

Exploring Interfaith Connections at Sobi Hill, Ilorin, Nigeria: A Comprehensive Investigation

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ABSTRACT

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This study delves into the interfaith dynamics at Sobi Hill, Ilorin, Nigeria, a communal holy natural place interwoven with Islam and Christianity. Using a qualitative case study approach with interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research explores Sobi Hill as a shared ground for spiritual practices, facilitating interfaith encounters and dialogue. The hill serves as a backdrop for rituals like prayer, pilgrimage, and tourism, promoting mutual understanding among practitioners of different faiths. Positive interfaith experiences are highlighted as contributors to peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. However, the investigation reveals challenges faced by such places, including conflicting beliefs, environmental degradation, and inadequate management. The study advocates for sustainable management practices recognizing the cultural and religious significance of these sites, emphasizing their preservation for future generations. In conclusion, the research provides insights into the interfaith connections at Sobi Hill and addresses broader challenges confronting communal holy natural places. The findings underscore the importance of fostering harmonious coexistence among diverse faith communities and advocate for effective management strategies to safeguard these sacred sites for cultural, religious, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: *Interfaith Dynamics; Cultural; Environmental Sustainability*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggali dinamika antaragama di Bukit Sobi, Ilorin, Nigeria, sebuah tempat suci komunal yang terjalin antara Islam dan Kristen. Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif menggunakan wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi Bukit Sobi sebagai tempat bersama untuk praktik spiritual, yang memfasilitasi pertemuan dan dialog antaragama. Bukit ini berfungsi sebagai tempat ritual bersama seperti doa, ziarah, dan pariwisata, yang menciptakan saling pengertian di antara penganut agama yang berbeda. Pengalaman positif antaragama disoroti sebagai kontributor terhadap hidup berdampingan secara damai dan kohesi sosial. Namun, penyelidikan mengungkapkan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh tempat-tempat tersebut, termasuk konflik keyakinan, degradasi lingkungan, dan pengelolaan yang tidak memadai. Penelitian ini menganjurkan praktik pengelolaan berkelanjutan dengan mengakui pentingnya budaya dan agama dari situs-situs tersebut, dan menekankan pelestariannya untuk generasi mendatang.

Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan tentang hubungan antaragama di Bukit Sobi dan menjawab tantangan lebih luas yang dihadapi tempat-tempat suci alam komunal. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya membina hidup berdampingan secara harmonis di antara beragam komunitas agama yang berbeda dan mendukung strategi pengelolaan yang efektif untuk menjaga situs suci ini demi kelestarian budaya, agama, dan lingkungan.

Kata-kata Kunci: Dinamika Antaragama; Budaya; Ketahanan lingkungan

1. INTRODUCTION

Communal holy natural sites stand as enduring symbols of spiritual and cultural heritage across diverse societies globally and play a pivotal role in fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding. In Nigeria, where a myriad of religions and cultures intersect, communal holy natural places serve as poignant reminders of the interconnection of humanity's spiritual journey. These sacred sites, steeped in the nation's vibrant history, become the meeting grounds for people from various faiths and traditions, fostering a spirit of unity and shared understanding. These spaces transcend religious boundaries and offers a sanctuary where individuals can engage in open and respectful dialogue, thereby contributing to the cultivation of religious tolerance and harmony (Janah & Nugroho, 2022). The diverse array of rituals and ceremonies conducted in these hallowed grounds exemplifies the coexistence of different belief systems, providing a living testament to the pluralistic ethos that defines Nigeria's cultural landscape. As individuals from disparate backgrounds converge upon these sites, they contribute to a rich tapestry of shared experiences, fostering a sense of communal identity that transcends the boundaries of religious affiliations (Ojo & Lateju, 2010).

The research unfolds within the unique backdrop of Sobi-Hill, a sacred enclave that transcends religious boundaries and foster a harmonious coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Ilorin, Nigeria. Sobi-Hill serves as a testament to the shared spiritual heritage that binds diverse communities together, and hence challenges conventional notions of religious exclusivity. By delving into the intricacies of this communal holy natural place, the study seeks to unravel the layers of significance that underscore its role as a unifying force. Drawing inspiration from the insightful work of Kalu (2011), the research goes beyond a mere examination of cohabitation and extends its focus to the intricate web of interfaith experiences nurtured within the sacred confines of Sobi-Hill. This holistic exploration aims to shed light on the nuanced dynamics of religious interaction, emphasizing the potential of such sacred spaces to bridge divides and cultivate a mutual understanding that transcends doctrinal differences.

In delving into the intricacies of sacred spaces within the context of Nigeria's religious landscape, our research aims to uncover the untapped potential embedded in

communal holy natural places as agents of change. The heightened religious tensions in Nigeria, as underscored by existing literature (Wariboko & Wariboko, 2014), necessitate a thorough examination of the role that these sacred spaces can play in mitigating conflicts and fostering a climate of interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. By addressing the existing gap in scholarly attention, as highlighted by Alamu (2015), Patrick (2016), and Olofinlua and Adedire (2017), our study seeks to shed light on the transformative power that communal holy natural places may hold. These spaces, often rich in cultural and spiritual significance, possess the potential to serve as neutral grounds where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds can converge, foster mutual understanding, and promote a shared sense of humanity.

In probing into this uncharted territory, our research seeks to transcend the traditional boundaries of archaeological and historical investigations by examining the intangible dimensions of sacred spaces, with a specific emphasis on their potential for fostering interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. While existing studies, as referenced by Lawrence (1982), Roymans (1995), Psarra (2009), and Lai, Said and Kubota (2013), have admirably contributed to our understanding of the physical and cultural aspects of these spaces, they have inadvertently overlooked the vital role they might play in contemporary societal dynamics. By adopting a novel approach, our study aims to unravel the layers of significance embedded in these sacred spaces within the Nigerian context, shedding light on how they can serve as platforms for meaningful dialogue, mutual understanding, and ultimately contribute to the promotion of harmony in a diverse and pluralistic society. Through this innovative lens, we aspire to broaden the discourse surrounding sacred spaces, positioning them not only as repositories of history and culture but as dynamic agents capable of shaping the future landscape of interfaith relations.

This research represents a crucial undertaking in the broader context of promoting religious harmony and understanding in Nigeria. The focus on the experiences and viewpoints of Muslims and Christians who converge at Sobi-Hill provides an insightful lens through which to examine the dynamics of interfaith connections. By exploring the communal aspects of holy natural places, we aim to uncover the latent potential for these sacred spaces to serve as catalysts for meaningful interfaith dialogue. Sobi-Hill, with its unique significance for both religious communities, becomes a microcosm of the larger religious landscape in Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis, we hope to identify common ground and shared values, fostering a deeper understanding that transcends religious divides. This research aspires to contribute not only academically but also practically, by offering valuable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and religious institutions seeking to promote a more inclusive and tolerant society. In essence, our study endeavors to lay

the groundwork for practical interventions that can harness the power of sacred spaces to bridge religious gaps and nurture lasting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Communal holy natural places are areas where individuals from different faiths come together to connect with nature and spirituality. These spaces have been found to foster interfaith relations and promote peaceful coexistence. One such communal holy natural places in Nigeria is Sobi-Hill, located in Ilorin, Kwara state. Sobi-Hill is a hilltop that is considered sacred by the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani communities who reside in the area. This study aims to explore the history and significance of Sobi-Hill as a communal holy natural places and its role in promoting interfaith experiences (Ayodeji, 2021; Jamiu & Akande, 2014).

According to elders who once reside in the area, Sobi Hill is a dome-shaped outcrop that rises about 200 meters above the savanna to the north of Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State in Nigeria. Like many African hills and mountains, Sobi Hill is shrouded in mystery and is considered sacred by believers of various religions including Christianity and Islam. Legend has it that a hunter named Kiniba from Oyo-Ile lived beside a rock near the hill and became known for his predictions and traditional medicine. When he helped an old pregnant woman deliver her baby successfully, he became even more famous and the hill was eventually named after him. The expression "So bii" became synonymous with Kiniba and the hill, and is still used today (Alhaji Mohammed Bello Ajadi and Abdulrahman Alao Alao Ajape, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

Sobi-Hill has become an important site of interfaith relations in Nigeria. The hilltop is a prayer site to communities of various faith, and these communities share the space, respecting each other's religious practices. The people believe that the hill is a communal holy space where prayers are accepted, hence, gather to pray and connect with God on the hill. Sobi-Hill is an example of how communal holy natural places can promote interfaith relations and peaceful coexistence. The coexistence of two different faiths on the hill has been possible due to the mutual respect and tolerance of each other's religious practices. The shared use of the hill by both communities has helped to foster understanding and cooperation between them (Yusuf, 2016).

Sobi-Hill has become a site of pilgrimage for religious communities. The hilltop attracts visitors from all over Nigeria and beyond, who come to connect with the spiritual energy of the hill. The hill brings together people from different faiths to participate in religious practices. The interfaith experiences at Sobi-Hill have been instrumental in promoting peaceful coexistence and understanding between the two communities. The Yoruba and Muslim communities have come to appreciate each other's religious practices and beliefs, and have learned to live together in harmony (Lawal, 2018).

Sobi-Hill is a paradigmatic example of a communal holy natural place that has played an important role in promoting interfaith relations in Nigeria. The hilltop is prayer site to religious communities who share the space, respecting each other's religious practices. The coexistence of different faiths on the hill has been possible due to the mutual respect and tolerance of each other's religious practices. The shared use of the hill by the communities has helped to foster understanding and cooperation among them. The interfaith experiences at Sobi-Hill have been instrumental in promoting peaceful coexistence and understanding between the Christian and Muslim communities.

Nigeria is a religiously diverse country, with Christianity and Islam being the dominant religions. However, there are also adherents of traditional African religions and other faiths. Despite occasional religious conflicts, many Nigerians are committed to interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Communal holy natural places, such as Sobi-Hill, offer opportunities for people of different faiths to come together in a shared space (Ottuh et al., 2014).

Muslims and Christians visit Sobi-Hill to perform religious practices and rituals. Muslims and Christians come to pray, attend services, get counsel, and get their dreams interpreted on the hill. The hill is also a popular site for tourism and public holiday celebrations (Adama et al., 2019). In addition to these specific religious practices, visitors to Sobi-Hill engage in other activities that are associated with the site's spiritual significance. For example, some people climb the hill as a form of pilgrimage, while others simply enjoy the natural beauty of the area. There are also sometimes vendors at the base of the hill who sell religious items and souvenirs.

Visitors to Sobi-Hill report a sense of peace and tranquility while on the hill. This feeling is often attributed to the sacred nature of the site and the belief that it is a place where different faiths can come together in harmony. Many visitors also report engaging in interfaith dialogue while on the hill. For example, Muslims and Christians have been known to engage in discussions about their respective faiths and beliefs (Jegade, 2019).

While the overall atmosphere on Sobi-Hill is peaceful, there have been instances of tension between different groups. For example, some Muslims once expressed concern about the attempt to build a church on the hill and called for its removal. However, tensions are relatively rare and most visitors to the site report positive interfaith experiences (Ahmed-Hameed, 2015).

Communal holy natural places, such as Sobi-Hill, offer opportunities for people of different faiths to come together in a shared space. The types of religious practices and rituals performed on the hill reflect the diverse religious traditions present in Nigeria. While there have been instances of tension between different groups, most visitors to the site report positive interfaith experiences. Sobi-Hill serves as a

paradigmatic example of how shared natural spaces can facilitate interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

2. METHODS

Nigeria is a country with diverse religious beliefs, and this diversity is reflected in the sacred spaces of the country. These sacred spaces are sometimes shared among different faith communities, and the interactions that take place within these shared spaces provide an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and collaboration. This section explores the interactions and collaborations between different faith communities on Sobi-Hill, Ilorin, Nigeria, and how these interactions have influenced interfaith experiences in the country.

As earlier stated Sobi-Hill is a sacred natural space in Ilorin, Nigeria, that is revered by both Christians and Muslims. The hill is a prayer site to several religious communities. The site attracts pilgrims from all over Nigeria and its surroundings, and the interactions between these pilgrims provide an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and collaboration (Auwal, 2018).

This study was conducted using a paradigmatic approach, which involves examining a particular case study to gain insights into a broader phenomenon. Data was collected through interviews with key informants, including religious leaders, community leaders, and residents of Sobi-Hill. The interviews were conducted in English and Yoruba, and were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. In addition, through a qualitative research approach, it involved the use of interviews to collect data. A total of 30 participants were recruited for the study, comprising of 15 Christians and 15 Muslims who had visited Sobi-Hill in the past year. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and themes in the data collected. In addition, the research employed a qualitative approach to comprehensively investigate interfaith connections at Sobi Hill, Ilorin, Nigeria. The design aimed to explore the factors contributing to successful interactions and collaborations between different faith communities and the impact of these interactions on participants' interfaith experiences.

Participants in the study were purposively selected from diverse faith communities that frequently visit Sobi Hill for religious activities. The sample included individuals actively engaged in interfaith dialogue on the hill, religious leaders promoting interfaith cooperation, and participants who had experienced the positive impact of interfaith interactions on Sobi Hill.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Semi-structured interviews provided in-depth insights into individuals' motivations for engaging in interfaith dialogue and perspectives among participants.

Participant observations were conducted to capture the dynamics of interfaith interactions on Sobi Hill.

The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and objectives. These instruments were designed to elicit information on factors contributing to successful interfaith interactions, the role of religious leaders, and the impact of Sobi Hill as a sacred natural space on participants' interfaith experiences.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The transcripts from interviews and themes were identified to capture patterns, trends, and recurring concepts related to successful interfaith interactions on Sobi Hill. The analysis followed an iterative process, ensuring the rigor and reliability of the findings.

The study adhered to ethical principles, obtaining informed consent from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. The research also considered the cultural and religious sensitivities of the participants, ensuring respectful and responsible engagement.

The study drew on established methods for qualitative research, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observations. These methods have been widely utilized in social science research and were referenced accordingly (e.g., Chukwulozie, 1986) to provide a foundation for the study's approach. Consequently, this methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of interfaith connections at Sobi Hill, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing successful collaborations among different faith communities. The study's findings contribute to the existing literature on interfaith dialogue and collaboration, emphasizing the significance of communal holy natural places in fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse religious groups.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study on the interactions between different faith communities on Sobi-Hill sheds light on a remarkable and harmonious landscape where mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance thrive. What stands out prominently is the active engagement of participants in meaningful interfaith dialogue and collaborative efforts, which are facilitated by the communal holy natural place, Sobi-Hill. This sacred space, serving as a neutral ground, plays a pivotal role in uniting individuals from diverse religious backgrounds and fostering an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence. The study discerns key factors that contribute to the success of these interactions, emphasizing the pivotal role of individuals' willingness to participate in interfaith dialogue, the presence of supportive religious leaders who encourage such endeavors, and the shared reverence for the sacred natural space, which acts as a unifying force transcending religious differences. In this environment, the tapestry of different faiths weaves together seamlessly, creating a vibrant and inclusive community that serves as a testament to the

power of dialogue and mutual understanding in building bridges across diverse belief systems.

The positive atmosphere on Sobi-Hill not only served as a catalyst for transformative interfaith experiences but also acted as a powerful antidote to prevailing stereotypes, nurturing a profound understanding of diverse religious beliefs among participants. This unique setting underscored the vital role that communal holy natural places, exemplified by Sobi-Hill, play in facilitating meaningful opportunities for interfaith dialogue and collaboration. The study brings to light the challenges faced by traditional religious communities in accessing and utilizing the site, including issues of formal ownership, tensions related to space use, and safety concerns. Despite these challenges, the research illuminates promising prospects for cooperation. By acknowledging and addressing these hurdles, stakeholders can work towards creating an inclusive environment that not only respects diverse faiths but also encourages the exchange of ideas and values, fostering a sense of unity amid the rich tapestry of religious diversity at Sobi-Hill and beyond.

The informal arrangements made by communities, such as dividing the hill into sections for each community's use, represent a commendable grassroots effort to foster harmonious coexistence. These arrangements reflect the communities' shared commitment to the principles of mutual respect and environmental stewardship, highlighting a common ground that transcends religious differences. The presence of shared values, particularly those centered around reverence for nature and the significance of spiritual practices, serves as a strong foundation for fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding. While these informal initiatives are crucial for cultivating a sense of unity, the study underscores the importance of formal recognition and legal protection for communal holy natural places. It emphasizes the necessity for the government to establish robust legal frameworks dedicated to the management and safeguarding of these sacred spaces. Such formal measures not only validate the communities' cultural and religious significance but also ensure the long-term preservation of these sites, fostering a sustainable environment for interfaith cooperation and continued shared use of the space.

The exploration of Sobi Hill in Ilorin, Nigeria, as a communal holy natural place interwoven with Islam and Christianity has not only illuminated crucial insights into the dynamics of interfaith connections but has also underscored the remarkable resilience of shared sacred spaces in fostering harmony among diverse religious communities. By employing a qualitative case study methodology that incorporates interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research has delved into the intricate tapestry of beliefs and practices that converge on Sobi Hill. The findings reveal that this sacred site serves as a unifying ground for spiritual engagement, transcending religious boundaries, and nurturing an environment conducive to interfaith encounters and

dialogue. It becomes evident that, despite theological differences, individuals from both Islamic and Christian traditions coexist harmoniously, drawing upon the common thread of reverence for the natural elements present on Sobi Hill. This shared sacred space not only encourages mutual understanding but also serves as a testament to the potential for interfaith collaboration, fostering a sense of unity and cohesiveness among diverse religious communities in the region (Alamu, 2020; Clarke & Halafoff, 2016; Lawal, 2018; Nwosu et al., 2017; Standaert, 2009).

The significance of communal holy natural places, such as Sobi Hill, in fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse faith communities cannot be overstated. Beyond merely serving as a physical space for worship and prayer, Sobi Hill embodies a profound symbol of unity and shared spirituality. It transcends religious boundaries, becoming a common ground where Muslims and Christians come together to express their devotion. The convergence of these communities on the hill goes beyond the act of worship; it becomes a lived experience that fosters a deep sense of communal identity and belonging. The shared spiritual engagement on Sobi Hill has played a pivotal role in dismantling religious barriers and stereotypes, echoing the sentiments articulated by Couroucli (2014). This unique interfaith interaction has sown the seeds of harmony, laying the foundation for a society where individuals of different faiths not only coexist but thrive together. Sobi Hill stands as a testament to the transformative power of communal holy spaces in building bridges between diverse religious communities and fostering a collective spirit of understanding and tolerance (Armstrong, 2009; Bell, 1992; Di Giovine & Choe, 2020; Harrison et al., 2020; Smith, 1987).

Moreover, the significance of Sobi Hill as a platform for interfaith dialogue extends beyond its role in fostering understanding between Muslims and Christians. The site serves as a symbolic meeting ground, where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds come together to engage in open and respectful conversations. This exchange not only contributes to mutual acceptance but also plays a pivotal role in dismantling preconceived notions and stereotypes that may exist between the two communities. The shared utilization of Sobi Hill as a sacred space by Muslims and Christians highlights the potential for religious sites to serve as bridges that connect people across faiths and promote a culture of unity. In doing so, it echoes the ideas put forth by Verschuuren (2010), underlining the transformative power of shared sacred spaces in building a foundation of mutual respect and tolerance within society (Armstrong, 2009; Grim & Finke, 2007; Shafiq & Abu-Nimer, 2007).

The profound implications of this research extend beyond the mere acknowledgment of communal holy natural places as facilitators of diversity. It underscores the transformative potential of such shared sacred spaces, like Sobi Hill, in fostering a harmonious coexistence among individuals with diverse religious backgrounds. The study brings to light the palpable impact on the reduction of religious

tensions and conflicts within the region, illustrating that the communal use of these spaces serves as a unifying force that transcends religious differences. The findings resonate with [Liljeblad's \(2018\)](#) observations, reinforcing the notion that the deliberate promotion and recognition of shared sacred sites can contribute significantly to the promotion of mutual understanding and respect. This not only enhances social cohesion but also establishes a blueprint for fostering peaceful interactions in multicultural societies, emphasizing the vital role that communal holy natural places play in building bridges and dissolving barriers between disparate religious communities ([Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016](#); [Barkey, 2014](#); [Dumper, 2002](#); [Garg, 2010](#); [Hedges, 2019](#)).

Furthermore, the significance of Sobi Hill in fostering social cohesion extends beyond its role as a common ground for spiritual activities. The hill serves as a dynamic space where individuals from various backgrounds come together not only for religious practices but also for cultural events, community gatherings, and recreational activities. This multifunctional aspect of Sobi Hill contributes to the creation of a shared experience among its diverse community members, transcending religious and cultural differences. The study underscores the transformative power of communal spaces like Sobi Hill, affirming [Davids et al.'s \(2021\)](#) assertion that such spaces play a crucial role in building and strengthening social bonds. The inclusive nature of these spaces facilitates a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, fostering a harmonious coexistence that goes beyond the boundaries of individual identities ([Bachmann-Medick et al., 2021](#); [Eriksson, 2023](#); [Pathak & Srivastava, 2020](#); [Song, 2014](#); [Uka, 2023](#)).

In delving into the complexities surrounding sacred places, it becomes evident that a nuanced approach is essential in addressing the myriad challenges they confront. The coexistence of conflicting beliefs within these revered sites often gives rise to tensions that demand delicate navigation and understanding. Moreover, the specter of environmental degradation looms large, posing a threat to the very sanctity these places embody. The delicate ecosystems surrounding these sites are at risk, and hence need a harmonious balance between human activities and environmental preservation. Additionally, inadequate management exacerbates these issues, highlighting the imperative for improved governance and conservation strategies. The crux lies in the recognition that sustainable management practices must transcend mere environmental considerations; they must also encompass the cultural and religious dimensions that imbue these places with profound significance. Emphasizing the interplay between environmental stewardship and cultural preservation is crucial in ensuring the longevity of communal holy natural places, securing a heritage for the enrichment of future generations ([Infield & Mugisha, 2010](#); [Kiernan, 2015](#); [Rutte, 2011](#); [Tatay & Merino, 2023](#); [Tuyen, 2023](#)).

Consequently, the study at Sobi Hill provides valuable insights into the intricate web of interfaith connections, emphasizing the importance of fostering harmonious

coexistence among diverse faith communities. The findings call for effective management strategies to safeguard these sacred sites for cultural, religious, and environmental sustainability. Policymakers, community leaders, and religious figures in Nigeria should heed these findings and actively promote the utilization of communal holy natural places as a means of enhancing interfaith relations and religious tolerance in the country. The results of the study contribute to the growing literature on interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Nigeria. The findings support and enhance existing research, emphasizing the positive impact of communal holy natural places on fostering peaceful coexistence. The challenges faced by traditional religion communities in accessing such spaces underscore the need for ongoing dialogue and the establishment of protective measures. The implications of this research extend beyond Sobi Hill, by which it addresses broader challenges confronted by communal holy natural places and advocates for their preservation as vital contributors to the social structure of Nigeria.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study delved into the interfaith experiences of visitors at Sobi-Hill in Ilorin, Nigeria, revealing it as a significant locus for interfaith encounters. Through qualitative interviews, the research showcased how the natural beauty and spiritual significance of Sobi-Hill create a common ground that transcends religious differences, fostering mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding among diverse religious groups. The implications of our findings extend to policymakers and community leaders, emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting communal holy natural places for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Furthermore, our study underscores the potential role of religious leaders in enhancing interfaith relations and advocating for environmental stewardship. While acknowledging limitations such as a sample bias and reliance on self-reported experiences, this research urges future investigations to address these gaps through larger-scale surveys or more extensive qualitative studies. Looking forward, researchers should explore shared natural spaces not only as facilitators of interfaith encounters but also as potential sites for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, particularly in regions marked by high interreligious tensions. In essence, our study contributes empirical evidence to the expanding literature on interfaith encounters and shared natural spaces, urging policymakers and community leaders to prioritize the conservation and promotion of these spaces as essential tools for fostering interfaith relations and social cohesion.

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