Exchange became necessary because the people could not produce all the items that they required for local consumption. The utilization of locally sourced materials for production also applied to ritual materials/objects. Ritual materials were sourced from within the immediate environment except for a few like stone balls called *shibit*, which was usually collected from a river (Gubam, 2014).

Ritual objects were usually collected early in the morning or in the night to avoid spirits leaving them at daybreak². Ritual objects were very important to Mwaghavul people. The chief priest and ritual priests used them to mediate between the people and their ancestors/gods, heal and drive away evil spirits, and appease the ancestors and gods. Ritual is/was an important aspect of the people's daily activities. The fact that the people were able to exploit the materials within their environment to earn a living and for worship means that they had a good knowledge of their environment as well.

Ritual practices, as an aspect of the people's cultural heritage, played important role in inspiring most crafts and ways of life in the past. As a major element of the people's culture, ritual has continued to provide the basis for social life (Bankole, 2013). Ritual itself is a performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or sacerdotal decree in a specific observable context demonstrating a model of behaviour exhibited by all societies (Ogundele, 2000). By the way and manner rituals operate in human lives, one can be right to say that it defines and describes human activities. Their importance in human affairs is acknowledged

² Personal Communication with Dadiyel (chief priest), February 8, 2018.

because they have the ability to produce or generate some expected results. The Mwaghavul, like other polities on the Jos Plateau, has practiced *Kum* as their religion, which is associated with many deities and rituals like libation, divination, ancestor's veneration, among others.

Although the act of performing ritual is intangible, most of the materials used in performing it are tangible heritage as they can be felt and touched and have physical component. They include spear, knives, ropes, gourd, calabash, monoliths, shrines, forest, cave, stone balls, gruel, local beer, local pots, etc. Being intangible means that ritual is by nature something that cannot be seen but can be felt. Hence, the two (ritual as an act and tangible heritage) perform complimentary functions and cannot be separated. As cultural heritage of the people, ritual objects are legacies from the past, what the people live with in the present and what they intend to pass on to future generations (Cleere, 1989; Bankole, 2013). The people have been able to sustain the practice within the Mwaghavul settlements as well as believing in the ability of such practice to meet their needs. For the fact that it has been able to survive overtime despite competition from foreign practices means that it is highly cherished and its efficacy acknowledged by the people. If properly managed, it will be a powerful tool for social development and tourism, and may attract development to the rural areas as well.

The Mwaghavul Rituals and Ritual Objects

In the Mwaghavul traditional religion, the chief priest and ritual priests perform different rituals for different purposes. They symbolize spiritual powers, which by implication means that they represent more than the visible objects that human beings see. According to the Mwaghavul beliefs, rituals perform different functions and have numerous responsibilities to carry out in the human world. Some of the functions of rituals are public and private, personal and communal, major and minor, family, clan and natural in nature. The chief priest performs a ritual on issue that affects the general welfare of the people under his domain. Rituals are performed in Mwaghavul land in relation to deities³. They embody ideas that make communication with the ancestors, God and gods of the land easier. Rituals involve prayer, supplication, worship, sacrifice, confession, offering, divination,

³ Personal Communication with Nafet Jingut (potter), January 3, 2011; Personal Communication with Mwoltu (farmer), July 4, 2019.

communication and communion with God, whom they refer to as *Naan* (Danfulani, 2011; Lere, 1996).

The chief priest can perform a ritual to intercede with the ancestors on behalf of the people when they commit any offence that will make the ancestors and God to withdraw their blessings. In this case, the chief priest makes sacrifices and some incantations seeking for forgiveness on behalf of the people. He can also do same when the people are about to embark on activities like war, farming, harvesting, iron smelting, blacksmithing and in times of famine. Minor rituals referred to as *kum mo* are performed by ritual priests who do that either in the elder's room called *Kpuk* (usually situated at the main entrance of the compound), or at the elders' saloon called *Psum* (usually situated outside the compound directly opposite the main entrance of the compound). In some instances, such shrines are situated in secret places at the back of the compound some distance away from the main compound to handle serious cases that an individual brings before the ritual priest or elders. The ritual priest works together with some elders in the family and it is hereditary. On the death of a ritual priest, the job is taken over by another person from the family and where no one is ready; the ritual may go into extinction.

The person performing the ritual uses some items that are either man-made or natural to facilitate his activities. Sometimes, ritual objects can be the things kept by a person because of their symbolic and emotional values. A ritual object has the capacity to take on a number of functions (Danfulani and Haggai, 2011). They include those used for worship, healing, dance, music, traditional ceremonies, honour ancestors, passage rites, and others. Ritual objects include but not limited to the following; spear, bow and arrow, knives, ropes, gourd, calabash, local pots, objects made from wood, bamboo, corn stalks, cob-webs, spider, smoking pipe, clay, monoliths, stone balls, gruel, local bear, millet, accah, goat, sheep, dwarf short horned cattle, and fresh human skulls. Other objects are ants, toads, special leaves, chicken, carved branches, feather, skins, animals' horns and coloured objects (red or white). Only the authorized persons (priests) in the designated place of worship must handle these objects (Fuller, 1994).

Figure 2: *Ritual Stone*



Figure 3: *Ritual Bangle*



Figure 4: *Ritual Pot*



Figure 5: *Ritual Leaves*



Source: Researcher (2023)

As explained earlier, the usage of these sacred objects carries restrictions and not every member of the community is free to handle or have contact with them. These ritual objects are to be used only when the individual has a clean heart to avoid the repercussions (Fuller, 1994). These materials are usually sourced from within the immediate environment but sometimes from outside when the need arises. However, they are usually obtained through special processes and are kept in the shrine or other places that are out of reach of women and children. The ritual ceremony marking the death of a chief priest called *Map-map* is celebrated with a short-horned cattle called *Ning* (in Mwaghavul language). The diviner makes use of wooden tray, fine particles of sand, and pebbles. Goat, preferably a he-goat, is the animal required for performing rituals by the Mwaghavul traditional worshipers.

Ritual priests carry out rituals to solve different problems faced by individuals. A ritual priest can only handle the area of his specialization. According to Danfulani and Haggai (2011), every family develops a ritual to enable them to control their daily lives and environment. This indicates that rituals play important role in the daily life of every Mwaghavul man thereby making it necessary for every family to keep one ritual and the objects related to that ritual. However, it is the

diviner that can diagnose the cause of every sickness or problem and direct the patient/victim to where he/she can be treated.

Notable Mwaghavul rituals include *Kum biyang* (to usher in a good farming season), and *Mulak* and *Tenpe* (to handle barrenness and controversial illnesses). Others include *Kum diyip* (for harvest), *Pun pun* (rite of passage, which is a ritual that marks a person's transition from one status to another for boys), and *Sor ndung* (movement to another world to seek for favour like brilliance, wealth and humility. It is common among desperate young people who want to acquire such favour to be ahead of their pairs in the community). Rituals are carried out daily, weekly and seasonally to guide the activities of the people. Powerful events are also held to mark major life occurrences such as birth, marriage, and death (Danfulani and Haggai, 2011). In recent times, some of these rituals are being celebrated in the Mwaghavul districts through festivities such as cultural days from February to April (Gubam, 2021). *Nji* and *Nuwar* are seasonal visits by the ancestors who come around to either appreciate or complain about the conduct of the people.

Nji festival is for the entire village but *Nuwar* is restricted to every family. The events usually take place at four-year intervals during which initiation of the young boys is done. *Nji* is the visitation to the entire village while *Nuwar* is visitation by the ancestors of every family. Usually, the *Nuwar* is expected to visit every female from the family that is married within Mangu. The woman called *Mrab* is expected to present a special gift to the *Nuwar* as appreciation for the visit and for more favour. Within this period, only initiated men are allowed to see the *Nji* and *Nuwar*. Visitors are not allowed to be going around in the community.

Judging by their ability to produce satisfactory outcomes, rituals and ritual objects have convinced many to acknowledge their efficacy. They have somewhat gained popularity in recent times despite attacks by the adherents of foreign religions who consider them outdated and barbaric⁴. Some ritual objects are hung at home (for protection), in the farm (to prevent stealing), rubbed on the body or erected or buried in different positions in society depending on the function. Others are hung at the main entrance of the compound to prevent witches and wizards, and bad spirits from entering the compound and to cause havoc. Rituals help in reorienting and stabilizing the people's feelings when they need to

⁴ Personal Communication with Chakmut (diviner), January , 2011

comprehend and cope with crucial life experiences. Ritual objects, therefore, form important aspect of the cultural heritage of the Mwaghavul people.

The increasing rate of migration from the rural to urban areas by young men along with the growing rate of technology are contributing to the disappearance of both rituals and ritual objects in Mwaghavul land. Cross-cultural contacts, especially contacts with the outside world like Europeans and Arabs (leading to the introduction of Christianity and Islam), have remarkably eroded the traditional religion and other practices that are attached to it. These have succeeded in uprooting this aspect of the Mwaghavul heritage as most of the people now embrace either Christianity or Islam, thereby leaving the ritual objects at the mercy of different agents of destruction both natural and human. The abandonment of ritual objects on rock outcrops, caves, rock shelters, sacred grooves or forests have further exposed them to dangers caused by termite, fire, hunters, farmers, animals and looters. With these developments, some measures should be taken towards preserving and safeguarding the ritual objects of the Mwaghavul people because they are presently the most vulnerable or endangered cultural heritage of the people.

Deeper Reflections on Mwaghavul Rituals and Cultural Practices

In traditional Mwaghavul society, ritual expression is a frequent occurrence that runs through the stages of life of every individual from childhood to old age (Danfulani, 2011; Azunwo and Chigozirim, 2017). Ritual rites are performed at different periods of life to appease God or the gods in a particular form of treatment or situation. When someone is sick among the Mwaghavul people, ritual is expected to be performed. Hence, Danfulani and Haggai (2011) observe that, a man can perform a ritual for his sick relatives, even though they may not be living together. It is believed that the ritual can still be efficacious wherever they are. Again, in a situation whereby someone is seriously sick, any of his/her belongings can be taken to the shrine and ritual performed on them for recovery or good health. Rituals, in this context, therefore mean more than mere symbolic exercise (Danfulani, 2011).

A ritual forms a major part of the religious expression of traditional Mwaghavul people, and it is also done to purify when an offence is committed against the ancestors, God and the gods of the land. It is also done to appreciate the ancestors, God and the gods of the land for blessings received and to gain permission for one to get the strength needed to participate in communal activities like iron smelting, farming and hunting. Some rituals are performed at particular periods of the year to usher in some important activities. For instance, there are the hunting, farming, human life, rite of passage, healing and crafts rituals, among

others. Some rituals are performed to the ancestors to protect the people against a calamity or an affliction, which has brought serious problems in local affairs (Arnold and Turner, 1982).

Some rituals are done to honour the ancestors. The most common among them in recent times is the annual cultural festivals, which are held between February and April in all the Mwaghavul districts. This is usually completed with the mother of all festivals called *Pus Ka'at*, which requires the contribution as well as the participation of all Mwaghavul districts (Gubak et al, 2020). The diviner called *Ngu pa'a* plays an important role in the Mwaghavul rituals. *Ngu pa'a* is an equivalent of a medical consultant. He can diagnose the cause of an ailment and direct the patient to where he/she can get the right treatment or medication. For the fact that Mwaghavul people believe in the ability of certain people to cast malevolent curses like fever (*m'ye*), infertility on a man or woman (*zul* and *je'er*), etc, voluntary sacrifices are made to the ancestors, God and spirits to protect them from such harm.

Mwaghavul people express a high level of believe in the protective power of sacrificial offerings and sacred objects. Hence, every ritual is accompanied by a sacrifice of well-prepared food from *fonio* (accah), goat or sheep meat. Community sacrifice, which is performed by the chief priest himself, was done with food from *fonio* and short-horned dwaft cattle called *ning* (in Mwaghavul and *muturu* in Hausa language). In special cases where *ng'long* (a special kind of masquerade) is to appear, the sacrificial food is prepared from finger millet (*kas* in Mwaghavul). The efficacy of ritual is so much recognized among a lot of Mwaghavul people, even among some adherents of foreign religions because of the believe that some diseases can only be cured through traditional methods of healing. Also, ritual healing is cheap and accessible.

The Mwaghavul rituals are key in determining local production and distribution of goods and services. In this way, ritual guides social interaction and social relations (Bankole, 2013). It dictates how the people can get good results out of a production process, how it is to be distributed as well as safer routes for distribution⁵. The ritual called *ngik shirop* determines the iron smelting among the Mwaghavul of Mangu. Since iron is a scarce commodity and a precious material, the search for iron ore is therefore so competitive. *Ngik shirop* can regulate the struggle/competition and prevent it from transforming into a fierce one. This is done by pronouncing the village or villages (as directed by the ancestors, God and the gods of the land) that will marry highest number of women that year so they would be allowed to access more iron ore sources - to meet the marriage demands - than other villages.

⁵ Personal Communication with Mwoltu (farmer), July 4, 2019.

Iron hoes were used for payment of bride price while an iron bracelet was presented to a lady for marriage engagement. The ritual priests could see beyond the human eyes and so they can foretell or predict the future concerning marriage in the land. Their prediction however depends on the direction in which the stone called *Nghik Shirop* turns to. Iron bracelet was presented to a bride to be by the groom to be a sign of marriage engagement while seven iron hoes were used for payment of bride price. The position of the ritual priest was not to be questioned because the people believed that it was for their good. This process, apart from promoting peaceful coexistence among the people, also encouraged them to be their brothers' keepers. In the same vein, another ritual called *She'el* also controlled sexual desires among Mwaghavul men and women. It forbids a man from sleeping with his brother's or neighbour's wife and should that happen, the individual is expected to present seven goats, chickens, *fonio* and some containers of local beer (*mos*) for cleansing. The failure to meet these requirements may spell doom for the perpetrator and his family.

Although inheritance marriage was allowed by the Mwaghavul customs and traditions, a man is only allowed to sleep with the woman when the man who happens to be her late husband's brother is able to fulfil the conditions attached to it. The point must however be made that inheritance marriage was not practiced by the Mwaghavul of Mangu and their neighbours, the Mushere. Mangu people were the only people in that area that did not practice inheritance marriage right from time immemorial. Apart from the calamity that may befall a person that engages in inheritance marriage among the Mangu people, the requirements for the cleansing ritual are grave⁶.

Rituals also encouraged interdependence and interconnection among pre-colonial Mwaghavul communities, as the desire to obtain solutions to health challenges and other societal problems forced people to go beyond their ethnic boundaries. As a result, people from neighbouring ethnic groups (like Ngas, Mupun, Ron, Mushere, Berom, Kofyar groups, and beyond) visited Mwaghavul ritual priests. This usually occurred in areas where Mwaghavul rituals were believed to be more effective in solving problems. The Mwaghavul people also visited their neighbours where better solutions could be provided for their problems.

The Mushere and Chakfem were good in a ritual called *Pun Kum*⁷. *Pun Kum* is a ritual that can destroy a family in the event that a member of that family

⁶ Personal Communication with Dachit (ritual priest), July 4, 2019.

⁷ Personal Communication with Dachit (ritual priest), July 4, 2019; Personal Communication with Dadiyel (chief priest), February 8, 2018; Personal Communication with Dutse (blacksmith), December 25, 2020; Personal Communication with Tonga Yamshan (farmer), December 25, 2020; Personal Communication with Yoila (farmer), December 25, 2020

stole someone's property, particularly livestock but refused to confess despite all plea. Once *Pun Kum* ritual was carried out, the male children as well as their descendants would be adversely affected until the surviving members provide a number of livestock for the ritual priest to cleanse the family. Another way of escaping the punishment was for the entire family to leave the environment completely naked. More so, they were not permitted to leave with any of their possessions. In this way, people were deterred from stealing in society. The Mwaghavul people, on the other hand, were known for *K'soom*, a ritual that could punish witches whenever they refused to confess but submitted themselves voluntarily for judgement by the ritual. *K'soom* shrine is an arrangement of circular stones structure like finger millet store but smaller and can accommodate only one person at a time. The accused, mostly women, would pull off their clothes completely as they enter the shrine to either confess or express their innocence. If confirmed a witch, the penalty would be instant death.

There were cases where only Mwaghavul people performed certain rituals in Mupun land before the latter was allowed to participate. However, migrants (particularly Mushere) introduced some of these rituals (like the *Mulak*) into Mwaghavul land. Rituals were therefore an important factor in promoting inter-group relations between the Mwaghavul and their neighbours.

The Challenges of Preserving and Safeguarding the Mwaghavul Ritual Objects

By their nature and people's perception of them as mythical and their symbolic representation of traditional religious practices, ritual objects of the Mwaghavul people are treated without respect in recent times. More so, they are seen as diabolical and have the power to attract calamities. Apart from the fact that Christianity and Islam are against traditional practices and by implication rituals, most people even those that are supposed to be in charge of these objects are afraid of touching them, not talk of safeguarding them. As a result, most of these objects are abandoned on hilltops or caves, forest and rock shelters, and at the mercy of bad weather conditions and agents of destruction like termite, fire, and other things that can destroy them naturally. The factors that have posed some challenges to the preservation of this aspect of the cultural heritage of the people include:

- a. **Globalization:** Globalization has converted the world into a global village, thereby making contacts between nations of the world easier. With this development, diffusion of ideas and culture is made easier. Most countries in the world including Nigeria came under colonial rule as a result of contact with other nations. Through this, foreign cultures including religion beliefs (Christianity and Islam) were introduced in Nigeria. Today, Christianity and Islam have successfully displaced traditional religion and have become the dominant religions in Nigeria. These foreign religions and their adherents have neglected the ritual practices of the people as well as the tools that are

associated with them. In some places, the adherents of the new religions physically destroyed these ritual objects. With most youths and elders converted to Christianity, attention is no longer given to these ritual objects. The consequences is that most of them are destroyed or left to be destroyed naturally.

b. *Migration.* Another factor is the migration of young men from the rural areas to the cities or urban centers in search of better life. As a result, most of the information about these objects are fast disappearing. As the elders keep disappearing, information about the objects also disappear with them such that with the passage of time nothing may be known about these ritual objects again.

c. *People's Negative Perception about the Objects.* The people's perception of ritual objects as being spiritual and superstitious have really affected their safeguard and preservation. With this perception, people are afraid of touching them, not to talk of keeping them in their homes or close to their homes, for fear that they would attract some calamities to their families. This can however be linked to the low level of awareness on the side of the people about the importance of their cultural heritage.

d. *Heritage Looters.* The activities of heritage looters is a contributory factor. Though most of the materials have been allowed to be destroyed on hilltops, caves, forests, rock shelters and on plain lands by fire and termite, some of the artifacts are being stolen and taken to unknown destinations by antiquity looters. There are rampant cases of missing ritual items from the shrines.

e. *Activities of Man and Some Natural Factors:* Human actions along with some natural agents have also posed a serious problem to the preservation of the Mwaghavul ritual objects. Human activities like indiscriminate bush burning and animal grazing have been leading factors in this regard. When not monitored or controlled, bush burning can destroy a shrine and the content of that shrine. Exposing these materials to bad weather and storage conditions for a long period of time can cause serious damage to them. In addition, most of the materials are under attack by termites and rodents.

f. *Nigeria's Heritage Law* - that is supposed to protect all cultural heritage materials - has also been weak and ineffective.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Rituals and ritual objects are part of the cultural heritage of the Mwaghavul people that usually play important roles in their daily lives and the precolonial contact with other ethnic groups. These objects are important to an individual's life from

childhood to old age. Every Mwaghavul man and woman must consult one oracle or the other as a way of seeking for blessings from their ancestors.

Like other African peoples, the Mwaghavul believes that blessing of human life abounds in nature, the process of obtaining blessing therefore involves negotiations between the living, the dead and the deities through the mediation of intermediaries such as spirits (Chirekure, 2015). For a person to access such blessings, a number of rituals are conducted to propitiate the ancestors and the gods of the land. The same thing happens when a person was sick or whenever a strange sickness or calamity occurs in the Mwaghavul society. Rituals are conducted to know the cause(s) and another ritual conducted to appease the ancestors and the gods of the land. In addition, ritual and ritual objects reflect the relationship that exists between the Mwaghavul people and their environment, how the people were able to exploit resources within their immediate environment to meet their needs and to establish a relationship with the supernatural as well as how these practices and objects make life meaningful to the people (Olanrewaju, 2015).

Despite these, the Mwaghavul ritual objects are yet to be given the needed attention in the area of preservation and safeguarding when compared to the preservation of other cultural heritage of the people like weaving, iron working, pottery, and the likes. If not given the needed attention, these objects may soon go into extinction. The paper makes the following recommendations:

- a.** The first step is for the people to accept the fact that these objects form part of their heritage and that they need attention. The only way to make them realize this is to intensify public enlightenment as a way of educating them about the importance of these objects as well as to change their perceptions about these objects as fetish and superstitious. Traditional institutions, public archaeologists, stakeholders and government agencies like Local Government Cultural officers, Plateau State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, National Orientation Agency, and the National Commission for Museums and Monuments have some role to play in this respect. Contrary to the popular beliefs among the people, ritual objects are like any other cultural heritage and can be kept and protected even at home or within the home. For those materials that have already been destroyed or are in bad conditions, members of the community should be advised to replace them.
- b.** Conducive worship environment should be provided to traditional worshippers. Provision of conducive worship environments for adherence of traditional religion is a better way of preserving most of these materials. This will encourage adherence to preserve them properly.

c. Government should introduce the teaching of Traditional religion into the curriculum of educational institutions from the primary up to the tertiary levels, just like the Christian and Islamic Religious Studies. This will be a good way of knowing more about traditional religion as well as ritual objects. With this, professionals would be raised not just to promote the religion but also to provide another way of understanding the religion better.

d. Good repositories should be provided in the localities to keep these objects under the close monitoring of the traditional rulers and locales. This will rescue the materials from being destroyed and they will be protected for future reference.

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