

# THE RESILIENCE OF MUSLIM IDENTITY AND THE AWARENESS OF HALAL PRINCIPLES AMONG INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS (IMWS) IN SOUTH KOREA

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## Abstract

*This article discusses the resilience of Muslim identity and the awareness of halal principles among Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in South Korea. As a developed country with strong economic growth, South Korea has become an important destination for migrating Indonesian Muslim communities. By applying symbolic interaction theory, this research provides insight into understanding the role of religion in social interactions, identity formation, and the interpretation of halal products by IMWs and other social actors in the Korean environment. The research findings on IMWs indicate that there are at least two attitudes among the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in South Korea regarding their Islamic identity as measured by their awareness of halal principles. The first attitude is selective and strictly adheres to the religious values prevalent in Indonesia. The second attitude is a permissive one, where an Indonesian Muslim diaspora makes efforts to adapt their values to the local culture as long as they do not violate clear boundaries in Islamic law.*

**Keywords:** Muslim Identity, Halal Awareness, Indonesian Migrant Workers, South Korea

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mendiskusikan bagaimana keberlanjutan identitas Muslim dan kesadaran akan prinsip-prinsip halal bagi para Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) di Korea Selatan. Sebagai salah satu negara maju dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi yang baik, Korea Selatan menjadi destinasi penting migrasi masyarakat Muslim Indonesia. Dengan menerapkan teori interaksi simbolik, penelitian ini memberikan gambaran bagaimana memahami peran agama dalam interaksi sosial, pembentukan identitas, dan penafsiran produk halal oleh PMI, dan aktor sosial lainnya di lingkungan Korea Selatan. Hasil temuan riset terhadap PMI menunjukkan bahwa setidaknya terdapat dua sikap diaspora Muslim Indonesia di Korea Selatan terkait dengan identitas keislamannya yang diukur dengan kesadaran akan prinsip-prinsip halal. Sikap yang pertama adalah sikap selektif yang benar-benar menjaga sesuai dengan nilai-nilai keagamaan yang berlaku di Indonesia. Adapun sikap yang kedua adalah sikap permisif dimana ada upaya seorang Muslim diaspora Indonesia yang mengadaptasikan nilai-nilai yang dianutnya dengan kebudayaan setempat selagi tidak melanggar batas-batas yang jelas dalam syariat Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** Identitas Muslim, Kesadaran akan Halal, Pekerja Migran Indonesia, Korea Selatan.

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, the mobilization of Indonesian society plays a significant role in the global Islamic discourse. Despite one-third of the world's Muslim population living as minorities far from their homeland (Srimulyani, 2021, p. 669), this does not prevent them from developing and adapting the religious values they uphold. One of the key factors driving the migration of Indonesian Muslims abroad is economic. Many believe working abroad offers distinct attractions, particularly in the informal sector. With relatively high wages despite the demanding work, interest among Indonesians in working overseas has been increasing yearly (Martiany, 2016, p. 289). Recent data from the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI) as of May 2023 shows a rising number of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). From 11,022 people in 2022, the number increased to 25,973 in 2023 (BP2MI, 2023).

Additionally, according to the 2013 International Migrant Report, the number of Indonesian migrant workers reached 295,433 (UNFPA, 2013). These workers are spread across various countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and other regions. Within ASEAN, South Korea is particularly popular among Indonesian migrant workers, with 1,806 or 7% of the total number in South Korea (BP2MI, 2022). According to BP2MI, South Korea ranks fourth after Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia (BP2MI, 2023). The increase in PMI in South Korea is attributed to the Government-to-Government (GtoG) program. Interestingly, compared to other countries, South Korea only accepts PMI in four sectors: operators, manufacturing, fishing, and oil mixing workers. As a result, female PMI is relatively rare and difficult to find.

Indonesian migrant workers, who are predominantly Muslim, face various challenges while working in South Korea. Firstly, South Korea is predominantly Buddhist. According to South Korean demographic data, the population is 51.32 million, with the Muslim population ranking fourth at 0.2%. Therefore, PMI constitutes a minority Muslim community in South Korea. This situation presents challenges for PMI in practicing their religious activities, including halal food, prayers, fasting, and other religious observances. Secondly, South Koreans are known for their late-night eating habits and frequent consumption of pork, chicken (Chi-maek), ramen with pork toppings, and other dishes. This pork mixed with other meats is common in South Korean cuisine (Kwon, Soon-Hee, Chung, Daily, & Park, 2023, p. 29). Adhering to halal principles is essential for Muslims and must be consistently observed (Yulia, 2015, p. 163).

Some previous studies show that Indonesian Muslims' awareness of halal products occupies the highest score. Based on research by Kurniawati and Savitri (2019), Indonesian Muslims have an index of 94.91 in awareness of the halalness of a product. This is supported by a very high religious belief index (96.61), health reasons (89.83) and logo certification (84.71), as well as a good exposure index (78.72). This study also shows that religious beliefs are the most influential factor in halal awareness in Indonesia, followed by health reasons and then logo certification. At the same time, exposure is the least influential factor in halal awareness. Slightly different from research conducted by Septiani and Ridlwan (2020) and Setyaningsih (2019) which show that halal certification is an essential factor in awareness of halal products by Muslim communities in Indonesia.

Research conducted by Nurhayati and Hendar (2019) shows a relationship between personal piety and knowledge of halal products with awareness of halal products and intentions towards halal products. Based on a survey of 238 Muslim consumers in Indonesia over the age of 17 selected to test the regressive relationship of these four constructs, it was found that awareness of halal products is indeed a partial mediation in the relationship between personal piety and knowledge of halal products with intention towards halal products. However, these two studies have not included the element of environmental adaptation in non-Muslim majority areas, which will certainly affect these indices. However, the application of the halal concept in several non-Muslim majority areas in Indonesia still faces many challenges. One of them is the concept of halal, which is not widely understood by the community, so the concept of halal is often associated with efforts to homogenize religious beliefs. One of them is the East Nusa Tenggara region. Research conducted by Novandi, Hutapea, and Aziz (2023, pp. 309-317) shows that

resistance to the halal concept that seeks to be used as one of the tourism standards in East Nusa Tenggara is influenced by factors of incomprehension and religious sentiment.

On the other hand, this research employs a qualitative approach using the symbolic interactionism theory developed by George Herbert Mead and popularized by Herbert Blumer (1969). Blumer's "Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method" emphasizes the importance of meaning and interpretation in social interactions (Blumer, 1986). In the context of halal studies in South Korea, this theory helps understand how individuals, including PMI, interpret and give meaning to halal products and how these meanings are constructed and exchanged in social interactions. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the question of the survival of Muslim identity and awareness of halal principles for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea.

Using this approach, this research explores the extent to which the level of resilience of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea will be aware of halal principles, especially consuming halal products, as their identity as Muslims. This includes interpreting halal labels, understanding religious implications in food choices, and how these interpretations influence purchasing decisions and interactions with others. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism highlights the significance of social processes in meaning-making. Researchers will explore how interactions between PMI, producers, sellers, and non-Muslim consumers shape perceptions of halal products. This includes the exchange of halal labels and certifications, discussions influencing halal product understanding, and its impact on consumer decision-making. Thus, employing symbolic interactionism allows qualitative research to delve deeper into the social construction and meanings associated with halal products in South Korea. The theory aids in comprehending the role of religion in social interactions, identity formation, and the interpretation of halal products by PMI and other social actors in the South Korean context.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This qualitative research uses a sociology of religion approach, which examines the relationship between religion and society (Wibisono, 2020). This approach highlights the influence of religion on people's behaviour (Mudzhah, 2000). In the context of halal products in South Korea, the sociology of religion explains how Islam influences the perception and consumption of products, from the ingredients used and production methods to halal certification.

In South Korea, institutions such as the Seoul-based Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Ansan, as well as various other Muslim communities play a strategic role in providing guidance, certification, and disseminating information on halal products. The KMF, for example, acts as the official halal certification body, issuing halal logos for several products in South Korea. In addition, these organisations also assist in providing halal products for the Muslim community, including for migrant workers working in various sectors in South Korea. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by PMI regarding halal products in a non-Muslim majority country, such as South Korea. Data were obtained through interviews, observations, and document studies.

While in South Korea, researchers conducted interviews with several resource persons, including First, policymakers at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) Seoul, namely the Education and Culture Attaché (Atdikbud) and the Labour Attaché (Atnaker). This interview aims to obtain information about the policy of accepting migrant workers in South Korea, as well as mapping the interests and challenges faced by Indonesians working in South Korea, especially regarding access to halal products. In addition to interviews, researchers also obtained data on migrant workers who work in various sectors, such as manufacturing, fisheries, construction, agriculture, and services.

Second, religious organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Fatayat NU in South Korea play an important role in disseminating Islamic studies and providing guidance to migrant workers on religious issues and halal products. NU and Fatayat NU are also often places for Indonesian migrant workers to gather, exchange information, and obtain halal products and Islamic study books.

Third, the Halal Commission of the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) is the institution responsible for certifying halal products in South Korea. In this interview, the researchers explored information about the halal product certification process, the scope of products that have been certified, and the challenges faced in implementing halal certification in South Korea. KMF has also designed an application, 'Scan Halal,' which makes it easier for migrant workers and other Muslim consumers to learn about the composition of their products.

Fourth, Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) who work in various sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and services in Seoul. These interviews aim to understand the first-hand experiences of migrant workers in finding and consuming halal products in a predominantly non-Muslim environment. All conversations during the interviews were recorded and will be used as the main material in writing the results of this research.

The data used in this research comes from in-depth interviews, field observations, and documents related to halal certification and Muslim community activities in South Korea. During data collection, the researcher managed to interview 15 people consisting of migrant workers from various industrial sectors, policymakers, namely the Indonesian Embassy in the Netherlands, the chairman of the Kore Muslim Federation (KMF), and respondents with a background in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) religious organization in South Korea. We also reviewed documents including information on the KMF halal certification program, halal product information dissemination strategies, and policies and regulations related to migrant workers in South Korea. By using the sociology of religion approach, this research is expected to contribute to the understanding of how migrant workers in South Korea interpret and implement halal principles in their daily lives in the midst of culturally and religiously different environments.

Technically, the research data was collected using interview techniques, document studies, and observation. The researchers started the research process by conducting in-depth interviews with several resource persons, paying special attention to halal products, policies for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea, and developing Muslim organizations. These interviews provided direct insights into the dynamics of the Muslim community, local policy challenges, and opportunities and obstacles in developing halal products in South Korea. This approach helps researchers understand the practical and strategic perspectives of relevant actors. In addition to policymakers, researchers also conducted interviews with 11 Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea. They are quite varied, ranging from manufacturing, agriculture, services, and government workers. These 11 people were selected using the snowballing technique, or a sampling technique that asks respondents to recommend other people to be sampled (Sugiyono, 2017).

After conducting deep interviews, the researchers reviewed documents and literature. This process involved both online and offline data searches that included information on PMI, halal products, and various other supporting documents. Through document review, the researchers gained a comprehensive overview of relevant policies, market trends, and business practices to support the research findings. These sources enriched the research context with historical data and in-depth analyses.

The observation was the final step in the data collection process. The researchers conducted direct observations at several locations, including stalls, shops, and markets offering local and imported products. The main observation was conducted in Itaewon, an area known for the Itaewon Grand Mosque, one of the largest mosques in Seoul. We visited halal shops and stalls run by Muslim communities from various countries such as India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Bangladesh. In addition, we also observed activities at Dongdaemun Market, which provides halal and non-halal products. These observations provided visual and practical data that complemented the interviews and document reviews.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea**

Based on interviews and observations with Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea, as well as policymakers, this study found that PMI often faces various challenges in maintaining their Islamic identity when living in a non-Muslim country like South Korea. Rahman & Nurhayati (2020) stated that the work environment, interaction with local culture, and the availability of religious facilities strongly influence the level of piety of migrant workers in developed countries.

In the context of South Korea, where the Muslim population is a minority, this challenge becomes more complex. This study found two approaches taken by migrant workers in South Korea: firstly, those who choose to be selective in maintaining religious values. Second, those who adopt a permissive stance while maintaining basic Sharia values. However, organisations such as the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) play a significant role in providing moral and religious support to the Muslim community, including Indonesian migrant workers. KMF helps connect Muslims from different countries through religious activities, dissemination of halal product concepts, and provision of worship facilities.

Within the framework of symbolic interaction theory, Goffman (1959) explains that individuals form identities through symbols used in everyday life. For PMI, the existence of a mosque is an important symbol that functions not only as a place of worship but also as a centre of social interaction and strengthening of Islamic identity. Wahyudi (2021) emphasizes that mosques in South Korea often become a collective space for PMI to worship together, learn religion, and build solidarity. In addition, mosques act as centres for distributing information related to halal products, teaching Islamic law, and providing social support for migrant workers facing the challenges of living in a foreign country.

Halal awareness also relies heavily on the support of religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). NU has a branch in South Korea that actively provides religious guidance and assists migrant workers in understanding halal practices in their daily lives. Hasan (2019) highlights the importance of networks of Islamic organizations such as NU in providing practical solutions for halal food, prayer times, and religious activities that strengthen religious awareness. With the role of NU, migrant workers have access to Islamic education that is contextualized and adaptable to life in South Korea.

Furthermore, Muslim community solidarity facilitated by KMF, NU, and mosques plays an essential role in maintaining PMI's level of piety. Prasetyo et al. (2022) explained that the existence of a community that actively helps migrant workers navigate life in non-Muslim countries can strengthen their Islamic identity. This community serves as a means of sharing experiences, overcoming difficulties in worship, and ensuring the fulfilment of religious needs such as halal products. Activities such as Islamic studies and mosque congregational prayers are tangible manifestations of this support.

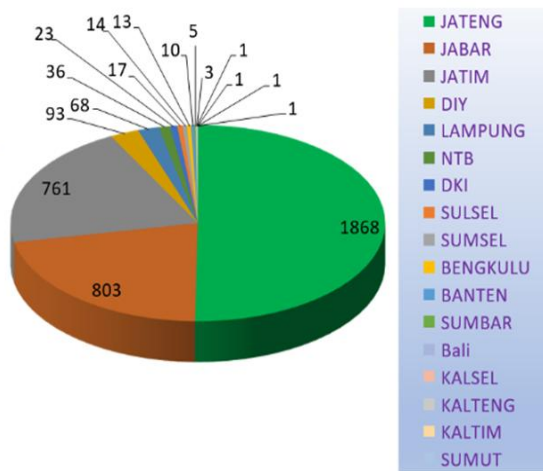
Therefore, factors such as the role of the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF), the presence of mosques, and the involvement of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization contribute significantly to the piety of migrant workers in South Korea. In addition to maintaining halal principles, these factors help migrant workers adapt religiously and socially to different environments. Indonesian migrant workers who have access to this support tend to show a selective attitude toward maintaining Islamic values. In contrast, those with limited access tend to be more permissive in adjusting as long as they do not violate Islamic law. The description and situation of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in South Korea will be explained in the following sections.

Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in South Korea number significantly at least two decades ago. According to data from the Indonesian National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, there are 42,000 PMIs in South Korea. The governments of South Korea and Indonesia have cooperated effectively in the placement and protection of PMIs through the government-to-government (G to G) Employment Permit System (EPS) since 2008. South



Korea has become a favored destination for many PMIs, with annual placement data showing that more than 10,000 PMIs apply yearly. In 2019, 9,946 PMIs were successfully placed; this number decreased to 2,422 in 2020 and 2,290 in 2021.

By the end of 2022, Indonesia had sent over 10,000 PMIs to South Korea. These workers are highly competent, skilled, educated, and motivated. From January 2023 until now, 4,632 PMIs



Source: BNP2TKI

have been deployed to South Korea under the G-to-G program, primarily in fisheries and manufacturing. The target for PMI placement 2023 is 11,545, exceeding the 2022 figures. At the beginning of 2023, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) sent 542 PMIs to South Korea under the Government-to-Government program. These individuals hail from various regions, from Java to Sulawesi, and include many young people striving for a better future. In 2022, the placement target was surpassed, reflecting the high enthusiasm and demand for PMI placements. In 2023, 18,000 Indonesian migrant workers will be sent to South Korea. BP2MI recognizes the continued strong prospects for PMI

placement in South Korea, where Indonesian workers are highly valued for their diligence, neatness, and obedience.

Ansan, a region in South Korea, hosts a significant number of PMIs (Interview with Atnaker KBRI Seoul, Yessi Kaulasari, June 9, 2023). The South Korean government has provided land for these migrant workers to cultivate voluntarily in Ansan, Gyeonggi, South Korea. There, the Indonesian Garden, a gift from the South Korean government, spans 390 square meters in Ansan. Typical Indonesian crops like water spinach and long beans thrive due to the Indonesian community's agricultural efforts. Through the empowerment program *KEBUN KITA* (Indonesian Community Garden in South Korea), the Indonesian Embassy in Seoul has mobilized the Indonesian community, primarily migrant workers in Ansan, to develop community-based agriculture.

Ansan is a city in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea, with a population of around 600,000. South of Seoul, Ansan is known for its cultural diversity and promotes Korean and foreign cultures. It is no surprise that in 2023, Ansan was chosen to host the 50th Anniversary of Indonesia-South Korea Cooperation in the form of the 2023 Indonesian Festival (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). The event attracted approximately 2,000 visitors, including Indonesian workers in Korea, Indonesian students, the Indonesian diaspora, South Korean nationals, and other foreign residents (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

In South Korea, various Indonesian community associations cater to PMIs based on their regions of origin, such as the East Java Association and even associations of specific cities in Indonesia (Yessi Kaulasari, 2023). For instance, the Solo or Central Java Association is among the largest in South Korea due to the significant number of PMIs from these areas. Additionally, there is the KOMPAK (Ansan-Korea Community Association) and 20 other associations (Eko Schoolmedia, n.d.). Throughout 2023, BP2MI has dispatched 9,700 Indonesian migrant workers to various countries, including South Korea (Suryadi, 2023).

## Muslim Migrant Community in South Korea

In South Korea, most Muslim migrant communities originate from Arab and non-Arab regions of the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The Muslim communities from Central and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) predominantly consist of workers, while those from Arab countries are primarily students. Muslims from the Middle East, Egypt, and Sudan include simple laborers, entrepreneurs, and international students,

particularly from the Maghreb region (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, etc.). A significant number of Muslim migrants form their own communities, and some, such as those from Saudi Arabia, achieve a stable life in Korea with the support of their home countries.

The economic levels of these countries vary, and their migration purposes differ accordingly. Non-Arab Muslim communities include those from Turkey and Iran. Turkish Muslim migration began after the 2002 World Cup, involving students and entrepreneurs actively participating in Korean society. The first Turkish Muslim community arrived in the early 1990s as students; after completing their education, they built careers and married Koreans. Turkish Muslims exhibit a higher degree of localization compared to other foreign Muslim communities. Iranian migrants have established a specific village in the Uijeongbu area, most working as simple laborers.

Muslim migrants primarily establish their religious communities around mosques, providing social, cultural, and emotional support to one another, creating social networks centered on religious communities. Both Korean Muslims and migrants grow as a minority Muslim society within a diverse religious culture, forming a unique unity and identity that interacts with South Korean society.

One of the factors contributing to the development of Islam in South Korea is the diaspora of migrant Muslims, which began in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Korean daily newspaper *Hankook Ilbo* reported that the Muslim population began to expand significantly due to the influx of migrant Muslims. In 2001, the Muslim population in Korea reached 130,000, including 30,000 Korean Muslims and the remainder being migrant Muslims. Muslim communities spread across various regions, following their places of work or study, with the largest concentration in the Itaewon district of Seoul (Jackson, 2018). The number of Muslims during the initial period of Islamization, starting in 1957, was 208, which grew to 1,000 by 1963. The presence of foreign Muslims residing in the country and those who changed their nationality to Korean contributed to the increase in the Muslim population (Seo, 2023).

The number of Korean Muslims yearly remains around 35,000, actively participating in religious rituals organized by the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF). The percentage of adherents to each religion has remained relatively stable over the past few years (Korean Statistical Information Service KOSIS, 2023). The diaspora of foreign Muslims from various countries has influenced Koreans' perceptions of Islam, with many Koreans converting to Islam through social interactions with Muslims or through marriage. The growing migrant Muslim population has led to an increase in religious conversion to Islam within Korean society. Additionally, some individuals convert to Islam while studying abroad.

The growth of the indigenous Korean Muslim population is slow but steady, with 1 to 3 conversions occurring every 1-2 months. Islam is categorized as a minority religion, with a percentage not exceeding 0.7% in 2005. Most conversions are due to social interactions with migrant Muslims. Migrant Muslims, particularly from Indonesia, tend to introduce Islam while forming friendships with Koreans, simultaneously promoting their home country (Paradays, 2022, p. 110).

In a country like South Korea, where there are significant challenges in accessing halal food, Muslims have established markets and restaurants to meet their needs within their communities. However, finding halal food outside these areas remains difficult. Although a halal meat shop was established in Seoul in 1983, a single location is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire Muslim community. During a trade meeting between the President of South Korea and the Emir of Dubai from the United Arab Emirates in 2014, the President of South Korea pledged efforts to address the issue of halal food availability. Following this, halal food gained considerable popularity among major companies. When the KMF issued halal certificates to companies, the inability to continuously monitor halal food and provide specific information impacted the reliability of new products. Moreover, Muslims travel to rural areas to perform sacrificial rituals during Eid al-Adha (INSAMER, n.d.).

The central mosque in Seoul receives approximately 300,000 Muslim visitors every Friday, including tourists and short-term workers (3-6 months), especially during Ramadan

(Moonyoung, 2020). The Muslim population in South Korea is expected to continue increasing, influenced by various factors such as the country's economic development, halal industry growth, and tourism targeting the global Muslim market, particularly in Asian countries (Putri & Hartati, 2022).

### **Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) and the Halal Landscape in South Korea**

The Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) is the official Islamic organization in South Korea, endowed with full authority by the South Korean government ("Korea Muslim Federation," n.d.). At its inception, this organization, akin to Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, was named the "Korean Islamic Association." It was established on September 15, 1995, through the proactive efforts of first-generation Korean Muslims Yoon Doo-young and Kim Yu-do, alongside two Turkish Muslims, Abdul Ghofur and Zubair Kochi, who assisted in the early Islamization of South Korea (Azad, 2015, p. 49). The KMF is the sole representative body for Korean and migrant Muslims in South Korea. As a minority group, the KMF seeks efficient and feasible methods for its proselytization activities, adapting to the context of Korean society.

The first president of the KMF was Sabri Suh Jung-kill, with Abdul Aziz Kim serving as secretary. The current grand imam of the central mosque is Abdurrahman Lee Jung-hwa, and the current president of the KMF is Dr. Hussein Kim Dong Eok. The KMF's administrative body comprises native Korean Muslims, but it also includes guest scholars and imams from various Muslim countries with varying lengths of residence contracts. The following sections outline the various divisions within the KMF, each with specific responsibilities to address the needs of Muslims in South Korea (Paradays, 2022).

### **Halal Awareness among Indonesian Migrant Workers in South Korea**

Several informants were successfully interviewed during the research in South Korea. These Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) are employed in various sectors including manufacturing, agriculture, services, and government. Most of them have been working in South Korea for at least two years. The interviews revealed that these workers generally hail from Java. According to BP2MI's data on the origin regions of PMI, East Java ranks first with 27,878 workers, followed by Central Java with 24,802, and West Java with 20,327. Below is the placement data of PMI. The PMI in South Korea who were interviewed include:

**Table 1.**  
PMI in South Korea who were interviewed

<b>No.</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Working Sector</b>
1	AJ	Manufacturing, Ansan for 5 years, failed the test twice
2	IB	Manufacturing, Ansan for 3 years, contract extended
3	TD	Manufacturing, Ansan for 2 years
4	AN	Manufacturing, Seoul for 3 years
5	AG	Foods, 2 years
6	IW	Foods, 2 years
7	DB	Services, Seoul, 2 years
8	LH	Agriculture, Busan 6 Years
9	DI	Services, Seoul 2 years
10	PR	Manufacturing, Ansan 2 years
11	AN	Religious organization Seoul, 7 years

The PMI's awareness of halal (halal awareness) in South Korea reveals two distinct groups or perspectives among those working in the manufacturing, fisheries, construction, agriculture, and services sectors. First, there is a selective group (strict adherence to religious rules). This group tends to cook for themselves, shop at "foreign marts" that offer halal products and bring their food from home. They generally avoid consuming food provided by their employers due to doubts about the ingredients, utensils, cooking methods, and processes used by factory chefs. They also highlight the lack of menus for PMI and local South Korean workers. However, due to the high cost of living in South Korea, they often find themselves "powerless" and must adapt to the available conditions. As stated by *Atnaker* of the Indonesian Embassy in Seoul, South Korea:



"Some PMI are indeed stricter about 'halal-haram'; they usually bring their own food. But generally, PMI eat the food provided by their employers as long as it's not pork." (Interview with YK, *Atnaker* Indonesian Embassy, July 9, 2023).

Second, a group with a permissive attitude is open and allows everything if the food does not contain pork. Generally, these PMI recite "basmallah" before eating. Essentially, if it is not pork, anything can be eaten. At work (factories), food is usually provided. Regardless of the processing methods, these PMI believe that the food is halal if it is not pork. As expressed by Atnaker of the Indonesian Embassy in Seoul, South Korea:

"The awareness here is relatively more permissive. Personally, I am selective; even if the product is chicken, beef, or buffalo meat, I will check first. Here, around 80% of the people I interact with believe that as long as it is not pork, saying 'Bismillah' is enough. For PMI working in factories, as the food is provided by the employers, usually in the canteen, it is fortunate that employers are becoming more 'aware'. Even though the society here is not religious, they understand that Muslims should not eat pork. They are becoming more 'open-minded'. However, food is prepared in large workplaces with about 100 people, and employees can choose their menu." (YK, 2023).

Furthermore, regarding halal food production, the PMI in South Korea is already aware of the halal food production processes, given its Islamic background. They consciously understand the halal food production processes while working and seeking halal food. They benefit from an application developed by the South Korean government. In conjunction with the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in February 2018, the South Korean government targeted 1.2 million Muslim tourists. Consequently, the South Korean government, through MAFRA (Korean Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs), in collaboration with Global Halal, created an application to find prayer facilities and halal food for Muslim tourists visiting South Korea (AH, 2023).

Regarding the ease of obtaining halal food, accessing halal food in areas with Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah and regions inhabited by the Indonesian Muslim Community (KMI) is relatively easy. These communities provide "mini-marts" and other products imported to South Korea. Below are some KMI in South Korea providing access to halal products: Ikmi Seoul, Sirothol Mustaqim in Ansan, Al-Amin in Daegu, Permata in Daegu, Pumita in Busan, KMC in Changwon, Ikmik in Gwangju, Al Hidayah in Gimhae, Al Barokah in Gimhae, Imnida in Daejeon, Imocom in Mokpo, An Noor in Seongnam, Al Huda in Kumi, Al Kautsar in Gyeongju, Miftahul Jannah in Yangsan, Masjid Nurul Hidayah in Angsong, Masjid Al Ikhlas in Uijeongbu, Al-ihsan in Waegwan, Al-Ikhlash in Yongin, Babussalam in Busan, An-Nur in Hoje, At-Taubah in Gwangju, and Baburrahmah in Ulsan (SN, 2023).

Additionally, Foreign Mart (FM) in Seoul, South Korea, provides PMI with access to halal food and products. FM offers various products such as meat, vegetables, spices, snacks, and more. PMI has a high level of trust as the sellers are usually from Arab, Uzbekistan, India, Turkey, and other Muslim countries that have partnered with KMF. Unfortunately, FM is not available in all regions of South Korea, only in certain areas with a significant KMI presence (AN, 2023).

### **Increasing Halal Awareness Factors among Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI)**

Research findings show several factors contribute to the heightened halal awareness among Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in South Korea, encompassing those working in the manufacturing, fishing, construction, agriculture, and service sectors. Firstly, the Role of the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF). The "Halal Committee" within the KMF plays a significant role in enhancing the sense of security for PMI in South Korea. Several products in South Korea have been certified by the KMF, ensuring their halal status.

The second factor regarding halal awareness among Indonesians is the role of the Indonesian Muslim Community (KMI) in South Korea. Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and other Muslim groups provide PMI with access to halal food and other halal products. These communities also offer Islamic guidance and capacity-building training,

including activities like Tahsin al-Qur'an, dawn study sessions, graphic design training, photography, and more. Additionally, they provide Korean language improvement programs, among other activities.

The availability of imported products from Muslim countries also influenced the awareness. Collaboration between South Korea and Muslim countries has led to the import of halal-certified products, which are available in places like Foreign Mart, National Foods Market, and restaurants around Itaewon. These markets offer PMI access to halal consumables such as meat, spices, and other food products (AC, 2023).

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) initiated several programs to engage the Muslim community. One is the "Korean Halal Restaurant Week," an annual event showcasing Muslim-friendly dining options. This program is for the Muslim community in South Korea and all tourists visiting the country. During this event, visitors can experience halal cuisines from various countries, including China, Turkey, and Italy, with participation from over 129 halal-certified restaurants across South Korea. The event lasts for 35 days (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020).

The classification of restaurants based on their level of halal compliance greatly assists the Muslim community in choosing dining establishments that align with their dietary preferences. This classification provides crucial information for Muslims to select appropriate restaurants, ensuring they feel safe and comfortable dining. In South Korea, the public often lacks an understanding of what halal entails, typically associating it solely with pork-free food. This misconception causes some Muslims to hesitate when consuming meat in South Korea. For instance, some Muslims avoid eating beef due to doubts about its halal status. However, with clear halal classifications, the Muslim community can more confidently enjoy meat that meets halal standards.

Therefore, the level of resilience of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) towards awareness of halal principles shows how their Muslim identity survives in a non-Muslim majority society. PMI adaptation is a form of fulfilling spiritual needs and a mechanism for maintaining cultural identity. Through supporting communities such as the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) and the Indonesian Muslim Community (KMI), PMI can build a cultural space that allows them to practice Islamic principles without feeling isolated. Training activities such as Quranic recitation and Islamic studies not only strengthen religious values but also strengthen solidarity among members of the Indonesian Muslim community. This reflects how the Muslim diaspora, including Indonesian migrant workers, can negotiate their identity in a new environment while creating cross-cultural relationships, especially through collaboration with local South Korean communities to promote halal products.

In addition, the presence of Muslim communities such as the Indonesian Muslim Community (KMI) creates a social network that helps migrant workers navigate daily life, including accessing halal products and religious services. This solidarity provides a sense of security for migrant workers, who often face social challenges such as cultural alienation and limited access to halal services. In addition, the participation of migrant workers in programmes organized by KMI and KMF, such as skills training, demonstrates the importance of community-based approaches in improving their quality of life overseas. This support reflects how the presence of the Muslim community becomes a form of social resilience that serves religious needs and supports the social and professional development of its community members.

Therefore, halal awareness among migrant workers reflects their efforts to maintain Islamic principles despite being in a minority context. Practices such as selectively choosing halal-certified restaurants and products show how migrant workers maintain their spiritual integrity. However, challenges such as the local community's lack of understanding of the concept of halal pose ethical dilemmas for migrant workers, for example, in consuming meat whose halal status is unclear. On the other hand, initiatives such as the Korean Halal Restaurant Week show how Islamic values are integrated globally. This not only has a positive impact on the Muslim community in South Korea but also shows the potential of Islam as a universal value that can bridge cultural and religious differences.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussions above, it can be concluded that there are two attitudes among Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) regarding halal awareness: selective and permissive. Selective PMI often bring food from home while working but frequently find themselves powerless against prevailing conditions. Permissive PMI, on the other hand, adheres to the principle that as long as they do not consume food derived from prohibited animals like pork, it is acceptable. At the factories where PMI work, food is provided, but much of it contains pork fat. There is also chicken, beef, and other meats available, but it isn't easy to verify whether the animals were slaughtered according to Islamic law. Although many factories are increasingly aware of the need for halal food for Muslims, PMI remains sceptical. Ultimately, they adopt a permissive stance as long as the food does not contain pork in its physical form.

Furthermore, a significant factor supporting the retention of Indonesian Muslim identity in South Korea is the government's political direction in tourism, which seriously supports halal tourism in the country. This institutional support is also independently carried out by the Muslim community in Korea. So far, the Korean Muslim Federation (KMF) has independently issued halal certificates for popular food products such as Kimchi Ramen, Samyang Ramen, Yukgaejang, Satah Ramen, and Hot Chicken Ramen. Although the existing Islamophobia stigma among the South Korean public somewhat impacts the ease of accessing halal food, it does not prevent the Indonesian Muslim diaspora from maintaining and practicing their beliefs regarding halal principles in Islamic law.

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