

## ARTICLE

# The Case for a Public Holiday for Traditional Worship and Ancestral Veneration in Ghana

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## Abstract

This study proposes the creation of a public holiday in Ghana to recognize traditional worship and ancestral veneration, advocating for equity in religious expression in a nation where only Christianity and Islam currently enjoy such privileges. Traditional African spirituality plays a vital role in Ghana's cultural heritage, embodying values that shape community and identity. The research highlights the historical marginalization of indigenous spiritual practices, which was exacerbated by colonial influences and the dominance of foreign religions. By drawing on examples from countries like China, Vietnam, and Benin, the study illustrates the significance of public holidays in fostering cultural preservation and social cohesion. This initiative seeks to engage stakeholders, including citizens, parliamentarians, traditional leaders, and religious communities, emphasising the legal, cultural, and social imperatives for this recognition. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of honouring Ghana's diverse spiritual landscape to promote national unity and pride.

**Key words:** Indigenous Spirituality; Ancestral Veneration; Public Holidays; Ghana.

## Introduction

The constitution of Ghana enshrines the freedom of association and religious practice, Article 21(1). Three of these religious groups, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional worship are very much recognised in the country and even in the public ceremonies. Despite this, only Christianity and Islam have received state recognition in the form of public holidays during their festive periods, at least twice a year for each of them (Article, 2019, 986; 601(2)). Ghana has not accorded the same recognition to traditional worship, despite its deep historical and cultural significance and as the religion of the motherland. This research argues for the creation of just a single public holiday as the state's recognition for traditional worship and ancestral veneration. It is therefore an appeal to a wide range of stakeholders, such as ordinary citizens, parliamentarians, traditional leaders, the executive, the judiciary, religious leaders, and traditionalists.

## Analytical and methodological approach

The study employs a qualitative approach, utilising historical and cultural analysis, comparative case studies, and stakeholder interviews to explore the implications of instituting a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration in Ghana. The research aims to answer the following questions: 1.) How have other countries successfully integrated public

holidays for traditional worship and ancestral veneration, and what can Ghana learn from these examples? 2) What potential social, cultural, and economic impacts could arise from recognising a public holiday dedicated to traditional worship and ancestral veneration in Ghana? 3) How can the establishment of such a holiday contribute to the preservation of Ghana's indigenous spiritual and cultural heritage?

## Background to the Study

Traditional African spirituality has been an integral part of the continent's cultural heritage for centuries, serving as the foundation for the social, political, and religious lives of its people. In Ghana, ancestral veneration and traditional worship are central to this spiritual fabric, symbolising a deep reverence for ancestors who are believed to guide the living and act as custodians of the moral and ethical principles governing communities (Gyekye, 1996). Despite this profound influence, colonialism's legacies, as well as the spread of Christianity and Islam, have often marginalized or overshadowed traditional African spiritual practices. African societies, historically shaped by their connection to the spiritual world, saw the living as inseparably linked to their ancestors. Not only was ancestral veneration a religious practice, but it also served as a means to reinforce societal norms, ensuring the transmission of past wisdom and values to future generations (Mbiti, 1990).

In Ghana, this spiritual framework guided governance, justice, and communal life. The ancestors viewed chiefs and traditional leaders as their earthly representatives, entrusted with upholding social harmony and conducting rituals that strengthened the bond between the material and spiritual realms (Ray, 2003). However, the imposition of colonial rule introduced new religious and political systems that de-emphasised African traditions and promoted European values, with Christianity and Islam gradually gaining prominence. The colonial era in Ghana saw the erosion of traditional institutions and the diminishment of African spiritual practices in public life. Missionary activities, in particular, contributed to the devaluation of indigenous belief systems, labelling them as pagan or primitive (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). As a result, Christian and Islamic practices replaced traditional worship and ancestral veneration, eventually becoming the dominant religions in the country. As a result, national holidays and public ceremonies began to reflect the values of these foreign religions, with little to no recognition given to indigenous spiritual practices. Since Ghana's independence in 1957, there have been efforts to reclaim and preserve elements of its precolonial cultural heritage. Cultural festivals and traditional chieftaincy institutions have played a role in this renaissance, but there is still a significant gap in the official recognition of traditional African spirituality. Traditional worship, despite its historical significance and continued practice by many Ghanaians, has not received the same level of respect or visibility as Christianity and Islam.

The absence of a public holiday dedicated to traditional worship and ancestral veneration reflects this imbalance and continues to marginalise an essential part of Ghana's cultural and spiritual identity. The call for national recognition through a public holiday is not only a call for equity but also a step toward fostering a deeper understanding and respect for Ghana's spiritual diversity. Recognising traditional African spirituality in this way would be a symbolic move to honour the contributions of indigenous belief systems to the country's history, culture, and identity (Amoah, 2019). A public holiday for ancestral veneration would also help bridge the gap between modern religious practices and indigenous spiritual traditions, fostering a more inclusive and unified national consciousness. Furthermore, establishing such a holiday aligns with a growing global movement to reclaim indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual practices. Countries such as Bolivia have made strides in recognising the spiritual and cultural contributions of their indigenous populations, acknowledging their historical significance in shaping the nation (Burman, 2016). Similarly, Ghana has an opportunity to affirm its commitment to cultural preservation and national unity by recognising traditional worship and ancestral veneration as essential components of its national identity. This recognition would create space for dialogue on how these ancient practices can contribute to contemporary nation-building and social cohesion.

Outside of Ghana, several countries have established public holidays for traditional worship and ancestral veneration, reflecting their cultural and religious practices. These holidays not only honour ancestral traditions but also foster a sense of community and national identity, contributing to cultural preservation and social cohesion. China: People honor their ancestors by visiting graves, cleaning tombstones, and making offerings during the Qingming Festival, also known as Tomb-Sweeping Day. This holiday, deeply rooted in Chinese tradition, falls on April 4th or 5th each year, or on the 15th day after the Spring Equinox. The festival promotes the preservation of cultural and ancestral heritage (China Scholar, 2020). During Qingming, people visit cemeteries to sweep and clean the graves of loved ones, emphasising the importance of respecting parents and ancestors in Chinese culture (China Scholar, 2020). Vietnam: Vietnam celebrates the Hung Kings Temple Festival, held annually on the 10th day of the third lunar month. This festival commemorates the Hung Kings, considered the founders of the Vietnamese nation. It is a time for the Vietnamese to pay respect to their ancestors and national heroes, reinforcing national identity and cultural continuity (Golden Holiday Travel, 2023). The King Hung Temple Festival is a national occasion for every Vietnamese to remember their origins and express respect and gratitude to their ancestors. Communities offer rice-based delicacies, perform verbal and folk arts, beat bronze drums, sing Xoan songs, and offer prayers and petitions (Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies, 2011).

Japan celebrates Obon, a Buddhist festival to honour the spirits of ancestors typically held in mid-August. The festival involves rituals like visiting ancestral graves, performing traditional dances (Bon Odori), and lighting lanterns to guide spirits back to the afterlife. Obon is a significant cultural event that highlights Japanese ancestor veneration (Japan Guide, 2023). It is believed that during Obon, the souls of the dead return from the afterlife to visit their living descendants and dance alongside them. The celebration, while spiritual, also includes festivities, making it one of Japan's most important holidays (Japan Living Guide, 2023). Benin (Africa): In Africa, Benin is notable for its public holiday dedicated to traditional

worship and ancestral veneration. The country celebrates Traditional Religions Day, or Fête du Vodoun, on January 10 each year. This holiday honours the West African religion of Vodoun, with rituals such as goat sacrifices in honour of spirits, singing, dancing, and other cultural festivities. This day highlights the significance of Vodoun in Benin's national identity, drawing both devotees and tourists (Global Voices, 2023). The formal recognition of Vodoun not only promotes cultural preservation but also enhances national pride, showcasing Benin's commitment to its rich heritage. Burkina Faso (Africa): Recently, Burkina Faso designated May 15th as an annual public holiday to honour the country's customs and traditions. Announced by the government in March 2024, the holiday is part of an effort to reaffirm the secular nature of the state while elevating the role of traditional religion in society. The Minister of Religious Affairs, Emile Zerbo, emphasised the holiday's importance in celebrating the country's rich cultural heritage and promoting religious and cultural tolerance (Burkina Information Agency, 2024).

These countries have many ways enjoyed the benefits that come with this state recognition and celebration. These can be measured their quality of life. Against this background has triggered the search to explore the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical underpinnings of the proposal to establish a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration. By examining the potential impact of such recognition on national consciousness, spiritual identity, and cultural continuity in Ghana, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role of indigenous spirituality in modern African societies.

## Ghana In Perspective

### Legal Imbalance

#### *Freedom of religion and equality*

Article 21 of the Ghanaian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and association, fundamentally ensuring equal treatment of all religious practices under the law. Ghana's commitment to a pluralistic society that respects and protects every individual's religious belief is evident in this provision. However, the current practice of recognising public holidays for only Christianity and Islam, while excluding traditional religions, stands in stark contrast to this constitutional promise. The selective recognition of religious holidays inadvertently marginalises practitioners of traditional worship, suggesting that their religious practices are less significant or deserving of public acknowledgment. This exclusion not only undermines the spirit of religious freedom enshrined in the constitution but also fosters a sense of inequality among religious groups in the country.

The absence of a public holiday for traditional religions poses a significant challenge to the constitutional mandate of equality. Legal scholars contend that this exclusion establishes a hierarchy of religions, with some perceived as more legitimate or state-sanctioned than others (Dovlo, 2006). This hierarchical treatment is antithetical to the principles of a democratic society that values inclusivity and equal treatment for all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. By failing to recognise traditional religious practices with the same respect as Christianity and Islam, the state perpetuates historical biases and fails to uphold its constitutional obligation to ensure no group is marginalised based on their faith. To truly reflect the constitutional commitment to equality, we must critically reassess the designation of religious holidays in light of this discrepancy.

Moreover, the recognition of public holidays for traditional religions would align Ghana with its international human rights obligations. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which Ghana has ratified, underscores the importance of protecting cultural and religious rights. Articles 8 and 18 of the Charter explicitly mandate that states must ensure the equal protection of all religions and promote the cultural heritage of their people (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981). By extending public holiday recognition to traditional religious practices, Ghana would not only rectify an internal constitutional inconsistency but also honour its international commitments. Ghana would demonstrate its commitment to promoting an inclusive society that respects and celebrates all cultural and religious practices, thereby enhancing national unity and social cohesion.

#### *Cultural Rights*

Article 26 of the Ghanaian Constitution explicitly protects the right to cultural practices and traditions, underscoring the importance of safeguarding the nation's diverse cultural heritage. Traditional worship, encompassing various rites, ceremonies, and festivals, is a fundamental aspect of this heritage. These practices deeply intertwine with Ghana's historical and cultural identity, transcending mere religious expressions. Not only would the establishment of a public holiday honour these practices, but it would also reaffirm the constitutional commitment to cultural rights. This recognition would serve as a formal acknowledgment of the value and significance of traditional religions in the national fabric, promoting an inclusive approach to cultural preservation. The alignment of public holidays with constitutional cultural rights protections is crucial for promoting and preserving Ghana's rich cultural diversity. Traditional worship includes a wide array of practices, such as festivals, libations, and rites of passage, all of which play a vital role in community cohesion and identity. The government could celebrate and transmit these practices to future generations by instituting a public holiday.

In an era of rapid globalisation, dominant global influences risk overshadowing traditional cultures, making this particularly important. Research by Appiah (2012) indicates that legal frameworks recognising cultural rights are pivotal in sustaining traditional practices and ensuring their continuity. Such frameworks provide the necessary support and legitimacy for cultural traditions to thrive in a modern context. Furthermore, recognizing traditional worship as a public holiday would have significant educational benefits. It would create opportunities for both formal and informal education

about Ghana's cultural heritage, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among younger generations. Schools and universities could incorporate traditional practices into their curricula, while community events could highlight the importance and beauty of these rituals. The long-term preservation of cultural heritage depends on this educational aspect, which guarantees the transmission and relevance of traditional knowledge and practices. By incorporating traditional worship into the national calendar, Ghana would be taking a proactive step toward safeguarding its cultural heritage, ensuring that the diversity and richness of its traditions continue to be a source of pride and identity for all of its citizens.

### **Legal Precedents**

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which Ghana has ratified, mandates the protection of cultural and religious rights, underscoring the importance of these rights within the broader human rights framework. Specifically, Articles 17 and 18 of the Charter emphasize that every individual has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of their community, and that states have a duty to promote and protect these cultural and religious practices (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981). By instituting a public holiday for traditional worship, Ghana would be fulfilling these international obligations, demonstrating its commitment to upholding human rights and fostering a culturally inclusive society. This move would not only align with the Charter's mandates but also affirm Ghana's role as a leader in promoting cultural diversity and respect on the African continent. Establishing a public holiday for traditional worship would set a significant precedent for cultural respect and inclusivity. This action would serve as a powerful statement that Ghana values all aspects of its cultural heritage equally, providing a model for other countries in the region to follow.

The recognition of traditional religious practices through a public holiday would underscore the importance of cultural pluralism and the need to protect minority cultural rights within a diverse society. Such a precedent is critical in a world where cultural homogenization threatens the survival of indigenous traditions. According to legal experts, the incorporation of cultural rights into national policies is essential for the protection and promotion of cultural diversity (Appiah, 2012). Moreover, adhering to these international legal precedents would enhance Ghana's reputation on the global stage. Demonstrating a commitment to cultural rights and inclusivity through concrete actions, such as the establishment of a public holiday for traditional worship, would bolster Ghana's standing in international forums and human rights bodies. This recognition would not only benefit the nation's international relations, but it would also attract support and resources from global organizations dedicated to preserving cultural heritage. Ghana's leadership can inspire other nations to adopt similar measures, fostering a global environment that respects and protects cultural rights. Ghana and the international community would both benefit from this further entrenchment of cultural diversity as a strength to celebrate and preserve.

## **Equity and fairness**

### **Inclusive Recognition**

In Ghana, the issue of equity and fairness in religious recognition is particularly salient given the country's rich tapestry of spiritual beliefs and practices. While Christianity and Islam, as the dominant religions, enjoy official recognition through public holidays, the indigenous traditional religions, which have historically served as the spiritual bedrock of Ghanaian society, are marginalized. This discrepancy raises questions of fairness and inclusivity in religious representation within the public sphere. As noted by Human Rights Watch (2009), the principle of religious equity is integral to international human rights standards, emphasising the importance of treating all religious groups with equal respect and consideration. The failure to formally recognise traditional religions not only undermines the cultural heritage of Ghana but also perpetuates a system of religious hierarchy that favours certain faiths over others. Such marginalisation can have far-reaching consequences, including feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement among adherents of traditional religions. In a country as diverse as Ghana, where religious pluralism is a defining feature, fostering an environment of inclusivity and recognition for all faith traditions is essential for social cohesion and harmony. By neglecting to acknowledge the significance of traditional religions, the state risks alienating a substantial portion of its population and perpetuating inequities in the realm of religious freedom and representation. Furthermore, embracing religious equity and inclusivity aligns with the broader principles of democracy and social justice. In a democratic society, all citizens should have equal opportunities to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or marginalization. By extending official recognition to traditional religions alongside Christianity and Islam, Ghana can signal its commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of all religious communities. Moreover, such recognition can serve as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue and understanding, fostering a more cohesive and tolerant society. In essence, achieving equity and fairness in religious recognition is not merely a matter of legal compliance but a fundamental step towards building a more inclusive and pluralistic Ghanaian society.

### **Social Cohesion**

In Ghana, introducing a public holiday specifically dedicated to traditional worship and ancestral veneration would not only acknowledge the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of traditional religions, but also promote social cohesion and unity among the diverse religious communities in the country. By officially recognising and celebrating the spiritual practices of traditionalists, the government would signal its commitment to inclusivity and respect for all religious beliefs. This gesture



would go a long way in fostering a sense of belonging and validation among adherents of traditional religions, who have long felt marginalised within the national discourse. Research by Chitando and Manyonganise (2011) supports the notion that inclusive policies recognising diverse religious practices can contribute to social harmony and mitigate inter-religious tensions, ultimately strengthening the fabric of Ghanaian society. Moreover, the establishment of a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration would provide an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and dialogue, facilitating greater understanding and appreciation of Ghana's diverse religious landscape. Individuals from diverse faith backgrounds may challenge stereotypes and misconceptions as they unite to commemorate and learn about traditional spiritual practices, fostering deeper interfaith connections and mutual respect. Such interactions can contribute to a more cohesive and tolerant society where individuals recognise the inherent worth and dignity of each other's religious traditions. Furthermore, the promotion of social cohesion through inclusive religious policies is not just a matter of moral imperative but also a strategic approach to nation-building and development. In a country as ethnically and religiously diverse as Ghana, fostering unity and solidarity among its citizens is essential for social stability and progress. By recognising traditional worship and ancestral veneration alongside Christianity and Islam, Ghana can demonstrate its commitment to embracing diversity and promoting a sense of national belonging that transcends religious divides. Ultimately, by prioritising inclusivity and respect for all religious traditions, Ghana can chart a path towards a more cohesive, resilient, and harmonious society.

### Historical Justice

The historical marginalisation and suppression of traditional religious practices in Ghana, exacerbated by colonial and post-colonial policies that favoured imported religions, have left deep scars on many indigenous communities (Addai Mununkum, 2023). By introducing a public holiday specifically dedicated to traditional religions, Ghana has an opportunity to address these historical injustices and embark on a path of restorative justice. Such recognition serves as a symbolic gesture of acknowledgment and rectification, signalling a commitment to healing the wounds inflicted by centuries of cultural imperialism. As Mbiti (1991) argues, acknowledging the significance of traditional religions is not only a matter of historical justice but also a crucial step towards promoting reconciliation and social healing.

Furthermore, the recognition of a public holiday for traditional spirituality carries profound implications for intergenerational justice. For generations, adherents of traditional religions have endured discrimination and marginalisation, with their spiritual practices often denigrated or suppressed in favour of dominant faiths. Ghana can affirm the inherent worth and dignity of indigenous belief systems by formally acknowledging and celebrating these traditions, ensuring that future generations inherit a society that values and respects all religious expressions. This acknowledgement is not just a matter of rectifying past wrongs but also of building a more equitable and inclusive future for all Ghanaians, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Moreover, the recognition of traditional religions through a public holiday serve as a catalyst for historical reflection and education, enabling Ghanaians to confront uncomfortable truths about the country's colonial legacy and its impact on religious freedom and cultural identity. By engaging with the historical context of religious marginalization, Ghana can foster a greater sense of national consciousness and collective responsibility for addressing past injustices. Through dialogue and commemoration, the nation can forge a more inclusive narrative that acknowledges the contributions of all religious communities to Ghana's rich tapestry of cultural heritage. In essence, recognising a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration is not merely a symbolic gesture but a substantive step towards building a more just and equitable society founded on principles of historical justice and reconciliation.

### Cultural and historical significance

#### Cultural and historical

Traditional worship and ancestral veneration hold profound cultural and historical significance in Ghana, representing spiritual practices deeply intertwined with the nation's heritage. These rituals are not merely religious observances but also serve as vital conduits for preserving and transmitting Ghana's rich cultural legacy. Introducing a public holiday dedicated to these traditions would not only honour their importance but also encourage the preservation of traditional knowledge, rituals, and cultural identity. As Smith (2006) highlights, actively celebrating cultural traditions is crucial for maintaining the vibrancy and continuity of indigenous cultures, ensuring they remain integral parts of Ghanaian society for generations to come. Moreover, the preservation of heritage through the recognition of traditional worship and ancestral veneration reinforces the intrinsic connection between spirituality and cultural identity in Ghana. Ghanaian communities deeply embed these practices in their collective memory and lived experiences, embodying centuries-old traditions passed down through oral histories and cultural practices. By officially acknowledging these rituals through a public holiday, Ghana affirms the enduring value of its cultural heritage, safeguarding it against the eroding forces of modernization and globalization. Thus, the creation of such a holiday serves not only as a gesture of reverence but also as a strategic initiative to ensure the continuity and vitality of Ghana's diverse cultural landscape. Furthermore, the preservation of cultural heritage through traditional worship and ancestral veneration holds implications beyond national borders, contributing to the global tapestry of cultural diversity. Ghana's rich cultural traditions have the potential to inspire and enrich the lives of people worldwide, fostering cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding. By recognising and celebrating these

traditions, Ghana asserts its position as a custodian of cultural heritage, inviting the world to appreciate and learn from its unique spiritual practices. In essence, the preservation of heritage through the acknowledgment of traditional worship and ancestral veneration not only strengthens Ghana's national identity but also contributes to the global dialogue on the importance of cultural diversity and heritage preservation.

### Promoting national identity

Embracing and celebrating all aspects of Ghana's cultural and religious diversity is essential for fostering a strong and unified national identity. Recognising a public holiday for traditional worship serves as a powerful symbol of respect for the nation's diverse heritage, contributing to a collective sense of pride and belonging among Ghanaians. The celebration of diverse cultural practices, which serve as unifying threads binding individuals from various ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds, often reinforces national identity. According to Anderson (1983), shared symbols and narratives construct the imagined community of a nation, with cultural celebrations playing a crucial role. Furthermore, the promotion of national identity through the recognition of traditional worship transcends mere symbolism, serving as a tangible expression of Ghana's commitment to inclusivity and unity. Ghana affirms its status as a pluralistic society that values and respects all religious beliefs by officially acknowledging the spiritual practices of traditionalists alongside Christianity and Islam. This inclusive approach not only strengthens social cohesion within the country but also enhances Ghana's reputation as a beacon of religious tolerance and multiculturalism on the global stage. In this way, the celebration of diverse cultural and religious traditions becomes not only a source of national pride but also a tool for projecting Ghana's identity and values to the world. Moreover, the promotion of national identity through cultural celebrations like traditional worship fosters a sense of belonging and shared citizenship among Ghanaians, transcending regional and ethnic divides. In a country as ethnically diverse as Ghana, forging a common national identity is essential for fostering solidarity and collective action towards shared goals. By celebrating the nation's cultural heritage through public holidays, Ghana creates opportunities for citizens to come together, celebrate their shared values, and reaffirm their commitment to the nation's prosperity and well-being. Thus, the promotion of national identity through recognition of traditional worship serves as a unifying force, binding together the diverse strands of Ghanaian society in a common journey towards a brighter future.

### Educational Opportunities

Introducing a public holiday for traditional worship not only provides a platform for cultural celebration but also offers valuable educational opportunities to deepen understanding and appreciation of Ghana's rich cultural heritage. Schools, universities, and community organisations can leverage this holiday to organise educational programmes, workshops, and lectures aimed at informing both young and old about traditional practices and their historical significance. Ghana can equip future generations with a comprehensive understanding of their cultural heritage by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into educational curricula. These educational initiatives significantly contribute to the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge, safeguarding cultural practices from extinction. By learning about traditional worship and ancestral veneration, students gain insights into the spiritual beliefs, customs, and values that have shaped Ghanaian society for centuries. Moreover, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives fosters empathy, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding among young learners, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious society. Furthermore, educational programmes focused on traditional worship provide opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and knowledge exchange. Elders and community leaders can share their wisdom and experiences with younger generations, bridging the gap between the past and present and fostering a sense of continuity and cultural pride. Through storytelling, rituals, and hands-on activities, students can actively engage with Ghana's cultural heritage, forging deeper connections to their roots and identities. In addition, the educational value of recognising traditional worship extends beyond the classroom, encompassing informal learning experiences in communities and households. Families can use the holiday as an occasion to pass down oral traditions, teach traditional crafts, and engage in cultural ceremonies, reinforcing the importance of cultural continuity within the fabric of everyday life. By integrating cultural education into various facets of society, Ghana can ensure that the preservation of heritage becomes a collective endeavour, enriching the lives of all citizens and strengthening the bonds of unity and pride in Ghana's diverse cultural tapestry. Thus, recognizing traditional worship as a public holiday not only promotes cultural preservation, but also fosters lifelong learning and appreciation of Ghana's rich cultural heritage.

### Tourism and Economic Benefits

#### Cultural Tourism

Ghana's vibrant cultural festivals and traditional practices have long been a draw for tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. Establishing a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration would further enhance Ghana's appeal as a cultural tourism destination, attracting travellers eager to immerse themselves in the country's rich cultural heritage. This influx of tourists holds significant economic potential, as highlighted by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), which identifies cultural tourism as a growing sector driven by the desire for authentic and immersive experiences (UNWTO, 2018). By capitalising on its cultural assets, Ghana can position itself as a premier

destination for cultural tourism, diversifying its tourism offerings and stimulating economic growth in the process. Moreover, the promotion of cultural tourism through the recognition of traditional worship can benefit local communities by creating opportunities for economic development and empowerment. As tourists flock to witness traditional rituals and participate in cultural festivities, local businesses catering to tourism, such as hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops, stand to benefit from increased patronage. This influx of tourist spending has the potential to boost the local economy, generate employment opportunities, and improve livelihoods in communities surrounding cultural heritage sites. Thus, by leveraging cultural tourism as a driver of economic growth, Ghana can unlock new avenues for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, cultural tourism presents an opportunity to showcase Ghana's diverse cultural heritage to the world, fostering cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. As tourists engage with traditional worship practices and interact with local communities, they gain insights into Ghana's rich history, customs, and traditions. This cultural exchange not only enriches the travel experience but also promotes mutual understanding and appreciation between visitors and hosts. By fostering meaningful connections between tourists and local residents, cultural tourism has the potential to promote cultural diplomacy and goodwill on a global scale, enhancing Ghana's reputation as a welcoming and culturally rich destination.

### Economic Growth

Tourism linked to traditional festivals and rituals has the potential to drive significant economic growth in Ghana. By promoting these events through a recognised public holiday, the government can tap into the economic benefits of cultural tourism, stimulating revenue generation across various sectors of the economy. Research by Richards (2011) underscores the economic significance of cultural festivals, which can attract both domestic and international tourists, fuelling demand for goods and services and bolstering local economies. By strategically leveraging traditional worship practices as cultural assets, Ghana can capitalise on this economic potential to create jobs, spur investment, and drive sustainable economic growth. Moreover, the economic benefits of cultural tourism extend beyond direct revenue generation to encompass indirect and induced impacts on the economy. As tourists patronise local businesses, their spending ripples through the supply chain, benefiting suppliers, producers, and service providers across various sectors. Additionally, the growth of cultural tourism can stimulate infrastructure development, such as improvements to transportation networks, accommodation facilities, and cultural heritage sites, further enhancing the tourism experience and attracting additional investment. Thus, by nurturing a thriving cultural tourism industry, Ghana can create a virtuous cycle of economic development that benefits both urban centres and rural communities alike.

### Sustainable Development

Cultural tourism, when managed sustainably, can play a vital role in advancing the broader goals of sustainable development in Ghana. By integrating traditional worship practices into the tourism sector, Ghana can promote a model of tourism that not only preserves cultural heritage but also supports local economies and fosters community pride. Timothy and Boyd (2003) highlight the potential of cultural tourism to contribute to sustainable development by encouraging the conservation of cultural heritage, promoting economic empowerment, and fostering community engagement.

One aspect of sustainable cultural tourism is the conservation of cultural heritage sites and practices. By promoting traditional worship and ancestral veneration as cultural tourism attractions, Ghana can incentivize the preservation and maintenance of sacred sites, artefacts, and rituals. Sustainable tourism practices, such as visitor education, site management, and responsible tourism guidelines, can help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism on cultural heritage while ensuring long-term sustainability for future generations. Furthermore, we can reinvest the revenue from cultural tourism into conservation efforts, bolstering ongoing preservation initiatives and guaranteeing the continuous vitality of Ghana's cultural heritage.

Furthermore, cultural tourism has the potential to economically empower local communities by providing opportunities for entrepreneurship and income generation. By involving local residents in the tourism value chain, from guiding tours to selling handmade crafts, cultural tourism can create avenues for economic participation and diversification. Moreover, community-based tourism initiatives that empower local communities to manage and benefit directly from tourism activities can contribute to poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. By harnessing the economic benefits of cultural tourism, Ghana can promote inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society, particularly those living in rural and marginalized areas.

Additionally, sustainable cultural tourism fosters community pride in and ownership of cultural heritage, strengthening social cohesion and identity. Ghana can ensure equitable sharing of tourism benefits and the preservation of cultural authenticity by actively involving local communities in the planning, development, and management of cultural tourism initiatives. Community-led cultural tourism projects can also serve as platforms for intergenerational knowledge transfer, as elders pass down traditional knowledge and practices to younger generations, ensuring their continuity and relevance in a rapidly changing world. Ultimately, by embracing cultural tourism as a tool for sustainable development, Ghana can harness the transformative power of its cultural heritage to promote prosperity, resilience, and well-being for present and future generations.

## Moral and ethical considerations

### Moral and ethical

An essential aspect of traditional worship in Ghana is the reverence for ancestral practices, which reflects a profound respect for lineage and heritage. By recognising this through a public holiday, Ghana underscores the moral and ethical imperative of honouring one's ancestors, thereby promoting values of respect and gratitude within society. As Gyekye (1996) posits, various ethical frameworks across cultures emphasise the importance of acknowledging and respecting ancestral traditions as a means of maintaining social harmony and continuity. Thus, establishing a public holiday for traditional worship serves not only as a cultural affirmation but also as an ethical imperative rooted in the principles of respect and gratitude towards one's forebears.

Moreover, ethical governance in a multicultural society like Ghana necessitates the inclusion and recognition of all religious practices. By instituting a public holiday for traditional worship, the state reaffirms its commitment to ethical inclusivity and respect for the religious diversity of its citizens. As argued by Rawls (1971), ethical inclusivity is foundational to democratic societies, ensuring that all groups feel valued and respected within the social and political framework. Ghana demonstrates its adherence to ethical principles of fairness and justice in governance by extending official recognition to traditional practices alongside Christianity and Islam, fostering a society that treats all religious beliefs with dignity and equality.

Furthermore, Ghana's promotion of a public holiday for traditional worship contributes to the cultivation of interfaith harmony and understanding. By acknowledging the significance of traditional practices, the state encourages a culture of mutual respect and cooperation among different religious communities. Esposito and Watson (2000) have highlighted that interfaith initiatives reduce religious tensions and promote peaceful coexistence by fostering dialogue and cooperation across religious divides. Therefore, by embracing traditional worship as a part of its national ethos, Ghana takes a significant step towards fostering interfaith harmony and nurturing a climate of respect and understanding among its diverse religious communities.

### Respect for ancestral practices

In Ghanaian culture, ancestral veneration holds profound significance, representing a sacred bond between the living and the departed. Recognising this aspect of traditional worship through a public holiday underscores the moral imperative of honouring one's ancestors and preserving cultural continuity. Ancestral practices serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness of past, present, and future generations, promoting values of respect, gratitude, and familial solidarity within society. By institutionalising a public holiday for traditional worship, Ghana reaffirms its commitment to upholding the moral and ethical principles of honouring one's heritage and acknowledging the contributions of previous generations to the collective fabric of society.

Furthermore, the recognition of ancestral practices through a public holiday fosters a sense of cultural pride and identity among Ghanaians, strengthening social cohesion and unity. Ancestral worship is not merely a religious observance but also a cultural tradition deeply ingrained in the national consciousness, reflecting the shared experiences and values of the Ghanaian people. By honouring ancestral practices, Ghana celebrates its rich cultural heritage and affirms the intrinsic worth and dignity of its cultural traditions. This acknowledgment serves as a testament to the moral and ethical values that underpin Ghanaian society, emphasising the importance of maintaining a connection to one's roots and preserving ancestral wisdom for future generations.

Moreover, the recognition of ancestral practices through a public holiday promotes intergenerational dialogue and the transmission of cultural knowledge within families and communities. As Ghanaians gather to honour their ancestors, they engage in rituals and storytelling that pass down traditional wisdom and values from elders to younger generations. This intergenerational exchange not only strengthens family bonds but also reinforces the moral and ethical foundations of Ghanaian society, instilling a sense of responsibility towards preserving cultural heritage and upholding ancestral traditions. In this way, establishing a public holiday for traditional worship serves as a catalyst for ethical reflection and reaffirmation of Ghana's cultural identity and values.

### Interfaith Harmony

Promoting a public holiday for traditional worship in Ghana represents a significant opportunity to foster interfaith harmony and understanding among diverse religious communities. By officially acknowledging the significance of traditional practices alongside Christianity and Islam, the state signals its commitment to creating a culture of mutual respect and cooperation among adherents of different faith traditions. Interfaith harmony is essential for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies like Ghana, where religious diversity is a defining feature.

Acknowledging traditional worship practices through a public holiday encourages dialogue and collaboration among religious communities, facilitating greater understanding and appreciation of each other's beliefs and traditions. As highlighted by Esposito and Watson (2000), interfaith initiatives have the potential to reduce religious tensions and promote peaceful coexistence by fostering respectful engagement and cooperation across religious divides. Recognizing traditional worship as a public holiday creates an environment where people of different religious backgrounds can come



together to celebrate their shared values and aspirations for a harmonious society by providing a platform for interfaith dialogue and interaction.

Furthermore, promoting interfaith harmony through a public holiday for traditional worship contributes to the cultivation of a culture of tolerance and acceptance within Ghanaian society. As individuals from diverse religious backgrounds gather to honour traditional practices, they demonstrate a willingness to recognise and respect the spiritual beliefs and customs of others. This spirit of tolerance and acceptance serves as a bulwark against religious discrimination and extremism, promoting social cohesion and unity across religious lines. By fostering a culture of interfaith harmony, Ghana reinforces its commitment to upholding the ethical principles of fairness, justice, and respect for religious diversity.

Moreover, the promotion of interfaith harmony through the recognition of traditional worship as a public holiday paves the way for collaborative efforts to address common societal challenges and promote the common good. As religious communities come together to celebrate their shared heritage and values, they also have the opportunity to collaborate on initiatives aimed at addressing social issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare. Interfaith partnerships have the potential to harness the collective resources and moral authority of religious communities to effect positive change and contribute to the well-being of society as a whole. Therefore, by promoting interfaith harmony through the institution of a public holiday for traditional worship, Ghana lays the foundation for a more cohesive, inclusive, and resilient society where individuals of all religious backgrounds can thrive together in harmony and mutual respect.

## Advocacy from various stakeholders

### Ordinary Citizens

Ordinary citizens who practice traditional religions would welcome the state's recognition of their religious practices through the establishment of a public holiday. This acknowledgment would not only validate their spiritual beliefs but also enhance their sense of belonging and national pride. By actively acknowledging and respecting traditional practices, the state fosters a more inclusive society where all citizens feel valued and respected. As Putnam (2000) argues, citizen support for inclusive religious policies is essential to building a cohesive and harmonious nation where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds can coexist peacefully and contribute to the common good.

### Parliamentarians

Supporting the proposal for a public holiday dedicated to traditional worship aligns with the duty of parliamentarians to represent all constituents fairly and impartially. Endorsing this initiative demonstrates parliamentarians' commitment to upholding constitutional principles of equality and freedom of religion, ensuring that the law treats all religious practices with equal respect and consideration. Legislative support for diverse religious practices is crucial in promoting democratic values and social justice, as highlighted by Lipset (1959), as it reaffirms the nation's commitment to pluralism and religious freedom.

### Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders, both the national and regional houses of chiefs, as custodians of Ghanaian culture, would view the establishment of a public holiday for traditional worship as a significant step towards preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Their support for this proposal would be instrumental in mobilising grassroots backing and reinforcing the cultural importance of traditional practices within local communities. Research by Ray and Reddy (2003) has widely recognised the role of traditional leaders in cultural preservation and community leadership, highlighting their influence and authority in matters related to cultural identity and tradition.

### The Executive

For the executive branch, endorsing the proposal for a public holiday dedicated to traditional worship reflects a commitment to inclusive governance and cultural preservation. By officially recognizing and celebrating traditional practices, the executive signals respect for the diverse religious landscape within the country, aligning with the broader goals of national unity and cultural tourism promotion. Executive support for cultural policies is crucial, as it can significantly influence their successful implementation and enforcement. As Dumont (1980) suggests, executive endorsement lends legitimacy and momentum to cultural initiatives, paving the way for their effective implementation and long-term sustainability.

### Judiciary

The judiciary's role in upholding constitutional rights makes it a key stakeholder in advocating for the recognition of a public holiday for traditional worship. Recognising traditional practices aligns with the judiciary's mandate to ensure equality and freedom of religion, reinforcing its commitment to justice and fairness. Judicial interpretations of religious and cultural rights play a critical role in shaping inclusive legal frameworks that protect the rights of all citizens, as highlighted by

Tushnet (1984). Therefore, judicial support for this proposal is essential in affirming the constitutional rights of individuals to practice their religious beliefs freely and without discrimination.

### Religious Leaders

Leaders of Christian and Islamic communities should lend their support to the initiative for a public holiday dedicated to traditional worship as a gesture of interfaith solidarity. Recognizing traditional religions alongside their own promotes mutual respect and harmony among different religious groups, contributing to social peace and understanding. Interfaith solidarity is crucial in promoting dialogue and cooperation among religious communities, as emphasised by Ammerman (1994). By supporting the recognition of traditional practices, religious leaders demonstrate their commitment to fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for religious diversity within Ghanaian society.

### Traditionalists

For traditionalists, the establishment of a public holiday for traditional worship represents a formal acknowledgment of their cultural and spiritual contributions to Ghanaian society. By empowering them to continue their practices with pride and visibility, it ensures the celebration and preservation of their heritage for future generations. Recognition of traditional practices can significantly enhance the cultural pride and identity of traditional communities, as noted by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). By advocating for the recognition of traditional worship, traditionalists assert their rights to practice their beliefs freely and assert their cultural identity within the national narrative, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse Ghanaian society.

### Conclusion

Establishing a public holiday for traditional worship and ancestral veneration in Ghana is a matter of constitutional equality, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. This article appeals to various stakeholders by highlighting the legal, cultural, economic, moral, and ethical imperatives of such recognition. By endorsing this initiative, Ghana can take a significant step towards honouring its rich cultural diversity, fostering national unity, and promoting social equity. Such recognition will not only comply with national and international legal standards but will also celebrate the cultural richness and historical depth that make Ghana unique.

### Author's Biography

Nana Yaw Wi Asamoah Boadi is a research associate and traditional African scholar with the Institute of Indigenous Intelligence. He is currently a PhD candidate, contributing to scholarship in areas that bridge indigenous knowledge systems and modern academic discourse. Nana Yaw Wi holds a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in Educational Leadership, enhancing his expertise in educational theory and practice. He also possesses dual diplomas: one in Philosophy and Religious Studies and another in Education. His academic journey includes a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Social Sciences from Spiritan University College (KNUST) and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Education, Winneba, Kumasi. His diverse research interests span across Indigenous Intelligence, Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence, Esoteric and Paranormal Research, Teacher Mentorship, Education, Educational Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, and Business Administration.

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