

Rewang as a Third Space for Negotiating Puritan Islam and Javanese Tradition in Laweyan, Surakarta

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the role of the rewang tradition as a third space in fostering social harmony amid differing religious views on the tahlilan ritual in Javanese society, using Kampung Batik Laweyan as a case study. The background of the research is rooted in the tension between groups that accept and those that reject tahlilan, which is considered bid'ah by some circles, as well as the strong influence of local culture within the Javanese social structure. Using a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews and documentation in Laweyan, a community institutionally dominated by Muhammadiyah yet continuing to preserve the practice of tahlilan. The results of the research show that rewang, as a practice of cooperation in event food preparation, serves as a neutral third space, enabling the negotiation of hybrid identities and practical coexistence without resolving theological differences. This space is dominated by female agency, which, through concrete actions and nonverbal communication, helps reduce potential conflict and maintain social cohesion. These findings enrich the application of the Third Space theory (Bhabha) in intra-religious and intra-cultural contexts, while simultaneously asserting that social harmony is often built through everyday practical spaces, rather than through discursive resolution. Although effective, the sustainability of this third space is vulnerable to pressure from formal religious authorities, generational change, and commodification.

Keywords: third space, rewang, tahlilan, social harmony, hybridity, Javanese culture.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran tradisi rawang sebagai ruang ketiga (third space) dalam menciptakan harmoni sosial di tengah perbedaan pandangan keagamaan mengenai ritual tablilan pada masyarakat Jawa, dengan studi kasus di Kampung Batik Laweyan. Latar belakang penelitian didasari oleh ketegangan antara kelompok yang menerima dan menolak tablilan yang dianggap sebagai bid'ah oleh sebagian kalangan serta kuatnya pengaruh budaya lokal dalam struktur masyarakat Jawa. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus intrinsik, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dan dokumentasi di Laweyan, yang masyarakatnya secara kelembagaan didominasi Muhammadiyah namun tetap melestarikan praktik tablilan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rawang sebagai praktik gotong royong dalam persiapan konsumsi acara berfungsi sebagai ruang ketiga yang netral, memungkinkan negosiasi identitas hibrid dan koeksistensi praktis tanpa menyelesaikan perbedaan teologis. Ruang ini didominasi oleh agensi perempuan, yang melalui tindakan konkret dan komunikasi nonverbal berhasil mengurangi potensi konflik dan menjaga kohesi sosial. Temuan ini memperkaya penerapan teori Ruang Ketiga (Bhabha) dalam konteks intra-religius dan intra-budaya, sekaligus menegaskan bahwa harmoni sosial sering dibangun melalui ruang praktis sehari-hari, bukan melalui resolusi diskursif. Meski efektif, keberlanjutan ruang ketiga ini rentan terhadap tekanan otoritas keagamaan formal, perubahan generasi, dan proses komodifikasi.

Kata kunci: ruang ketiga, rawang, tablilan, harmoni sosial, hibriditas, budaya Jawa.

INTRODUCTION

The dialectic between cultural syncretism and religious puritanism in Java is not merely about teaching a theory on paper, but rather a dynamic aspect of life that continues to pulse through the history of its society (Arfan, 2024). Since the early period of Islam's arrival in the Nusantara archipelago, an ongoing process of negotiation has taken place between the pure teachings brought from the centre of Islamic civilisation and the local wisdom deeply rooted for centuries. The meeting of these two major currents has created a highly diverse landscape of religiosity, where the boundaries between areas considered sacred normatively and those regarded as profane culturally often become blurred in everyday practice (Ashar et al., 2025; Ridwan et al., 2015). This reality demonstrates that Islam in Java has never been monolithic but has always been part of a process shaped by intense interaction with local traditional structures (Faturahman & Berakon, 2025).

Therefore, understanding the diversity of Islamic expressions in Java requires a keen insight into how society manages the tension between doctrinal obedience and the demands of cultural harmony.

Laweyan in Surakarta exemplifies a notably complex and intriguing manifestation of the ongoing quest for identity, attributable to its dual status. On one hand, this locality is historically recognized as a center of indigenous economic strength through its batik industry; on the other, it serves as fertile ground for the proliferation of puritanical Islamic movements, such as Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah (Iqbal, 2025). As the foundational hub of reformist groups, Laweyan is theoretically expected to be an area devoid of traditional practices that are deemed burdensome cultural remnants or doctrinal deviations (Rizal & Akhyat, 2015; Williams, 2004). Nonetheless, empirical observations reveal an opposing phenomenon: a remarkable persistence of ritual practices aimed at preserving local traditions among the majority of its residents. This transformative and reformatory strategy is based on the assumption that each culture has its own way of building a culture of peace through the internal culture of society, which serves as an effective force for reconciliation in building relationships between religious sects and social groups (Faiz, 2020). The community demonstrates a highly sophisticated internal mechanism capable of distinguishing between private theological matters and those that serve as a source of social cohesion.

The tension between puritan adherents, who are sensitive, and traditionalist groups that preserve ancestral rituals is frequently portrayed as an insurmountable obstacle (Aedi, 2025; Turmudi, 2012). Many scholars in Islamic studies tend to assume that doctrinal disagreements regarding the correctness or incorrectness of rituals, such as tahlil, inevitably lead to pronounced social segregation within the community. This binary perspective often fails to reflect the nuanced flexibility of social reality, which frequently operates with greater sophistication than rigid formal theories suggest. Beneath the surface of ideological disparities, the people of Laweyan have developed a mechanism known as a peace protocol that operates subtly yet profoundly. This protocol facilitates the continuation of social interactions in a normal manner without compromising the integrity of each individual's religious practice (Rosyidi, 2025).

In the context of tension management, the phenomenon of *rewang* emerges as a highly effective mediation instrument; however, it seldom attracts significant attention within the discourse of religious sociology. *Rewang* should not be regarded merely as a simple physical activity, such as peeling onions, cooking rice, or arranging dishes in the kitchens of residents hosting events. More than that, *rewang* constitutes an event of cross-boundary communication that naturally occurs in domestic spaces, where differences in religious organisational identities are temporarily set aside (Aulia et al., 2022; Purnamasari & Ribawati, 2025). In these spaces, discussions of religious doctrines or laws seem to dissipate alongside the smoke from cooking, replaced by a sense of shared suffering and solidarity among members of a community living in the same area. This activity illustrates that the need for social solidarity often transcends the theological boundaries established by religious institutional authorities.

The concept of the Third Space, introduced by Homi K. Bhabha, serves as a highly incisive analytical tool for differentiating how the *rewang* tradition functions as a neutral zone within the society of Laweyan. This third space engenders the potential for ambivalent identities, whereby an individual can steadfastly uphold their puritan principles in the private domain while concurrently engaging in traditionalist rituals in the social sphere (Epafras, 2012; Faisal et al., 2022). This phenomenon clearly illustrates that human identity is not monolithic, static, or rigid, but rather exceedingly fluid and perpetually engaged in active dialogue with the contextual environment in which it resides. In the third space, society is not compelled to adopt a single identity but is allowed to negotiate and reconcile differences to preserve community stability (Bhandari, 2022). This underscores that diverse perspectives need not inevitably lead to division, provided that there exists a space conducive to accommodating such differences.

The role of women in the *rewang* tradition is vital, serving as peace architects who operate unobtrusively within residents' households (Winarsih, 2023). Through informal, familiar conversations, coupled with intensive collective labor, these women effectively deconstruct the rigid religious ideological barriers typically erected by men in the public sphere. They adeptly establish emotional bridges, which have frequently been shown to be more resilient than logistical or formal arguments, which are often characterized as

separated and confrontational. By emphasizing the core values of love and pragmatic care, women in Laweyan sustain social cohesion even amid pronounced disagreements within the religious elite. Their actions exemplify a tangible form of grassroots diplomacy that upholds peace without relying on complex, grandiloquent rhetoric.

From an epistemological perspective, the transition in research focus from a textual-normative approach to a socio-cultural context approach significantly advances the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia. Islam is no longer regarded merely as a collection of static, closed dogmas but is recognized as a living, dynamic phenomenon that continually interacts with the surrounding social structures. This research seeks to accurately depict how local wisdom serves as a safety valve amid rising currents of radicalism and religious polarization that occasionally threaten local harmony. By examining religion through the prism of daily practice, more authentic solutions for peace—rooted in community traditions—can be identified. This methodological shift broadens the scholarly scope in exploring the relationship between faith and culture within the framework of modern society, which remains closely tied to ancestral traditions.

The existence of inclusive cultural meeting spaces such as Rewang is increasingly vital in a world presently characterized by divisions rooted in identity politics and exclusivism. The demonstrated presence of social mediation mechanisms in Kampung Batik Laweyan illustrates that harmony does not necessarily equate to uniformity across all facets of life, including religious rituals. Genuine harmony resides in the community's capacity to maintain mutual respect and support, even when confronted with fundamentally differing perspectives (Sukandarman & Sofa, 2024). The social orchestration within the Rewang kitchen enables each individual to uphold their beliefs without the need to ostracize or judge those with different worship practices (Susanti et al., 2024). Such exemplars of harmony constitute a significant form of social capital for Indonesia, facilitating unity amid rapid societal transformations (Afandi & Pratomo, 2025).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive reflection on the importance of safeguarding traditional social institutions that serve as mediators of local-level conflict. In the context of modernization, which often emphasizes individualism, customs such as rewang are often overlooked despite their vital role in safeguarding social stability. The

research emphasizes that conflict resolution does not necessarily originate from governmental policies or formal agreements among higher-level religious leaders. Frequently, the most enduring peace is achieved through interactions among community members who dedicate their efforts and attention to small-scale events within their environment. By revitalizing the values associated with *rewang*, we are reminded of the fundamental nature of humans as social beings, whose existence continually relies on the presence of others.

In conclusion to the introductory section, it is important to emphasise that this research seeks to identify the hybridity of patterns that enable Islam and Javanese culture to synergise in creating social harmony. Focusing on Kampung Batik Laweyan provides profound context, given its long history marked by the dialectics of identity among economic independence, religious puritanism, and preservation traditions. Through the analysis of *rewang* as a third space, this study aims to contribute ideas to Islamic studies on managing diversity both substantively and practically. The results of this research are expected to serve as a reference for other regions facing similar challenges in managing the relationship between religion and local tradition. Ultimately, this effort is part of an academic endeavour to strengthen tolerance in Indonesia, grounded in local wisdom that has been tested by history.

METHODE

The research methodology employs a qualitative approach featuring a single case study. Qualitative research is used to explore social contexts and to comprehend phenomena experienced by research participants through descriptive narratives derived from data collection and analytical techniques (Moelong, 2018). The case study selected is an intrinsic case study, focusing on a specific instance within a particular context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Sakir, 2024). In this framework, qualitative research is applied to examine '*rewang*' as a third space aimed at alleviating tensions between divergent, exclusive religious perspectives. The chosen location is Kampung Batik Laweyan, recognized for its community heterogeneity: the majority of residents are affiliated with Muhammadiyah, yet there are still community members who uphold the cultural practice of *tahlilan*. Data are gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary data are obtained through in-depth

interviews, while secondary data are derived from documentation. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, which identify research subjects and objects in accordance with the research objectives (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024). The validity of data is assessed through triangulation, which enhances data credibility by cross-verifying information from multiple sources (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). Data analysis encompasses data collection, reduction, presentation, conclusion, and validation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sofwatillah et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rewang as a Third Space within the Laweyan Society

The primary finding, which is of utmost significance in this study, concerns the role of the *rewang* tradition as a third space within the social fabric of Laweyan society. The concept of the third space, as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in his work "The Location of Culture" (1994), delineates a liminal zone situated between two conflicting identity positions, where negotiation, translation, and ongoing transformation of meaning transpire without annihilating the original identities of each entity (Bhabha, 1994). This space is not a neutral zone devoid of tension; rather, it is a productive domain where differences are confronted, negotiated, and managed to foster meaningful coexistence.

Within Laweyan society, the *rewang* tradition serves as an intermediary platform that unites groups with diverse religious affiliations through a shared social activity. Historically, the Laweyan community has exemplified religious pluralism (Flambonit et al., 2021; M & Hajar, 2025). Some residents adhere to puritanical Islamic movements that emphasize doctrinal purity and reject syncretic practices. In contrast, others uphold a more inclusive Islamic tradition that incorporates Javanese cultural elements, such as *selamatan* rituals, communal prayers accompanied by readings customary in *pesantren*, and other communal rituals. These two groups are positioned differently theologically and, in some respects, may even stand in opposition.

Nevertheless, field research indicates that these theological distinctions do not necessarily lead to significant social segregation in daily life. The *rewang* tradition serves as a platform where members of different groups convene, interact, and collaborate without the need to resolve their doctrinal differences. An informant, known for

maintaining a puritanical religious stance, remarked that their participation in *rewang* activities demonstrates respect for neighbors and relatives, rather than endorsing all ritual practices associated with the celebration. This assertion affirms that, within the *rewang* context, participation is stratified and selective: individuals may be present and engaged in cooking and logistical tasks without necessarily adopting the ritual practices that conflict with their personal beliefs.

This mechanism of selective participation is a characteristic of what Bhabha refers to as negotiation in the third space. An individual's identity is not entirely erased or compromised, but rather its expression is adjusted according to the context of the space entered (Bhabha, 1994). In the workroom space, social identities as neighbours, residents, or community members become dominant, while more formal and doctrinal religious identities are temporarily set aside. This does not mean that the religious identity is lost or abandoned; rather, it operates at a different frequency depending on the situational context.

Furthermore, the third space generated by the *rewang* tradition also serves as a forum for the reproduction of social capital. According to Robert Putnam, social capital encompasses networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation and coordination among individuals within a community. The *rewang* tradition actively constructs and revitalizes this social capital through repeated interactions occurring within an informal and egalitarian environment. When individuals from diverse ideological backgrounds convene in a communal kitchen to cook together, trust naturally develops. This trust is not established through formal negotiations or joint declarations but through the accumulation of lived coexistence experiences that recur over time.

The temporal dimension of the *Rewang* tradition also warrants particular attention. Unlike inter-group meetings that are either incidental or formally scheduled, *Rewang* is an event that recurs cyclically in accordance with the community's life cycle: birth, marriage, circumcision, and other significant events consistently bring this space into focus. This recurrence ensures that the third space is not transient or fragile, but is continually reproduced and reinforced by the rhythm of community life. In other words,

Rewang transcends being merely an event; it functions as a social institution with regulatory capacity over the relationships among groups within the Laweyan community.

Another significant aspect is the egalitarian nature of the rewang space. In daily life, differences in economic status, educational background, and religious organisation affiliations can create tangible social distances. However, within the rewang space, everyone is present with an equal role: cooking, delivering dishes, serving guests, and tidying up the equipment. There is no rigid hierarchy in this division of labour. Women from the host family work alongside neighbours from different social classes and those with different religious affiliations. This practical egalitarianism is one of the most important mechanisms that allows the third space in the rewang tradition to function effectively as a bridge between identities.

Based on the entire discussion above, it can be concluded that this first finding confirms the relevance of Bhabha's concept of the third space in the context of contemporary Javanese Muslim society. The rewang tradition is not merely a cultural heritage maintained for aesthetic or sentimental reasons, but rather a social mechanism that actively produces and reproduces harmony amidst pluralistic beliefs. The space it creates does not impose uniformity but rather celebrates the human capacity to live together amid differences without necessarily erasing them first (Bhabha, 1994).

Ambivalence of Religious Identity in the Rewang Tradition

The second theme identified in this study is ambivalence in religious identity, as reflected in the behaviour and speech of Laweyan residents participating in the rewang tradition. Within Bhabha's theoretical framework, ambivalence is a psychological and social condition in which the subject is uncertain between two opposing positions: wanting to reject yet also to accept, wishing to maintain their original identity while also seeking to adapt to a broader social context. Ambivalence is not a weakness or a form of inconsistency, but rather a natural and even intelligent response to complex and tense social situations (Harahap, 2017; Huddart, 2006).

Field findings indicate that this identity ambivalence is primarily evident among residents affiliated with puritan or reformist Islamic movements. These individuals are ideologically trained to distance themselves from traditional practices deemed to contain

elements of *bid'ah* or superstition, such as reciting certain prayers in Javanese, ritual offerings, and other syncretic practices that often accompany community celebrations. In their normative religious logic, participation in events containing such elements can be interpreted as a form of excessive tolerance or even as support for practices deemed not authentic according to sharia.

Nevertheless, social reality offers a considerably more nuanced perspective. Informants from this group typically do not entirely withdraw from community social engagements. They continue to participate in *rewang* activities, persist in assisting with labor and materials, and sustain personal relationships with residents from diverse groups. What distinguishes them is their selective participation: they engage in theologically neutral activities but withdraw from specific rituals they find doctrinally problematic.

This phenomenon can be analysed using the concept of social accommodation strategies developed by several sociologists of religion. From this perspective, individuals living within a plural community do not always operate entirely based on the logic of their formal ideology. They are also influenced by relational logic, which is the imperative to maintain good relationships with fellow citizens for the sake of a harmonious social life. These two logics often come into conflict, resulting in ambivalence: individuals desire ideological consistency but also seek social inclusivity. Achieving both simultaneously is not easy, and this is why ambivalence becomes a common condition.

Moreover, the ambivalence of identity identified in this research indicates that the Laweyan community's religious identity is adaptable and contextual rather than fixed and absolute. This identity does not exist in isolation but continuously interacts with the surrounding social environment. In formal worship settings, such as mosques or study circles, religious identity functions comprehensively and without compromise. However, in more flexible social contexts like *rewang* (community work), social identity takes on a more prominent role, while religious identity remains present but does not overshadow it.

This finding bears significant theoretical implications. It challenges approaches that excessively emphasize coherence and internal consistency of religious identity as prerequisites for an authentic religious life. In the practical context of the Laweyan community, the authenticity of religiosity is not exclusively determined by an individual's

ability to maintain their ideological identity consistently across all social settings. Authenticity may also reside in an individual's capacity to exercise discernment when navigating diverse demands and contexts, including social expectations to be present and participate actively in community life.

It is also important to note that the identified ambivalence is neither passive nor coercive. The individuals involved do not feel compelled to participate in communal activities out of fear of ostracism; rather, they deliberately choose to engage based on broader values rather than mere ideological consistency. Values such as social solidarity, cooperation, respect for fellow citizens, and a sense of responsibility towards the community are also profoundly ingrained within them and underpin their decision to remain actively involved in communal life.

This second finding also bears considerable practical significance regarding the discourse on religious life in Indonesia generally. In the context of escalating polarization among religious groups, the phenomenon of ambivalent identity within the *rewang* tradition demonstrates that grassroots social spaces inherently have the capacity to mitigate these tensions. Such spaces function not through enforcing doctrinal conformity but through fostering shared experiences that transcend ideological distinctions. Activities such as communal cooking, sharing ingredients, and working in harmony represent fundamentally human experiences that surpass ideological boundaries.

The Hybridisation of Islam and Javanese Culture in the Social Life of Laweyan

The third theme emerging from the findings of this research is the hybridity between Islamic values and Javanese cultural traditions in the social life of the Laweyan community, as reflected through the *rewang* tradition (Hilal & Munaris, 2023). The concept of hybridity in Bhabha's thinking refers to cultural products born from the encounter between two or more different cultural systems. Hybridity is not merely a mixture or balanced synthesis, but something new, with its own logic and dynamics, which cannot be fully reduced to one of its original elements (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity in this sense is creative and productive: it produces cultural forms capable of responding to social realities in ways that neither original tradition alone can achieve.

Within the context of Kampung Batik Laweyan, the hybridity between Islam and Javanese culture can be traced back deeply into historical records. Laweyan is among the oldest Muslim communities in Surakarta, with a longstanding Islamic tradition that has endured for centuries. Nonetheless, the Islam practiced by the Laweyan community has never evolved in isolation from the surrounding Javanese cultural influences. From its inception, Islam in this region has encountered, engaged in dialogue with, and integrated into the value systems, norms, and cultural practices of Java, which were already deeply embedded in the community's way of life. This synthesis has engendered a distinctive form of Islam: a Javanese Islam that is not synonymous with Arabism, yet is also not merely Javanese with Islamic symbols superimposed.

The *rewang* tradition exemplifies a significant expression of cultural hybridity. Regarding values, it integrates principles rooted in both Islam and Javanese tradition. The concept of mutual assistance, known as *ta'awun* in Islam, stands as one of the fundamental pillars of Islamic social ethics. Nonetheless, a similar principle exists within Javanese tradition in the form of *gotong royong*, which serves as a foundational concept for organizing communal work and predates the arrival of Islam in Java. Within the *rewang* tradition, these two values converge: individuals are not required to choose whether to participate in *gotong royong* in the context of Islam or the Javanese tradition, as both operate concurrently and mutually reinforce each other.

This hybridity is also evident in the ritual and symbolic aspects accompanying the *rewang* activities. The prayers recited during the event in Laweyan often blend Arabic prayers from Islamic tradition with Javanese mantras and expressions rooted in local traditions. Similarly, the foods served: some ritual foods carry symbolic meanings rooted in Javanese tradition, yet are prepared and presented within the context of an event that is overall framed within an Islamic framework. This fusion creates a distinctive cultural aesthetic that is not easily classified into rigid categories.

From a sociological perspective on religion, the concept of hybridity exemplifies cultural accommodation in the process of religious dissemination. When Islam spread to Java, it did not manifest as a system that outright replaced the existing cultural order; rather, it served as an influence that engaged with and negotiated local culture. The

outcome of this interaction is not a unilateral victory but a dynamic and perpetually evolving synthesis. The *rewang* tradition exemplifies this synthesis: it is neither purely Islamic nor purely Javanese culture, but a cultural expression emerging from their historical encounter.

What is particularly noteworthy in the findings of this research is that hybridity extends beyond a mere historical dimension; it is also persistently reproduced and negotiated within contemporary life. In the face of pressures exerted by religious purification movements that aim to eliminate local cultural elements from Islamic practices, the Laweyan community continues to uphold the *rewang* tradition, with all its inherent hybridity. This steadfast maintenance is not due to ignorance of such pressures, but rather because they ascribe irreplaceable value to this tradition—specifically, social solidarity, communal identity, and cohesion among residents that cannot be solely achieved through vertical religious practices (between humans and God) without incorporating horizontal dimensions (interpersonal relations).

This finding also demonstrates that local culture does not threaten religion; rather, it serves as a conduit that facilitates religion's establishment and relevance in the community's daily life. Islam in Laweyan has gained strength not through its separation from Javanese culture, but through its capacity to engage in dialogue with that culture and to incorporate its values into dynamic, meaningful social practices for the community. In this context, hybridity should not be perceived as contamination or a weakening compromise; rather, it is a strategic mode of existence that enhances religion's pertinence in concrete social interactions.

Theoretically, this third finding contributes to the discourse concerning the relationship between Islam and indigenous culture in Southeast Asia. It illustrates that the most efficacious model of interaction is not one of confrontation or assimilation, but rather a model of constructive dialogue that engenders novel, nuanced, and sophisticated forms. The Laweyan community has employed this paradigm for centuries, and the *rewang* tradition stands as one of the most dynamic and tangible exemplifications of this approach.

Rewang as a Social Peace Mechanism

The fourth theme identified in this research pertains to the role of the rewang tradition as a mechanism for fostering social harmony, functioning organically and sustainably within the community. The concept of social harmony, as articulated by Bhabha and referenced herein, extends beyond the mere absence of overt conflict; it encompasses a state in which diverse groups, possessing varying identities, interests, and worldviews, can coexist peacefully through the maintenance of meaningful, mutually advantageous interactions (Bhabha, 1994). Accordingly, social harmony is regarded as an actively produced and continuously reproduced phenomenon, rather than an inherent condition.

Field data indicate that the rewang tradition plays a highly significant role in fostering social harmony within Kampung Batik Laweyan. One of the paramount mechanisms involved is the cultivation of shared experiences that transcend boundaries of identity. When individuals from diverse groups participate in the same activities, occupy the same physical space, and collaborate towards a common objective, they indirectly cultivate a sense of unity that transcends existing differences in identity. Social psychology refers to this phenomenon as intergroup contact, and numerous scholarly studies have demonstrated that positive and well-structured intergroup interactions can mitigate prejudice and promote empathy among distinct groups.

In the rewang tradition in Laweyan, intergroup contact occurs under highly conducive circumstances. Firstly, such contact occurs within a cooperative rather than competitive setting: all participants collaborate towards a shared objective, which is the success of the host's event. Secondly, the interaction takes place in a relatively egalitarian atmosphere, characterized by the absence of a formal hierarchy governing the division of labor among groups. Thirdly, the contact is reinforced by robust social norms that emphasise respect and unity. The amalgamation of these three conditions fosters an environment exceptionally effective at cultivating and renewing positive social relations between groups.

An additional aspect of the traditional social peace function of rewang is its role in constructively managing and channeling potential conflicts. In every plural society, the

possibility of conflict inherently exists, as differences in worldviews, interests, and values can invariably lead to friction. The *rewang* tradition does not eradicate this potential for conflict; rather, it provides a framework within which such potential can be effectively managed and directed in a non-destructive manner. By establishing spaces for positive, repeated interactions, this tradition helps communities consistently renew empathy and a sense of unity, which constitute the most fundamental bonds of social cohesion.

Field findings also indicate that within the *rewang* space, discussions concerning religious doctrines that could potentially cause division are frequently not surfaceable. This is not due to the topic being regarded as taboo or insignificant, but because the environment and dynamics of the *rewang* space itself are not conducive to such debates. When individuals are engaged in cooking, delivering dishes, and serving guests, their focus and energy are directed towards practical tasks that necessitate coordination and cooperation. In this context, ideological identities are marginalised not because of prohibition, but because they are inherently irrelevant to ongoing activities.

This serves as a compelling illustration of what may be termed as peace through constructive distraction: a form of peace not attained through direct dialogue and resolution of differences, but rather through collaborative participation in activities that shift focus away from these differences towards common interests. While this approach may appear straightforward, it is, in fact, highly effective, as it capitalizes on fundamental psychological principles: humans tend to form closer bonds with individuals with whom they share experiences.

From the perspective of peace studies, the tradition of *rewang* in Laweyan can be categorized as a form of peace grounded in culture (culturally based peace) that originates within the community itself rather than being imposed externally through formal regulations or third-party interventions (Purnamasari & Ribawati, 2025). Such a variant of peace tends to be more sustainable and resilient because it is rooted in core values and practices that have become integral to community life. It does not depend on external authorities or formal agreements but instead relies on the community's internal dedication to sustain harmonious social relations.

This fourth finding also holds considerable implications for public policy and peacebuilding initiatives in Indonesia. In the context of escalating concerns regarding social fragmentation and religious intolerance, this evidence suggests that indigenous traditions such as *rewang* possess substantial potential as peace resources that remain insufficiently recognized and utilized. More efficacious peacebuilding strategies may involve acknowledging, supporting, and reinforcing these local customs, rather than substituting them with externally developed intervention models.

Women as the Managers of the Third Space

This study demonstrates that women play a pivotal role as primary actors in managing the third space established by the *rewang* tradition. This discovery introduces a significant gender perspective to prior analyses. It illustrates that the creation of the third space is not a gender-neutral process but one that has historically and culturally been sustained by women's contributions in domestic and communal spheres.

Field data indicate that women serve as the primary participants in the *rewang* tradition. They are invariably the first to arrive, most actively engaged for the longest duration, and assume the most substantive roles to ensure the activity's success. From planning the menu, procuring ingredients, and cooking to serving and clearing the venue afterward, women predominantly oversee these responsibilities. In this context, women are not merely technical implementers but also social managers who regulate the dynamics of interaction within the *rewang* setting.

One of the most intriguing aspects of women's roles is their indirect function as mediators in social interactions. Within a collaborative work environment situated in the *rewang* space, women serve as facilitators of communication among individuals and groups. Conversations in the wedding kitchen extend beyond menu selections and technical tasks; they also include sharing information about residents' lives, expressions of sympathy and mutual support, and various forms of emotional engagement that reinforce social bonds.

Women engaged in the *rewang* tradition execute what can be characterized as social diplomacy rooted in quotidian interactions. They abstain from formal negotiations or structured mediation; however, through the way they manage interpersonal

interactions—ensuring everyone feels welcome and valued, and fostering a harmonious environment—they effectively assume a mediating role that significantly influences the quality of social relations within the community. This constitutes a form of social authority that is frequently unacknowledged or not overtly apparent, yet its impact on community life is profoundly tangible.

Conversely, the prominence of women within the *rewang* space may also be interpreted as an authentic expression of agency. As the most influential managers in the space, women shape the community's social dynamics. Their decisions regarding invitations, the organization of interactions, and the management of the environment directly impact the quality of relationships among residents. Although this authority may lack formal or institutional recognition, within the community's practical realities, informal power frequently surpasses formal authority in effectiveness.

This research further reveals that women actively utilize the *rewang* space as a platform to develop and sustain their social networks. In a society where social mobility for women remains restricted, *rewang* serves as one of the few venues that allows them to go beyond household boundaries and interact with a wider community. In this context, they exchange information, form alliances, and reinforce relationships that are not only socially advantageous but also economically and practically beneficial in daily life.

Within the framework of Bhabha's theory, the role of women in the production of this third space aligns with the idea that the third space does not exist on its own but is produced by subjects who actively negotiate and mediate culture. In the case of the *rewang* tradition in Laweyan, these subjects are women who, through their daily work that appears ordinary and simple, are actually performing a much greater function: maintaining social cohesion, reproducing communal identity, and fostering peace in the community's everyday life.

This finding reminds us that in studies of communities and social peace, there must be greater attention to the contributions of women, which are often invisible. Women's work in the tradition of *rewang* is a concrete example of what feminists refer to as invisible labour: work that is not publicly visible, not counted in economic statistics, yet has a significant social impact. Recognising and valuing this work is not only a matter of

gender justice but also an issue of intellectual honesty in understanding how society truly functions and sustains itself.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive analysis of *rewang* as a third space would be incomplete without a critical discussion of its boundaries and fragility. Romanticising the third space as a permanent solution to religious tensions is a serious analytical mistake.

Firstly, the third space is contextual and local. An effective mechanism in Laweyan may not work in the same way in a community with a different history, social composition, or power dynamics. The effectiveness of *rewang* as a third space in Laweyan depends on several very specific conditions: a deeply rooted tradition of *rewang*, Javanese social norms regarding harmony and respect that are still upheld, the absence of traumatic open religious conflicts in the past, and the presence of informal community leaders (especially core mothers) who are skilled and committed.

Secondly, the third space is vulnerable to external pressure. Formal religious authorities who issue strict bans on all forms of presence at "bid'ah" events—and impose social sanctions on violators—can quickly erode the legitimacy of *rewang* as a neutral space. In the social media era, puritanical and exclusivist voices are amplified far more than before. They can reach individuals in Laweyan with an intensity that exceeds the local third space's capacity to neutralise them.

Thirdly, there is a risk that the *rewang* mechanism maintains surface harmony without resolving underlying tensions. As Simmel (1969) reminded us in his work on conflict, suppressing conflict is not always better than openly resolving it. If theological tensions are continually pushed beneath the surface, they may accumulate and eventually explode in a much more destructive form—especially if a triggering event legitimises the expression of hidden conflict (Simmel, 1969).

Considering these boundaries, this research does not claim that *rewang* is a universal solution for religious conflicts. It claims something more limited but no less important: that in Batik Laweyan Village, in a very specific context, *rewang* has successfully functioned as a productive third space to maintain social harmony amidst real theological

differences. This specific local success offers valuable lessons on how local wisdom can serve as a genuine resource in facing the challenges of religious pluralism.

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