


Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Plural Space: A Perspective Inspired by Homi K. Bhabha

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Abstract

The development of interreligious studies has increasingly gained significant attention in global academic literature. However, most existing research still tends to focus on the dynamics of interreligious relations in Western countries. Theoretical and practical contributions from the Asian region—including the richness and complexity of its interreligious interactions—have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. This article aims to analyze interreligious relations in Indonesia by referring to field data collected through interviews with Muslim, Christian, and Kaharingan communities in the Central Kalimantan region. Using Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical framework of the *Third Space*, this study highlights how interfaith interactions unfold among Islamic, Christian, and local Kaharingan communities in two villages: Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang, in the province of Central Kalimantan. This research explores how the narrative and practice of the third space emerge in interfaith relations, whether at the personal, institutional, or societal level. This study adopts a descriptive-qualitative approach with social-cognitive discourse analysis across three dimensions: micro, meso, and macro. The study's findings indicate that the region's diverse religious communities are capable of living peacefully side by side, strongly supported by the local socio-cultural context rich in heritage values. Cultural elements such as Indonesian-style communalism and a spirit of collectivity serve as key drivers in fostering harmonious interfaith relationships. The study concludes that these communities actively construct "third spaces"—shared spaces that allow for common ground in diversity, while still maintaining the uniqueness of each religious identity.

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INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, conflicts, wars, and terrorism are frequently triggered by religious, socio-economic, and political tensions between faith communities (Jamaluddin, 2022). This indicates that diversity, while a national asset, can also become a source of conflict if not managed wisely (Haryanto, 2015). For example, after the Poso conflict, other regions such as Kalimantan also experienced inter-group tensions—such as between the Dayaknese and Madurese communities (Munir et al., 2022; Rahmana, 2018). This underscores that countries with cultural and religious plurality like Indonesia are vulnerable to social conflict if values of tolerance are not deeply instilled.

Historically, multi-religious communities have existed in Indonesia since the Majapahit era—one of Southeast Asia's greatest Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that promoted interfaith harmony (Haluti et al., 2025). Over time, various efforts have been made to build a "civil religion," a social doctrine encouraging peaceful coexistence and mutual respect across faiths (Aritonang, 2023). Hence, it is crucial for Indonesia to cultivate tolerance, openness, and inclusivity as long-term solutions to prevent conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

In this context, conceptualizing tolerance within social and cultural spheres becomes essential to deepen its meaning and identify new potentials (Yenuri et al., 2021). Multi-religious communities are central to social tolerance and pluralism, reflected in the national education system's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* 'unity in diversity' (Pratama et al., 2023). However, if a

multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural society is perceived as incompatible, true unity is difficult to achieve (Sulong et al., 2019). Conversely, when well-managed through inclusive and respectful approaches, diversity becomes the foundation of national unity (Zahra, 2025).

Interfaith studies have expanded significantly, especially in Western universities offering courses and academic chairs in the field. Foundational works like *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace* by Wijzen (2007) marked this study with relational dialogue and religious activism, followed by contributions from Hedges (2013), Patel (2013), Leirvik (2014), Stanton (2014), and edited collections such as Cheetam (2025) and Pratt & Thomas (2013). Nevertheless, most focus remains on Western contexts, while Asia—particularly Indonesia—represents a vital setting where pluralistic communities coexist peacefully. Studies in West Papua and Lampung, for instance, show how multi-faith communities build harmony through local wisdom and conflict resolution, yet literature has yet to fully integrate Asia's interreligious dynamics (Ruslan, 2018).

This study addresses that gap—namely, the lack of conceptual exploration regarding the application of Homi K. Bhabha's *Third Space* in interfaith practices within Indonesia's rural communities. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of the *Third Space* framework with religious moderation in multifaith societies, offering a model for shared spaces that preserve distinct group identities. Thus, the study introduces a fresh conceptual perspective that enriches interreligious discourse through a contextually grounded and locally relevant approach.

Based on this background, the research seeks to answer the following question: How do Muslim, Christian, and Hindu Kaharingan communities in rural Central Kalimantan construct and experience the Third Space in their daily interfaith lives?. To address this question, the study was conducted in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang villages, which were purposively selected for their histories of peaceful interfaith coexistence and their reflection of local Indonesian values (Hadijaya et al., 2024; Mahdayeni et al., 2019).

These two villages illustrate how interfaith communities can build relationships based on peace, tolerance, nonviolence, inclusivity, and acceptance of local culture. In these areas, mosques, churches, and Kaharingan temples stand side by side; Muslim and Christian cemeteries are adjacent; interfaith families live under one roof; and residents from various religious backgrounds actively participate in joint social, cultural, and religious events (Field observations, 2025). This demonstrates that pluralism is not only an idea but a lived reality.

To explore this dynamic, the study adopts a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods and social-cognitive discourse analysis to understand how tolerance practices are socially constructed across three levels: micro (interpersonal interaction), meso (the role of institutions and faith leaders), and macro (broader social structures) (Bhandari, 2022). The *Third Space* concept from intercultural studies serves as the primary analytical lens for examining how plural communities create dialogic, inclusive, and harmonious shared spaces without erasing their unique identities.

As far as the researcher's investigation goes, there has been no study that specifically explores the dynamics of the third space in the context of multireligious communities in Central Kalimantan. Several prior studies have highlighted religious moderation and intercultural interaction, such as Usman (2024) in Aceh, Tamburian (2018) in West Kalimantan, and Wilson (2022) in Palangka Raya. However, these studies have not yet addressed the concept of interstitial space as a site of interreligious identity negotiation. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring reflective and dialogical religious moderation in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang.

Other studies—such as Aslam (2024), Tyurikov (2021), and Akrim et al. (2021)—offer compelling perspectives on religious moderation through literary narratives, international relations, and spiritual coping strategies. While these approaches enrich academic discourse, they tend to be theoretical, elitist, or individually focused, and therefore do not adequately capture the lived dynamics of religious moderation within grassroots communities. Addressing this gap, the present study employs a more contextual ethnographic approach to explore how Muslim, Christian, and Hindu Kaharingan communities in rural Central Kalimantan cultivate religious maturity through

everyday social practices in shared social spaces. The novelty of this research lies in the application of Homi K. Bhabha's *Third Space* concept to interfaith life in Indonesia's multicultural rural settings. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on urban and institutional contexts, this research offers a reflective, locally grounded perspective that remains largely underexplored in the academic literature on religious moderation.

Referring to Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, this study examines how multireligious communities actively create inclusive zones of interfaith encounter. The focus is on the tangible practices of religious moderation that foster a mature religious consciousness—rooted in local realities and not dominated by a single religious identity. This becomes a novel contribution to the study of religious moderation in Indonesia, particularly within multicultural rural communities.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of intercultural communication and traces of religious maturity in the formation of the Third Space within multireligious communities. This approach allows the researcher to capture the meanings, experiences, and authentic voices of social actors involved in interfaith interactions, as emphasized in the qualitative paradigm (Muri Yusuf, 2014; Moleong, 2012). The research sites are centered in Pendahara Subdistrict and Tumbang Kalang Village, Central Kalimantan—two areas that exemplify harmonious interreligious life, where mosques, churches, and Kaharingan temples stand side by side, and the communities actively engage in interfaith social interactions in daily life.

The data collected were qualitative in nature, obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation involving 12 informants consisting of religious leaders, traditional leaders, village officials, and community members. The participants represented three major religions—Islam, Christianity, and Kaharingan—with a balanced gender composition (6 men and 6 women) and an age range between 25 and 65 years. These demographic details are included to ensure transparency and support the replicability of the study in similar contexts. Secondary data were gathered from literature reviews, policy documents, and relevant previous research. Data collection techniques utilized methodological triangulation, including interviews, observation, documentation, and internet-based information tracking to enrich the context and support the validity of the findings (Bungin, 2006). The researcher serves as the primary instrument (key instrument), responsible for systematically and adaptively accessing and evaluating the data. Additional instruments such as voice recorders, digital cameras, stationery, and interview guides were also used to support the data collection process. To ensure data validity, the study applied source and method triangulation and referred to the four criteria of qualitative data validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Djam'an & Komariah, 2010).

Data were analyzed using a socio-cognitive discourse approach aimed at uncovering how participants interpret interactions and the surrounding social structures (Zubir & Halim, 2020). The analysis was conducted across three levels: the micro level, which focused on individual experiences in interfaith encounters; the meso level, which examined the institutional roles of religious leaders and faith-based communities; and the macro level, which reflected broader societal constructions of social cohesion and interreligious tolerance. To enhance methodological rigor, the data were first transcribed and coded manually, then categorized thematically according to these three levels. Emerging patterns and meanings were interpreted through iterative reading, paying close attention to both linguistic expressions and contextual references. This multi-level discourse analysis allowed the study to capture both the cognitive and structural dimensions of interfaith interaction.

The theories used to discuss the data are Third Space and Religious Maturity theory. The concept of the Third Space is a theoretical framework developed by Homi K. Bhabha, expanding on earlier ideas of encounter spaces between subjects, often referred to as the *realm of between*. This space is not merely a physical location or a meeting point between two cultural entities, but a

liminal and transitional zone where meaning, identity, and values are actively negotiated. In Bhabha's view, meaning arises not through the dominance of one side over the other, but through the interaction between both. The Third Space, therefore, creates a platform for transcending fixed, exclusive identities and opens possibilities for more fluid and inclusive forms of identity. One of the main features of the Third Space is its capacity to generate *hybridity*—a blending of cultural elements. This represents a kind of cultural intelligence that enables individuals or communities to bridge different value systems through creative negotiation. Hybridity marks a shift from dichotomous approaches such as “us or them” to more inclusive thinking: “us and them.” Within this space, new collective identities can emerge without erasing each party's uniqueness. The concept simultaneously rejects essentialist views of identity as fixed and pure. Instead, identity is seen as a social construct that continually evolves through cultural interaction and group dialogue. In the context of religious moderation in Indonesia, the Third Space provides a powerful theoretical lens to understand how people from different religious backgrounds build inclusive relationships. It facilitates interfaith encounters grounded in communal awareness, respect for differences, and a spirit of collaboration. Rather than sharpening dichotomies like “us versus them,” the Third Space promotes the creation of a social arena where religious communities can coexist harmoniously and enrich each other. Although it has faced criticism for downplaying material conditions and the historical legacy of colonialism, the concept remains relevant in fostering social cohesion and cultural transformation in multicultural societies like Indonesia.

Religious maturity is a concept that reflects an individual's ability to maintain a balance between sincere religious commitment and openness to diverse belief systems (Kristensen et al., 2001). It is not merely about adherence to religious doctrines, but also involves internal dynamics in responding to doubt, spiritual experiences, and social engagement within pluralistic societies (Hasanah et al., 2022). This kind of maturity is marked by a creative tension between firm belief and the willingness to reflect on and revise one's worldview in light of new knowledge and experiences (Ahmed & Mufaizin, 2022). In this process, doubt is not the enemy of faith, but a crucial part of shaping a mature religious identity (Francis & Pocock, 2009). The concept is rooted in Gordon Allport's psychology of religion, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation. Allport emphasized that religiously mature individuals do not accept teachings dogmatically, but through critical reflection and personal evaluation (Leak & Fish, 1999). Acknowledging that not all existential questions have definitive answers is another characteristic of mature faith (Park, 2021). In this sense, a person can approach religious pluralism with greater openness without losing their spiritual grounding. Religious maturity, therefore, involves moral growth and increased tolerance toward differing beliefs as part of an ongoing spiritual journey. Empirical research shows that religious maturity positively correlates with adaptive qualities such as psychological resilience, healthy coping strategies, and engagement in social activities rooted in justice and citizenship (Nipkow, 2018). Conversely, it has a negative correlation with religious fanaticism and authoritarianism. Furthermore, religious maturity enables individuals to explore spiritual experiences across traditions without losing their original religious identity (Wantini et al., 2024). The readiness to evaluate long-held beliefs creates space for spiritual transcendence and broader empathy, which form the foundation for healthy, inclusive, and productive interfaith relations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Religious Demographics of the Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang Communities

The villages of Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang, located in Katingan Regency, Central Kalimantan, represent a pluralistic and harmonious model of socio-religious life. In Pendahara Village, religious diversity is evident in the composition of its population: 53% Christian (1,680 people), 32% Hindu Kaharingan (1,012 people), 13.5% Muslim (427 people), and 0.7% Catholic (23 people). This diversity is not merely a statistical figure, but is reflected in inclusive and peaceful social practices. Houses of worship such as Debora Evangelical Church, the Hindu Kaharingan

Balai Basarah, Al-Mu'min Mosque, and Firdaus Church stand side by side, symbolizing interfaith life marked by mutual respect. The people of Pendahara exhibit strong solidarity during various life events, whether joyful or sorrowful, reinforcing interreligious social relations and tolerance (Sulistiawati, 2023).

Meanwhile, Tumbang Kalang Village also demonstrates a balanced religious configuration and harmonious social practices. Out of a total population of 3,677, 43% (1,581 people) identify as Muslim, 30% (1,103 people) as Hindu Kaharingan, 18% (662 people) as Protestant Christians, and 9% (331 people) as Catholics. The four houses of worship representing these religions—Hindu Kaharingan Balai Basarah, Stasi Kudus Catholic Church, Eka Shinta Protestant Church, and Al Haddi Mosque—are located adjacent to each other, reflecting openness and respect for diversity (Kusuma, 2021). Interfaith mutual cooperation (*handep*) and involvement in traditional activities serve as foundational elements that strengthen social cohesion. The presence of Hindu Kaharingan as a local religion adds spiritual and cultural values that enrich interreligious interactions. In both villages, values of kinship, brotherhood, and shared community identity are preserved and passed down through generations in a spirit of harmony and togetherness.

The Third Space and Religious Maturity: Narratives of Interfaith Interaction

Central Kalimantan Province is a region rich in ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Despite being inhabited by various communities, the people in this region demonstrate a mature attitude in responding to differences. Religious differences—which in many contexts often serve as sources of conflict—are not seen as divisive threats. On the contrary, the residents of Central Kalimantan are able to live harmoniously without abandoning their respective religious identities.

In such an environment, forms of symbolic and social interaction emerge that reflect the presence of a "Third Space"—a shared space created by the community to foster interfaith relations without erasing individual religious identities. Research findings in the villages of Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang reveal that collective narratives such as "family or *pahari*," "brothers and sisters," and "neighbors or *uluh sila huma*" are used as the basis for building peaceful and equal interactions among religious communities.

This third space can be observed through two main dimensions: collective narratives and interreligious social practices. These diverse communities develop an inclusive "we"-oriented narrative that transcends the dichotomy of "us versus them" or distancing terms such as "the other." In daily life, this is manifested through the habit of referring to people of different faiths as part of an extended family, indicating the presence of strong social and cultural bonds beyond formal religious boundaries.

For example, a Muslim community leader from a multi-faith village in Kotawaringin Timur Regency stated, "*For us Muslims here, all residents are brothers and sisters—whether they are Christians, followers of Kaharingan, natives, or newcomers*" (AH, 2025). A similar sentiment was expressed by a Christian religious leader, "*We live side by side with Muslims, followers of Dayak indigenous beliefs, and other communities. We regard them all as family.*" (S, 2025). A follower of Kaharingan similarly remarked, "*We are indeed the native people here, but we treat adherents of other religions like Muslims and Christians as part of our family. They are our neighbors*" (TE, 2025).

Expressions such as "family members" or "brothers and sisters" become symbols of the third space narrative, reflecting a mature form of religiosity. Even in everyday greetings, people in Central Kalimantan from various religious backgrounds commonly use kinship terms, as noted by a Muslim resident, "*We often visit each other during religious holidays like Eid and Christmas. In our family, religious difference is normal. We are still siblings*" (AH, 2025). This was echoed by a follower of Kaharingan, "*We are used to living with religious diversity. For me, Muslims and Christians are still brothers and sisters*" (SR, 2025).

Moreover, the third space narrative is also reflected in the concept of "neighbor" as a symbol of closeness and social responsibility. A Muslim leader residing in Palangka Raya said, "*Our*

neighborhood consists of various religious communities. But we see each other as neighbors who must support one another" (MF, 2025). A Christian resident reinforced this narrative, *"In this area, there are Christians, Muslims, followers of Kaharingan; there are Javanese, Banjarese, Dayaks, and Batak. All are good neighbors. We look after and help each other"* (KNS, 2025).

The testimonies from various religious and ethnic community members in Central Kalimantan illustrate a deeply rooted culture of coexistence and mutual respect. Terms such as "family," "siblings," and "neighbors" are not mere expressions but reflect a lived experience of inclusive and mature religiosity that transcends doctrinal boundaries. This shared narrative of belonging—what can be described as a "third space"—enables diverse communities to engage in daily interactions grounded in empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility. Ultimately, these interfaith and intercultural relationships foster a resilient communal identity where diversity is not only accepted but celebrated as a source of strength.

Narrative Construction of Religious Maturity in the Third Space

In the context of Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang in Central Kalimantan, the construction of the third space is reflected not only in the narratives of "family" and "neighbor," but also through the use of the term "friend" as a symbol of warm interfaith relations. A young Christian teacher at a local secondary school stated that she has many Muslim friends. She emphasized that despite their different beliefs, their relationships remain strong, both in the workplace and in daily life. She added that one of her closest friends is a Muslim whom she has known since college. Similarly, a young Muslim man described his childhood Christian friend as a close companion, asserting that religious difference is not a barrier to building sincere friendships.

Furthermore, communities in Central Kalimantan construct the third space through a shared spiritual idea, *"we are all seeking heaven"*. This narrative fosters a collective awareness that, although individuals hold different beliefs, they share a similar spiritual goal. A Dayaknese Muslim explained that no human can determine who will enter heaven or hell. Therefore, for him, interfaith debates are less important than preserving familial bonds, kinship, and social unity across religious lines.

The construction of the third space among interfaith communities in Central Kalimantan becomes more visible when religious discourse and institutions are brought into institutional contexts. At this level, adherents of different faiths no longer emphasize claims of theological superiority or highlight interfaith conflicts. Instead of maintaining dichotomies such as *"our religion is right"* and *"your religion is wrong"*, communities seek to create spaces for interreligious dialogue grounded in equality and collective vision.

Within this framework, the third space is built through narratives such as *"all religions teach goodness"*, which are internalized by various religious communities in the region. For instance, a Dayaknese Muslim stated, *"Yes, here we practice different religions. But essentially, all religions teach goodness. No religion teaches evil. So there's no need for us to quarrel over our differences in belief, because at our core, we are brothers and sisters."* (NN, 2025)

Additionally, as part of the effort to move beyond religious and ethnic compartmentalization, religious communities in Central Kalimantan construct the third space at the social level. One manifestation of this is the use of the collective term "our people" (*oloh itah*). Through this concept, communities affirm a shared identity that transcends religious boundaries and embrace one another as a single community united by blood and culture. Even those of different faiths are still considered "our people" because of shared ancestry and cultural heritage. This is collectively expressed in the phrase "we are family," indicating that despite differing beliefs, they originate from the same cultural roots and bloodlines.

Solidarity within these communities is further reinforced by the narrative "we are Kalimantan people," which expresses a broader awareness of regional identity. Being Dayaknese is understood as upholding shared values, life philosophies, and cultural traditions, even amid religious diversity. Finally, the third space is extended through national narratives such as "we are Indonesians" and

“we are citizens of Indonesia.” These narratives embed a moral and social responsibility to love and protect one another, transcending religious identity zones—Muslim, Christian, or Kaharingan—in favor of building unity within an inclusive framework of Indonesian citizenship.

Traces of Religious Maturity in the Practice of the Third Space in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang

The traces of religious maturity among multifaith communities in Central Kalimantan—specifically in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang—are clearly evident in their implementation of the Third Space concept as described by Homi K. Bhabha. This concept is not merely rhetorical but is actualized through daily practices among adherents of different faiths. People in these two villages do not just express narratives of moderation—they implement them through tangible, harmonious interfaith interactions.

At the personal level, the Third Space materializes in family relationships across religious lines. Among Dayaknese communities, it is common for a single family to include followers of Kaharingan, Islam, and Christianity. Instead of contesting these differences, they acknowledge that belief is personal and choose to emphasize shared familial values. Bonds of blood and affection within the family become stronger than religious divides.

One Dayak Muslim described, *“Every Sunday, my wife’s parents stop by our house after church. They are Christian. I also visit their home. We maintain good relations. My wife herself is a convert (muallaf)”* (PW, 2025).

A Kaharingan adherent stated, *“I come from a family of various faiths. Some are Christian, some Muslim. My sibling is Muslim. We often visit each other. There’s never been any problem”* (YS, 2025). A Christian noted: *“We often visit each other. My uncle is Muslim, and my sister married a Muslim. How could I not visit their home?”* (ES, 2025).

Religious maturity is also apparent in social gatherings such as weddings. Families of Kaharingan, Christians, and Muslims regularly invite one another to these events. Hosts adapt according to their guests’ beliefs, especially concerning food. For example, Christian or Kaharingan families specifically prepare halal food—having meat slaughtered and cooked by Muslims, and served in a separate area to accommodate Muslim guests.

One Christian explained, *“At our weddings, we invite all our neighbors, including Muslims. We understand they don’t eat pork or drink alcohol. So we prepare halal meat, cooked by Muslims, and place the food in a special area”* (ES, 2025). Muslim guests also understand and appreciate this gesture. One Muslim said, *“I’m often invited to Christian and Kaharingan weddings. I go as a neighbor. I know there’s a special food area, and that’s where I sit”* (PW, 2025). An imam added that at Christian or Kaharingan wedding celebrations, the timing of the event is organized, *“Usually from 9 AM to 2 PM for all guests, especially Muslims. After that, the family continues their private celebration. The food is different, and we respect that”* (MAR, 2025).

Even symbolic gestures like giving envelopes and simply attending are considered acts of solidarity. A Dayak Muslim said: *“We give an envelope, eat in the separate area, and come with good intentions”* (PW, 2025). Conversely, when Muslim families hold celebrations, Christian and Kaharingan guests attend without issue over food because they have no dietary restrictions according to Islamic law. A Muslim shared: *“When we hold a celebration, Christian and Kaharingan neighbors are invited and come to help. Our food is served normally—no special adjustments—and they have no problem with it”* (AR, 2025).

The Third Space is also evident in social responses to death. Even though interfaith individuals do not participate in the funeral rituals, they still provide moral support and material assistance. This is a form of solidarity that avoids theological conflict while demonstrating empathy across faith boundaries. One Muslim explained: *“We go to the homes of Christian or Kaharingan families in mourning, offer condolences. We don’t join the ritual ceremony, but we provide help—whether monetary or food”* (AR, 2025).

All of this reflects concrete traces of religious maturity in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang—where the Third Space is not just an idea, but a space of interaction enabling peaceful interfaith coexistence. This demonstrates that local communities have translated religious moderation values into real actions that reject polarization and prioritize togetherness within the frame of local culture and shared citizenship.

At the social level, religious communities in Central Kalimantan apply the Third Space concept through the construction of houses of worship for different religions within the same area. In various parts of the province, interfaith communities agree to build places of worship side by side. For instance, in Palangka Raya city, there are at least three locations where a mosque and church stand next to each other. In other regencies, up to four places of worship from different religions may be found within one area. In Antang Kalang district, Kotawaringin Timur Regency, four houses of worship stand close together—a mosque, a Catholic church, a Protestant church, and a Kaharingan temple. Meanwhile, in Pangkalan Bun, there are three worship places (mosque, church, and vihara) built side by side. A similar pattern is observed in Gunung Mas and Kapuas regencies. Even cemeteries in Central Kalimantan are organized in a similar manner: in Palangka Raya, Muslim and Christian burial areas are symbolically separated but still located within the same land.

A Kaharingan adherent revealed that the establishment of different worship places within one area aims to reflect interfaith harmony. He stated that the buildings are beautiful and never cause issues, even becoming symbols of peace rarely found elsewhere. Mutual respect forms the foundation of interfaith relationships there.

Meanwhile, a Christian resident added that construction began in the same year and was funded by the local government. Although the mosque was used first, even though it was smaller, all parties approved the shared use of the other houses of worship. He also mentioned that the project was born out of the spirit of interfaith unity. Muslims, Christians, and Kaharingan adherents worked together—digging the foundations and providing facilities such as water pumps. Everyone helped one another, creating a strong sense of togetherness.

The ability of religious communities in Central Kalimantan to build the Third Space is also evident in their solidarity for one another's religious events. One concrete example is the support across faiths for the 2014 *Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran* (MTQ) in Antang Kalang subdistrict. Even though MTQ is an Islamic religious event, its organization also involved Christians and Kaharingan followers. They volunteered in setting up the stage, preparing food, and providing security. Regardless of religious differences, the entire community worked together for the event's success. A Christian shared that Muslims were responsible for technical aspects, while non-Muslim residents assisted in tasks such as seating arrangements, logistics, and security. All layers of society were involved.

In addition, the Third Space practice in Central Kalimantan can be seen in the philosophy and life practice of the *Huma Betang*—the longhouse characteristic of the Dayak tribe. This structure serves as a shared residence for several extended families of a single lineage, without distinguishing religion or belief. The *Huma Betang* symbolizes solidarity and togetherness. Though its physical form has become rare, the values it embodies remain alive in Dayak society. In Palangka Raya, for example, a *Huma Betang* still stands near the governor's office and the provincial parliament building.

It is now commonplace for family members of different faiths—such as Kaharingan, Islam, and Christianity—to live together in one house or community. Kinship ties serve as the primary foundation for communal living, where religious differences are set aside in the interest of unity and family cohesion. The *Huma Betang* philosophy demonstrates how Dayak society can create the Third Space by placing shared values above differences in belief.

Building the Third Space: Interfaith Life Practices in Muslim, Christian, and Kaharingan Communities in Rural Central Kalimantan

These field findings can be understood through the framework of Homi K. Bhabha's *Third Space*—a cultural interstitial space that emerges from interactions between differing identities, not by erasing differences, but by enabling the formation of new meanings through dialogue. In the context of Muslim, Christian, and Kaharingan communities in Central Kalimantan, the Third Space is not merely an abstract concept but is manifested in everyday social practices. Interfaith relations are demonstrated through narratives such as “brothers,” “family,” and “our people,” reflecting a form of religious maturity grounded in collective awareness rather than the hegemony of a single theological doctrine.

Compared to previous studies such as [Aslam \(2024\)](#), [Tyurikov \(2021\)](#), and [Akrim et al. \(2021\)](#)—which explore religious moderation through literary, international relations, and spiritual psychology approaches—this research presents a more grounded view of collective social dynamics. Those studies tend to be theoretical and individualistic, while this ethnographic approach highlights the lived experiences of grassroots communities. Similarly, unlike [Usman \(2024\)](#) in Aceh and [Wilson \(2022\)](#) in Palangka Raya, who emphasize normative narratives of religious moderation, this study presents a reflective perspective based on local contexts and the lived experiences of multifaith rural communities.

Furthermore, inclusive narratives such as “all religions teach goodness” and “we’re all seeking heaven” indicate the emergence of the Third Space as a site for forming fluid and transformative social-religious identities. This concept demonstrates how differences are not merely tolerated but transformed into a foundation for solidarity. However, following Bhabha's view, this space is also fraught with ambivalence. The findings reveal that beneath the surface of harmony, there are still negative stereotypes of “the other,” such as accusations of Christianization against Muslim minorities, or stigma of intolerance against segments of the Muslim population. Nevertheless, the community is able to distinguish between individual actions and the collective, demonstrating reflective capacity and spiritual maturity in maintaining coexistence.

In contrast to [Tamburian's \(2018\)](#) approach in West Kalimantan—which emphasizes normative interactions—this study goes beyond symbolic realms to concrete social practices. The Third Space in Central Kalimantan is realized through actions such as the provision of halal food at celebrations, scheduled timing for interfaith events, the construction of adjacent houses of worship, and participation in mourning ceremonies without infringing on religious boundaries. This phenomenon proves that the Third Space is not utopian, but is built through social habits, local values, and a shared commitment to social cohesion.

The findings also show that shared identities such as “we are Kalimantan people” and “we are Indonesian citizens” become national narratives that culturally and politically expand the Third Space. This awareness of local and national identity reinforces values of religious moderation that are not only spiritual but also rooted in civic ethics and an open form of ethnocentric solidarity. The *Huma Betang* philosophy becomes an important symbol in this regard, where diversity is embraced as an inseparable part of communal life.

In relation to the concept of religious moderation developed by Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, this study also highlights the presence of four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture ([Arifin, 2023](#); [Mahamid, 2023](#)). The fourth indicator—cultural accommodation—is particularly relevant to the social practices observed in these communities. It reflects a readiness to accept religious expressions that align with local traditions, as long as they do not contradict the core principles of religious teachings. Individuals and communities with a moderate religious character are generally more open to plural religious practices that emphasize shared goodness rather than doctrinal purity. Practically, this study offers a model of religious moderation grounded in local values such as kinship, solidarity, and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), which are embodied in tangible actions like the provision of halal food, the construction of adjacent houses of worship, and the facilitation of interfaith participation

in religious and social activities. Thus, this study not only enriches interfaith and intercultural communication scholarship through a contextual and reflective approach, but also provides practical contributions that can be replicated to build inclusive and peaceful communities amid religious diversity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented earlier, this article concludes that the religious communities in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang, Central Kalimantan, have successfully implemented the practice of the "Third Space" as conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha. In this context, the third space refers to a sphere of encounter and identity negotiation across religious communities, realized at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. Within this space, Muslims, Christians, and adherents of Kaharingan develop open and hybrid forms of interreligious relations. They demonstrate the capacity to negotiate differences not by reinforcing rigid identity boundaries, but by bridging and integrating positions that were previously seen as opposing. These communities no longer operate within the binary logic of "either/or" ("me or you," "us or them"), but instead adopt an alternative "both/and" approach ("me and you," "us and them as well"). This orientation allows each group to maintain their distinct identities while simultaneously constructing a shared, inclusive space for collective purposes. In this context, the third space is not intended to dissolve identity, but rather serves as a dynamic arena that transcends exclusivist boundaries while affirming diverse identities within a unified whole. The model of coexistence exhibited by the religious communities in Pendahara and Tumbang Kalang reflects a form of religious maturity rooted in strong local values. These values include communal spirit, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and a deep sense of kinship that has long been part of the Dayak people's cultural wisdom in Central Kalimantan. This cultural heritage forms an essential foundation for shaping the social ethics that foster religious harmony and moderation. Thus, the third space experience in these two regions not only reflects a social practice of diversity but also affirms that religious maturity can organically grow through the internalization of local values within a context of shared life.

The limitation of this study lies in its narrow geographical scope, focusing only on two multi-faith villages in Central Kalimantan, which means the findings cannot be generalized to other communities with different social and religious dynamics. Additionally, although the ethnographic qualitative approach offers in-depth understanding, it does not allow for quantitative measurement of perceptions or levels of religious moderation across different age groups and social backgrounds. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the study sites to urban areas or post-conflict religious regions, and to adopt a mixed-methods approach to obtain more comprehensive data. Further studies may also explore the role of educational institutions, local media, and regional government policies in shaping or strengthening the interfaith third space in society.

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