

A wooden stool is positioned in the lower right foreground. The background is a dark, textured blue wall. A yellow rectangular sign is centered in the middle ground, with two light blue rectangular shapes overlapping its top and bottom edges. The sign contains the text "Saving God's Face on Instagram" in a white, cursive font.

Saving God's Face on Instagram

She tucked the airphone between her ear and *hijab*; in front of her there was a laptop and a cup of coffee. Sitting in a luxurious cafe in the city of Bandung, Dewi looks like a typical Indonesian millennial generation Muslim woman who comes from the upper middle class. With confidence she took a selfie and then was busy updating her status on Instagram: “My honor is that I embrace the true religion and I have kept a pure and holy life.” Dewi is a young businesswoman. She has a famous Muslim clothing line with a very high level of online sales. She is also an Instagram celebrity who has 7 million followers.

The Face of Allah in Indonesia

In Indonesia, honor and shame are not only related to local culture and community, but also very closely related to religious life. Usually the effort to increase honor is not only done for the benefit of a person and their family but also to defend their religion or to “save the face” of their Lord.

These past few years I have watched the efforts social media users make to save God’s face. They try to maintain the honor of the God they worship by what they display on social media and also through their interactions digitally, especially among the young millennial Muslims.

Since the rise of ISIS and increasing radicalism, the face of God and Islam in Indonesia has changed. Previously, Islam in Indonesia was known as a religion full of tolerance, and there were only a few radical Islamic groups. After the influence of Islamic radicals spread massively, I saw a lot of debate on social media about what true Islam is, what the real face of Islam is, and what the real face of Allah is.

In the midst of debate and discussion about the true identity of Islam, the younger generation try to express their faith in different ways. They try to display their Islamic identity on social media and create a new image of millennial Islam that is exclusive, rich, pious, and fashionable.

Honor and Fame

According to research by M. Hatta and the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture at Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University in Jakarta, millennial Muslims in Indonesia prefer to study their religion through social media.⁷⁵ This has contributed to the rise of social-media-savvy preachers who build their esteemed image through social media. Social media is helping to drive a new movement known as *hijrah*,⁷⁶ in which Indonesian Muslim millennials began to build trends in their spiritual life by exhibiting a pure Islamic lifestyle and showing it on social media.

Because of this phenomenon, the expression of honor and shame in the digital generation has also changed. Before the digital era came to Indonesia, the practice of honor and shame was confined to the local community among extended families.⁷⁷ With the advent of social media, the practice of honor and shame has become wider and deeper.

⁷⁵ M. Hatta, "Media Sosial Sebagai Sumber Keberagaman Alternatif Remaja Dalam Fenomena Cyberreligion," *Jurnal Kajian Dakwah Dan Kemasyarakatan* 22, no. 1 (2018): 1–5, <http://doi.org/10.15408/dakwah.v22i1.12044>.

⁷⁶ The word *hijrah* refers to the journey Muhammad took from Mecca to Medina. Philip Kitley, *Television, Nation, and Culture in Indonesia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for Intercultural Studies, 2000), 134.

⁷⁷ The rules of honor and shame in each community differ, even though in general they have the same values in accordance with the customs and religions of each family. For example, in general women who become pregnant out of wedlock will be considered as carrying shame and need to be exiled. In the Islamic community someone who can perform the Hajj pilgrimage will be considered honorable.

In Indonesia, honor, and fame have been closely related. The more famous people follow a certain religion the more famous that religion is, and the honor of the followers of that religion also increased.

The trend of *hijrah* has become very popular as many young celebrities practice it and show it off on social media. From May 24 to 26, 2019, several celebrities hosted a festival in Central Jakarta called Hijrah Fest. The main mission of the festival was to facilitate the development of the hijrah trend and encourage the increasing number of millennial Muslim communities in Indonesia. Carrying the theme 'Unforgettable Hijrah,' the festival showcased various figures and Muslim communities sharing their knowledge, experiences, and stories of their hijrah trips. Since the festival, more and more young millennial celebrities have joined the trend, publicly declaring their intention to *hijrah*, or to leave their less Islamic ways and move toward a more religious way of life.

For example, Ria Ricis, before becoming the most successful female YouTuber in Indonesia and in Asia, was already known on Instagram as a celebrity with millions of followers, posting interesting Islamic content. Now she has 17.7 million followers on Instagram and 18.8 million subscribers of her YouTube channel. Zaskia Sungkar, who promotes *hijrah* trendy fashion, has 19.5 million followers on Instagram.

This change is not only happening among young people but also among Islamic religious leaders. A few years ago when we talked about *imams* (clerics), it was usual to refer to religious leaders who were modest and respected by their followers in their local communities. Today *imam* has a different new category, with many of them now celebrities. Cleric Abdul Somad has more than 10 million followers on YouTube,

Instagram, and Facebook.⁷⁸ Hanan Attaki has 8 million followers on Instagram, and Yusuf Mansur has more than 5 million followers on YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. These celebrity *imams* are not only preachers, but they also often display luxurious lifestyles. Many of their followers are well-known artists who promote their Islamic lifestyles alongside online businesses selling Umrah pilgrimage tours and Islamic-friendly clothing.

Because of the *hijrah* trend, the face of Islam among millennials has changed. Those who used to be called pious were mostly from lower class groups who went to a *pesantren* school to become religious teachers.⁷⁹ Usually they go to school there because their parents cannot afford to send them to regular school. *Pesantren* are a good alternative because the cost of education is very cheap, and they can also study religion. However, since the *hijrah* movement has been heavily promoted by celebrities, piety in Islam has also now become a prestigious trend. They are the generation of millennials that are famous, rich, and very fashionable. The face of God has changed: God is not only in favor of those who are poor and meek but also of those who are rich and famous.

Honor, Wealth, and Hijrah Fashion

Not only fame but wealth and fashion have also become important aspects of honor in the society at least in Indonesia. The same thing happens in the church. From Martin

⁷⁸ Resty Woo Yuniar, "How social media inspired Indonesia's born-again 'hijrah' Muslim millennials," This Week in Asia, April 6, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3004911/how-social-media-inspired-indonesias-born-aqain-hijrah-muslim>.

⁷⁹ Pesantren are Islamic education schools that usually provide dormitories for students because students come from disadvantaged families.

Luther's protest about papal wealth and the selling of indulgences to the recent controversy regarding preachers and their shoes that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*⁸⁰ and *The New York Times*,⁸¹ there has been tension regarding displays of wealth in the church.

Since it first appeared, the @PreachersNSneakers Instagram account has gone viral. This account features celebrity pastors who wear extravagantly priced outfits. We do not fully understand the reasons behind the appearance of celebrity pastors who use clothes and shoes that are very expensive. But if we look at the theology behind the prosperity gospel we can understand that they want to display the face of Christianity or the face of followers of Christ who are fashionable, prestigious, expensive, and honorable. They want to display the rich, generous, loving face of God. After all, God is the creator and the owner of everything in the world. Therefore, as representatives of God in the world it is important to show to the world that they live according to what they believe.

Similar to what is happening within the church, an elite group of young people who can be categorized as "devout bourgeoisie"⁸² has emerged in Islam. These are young people who are successful with their careers and businesses, but on the other hand are also very devout Muslims. Aurélie Biard explained in the Eurasian context that for these young Islamic entrepreneurs, economic success and wealth are rewards from

⁸⁰ Jacob Gallagher, "Sneakerhead Pastors Are Riling Up the Faithful," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sneakerhead-pastors-are-riling-up-the-faithful-11555024688>.

⁸¹ Rick Rojas, "Let He Who Is Without Yeezys Cast the First Stone," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/nyregion/preachers-sneakers-instagram-account.html>.

⁸² Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 67.

God. They get the wealth because they have successfully, and faithfully, carried out Islamic law.⁸³

This young generation of Islam not only enjoys life's luxuries, but also displays them on their social media, especially Instagram. They often exhibit expensive branded items such as shoes, bags, and clothes. They also upload their prestigious socialite activities, and travel to various developed countries, using business-class flights and enjoying halal cuisine offered in world-class restaurants.

Clothing is one of the most important factors in Islam to maintain honor both for men and women.⁸⁴ For this reason, when the *hijrah* movement became popular, the Islamic clothing business also boomed. Lots of new fashion brands have sprung up that offer modern, fashionable, and elegant Islamic dress styles. The price of these clothes is very diverse and can even be very expensive. *Hijab* fashion shows in big cities also offer the concept of *hijrah* for the elite.

Public Honor and Shamming

As it is generally understood, in a society that places a high value on honor and shame, the role of a person is determined by public expectations. Public expectation determines the clothes you wear, the person you marry, the way you speak, behave and relate to others.⁸⁵ With the development of social media, the scope of the public is

⁸³ Aurélie Biard, "Bourgeois' Islam, Prosperity Theology and Ethics in Muslim Eurasia," (Central Asia Program Paper 198, The George Washington University, January 2018), 1, <https://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/12116>.

⁸⁴ Jayson Georges says, "Because the body showcase a person's honor, the food people eat and the clothing they wear indicate social status as well. For example, the book of Esther opens with King Ahasuerus's displaying the splendor of his majesty through lavish dining and royal attire." Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 41.

⁸⁵ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 57.

also growing, the community is becoming wider, and expectations are increasingly high, especially among Muslim millennials who are embracing the way of *hijrah* digitally.

Bilqis, one of Indonesia's Instagram celebrities, comes from a very devout Muslim family. Her father arranged her marriage when she was 18 with an *imam* who had just graduated from an Islamic university in Egypt. After three months she filed for a divorce because she rejected his idea of taking a second wife. Soon after that she received bullying on social media accusing her of being a bad Muslim woman who refused to submit to her husband. Bilqis became very confused: "I am shocked and confused, all my haters are very devout Muslims, why... so much hatred... the more they become pious, the more they are hostile." She had many questions that she could not find answers to. She felt lonely and there was no one could she trust, not even God. Then she made the decision to remove her *hijab* and more and more people bullied her, accusing her of disgracing Islam and Allah. She became a disgrace in the eyes of her followers on Instagram, and their words of hatred and insult make her depressed. Even though her family and the surrounding community finally become very supportive, her followers' opinions on social media were more influential and important for her. Her role as a woman is no longer determined exclusively by the family or community where she lives, but also by the online social media community.

Technological advancement apparently not only makes culture increasingly global, but in fact in some religious communities, technology and social media give

them a platform to become more exclusive and radical.⁸⁶ The motivation of those who attack Bilqis is actually to save the face of God. They do not want Allah or Islam to be insulted by the behavior of a celebrity who is divorced and removes her *hijab*. All the insults and curses that appear on the Bilqis' Instagram account are wrapped in spiritual words and verses of the Qur'an, and the perpetrators are mostly women who wear the *hijab*.

The God Who Lost His Face for The People He Loves

Does the face of God need to be saved? What if God was willing to lose face and honor for the person he loved? Therein lies the gospel message. The God we know in Christ is not a God who wants to preserve his honor and glory, or a God who will punish his people when they fail to maintain the honor of their Lord. But He, Christ, is God who actually gave up his honor to save people who are full of sin, shame and dishonor.

In the crucifixion, Jesus really lost His glory. He died as a criminal. No one wanted to be associated with Him, and even the disciples left and betrayed Him. He was stripped naked on the cross, his arms and legs nailed so that he could not cover his nakedness. Everyone looked at him with contempt and shame, mocking and laughing at him. That is the face of our God, the face of God who bore our sins and shame.

In the midst of great loneliness and sadness, Jesus visited Bilqis through her Christians friends who walked with her in her suffering. In her

⁸⁶ Alava Séraphin, Frau-Meigs Divina, and Hassan Ghayda, *Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), 34–35, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382>.

testimony she said, "When everyone abandoned me, Christ accepted me as I am, he atoned for my sins and saved me. In the eyes of society, I am a shameful woman, but in Christ I am precious. In my old religion I only found judgment, in Christ I found grace and forgiveness. I found caring friends who supported me in my hardships. I don't have to be alone anymore, Christ will always be here with me."