Companionship in Insecurity: An Anthropological Perspective on Indonesia-Palestine Relations

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Article Info	Abstract
	This research analyzes Indonesia-Palestine relations through the perspective of anthropology of friendship, highlighting how friendships are built, maintained, and mobilized in conditions of insecurity, political ambiguity, and structural violence. Through the study of tricky trust, careful involvement, collective effervescence, and symbolic interaction theory, this paper argues that this relationship cannot be reduced solely to formal diplomatic relations or incidental political solidarity. Rather, it is a form of collective friendship rooted in the experience of colonialism, the suffering experienced by both nations, and a sustained commitment to global justice. Through qualitative analysis of literature, participatory observation of Palestinian solidarity events in Indonesia, and discussions with Palestinian clerics, this paper shows that friendship functions as an alternative relational mechanism. These interactions maintain a collective orientation and serve as moral support when international law and humanitarian regimes face failure or limitations in the context of unequal conflicts. Thus, the findings of this article expand the scope of the anthropology of friendship, which usually focuses on the interpersonal realm, by showing that bonds of friendship can operate at the collective, community, and even transnational levels, offering a new perspective for understanding the dynamics of solidarity in global politics.

Riset ini menganalisis relasi Indonesia-Palestina melalui perspektif antropologi persahabatan dengan menyoroti bagaimana persahabatan dibangun, dipelihara, dan dimobilisasi dalam kondisi ketidakamanan, ambiguitas politik, dan kekerasan struktural. Melalui studi terkait tricky trust, careful involvement, collective effervescence, serta teori interaksi simbolik, tulisan ini berargumen bahwa relasi ini tidak dapat direduksi semata sebagai hubungan diplomatik formal atau solidaritas politik insidental. Relasi tersebut merupakan bentuk persahabatan kolektif yang berakar pada pengalaman kolonialisme, penderitaan yang dialami kedua bangsa, dan komitmen berkelanjutan terhadap keadilan global. Melalui analisis kualitatif atas kajian pustaka, observasi partisipatif dalam event solidaritas Palestina di Indonesia, serta diskusi dengan ulama Palestina, tulisan ini menunjukkan bahwa persahabatan berfungsi sebagai mekanisme relasional alternatif. Interaksi tersebut mempertahankan orientasi kolektif dan berfungsi sebagai penopang moral ketika hukum internasional dan rezim kemanusiaan menghadapi kegagalan atau keterbatasan dalam konteks konflik yang timpang. Dengan demikian, temuan artikel ini memperluas cakupan antropologi persahabatan yang biasanya berfokus pada ranah interpersonal dengan menunjukkan bahwa ikatan persahabatan dapat beroperasi pada level kolektif, komunitas, dan |

bahkan antarnegara, menawarkan perspektif baru untuk memahami dinamika solidaritas dalam politik global.

A. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Indonesia and Palestine has often been understood within the framework of political diplomacy and state support for the struggle for independence. Historically, Indonesia has consistently expressed its support for Palestine since the official recognition of the State of Palestine in 1988, the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1989, and active engagement in international forums such as the UN, OIC, and the Non-Aligned Movement. In international relations studies, these facts are often read as expressions of a normative foreign policy and the state's commitment to issues of global justice.

However, a reading focused solely on the state and formal institutions tends to oversimplify the complexity of the Indonesia-Palestine relation. This relation is not produced solely through diplomatic policies, but also through historical memory, emotional affiliation, civil society solidarity practices, and collective rituals reproduced across generations. Legal studies also show that Indonesia's foreign policy is based on a strong ideological foundation. The explanatory notes on Law No. 37 of 1999 concerning Foreign Relations, Article 2, clearly state: "The implementation of the foreign policy of the Republic of Indonesia must be a reflection of the nation's ideology. Pancasila as the ideology of the Indonesian nation is the ideological foundation that influences and inspires the foreign policy of the Republic of Indonesia" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022). More fundamentally, the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution affirms that "colonialism must be abolished in the world because it is not in accordance with humanity and justice," a principle that forms the constitutional basis for Indonesia to support the independence struggles of oppressed nations, including Palestine. In this context, the Indonesia-Palestine relation is more aptly understood as a living and dynamic social relation, not merely a contract between states.

The study of the anthropology of friendship offers an alternative analytical framework for reading such a relation. Bell and Coleman (2011) assert that friendship is a social relation embedded in history, power structures, and collective practices, often functioning as a form of non-biological kinship (fictive kinship). This perspective allows friendship to be understood as a collective and political relation without being

reduced to merely private or emotional bonds. Based on this framework, this article raises the main question: how is the Indonesia-Palestine friendship built, maintained, and mobilized under conditions of prolonged occupation, structural violence, and global political asymmetry? By answering this question, this article contributes to the study of Indonesia-Palestine while expanding the anthropology of friendship into the realm of global politics and protracted conflict.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative-interpretative approach rooted in the tradition of social anthropology. The main focus of the research is friendship as a social construction that is historical, situational, and collectively meaningful. This approach was chosen because the research objective is not to quantitatively measure public attitudes or policy effectiveness, but to understand how the Indonesia-Palestine relation is produced and maintained as a friendship within the context of global insecurity and inequality.

Conceptually, this research is grounded in the study of the anthropology of friendship (Bell and Coleman 2011; Beer and Gardner 2015; Diphoorn and van Roekel 2019), the concept of tricky trust which explains the ambiguity of trust in unstable situations (Meinert 2015), and the idea of careful involvement in conflict relations (Diphoorn and van Roekel 2019). This framework is enriched by symbolic interaction theory (Blumer 1969; Ahmadi 2005), which emphasizes that the meaning of social relations is formed through an ongoing process of interpretation, as well as studies on relations of care that transcend family and intimate community boundaries (Roseneil and Budgen 2004).

Empirically, data was obtained through a combination of document analysis and the researcher's direct involvement in social spaces of Palestine solidarity in Indonesia. Data sources include historical relationship between Indonesia-Palestine, speeches and public statements by state actors, as well as civil society and religious institution solidarity practices. I was attended pro-Palestine event as a form of limited participatory observation to understand the emotional, symbolic, and collective ritual expressions of public solidarity. Furthermore, the research was enriched through reflective discussions with Palestinian citizens visiting or residing in Indonesia. All data was treated as social text and analyzed thematically-interpretatively with

reference to the concepts of tricky trust, careful involvement, and collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912; Paine 1969).

This research data was collected through informal discussions with three Palestinian scholars who attended the "Safari Ramadhan: Healing the Wounds of Palestine" program held from 2nd to 24th March 2025. In addition to the discussions, the author also participated immersively in the program by serving as a translator for the Palestinian scholars' lectures at various mosques in Jakarta and its surrounding areas. The program was a collaborative effort between the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) and the National Board of Zakat of the Republic of Indonesia (BAZNAS RI).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Friendship in Insecurity and Tricky Trust

In my observation notes, I wrote: "On March 25, 2025, I attended the kick-off of the 'Healing the Wounds of Palestine' [Membasuh Luka Palestina] program, which was also attended by scholars from Palestine who will preach about the conditions in Palestine at various points across six provinces in Indonesia: North Sumatra, Riau, Jakarta, Banten, Central Java, and West Java. They are Sheikh Mahmud Shiyam, Sheikh Ahmad Hussain, Sheikh Umar Abdullah, Sheikh Hasan Abu Thoha, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Mudallal, and Sheikh Ali Issa Mousa. This program is inseparable from the insecurity experienced by the Palestinian people due to Israeli occupation. The Indonesian nation considers it important to assist their fellow believers as *ukhuwah Islamiyah* [Islamic brotherhood] relationship." (fieldnotes, March 25, 2025)

In the context of structural insecurity, friendship is rarely built on full trust. Meinert (2015) refers to this condition as tricky trust, a situation where trust is continuously sought but never fully stable. In conflict situations, friendship operates on a spectrum between trust and vigilance, giving rise to a form of careful involvement (Diphoorn and van Roekel 2019). The Indonesia-Palestine relation reflects this condition. Palestine lives under prolonged occupation and a humanitarian crisis, while Indonesia operates within an international order that is often selective in upholding justice. In this situation, friendship does not rely on a sense of security or strategic reciprocal calculation, but rather on consistency of stance and long-term orientation. Friendship in this context is better understood as a social process that is continuously

renewed through repeated actions and consistent public positioning. Tricky trust does not signify an absence of trust, but rather a reflective and risk-aware form of trust, which actually allows the relation to endure under prolonged uncertainty.

The statement by Foreign Minister Retno L.P. Marsudi in 2021 is a manifestation of this consistency: "...support for the Palestinian nation to achieve its independence will continue" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022). This statement is not merely a diplomatic promise, but a reinforcement of tricky trust, an affirmation that despite an often unfavorable international political reality, Indonesia chooses to maintain its commitment. This commitment was even tested in increasingly difficult situations, such as the normalization of relations (Abraham Accords) between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020. This agreement, hailed as a "change in the course of history" by its supporters, actually deepened Palestinian insecurity because it did not resolve the root conflict and could even delay a two-state solution. Responding to this, Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim (Chairman of the MUI for foreign relations and international cooperation, 2020-2025) firmly stated: "We must show empathy towards Palestine... Cooperation also does not have to be with Israel" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022). This statement reflects Indonesia's careful involvement—a cautious and critical stance towards geopolitical dynamics that can erode solidarity.

This consistency continues, as seen from the statement by Foreign Minister Sugiono at the International Court of Justice (30/4/2025) affirming that Indonesia "always has and always will stand with the Palestinian people" (detik.com 2025). Furthermore, this commitment was concretized in the form of the proposal to send peacekeeping troops to Gaza by President Prabowo Subianto, a step that shows a long-term orientation and readiness to take risks to operationalize friendship in the most real field of insecurity (see Syukur 2025).

2. Shared History and Shared Emotion

"At one of the mosques in a Muhammadiyah boarding school *(pesantren)* in Bogor Regency, I translated a sermon by Sheikh Hasan Abu Thoha. After discussing the hardships faced by the Palestinian people due to the Israeli war, he also mentioned that the Indonesian people have long defended Palestine. As a nation that experienced colonization in the past, Indonesia has deep concern for them. In fact, there is a pulpit at Al-Aqsa Mosque donated by an Indonesian. In Arabic, he spoke about the duty of

every Muslim to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque as a universal obligation for all Muslims, wherever they may be." (fieldnotes, March 27, 2024)

The sustainability of friendship greatly depends on shared history and common historical experience (Young and Willmott 1961; Whyte 1993). Indonesia and Palestine have parallel experiences as nations that underwent colonialism and struggled for independence. However, beyond mere parallelism, this relation is built from concrete and reciprocal acts of solidarity from the very beginning. Palestinian support for Indonesia came at the most crucial moment: when Indonesia was fighting for its independence and recognition. On September 6, 1944, even before the proclamation, Grand Mufti of Palestine Sheikh Muhammad Amin al-Husaini publicly declared support for Indonesia's independence struggle via radio broadcast. This support was followed by concrete action, such as financial aid from wealthy Palestinian merchant Muhammad Ali Taher to support the economic struggle of Indonesia. After Indonesia's independence, lobbying and support from the Palestinian diaspora network, especially through the Muslim Brotherhood group, helped Indonesia gain sovereign recognition from Egypt in 1947. Historian M. Zein Hassan notes that recognition from Egypt and Palestine was the "fruit of Haji Agus Salim's diplomacy" through that network. In return, Indonesia recognized Palestine as a state in 1988—long before the recent wave of international recognition—and established diplomatic relations a year later (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022). This cycle of mutual support formed a strong emotional foundation.

This shared history gives rise to shared emotion and instrumental aspects (Rawlins 1992). Carrier (1999) emphasizes the role of sentiment in the formation of social relations, while Killick and Desai (2010) show that the instrumental dimension need not be material. In the Indonesia-Palestine relation, sentiment and instrumental dimensions intertwine as a collective ethical orientation, not as an exchange of benefits. Indonesia's recognition of Palestine and its refusal to establish diplomatic relations with Israel since the Sukarno era constitute a form of "reciprocity" that has become institutionalized as a state principle. As Bung Karno said in 1962: "...As long as the independence of the Palestinian nation has not been returned to the Palestinian people, for that long the Indonesian nation stands against Israeli colonialism" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022). This principle was then passed down across generations and became collective memory.

Historical memory functions as moral memory that binds the relation across time and generations. Within the framework of the anthropology of friendship, this memory allows the relation to endure even as actors and geopolitical configurations continuously change. The Asian-African Conference (KAA) of 1955 became a monument to this shared memory, where Sukarno invited Palestinian representatives and called for anti-colonialism, while refusing Israel's participation. Indonesian Ambassador to the UN, Dian Triansyah Djani, in 2017 reminded of this memory: "Palestinian independence is our promise since the 1955 Asian-African Conference. It is the only participating country in the KAA that is not yet independent... It is our moral responsibility to fight for Palestine" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022).

3. Collective Effervescence and Collective Solidarity

The Indonesian public's response to Palestine can be read as collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912), a collective emotional experience arising from participation in shared rituals. Pro-Palestine demonstrations, joint prayers, and fundraising activities carried out by Islamic mass organizations function as public rituals that renew collective commitment.

During an observation at the headquarter of Majelis Ulama Indonesia, I noted as following: "The Indonesian Council of Ulama invited various Islamic mass organizations to attend a discussion on solidarity with Palestine at the Buya Hamka Hall. I also saw Dr. Ahed Abul Atta, a Palestinian activist originally from Palestine, mingling with other participants. He was wearing a black suit and a Palestinian scarf. One important aspect of the meeting was the effort to 'urge the international community to increase sustained pressure through political, diplomatic, media, and grassroots actions so that Israel meets the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people.' The forum also agreed on the urgency that political, media, and public support for the Palestinian resistance is crucial as a protective umbrella for the human rights and sovereignty of the Palestinian nation." (observation, October 7, 2025)

This solidarity is institutionalized through the role of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), which is consistently involved in humanitarian aid and the production of religious discourse framing Palestine as a universal justice issue. Even through Fatwa No. 83 of 2023, MUI stated that supporting the Palestinian independence struggle against Israeli aggression is obligatory (mui.or.id 2023). This transforms solidarity from mere spontaneous action into an institutionalized religious moral obligation.

Figures such as Buya Hamka (first Chairman of MUI, 1975-1981) and KH. Muhyiddin Junaidi (Vice Chairman of MUI, 2020) have long voiced this, connecting the Palestine issue with Islamic and Indonesian identity.

Furthermore, the concept of "tangan di atas" (helping hand/giver) often attributed to Indonesian diplomacy is a manifestation of this collective solidarity. It is carried out not only by the state but also by civil society. The construction of the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza (which was besieged and attacked in 2023) is a clear example of brave careful involvement, where humanitarian aid is sent directly into the heart of the conflict. In Blumer's symbolic interaction theory, symbols such as "hospital", "humanitarian aid", and "joint prayer" are media through which the meaning of this collective friendship is continuously produced and reinforced. Through these solidarity rituals, Indonesia's social identity as an anti-colonial and helpful nation is reproduced en masse.

4. Friendship and the Limitations of International Law

The Gaza crisis (since October 2023), which has killed tens of thousands of civilians and destroyed infrastructure, reveals the limitations of international law in protecting civilians. In this situation, friendship functions as an alternative relational framework (Paine 1969). When international law is ignored by powerful states, and mechanisms like the veto power in the UN Security Council (often used by the US to protect Israel) obstruct justice, then networks of friendship between nations become a significant substitute.

At the state level, the Indonesia-Palestine friendship is expressed through a consistent political commitment to a two-state solution, as always affirmed in various forums. This commitment is also realized in institutionalized economic cooperation, such as Presidential Regulation Number 34 of 2018. At the global community level, Indonesia actively lobbies for support in the UN General Assembly, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the OIC to recognize Palestinian rights, as a form of total diplomacy that transcends official channels.

The greatest challenge to this friendship is the changing geopolitical reality, such as Arab-Israeli normalization (Abraham Accords) which erodes the traditional united Arab front supporting Palestine. However, precisely in this context, the Indonesia-Palestine friendship finds its relevance as a constant voice refusing to ignore the occupation issue. The statement by Vice Chairman of MUI KH. Muhyiddin Junaidi

calling for Arab states that normalized relations to be expelled from the OIC shows how this friendship maintains a principled position amid geopolitical pragmatism (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022).

Following Blumer (1969), the meaning of friendship is produced through symbolic interaction and can only be understood within a specific historical context. In the Indonesia-Palestine relation, friendship also functions as a medium for reflecting Indonesia's collective identity in the global order. Support for Palestine is how Indonesia defines itself on the world stage: as a nation that is independent, sovereign, anti-colonial, and consistent in principle. As Bung Karno's speech at the UN in 1960 quoted in the data states, support for the sovereignty of other nations is something "eternal... as hard and as brilliant as a gem" (Saptomo, Widarso, and Syukur 2022).

Discussion

The findings of this article affirm that the Indonesia-Palestine relation can be understood as a collective transboundary friendship within the framework of the anthropology of friendship. Unlike friendship studies that focus on interpersonal relations, this article shows that friendship can operate at the state and societal level without losing its relational character (Bell and Coleman 2011).

This analysis reveals the complexity of the relation. It is built on a foundation of "tricky trust"—trust born and nurtured not from certainty, but from consistent action in extreme uncertainty. This foundation is strengthened by shared history and emotion that is highly personal and reciprocal, which has transformed into collective memory and national political ethics. Subsequently, this bond is continuously reproduced through "collective effervescence" in public solidarity rituals, institutionalized by religious and social authorities. Finally, this collective friendship functions as a robust alternative mechanism in facing the failures and limitations of the inequitable international legal regime.

These findings enrich the debate on the affective and instrumental aspects of friendship. In line with Carrier (1999) and Killick and Desai (2010), friendship can be institutionalized without being reduced to a merely transactional relation. Indonesia's support is instrumental (political, diplomatic, humanitarian), but its motivation and maintenance are deeply affective and value-laden. Furthermore, in line with Rawlins (1992) and Roseneil and Budgen (2004), collective friendship can endure through continuity of orientation, historical memory, and practices of care at a distance.

This article also demonstrates the relevance of symbolic interaction theory in the analysis of political anthropology. Symbols such as "1945", "KAA 1955", "Indonesian Hospital", "obligatory fatwa", and even "sending peacekeeping troops" are units of meaning that, through repeated interpretation in public discourse, shape and reinforce the narrative of this collective friendship. Through this symbolic interaction, Indonesia's identity as the "true friend of Palestine" is continuously maintained.

D. CONCLUSION

The Indonesia-Palestine relation is a form of collective friendship built in insecurity (tricky trust), maintained through shared history that is reciprocal and emotional, and reproduced through the practices of civil society solidarity, religious institutions, and consistent state commitment (collective effervescence).

From the perspective of the anthropology of friendship, this relation shows that friendship can become a robust socio-political mechanism for maintaining collective orientation and moral principles amidst the limitations, inequalities, and failures of the global order. This friendship is not a static relation, but a dynamic process that is continuously tested and renewed—from Palestinian support for Indonesian independence, Indonesian advocacy in international forums, to the contemporary idea of sending peacekeeping troops to Gaza.

The limitation of this research lies in the relatively short duration of the study. However, this paper has attempted to examine the Indonesia-Palestine relationship within the framework of the anthropology of friendship. Therefore, this study suggests conducting research with a longer duration to obtain more comprehensive data that can enrich various analyses of the relationship between the two nations.

Finally, this article expands the anthropology of friendship from the interpersonal realm towards the analysis of relations across nations, communities, and history. It offers a rich lens for understanding how social and moral bonds can transcend into political force in international relations, especially for nations struggling against structural injustice.

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