

The Dramaturgy of Religious Tolerance: Representing Religious Group Identities in the Public Sphere of Contemporary Urban Society

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of religious identity in the public sphere to express religious beliefs and strengthen social cohesion through interfaith interactions. Drawing on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, this study examines how religious identity is performed to foster social harmony. Using a descriptive qualitative and phenomenological design, the research was based on observations, in-depth interviews with religious and community leaders, and document analysis. The findings indicate that religious groups use the front stage to promote tolerance through interfaith rituals, community service, and symbols of peace. At the same time, the backstage enables religious leaders as mediators of tolerance. These performances are shaped by social scripts grounded in tolerance narratives and local cultural values. Impression management strategies include inclusive language, interfaith symbols, and adaptive behavior to create a positive public image. Audience responses vary, reflecting appreciation for harmony-building efforts and criticism of representations viewed as symbolic or insufficiently inclusive.

Keywords: Dramaturgy; Religious Tolerance; Urban Society; Public Sphere

Introduction

Religious diversity in contemporary urban society is a defining feature and a challenge to harmonious social life. Major cities such as Bandung, Indonesia, have high levels of social diversity, bringing together various religious groups in the public sphere (Hidayatulloh & Saumantri, 2024). Walzer explains that the level of tolerance reflects the quality of social relationships within a nation, making it a critical pillar for maintaining social cohesion. In a multicultural society, religious tolerance reflects religious teachings and provides a foundation for harmonious social relationships (Walzer, 2017).

However, significant challenges remain in creating an inclusive public sphere. A 2023 report by the Setara Institute revealed that religious intolerance remained prevalent in Indonesia, including in West Java. Public sphere, which should serve as an arena for peaceful encounters, often becomes a site of conflict because of the exclusivity of certain group identities (Yosarie et al., 2024). This finding highlights that religious tolerance involves complex identity negotiations within power dynamics and social representation.

From a sociological perspective, religion plays a significant role in shaping norms and social relations, although modernization has shifted its role from the institutional sphere to a more personal realm (Greenway, 1979). Thinkers such as Weber, Berger, and Habermas highlight that

modernization has strengthened the separation between the private and public spheres. However, religious identity continues to influence social relations in the public sphere through symbolic expressions and ritual practices (Purba et al., 2023).

Religion continues to play a significant role in the public sphere as an identity that shapes social relations. According to Jenkins (2004), identity is formed through an individual's understanding of themselves and how they are recognized by others, based on perceived similarities and differences. Manuel Castells explains that individual identity is constructed through cultural, religious, and group affiliation attributes that are internalized in everyday life. This process of internalization allows for religious expression in the public sphere that differs from that in traditional societies (Castells, 2014).

Various studies on urban religious practices have been conducted from diverse perspectives. For instance, James (2016) highlights that appropriate theological interpretations can support the transformation of urban communities. Meanwhile, Dias emphasizes the importance of religious institutions adopting a secular role to contribute to urban society through the strengthening of its social ethos (Dias, 2019).

A different study conducted by (Shannahan, 2019) reveals that although secularism is often considered dominant in urban areas, religion and spirituality remain important components of urban communities' identity, offering opportunities to develop liberation theology that responds to current conditions. Agbèdè (2022) also examined urban religiosity and emphasized the need to manage urbanization effectively to develop religiously integrated cities and revise religious education curricula to increase their relevance to urban life.

Greenway offers another perspective on the relationship between cities and religion, emphasizing that cities and their inhabitants represent unique phenomena in religious studies. Cities are often portrayed as “citadels of sin,” associated with deviant behavior and the marginalization of religion because rationality is considered the main foundation of urban life. However, in some religious narratives, cities are portrayed as the “city of God,” representing religious aspirations for a progressive, prosperous, and civilized life (Greenway, 1979).

As a multicultural city, Bandung has complex social dynamics. Its high level of social diversity enriches urban life but can also create conflict arising from ethnic, cultural, and religious differences (Hermawati et al., 2017). Bandung's diversity is also viewed as a cultural asset that enriches community life and encourages residents to practice tolerance in their daily interactions (Saumantri, 2023). This diversity is evident in areas where residents from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds interact, contributing to relatively tolerant interfaith relations in the city.

Bandung, one of Indonesia's most multicultural cities, has established five Tolerance Villages (*Kampung Toleransi*) as community-based initiatives designed to promote interfaith harmony and strengthen multicultural urban identities (Simbolon, 2022). These villages represent the municipal government's commitment to preserving religious diversity and fostering inclusive relationships among different religious groups in the urban public sphere. Among these five villages, this study focuses on the Tolerance Village located in Neighborhood Unit (RW) 12 of the Dian Permai Residential Area, Babakan Ciparay District, Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia.

This urban neighborhood brings together residents from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, including Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus. Everyday social interactions within this neighborhood reflect peaceful coexistence and interfaith cooperation among different religious groups. The Tolerance Village reflects the Bandung municipal government's commitment to managing religious diversity and functions as a social stage where

residents publicly perform and sustain tolerance, mutual respect, and interfaith solidarity in everyday urban life.

In the context of religious life, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective provides a relevant framework for understanding how religious identities are constructed and represented in the public sphere. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman argues that social interaction resembles a theatrical performance in which individuals and groups perform their roles to create specific impressions on an audience. Dramaturgy assumes that social actors actively manage their behavior, symbols, and interactions to achieve social acceptance and legitimacy (Goffman, 1995).

A central concept in Goffman's framework is the distinction between front stage and backstage. The front stage refers to public spaces where individuals or groups perform roles and display idealized identities before an audience. In religious settings, front-stage performances include religious rituals, interfaith activities, and public expressions of tolerance that communicate harmony and inclusiveness. By contrast, the backstage is a private space where religious actors prepare, negotiate, and reflect on their public performances by discussing internal differences and formulating strategies for interfaith engagement (Lichterman, 2012).

Another important concept is impression management, which refers to individual or collective efforts to control how others perceive them. Through inclusive language, religious symbols, and cooperative social practices, religious communities seek to project a positive image and gain recognition within multicultural societies. This perspective enables analysis of how religious beliefs, practices, and identities are publicly represented and reveals the backstage negotiation processes.

Accordingly, this study examines how the identities of religious groups are represented in the public sphere through a dramaturgical perspective. The study aims to investigate how people and religious communities play roles, manage impressions, and use religious symbols to achieve social peace and cohesion. This study is expected to deepen understanding of the dynamics of religious tolerance in contemporary urban society and contribute to urban space design by fostering tolerance and inclusivity, particularly in Tolerance Villages in Bandung, Indonesia.

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design with a phenomenological approach. This research aims to provide a detailed depiction of the phenomenon of group religious identity representation in the public sphere, as understood and experienced by individuals and religious groups in a multicultural society. Given the multidisciplinary nature of this research, the phenomenological approach was chosen to guide the analysis. Phenomenology, as described by Smith et al. (2009), aims to understand the essence of individuals' lived experiences without imposing external assumptions.

Data were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews. Once the data were collected, the analysis was performed narratively using a thematic approach based on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. The data was analyzed to identify patterns in the representation of religious identity, social roles performed by individuals or groups, and the use of religious symbols in public spaces. The key findings were then interpreted through the theoretical and conceptual framework to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of religious tolerance in Tolerance Village, Bandung City, Indonesia.

Literature Review

Goffman's dramaturgical framework offers a useful perspective for examining how Muslim communities in contemporary urban societies perform and negotiate their religious identities in the pluralistic public sphere. In contexts characterized by religious diversity and heightened sensitivity to interfaith relations, Muslim actors often balance the expression of Islamic principles with the inclusivity and tolerance expected by broader societal norms. From this perspective, the front stage is where Muslim groups present Islam as a religion that promotes peace and coexistence while addressing prevailing stereotypes and reducing the risk of marginalization.

On the front stage, Muslim communities participate in interfaith dialogues, host or participate in interfaith prayer events, and undertake humanitarian initiatives that express Islamic values such as compassion (*rahmah*) and justice (*'adl*). These performances frequently draw on social shaped by secular tolerance narratives and Islamic teachings that emphasize respect for others (*tasamuh*), peaceful coexistence (*sullh*), and religious pluralism, as reflected in Qur'anic verses like "*For you is your religion, and for me is my religion*" (Qur'an 109:6). Such scripts connect Islamic identity to civic ideals of harmony, and counter discourses that stigmatize Islam as incompatible with pluralism (Bisri et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the backstage provides Muslim leaders and community members a more private space to address internal theological debates, develop strategies for responding to sensitive public issues, and strengthen internal solidarity. With this space, they discuss how broader cultural expectations can be accommodated without compromising Islamic principles, reflecting the tension between religious commitments and social integration.

Impression management, as theorized by Goffman (1995) is clearly reflected in the strategies Muslim groups use to foster positive public perceptions. Inclusive language is intentionally used to present Islamic teachings in terms that align with universal human values, thereby avoiding exclusivist rhetoric that could alienate non-Muslim audiences. Symbolic gestures, such as opening mosques for public tours, participating in interfaith commemorations, and establishing shared community spaces, communicate goodwill and openness. Behavioral adjustments, including appropriate adaptations in dress, tone, and ritual practices in interfaith settings, reflect awareness of the needs and sensitivities of diverse audiences.

Consistent with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, public performances of Islamic tolerance and inclusivity remain vulnerable to audience interpretation. Audience responses are mixed: some appreciate Muslim initiatives that foster social harmony, while others view these efforts as superficial or merely performative, especially when not accompanied by deeper structural engagement or reciprocal understanding. Such representations become less credible when front-stage portrayals differ from backstage discourses, potentially fuelling skepticism or reinforcing existing stigmas.

Results and Discussion

Religious Groups in the Urban Tolerance Village

Neighborhood Unit (RW) 12 of the Dian Permai Residential Area, Babakan Ciparay District, Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia, was officially recognized as a Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*) on October 18, 2018, as part of the Bandung Municipal Government's initiative to promote interfaith harmony and preserve social diversity in urban areas (Oktora, 2018). Among the five officially recognized Tolerance Villages in Bandung, Dian Permai has become a prominent example of peaceful coexistence among religious and ethnic groups.

The Tolerance Village comprises approximately 300 households. Around 30 percent (approximately 90 households) are Muslim, while the remaining 70 percent (approximately 210 households) represent other religious groups, including Protestant Christians, Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus. The area is also ethnically diverse, comprising Sundanese, Javanese, Sumatran, and Chinese-Indonesian residents. This demographic composition reflects the multicultural character of Bandung's contemporary urban society (Chandra & Budiuyuwono, 2021).

Religious and ethnic diversity supports social integration and collective action rather than social fragmentation. Interfaith cooperation is manifested through various community activities, including participation in Eid al-Adha celebrations, neighborhood health programs, mutual assistance initiatives, and shared access to public facilities. These practices have fostered mutual trust, strengthened social solidarity, and contributed to a culture of tolerance across religious and ethnic boundaries.

The Tolerance Village community's success in social cohesion is evident in traditional practices that demonstrate interfaith collaboration. One example is the participation of non-Muslim residents in Eid al-Adha celebrations, such as donating sacrificial cattle and helping maintain security during the event. Reverend Leonard Lomi, a Catholic leader and Secretary of Neighborhood Unit (RW) 12, explained that this solidarity is not limited to moments of religious celebration but also extends to other community activities, including those conducted at the integrated health post, where residents from different religious backgrounds support one another.

Rahaja, Head of Neighborhood Unit (RW) 12, described the proximity of three places of worship as a visible representation of interfaith harmony: the Sumber Sari Al Amanah Mosque, Gandarusa Catholic Church, and Cakrawala Dharma Indonesia Buddhist Foundation. Interfaith cooperation is also reflected in everyday practices, such as safeguarding neighbors' homes during religious holidays and supporting one another's religious observances. For instance, non-Muslim residents frequently remind Muslim residents about the dawn prayer time through neighborhood WhatsApp groups. These interactions transcend formal expressions of tolerance and illustrate the emergence of social solidarity, reciprocal trust, and interfaith citizenship in everyday urban life.

The principles of sharing and interfaith cooperation reflect Walzer's view of tolerance as an active social practice that strengthens social solidarity and mutual respect (Walzer, 2017). Similarly, interfaith dialogue aligns with Habermas's concept of rational communication (Habermas, 1989). In this context, dialogue is seen as a tool to foster mutual understanding, bridge divisions, and strengthen social cohesion.

From Manuel Castells's perspective, the public sphere in the Tolerance Village can be understood as a multicultural space for peaceful relations among religious groups. Religious identity in marks differences while also contributing to social cohesion (Castells, 2000). Therefore, the everyday practices of the Tolerance Village reflect integration within modern urban contexts and also serve as a context-specific example of religious tolerance for other multicultural communities.

Front Stage: Representation of Religious Group Identities in the Public Sphere

In Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the front stage refers to the public sphere where social actors perform their roles before an audience. Front-stage performances involve presenting individual or group identities and creating impressions that align with prevailing social conventions and expectations (Goffman, 1995). In religious contexts, religious practices, rituals, and symbols are publicly displayed to convey piety, religious commitment, and social unity.

Rituals and religious symbols are part of the front-stage performances. In Tolerance Village, located in Neighborhood Unit (RW) 12 of the Dian Permai Residential Area, religious ceremonies serve as expressions of faith and as means of fostering social unity. Activities such as interfaith prayers, celebrations of major religious holidays, and the public display of religious symbols function as social performances that communicate the values of tolerance and inclusivity. Goffman states that social performances encompass actions, symbols, and dramaturgical props through which individuals or groups convey messages that align with audience norms and expectations (Goffman, 1995).

Religious groups present their identities to a wider public. In this setting, religious symbols function as markers of faith and as communicative instruments through which social meanings are expressed, interpreted, and negotiated. Yusuf et al. argue that publicly displayed religious symbols can generate implicit forms of dialogue that strengthen relationships among different religious communities (Yusuf et al., 2021). In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), symbols such as religious attire, places of worship, and ritual objects express religious identities while also conveying messages of coexistence, mutual respect, and inclusivity.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, these symbols acquire meaning through social interaction. Drawing on Mead, Siregar (2016) explains that symbols enable individuals to create and share meanings within society. Consequently, the display of religious symbols on the front stage can encourage members of different religious communities to interpret one another's identities more positively, thereby fostering mutual understanding and reducing social distance. By contrast, the backstage functions as a private sphere where religious actors discuss and negotiate the meanings attached to these symbols and prepare strategies for their public presentation.

The symbolic dimension of religious practices is also observed during the Eid al-Adha celebration in the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*). Beyond its theological significance for Muslims, the sacrificial ritual functions as a public symbol of generosity, solidarity, and social responsibility. The participation of non-Muslim residents in supporting the celebration, including donating animals for sacrifice and assisting with event organization, demonstrates how a religious symbol can acquire broader social meanings that transcend doctrinal boundaries. In this context, the sacrificial ritual becomes a shared symbol of social cohesion and interfaith cooperation. As Leonard Lomi, a Catholic community leader, explained, "*Our participation in the Eid al-Adha celebration is not merely a social obligation but a form of interfaith solidarity that strengthens our bond as a community.*"

Religious symbols, including traditional religious attire, hijabs, crosses, and ritual attributes, play an important role in representing religious identities in the public sphere. According to Mahfudhoh (2024) that religious symbols in the public sphere function as markers of individual or collective identity and as forms of nonverbal communication that facilitate interfaith dialogue. For example, during Vesak celebrations, Buddhist residents wear traditional religious attire and invite neighbors from different religious backgrounds to participate. Hendrawan, a Buddhist religious leader, explained, "*We want our religious symbols to not only serve as markers of identity but also as bridges that foster mutual respect.*" (H. Hendrawan, personal communication, March 22, 2025).

From a dramaturgical perspective, these symbols function as front-stage props that communicate values of openness, recognition, and inclusivity to a wider audience. The public display of religious symbols transforms religious differences into opportunities for social interaction rather than sources of division. By making religious identities visible and accessible in

shared public spaces, these symbols foster familiarity, mutual understanding, respect for other religious traditions, religious tolerance, and interfaith dialogue (Hidayatulloh & Saumantri, 2024).

Joint rituals, such as interfaith prayers and celebrations of major religious holidays, function as public performances that reinforce unity in diversity. Interfaith prayers held during Indonesia's Independence Day commemorations, with representatives of each religious group offering prayers in accordance with their respective beliefs. Magdalena, a Christian leader, said: *"Through joint prayers, we want to set an example for the younger generation about the significance of unity amidst diversity. Besides rituals, social programs including mutual working, mutual assistance, and humanitarian activities play a key role in developing friendship between different religious believers."* (M. Magdalena, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

A Muslim resident of the Tolerance Village explained, *"During community service, the difference of religion or race was not a concern. We come together as neighbors, and we help one another."* This statement aligns with Hamali (2018) argument that interfaith social activities create neutral and welcoming spaces where people from different religious backgrounds can interact, feel accepted, and be treated with respect.

The religious role of the front stage is to project piety, loyalty, and unity to community members and the wider public. Goffman (1959) conceptualizes this activity as a performance that helps sustain social order and strengthen social solidarity amid diversity. Within an intercultural society like the Tolerance Village, these front-stage performances present religious identity as peaceful and inclusive while strengthening collective awareness of the importance of religious tolerance (Ayunda et al., 2022).

Backstage: Preparation and Internal Dynamics of Religious Groups

Erving Goffman describes the backstage as a private space where individuals or groups prepare their public performances. He characterizes the backstage as a place where formal performances are set aside, allowing social actors to behave more freely and informally (Goffman, 1995). When the realm is religious, the backstage is important as a site of planning, reflection, and strategic coordination before religious identities are presented in the public sphere. Religious leaders and community members use this space to coordinate their approaches, refine public messages, and resolve internal differences, enabling them to present a more unified image on the front stage.

Christian leaders tend to use the backstage to rehearse sermons, prayers, or religious ceremonies before presenting them publicly. They also engage in internal discussions to ensure that their messages align with the values of religious tolerance and inclusivity. In the Tolerance Village, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist leaders regularly meet to coordinate and review preparations for interfaith activities. Reza, an Islamic religious leader, explained in an interview, *"In the preparation for joint prayer or religious celebration, we discuss how to communicate and conduct the activity in ways that reflect tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others. These discussions help ensure that our messages promote inclusivity."* (Reza, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

Backstage also functions as a space for reflection, negotiation, and internal preparation. Within this private setting, religious leaders and community members can express concerns, discuss sensitive issues, and resolve potential disagreements without disrupting the harmonious image presented in public. Dodego and Witro (2020) similarly note that private spaces enable religious communities to address sensitive matters openly while maintaining social cohesion in the wider community.

In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), these backstage processes occur through informal meetings, internal discussions, and interfaith consultations that are generally unseen by the public (Muchtar Ghazali & Hasanah, 2020). Community leaders regularly engage in dialogue to prevent misunderstandings, coordinate collective activities, and formulate shared responses to issues that may affect interfaith relations. Although these processes are not publicly displayed, they provide an essential foundation for sustaining tolerance in the public sphere. The harmonious interactions observed on the front stage are therefore supported by continuous negotiation, mutual adjustment, and consensus-building behind the scenes (Saumantri et al., 2024).

Disagreements occasionally emerge among religious groups regarding the use of shared public facilities and the scheduling of community activities. However, the backstage enables these differences to be discussed and negotiated constructively. Through informal meetings and internal consultations, community members seek mutually acceptable solutions to prevent tensions from escalating into open conflict.

This finding is illustrated by Putu Sudarsana, a Hindu community leader, who explained: *"We often use these meetings to coordinate with other religious communities, particularly when activities overlap in terms of time or location. Our goal is to find a solution that works for everyone while maintaining harmonious relationships within the community."* (P. Sudarsana, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

From a dramaturgical perspective, backstage negotiations allow religious groups to resolve differences through dialogue and compromise, thereby sustaining a harmonious front-stage image of religious tolerance and social cohesion in the public sphere.

The backstage also functions as a setting for socializing the values of religious tolerance among younger residents. In Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), cross-cultural communication activities and interactive discussions help young people understand the norms and dynamics of interfaith interaction before participating in public activities. Magdalena explained that these backstage processes allow the younger generation to internalize the values that guide interfaith engagement in the public sphere (M. Magdalena, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

The backstage provides religious groups a space to develop deliberative approaches to addressing the interfaith challenge. According to Rahardjo (2018) strategies developed in private settings emerge from reflection on previous experiences and are later applied in the public sphere to prevent conflict. In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), community members use these strategies to prepare sensitive interfaith events, such as shared prayers in the aftermath of a disaster or joint commemorations of national holidays. This careful preparation helps ensure that public activities support social harmony and inclusivity, particularly in emotionally or culturally sensitive situations.

Although backstage interactions are largely hidden from the wider public, they are essential to sustaining interfaith relations. Within this private sphere, religious leaders and community members engage in reflection, negotiation, and consensus-building to support harmonious public interactions. Backstage discussions enable them to address internal differences, coordinate collective activities, and formulate shared strategies for maintaining interfaith cooperation.

The findings of this study indicate that harmonious relationships result from ongoing preparation, dialogue, and behind-the-scenes mutual adjustment rather than emerging spontaneously. The backstage functions as a foundation for sustaining tolerance on the front stage. The relationship between the front stage and the backstage shows that interfaith harmony in urban communities depends on both visible public interactions and internal processes of reflection and negotiation.

The backstage is significant because it provides a relatively safe setting for internal dialogue, the development of inclusive strategies, and the negotiation of tensions between the idealized public image and the internal realities of religious groups. As argued by Lichterman, (2012), the backstage is where the public image is crafted and maintained. The backstage provides an important foundation for sustaining social order in multicultural communities such as the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*).

Roles and Scripts in Interfaith Interaction

According to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model, social interaction resembles a theatrical performance in which individuals and groups act as social actors, performing roles guided by shared scripts. Social roles, as Goffman explains, reflect social norms and guide individuals' behavior in accordance with those norms (Goffman, 1995). In religious life, roles and scripts shape how individuals and religious groups interact on the front stage and prepare their public performances backstage. Roles are the functions performed by religious leaders and ordinary people, while 'scripts' refer to narrative or action instructions aimed at promoting peace and interaction through interfaith relations.

Religious leaders have a strategic role in maintaining peace between religious communities. As intermediaries, bridge-builders, and icons of tolerance, they help prevent conflict and strengthen social unity. Yani et al. (2020) describe religious leaders as custodians of inclusive peace narratives in multireligious societies. This role is visible in interfaith social movements in the Tolerance Villages (*Kampung Toleransi*), where, for example, *ustadz* (Muslim religious leaders), pastors, monks, and other religious leaders work together to address social dynamics arising from religious differences.

Urban communities are pluralistic, and that can create problems, but they are also earnest stakeholders in promoting tolerance and inclusivity. Pratama et al. (2024) argue that community support for interfaith activities is a key factor in fostering social harmony in plural societies. In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), residents from different religious backgrounds participate in a range of community services, religious holiday celebrations, and interfaith dialogue. These shared activities show how plural communities can come together to build social relations and mutual appreciation.

Putu Sudarsana, a Hindu community leader, said community participation is important for building harmony. *"We view diversity as a strength that should be celebrated! Through shared activities and interfaith events, we build the foundation of tolerance in our community."* This statement shows that community members do more than recognize the role of religious and community leaders; they also participate directly in collective actions that sustain social harmony and inclusivity.

In addition to individual or group roles, the social script guides behavior by defining how social actors are expected to act in particular situations. In an interfaith setting, these scripts often draw on narratives of acceptance rooted in local cultures and religious histories. Goffman (1995) explains that social scripts enable people to play roles in culturally appropriate ways and manage impressions in accordance with prevailing social norms and audience expectations. Social scripts serve as normative instructions that organize complex interactions among individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and foster inclusive social relations.

In multicultural cities, tolerance is evidenced in a variety of public practices, including celebrations of religious holidays. During Eid al-Adha in the Tolerance Village, non-Muslim residents participate by donating animals for sacrifice and joining the event's organizing

committee. This tradition proves that the script of tolerance is enacted through concrete actions that sustain interfaith harmony.

The tolerance narrative is central to the social script of the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*). This narrative shapes collective awareness of the shared value of interfaith harmony (Hefni, 2020). It is enacted through practices such as interfaith dialogue, which strengthens solidarity, and inclusive community activities involving residents from different religious backgrounds.

Local cultural and customary values also support the script of tolerance. Being a land of ethnic and religious diversity, the local tradition plays an important role in building social harmony in Indonesia (Haryanto, 2015). Local traditions often provide shared norms that support social harmony in multicultural societies (Bisri et al., 2024). In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), community service, caring for neighbors' houses during religious holidays, and joint celebrations of significant religious holidays demonstrate the incorporation of cultural norms and social scripts into practices that sustain religious tolerance.

Empirically, the study shows religious behavior in urban contexts as an expression of social dynamics under conditions of religious and cultural plurality. Social harmony is expressed through public religious observances and communal activities that promote interfaith relations. Through the multiple roles of religious leaders, active community participation, and shared social scripts, the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*) serves as a concrete example of the balance and integration achievable in other multicultural communities.

Impression Management: Strategies for Constructing a Positive Public Image

From a postmodern perspective, public images are understood as social constructs shaped by symbolic representations, narratives, and media. Image is not seen as a direct representation of reality anymore; it is a result of mediation influenced by culture, power, and ideology (Ritzer, 2010). Audience perceptions are also subjective because individuals interpret constructed images through their experiences, frames of reference, and social values (Tutupary, 2016).

In religiously diverse societies, image and perception are closely connected because the way religious groups present themselves influences how others understand them. Symbols and rituals are not merely displayed but are strategically managed through impression management to support inclusive and sustainable interfaith relations (Saumantri et al., 2023).

As Erving Goffman states in his dramaturgical theory, impression management is a key component of social interaction. Conscious Living, as explained by Goffman (1995) people or groups deliberately manage their behavior, symbols, and words on the front stage to project specific impressions to an audience. To fulfill social norms, keep face, and maintain intra-group harmony and social cohesion. In such a religious life, impression management plays an important role in signaling a person's allegiance to values of tolerance, harmony, and inclusion.

Impression management is evident in various interfaith events in Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), including communal prayers, religious holiday celebrations, and community meetings. Through these activities, religious groups deliberately construct their image as peaceful and unifying, and this affects the general public's perception of the importance of tolerance.

Impression management in the public sphere includes the use of inclusive language, peace symbols, and behavioral adaptation. Inclusive language, using terms or phrases such as "unity in diversity", "collaboration," "partnership," and "togetherness in harmony," is commonly used in interfaith dialogue to create a conducive and neutral environment for conversation (Abdullah,

2017). Madjid (2009) notes that inclusive language can help reduce social tensions and foster more constructive dialogue within diverse communities.

Impressions management in the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*) is not limited to the use of peace symbols; it also involves deliberate communicative and behavioral strategies used by different religious groups to project an image of tolerance and inclusivity. In Goffman's terms, social actors use these strategies to shape audience perceptions in the public sphere (Goffman, 1995).

Muslim residents, for example, frequently emphasize inclusive language and openness during interfaith activities. Ustadz Reza explained, "*When speaking in public gatherings, we avoid language that may create distance between religious groups. Instead, we focus on shared values such as mutual respect, solidarity, and community service*" (Reza, personal communication, March 24, 2025). This strategy allows Muslim participants to present Islam as a religion that promotes peaceful coexistence and social harmony.

Similarly, the Catholic and Protestant communities actively participate in community activities, including neighborhood clean-up programs, community health initiatives, and religious celebrations organized by other religious groups. Leonard Lomi, a Catholic community leader, stated, "*Our presence in activities organized by other religious communities is a way of showing that we are part of the same neighborhood and share responsibility for maintaining harmony*" (L. Lomi, personal communication, March 22, 2025). Through active participation, Christian communities seek to communicate openness and strengthen social trust across religious boundaries.

Buddhist residents manage public impressions by displaying religious symbols and demonstrating openness to interfaith engagement. During Vesak celebrations, Buddhist families invite neighbors from different religious backgrounds to attend cultural and religious events. Hendrawan, a Buddhist leader, noted, "*We want people to understand that our religious traditions are not barriers but opportunities to learn from one another*" (Hendrawan, personal communication, March 22, 2025). Such practices help transform religious symbols into instruments of dialogue and mutual recognition.

Hindu residents also manage impressions through cooperation and accommodation in shared public activities. Putu Sudarsana explained, "*Whenever community activities overlap with religious events, we prioritize communication and coordination to ensure that everyone feels respected*" (P. Sudarsana, personal communication, March 24, 2025). This approach reflects a commitment to flexibility and collective responsibility, reinforcing the image of Hindu communities as cooperative partners in sustaining social cohesion.

Behavioral adaptation is an important component of impression management. During interfaith dialogues and community meetings, participants consciously avoid exclusive or confrontational language and emphasize common concerns and shared interests. These practices show that impression management in the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*) is more than symbolism; it involves ongoing efforts by various religious groups to construct a public image of tolerance, mutual respect, and interfaith cooperation.

Within the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), differences in perspectives are generally addressed through informal discussions, interfaith meetings, and community deliberations before messages or collective actions are presented in the public sphere. These backstage interactions allow religious leaders and community members to clarify misunderstandings, negotiate differences, and reach mutual agreements. Nevertheless, not all audiences fully accept the narrative

of religious tolerance. Haryani (2019) notes that resistance often emerges from groups that perceive an inclusive collective identity as a threat to their religious boundaries.

Audience and Responses to the Representation of Religious Identity

In this study, religious identity refers to the collective expression of beliefs, values, symbols, rituals, and social practices through which religious groups define themselves and are recognized by others in the public sphere. Religious identity is not merely a matter of personal belief but a socially constructed identity that is negotiated and represented through everyday interaction (Jenkins, 2004). Hogg et al. (2010) describe religious identity as a source of belonging that shapes how individuals and groups understand themselves and relate to others in diverse social settings. In the context of the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), religious identity is represented through public religious practices, participation in interfaith activities, the use of religious symbols, and collective efforts to promote tolerance and social harmony. Therefore, this discussion focuses on theological doctrines and the public representation of religious identity as expressed through social interaction and interfaith engagement.

In social interaction, the audience is a passive observer and an active participant that interprets, evaluates, and responds to social performances, thereby influencing how identities are presented in the public sphere. According to Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the audience is not just a passive observer; they actively interpret, modify, and sometimes intervene in social performances (Goffman, 1995). In the public sphere, audience members from different religious backgrounds interpret representations of religious identity through their own expectations, perceptions, and values.

In the modern era, expectations about how religious identity is portrayed continue to change. Communities are increasingly expected to respect religious values while promoting acceptance, religious tolerance, and social harmony. Rahman points out that audiences have sectarian norms of how religious representation in spaces evolves to signify meaningful diversity within social relations (Rahman, 2018). These expectations are reflected in the use of religious symbols, which convey values of peace; for example, through the organization of interfaith rituals or the use of inclusive linguistic formulations in public interaction.

A positive audience response is projected when the portrayal of religious identity reflects current social norms. In the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), for example, residents express appreciation for practices such as interfaith prayers and joint community service activities. These responses reflect the public recognition of both the outcomes and the broader purpose of interfaith initiatives in fostering a more harmonious society. Asyhabuddin (2020) notes that active community participation in interfaith activities contributes to mutual respect and improved social relationships. Such responses suggest that community members recognize religious diversity as a resource for strengthening the social fabric.

However, not all audience members respond positively. Some may criticize or resist particular religious symbols or practices that they perceive as conflicting with their values. For example, the display of certain religious symbols in the public sphere can be seen by other groups as a form of symbolic dominance, inciting resistance from those groups. Ayuningsih et al. (2019) note that criticism of religious representation in the public sphere often arises when symbols or practices are perceived as insufficiently inclusive.

This criticism can also be seen in the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*), where some members view interfaith activities as overly symbolic and insufficiently focused on concrete change. This criticism reflects the need to harmonize symbolic presentation with practical activities to achieve sustainable social harmony. The interfaith activities can contribute to peaceful social relations by creating opportunities for interaction across religious boundaries. When people pray together, participate in community service, and celebrate religious holidays, there is an opportunity to become familiar with one another and develop mutual understanding and respect (Harjuna, 2019). Interfaith events can create emotional connections and reduce negative stereotypes. This shows that interfaith activities serve as a reminder of the importance of respecting differences and as a strong basis for long-term interfaith relations

Conclusion

This research shows that, in contemporary urban society, as illustrated by the Tolerance Village (*Kampung Toleransi*) of Dian Permai, Bandung, the public representation of religious identity serves to express faith while fostering social cohesion and interfaith harmony. Religious groups use the front stage to show tolerance through interfaith rituals, community service, and symbols of peace and inclusivity. Religious leaders act as mediators and promoters of interfaith understanding, while active community participation strengthens social solidarity across religious boundaries. The findings further reveal that social scripts, expressed through narratives of tolerance and cultural values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), guide interactions among religious groups. Through impression management strategies, including inclusive language, peace symbols, and adaptive social behavior, religious communities construct positive public images that reinforce harmonious coexistence. Audience responses to these representations remain dynamic, ranging from appreciation of genuine efforts toward interfaith harmony to criticism when such representations are perceived as merely symbolic or insufficiently inclusive. Overall, the study shows that sustainable religious tolerance in urban settings requires aligning symbolic representation with ongoing dialogue, collective participation, and practical engagement among diverse religious communities.

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