

Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to Pacific Island Countries

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Within the discourse of aid in the global South, where a developing country provides foreign aid to another developing country, emerged discussions on the extent to which the symbolic claims presented by the donor to the public (e.g. the aid as being driven by the donor's sense of mutual respect, horizontality, inclusivity, and solidarity with the recipient) reflect the real motivations behind the aid. Using the case study of Indonesia's aid to Pacific Island countries (PIC), this research assesses the relations between symbolic claims and critical aid drivers. This research uses a qualitative method and secondary data, which rely mainly on official statements and publications of the Indonesian government. This research found that whilst symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid narratives could strengthen the sense of Southern solidarity and identity with PIC – which is in line with the spirit of South-South empowerment that Indonesia has been championing since the Asia-Africa Conference in 1955, these claims are used mainly to obscure Indonesia's internal political-security motive. The symbolic claims mask the critical political driver of the aid, which is closely related to Indonesia's interest in maintaining its sovereignty over West Papua province and influencing the stance of PIC about this issue.

Keywords: *aid; Global South; symbolic claims; solidarity; Indonesia-PIC relations*

Introduction

As a developing country, Indonesia has been among the significant foreign aid recipients in the world. In 2019, for example, Indonesia was Australia's second largest foreign aid recipient, with approximately USD 4 billion (Massola & Rompies, 2019). In October 2019, just a few months after the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) conveyed a petition to

the United Nations Human Rights Chief demanding severe attention given to the issue of West Papua's independence from Indonesia, the Indonesian government for the first time launched the Indonesian AID — a government body tasked to manage Indonesia's endowment fund and distribute it as an aid to other developing countries (Indonesian MoFA, 2019). From 2020 to 2023, two PIC¹, namely Fiji and Palau, are among the

¹ PIC spread across three sub-regions, namely Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Melanesia is located on the eastern side of Indonesia and consists of countries such as Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Solomon Island and Papua New Guinea. Micronesia comprises small countries: Nauru, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, the Marianas, and the Caroline Islands. Polynesia is located in the east-central region of Oceania. It consists of countries such as the Hawaiian Islands, Easter Island, Cook Islands, Samoan Islands, Marquesas Islands, Niue Island, and

top five largest recipients of aid distributed by Indonesian AID. The amount of aid delivered to PIC since 2019 amounted to USD 37 million, or around 30 per cent of the total aid distributed by Indonesian AID to developing countries in the world in this period (Indonesian AID, 2023).

The significant amount of aid given by Indonesia to the PIC amidst the apparent support by some of them at the UN forums to investigate the West Papuan independence issue prompted questions among some experts on whether the aid was part of Indonesia's more extensive diplomatic strategy to strengthen relations with PIC and influence their view on the West Papua issue (Darmawan, 2022). The Indonesian government, however, strongly emphasized that Indonesia's aid to the PIC, just as its aid to other developing countries in the world (e.g. aid to Palestine or Myanmar), is driven by a strong sense of equality, solidarity, and mutual respect with other countries in the global South. Aid to PIC is also provided to assist these countries in facing common global challenges, such as climate change (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020).

In 2012, Mawdsley argued that aid in South-South Cooperation (SSC) is mainly driven by the donor's national interests, which supersede its intention to jointly address common challenges or lighten the development burdens of other developing countries. These interests, however, are obscured under the symbolic claims that a Southern donor often presents to the world (e.g., the

aid is driven by a sense of solidarity, equality, shared identity and challenges with other countries in the global South). These claims mask the real motivation behind the aid but are presented to the public to create a positive image of the donor (Mawdsley, 2012). Contrary to Mawdsley's argument, Ndlovu and Tiara (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Tafira, 2018), reflecting on aid from Brazil to countries in Africa, argued that foreign aid in SSC is strongly driven by a spirit of solidarity and shared goal among donor and recipient to shift centres of economic and political power from the global North to the global South.

The contention over the state of symbolic claims in aid in the global South and the extent to which it reflects the critical drivers of the aid prompted the author to conduct this research. The main research question this research attempts to answer is "What is the relation between symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC and the real motivation for the aid?". The author will attempt to identify symbolic claims used by Indonesia and interpret their functionality concerning possible key drivers of aid, especially West Papua's independence issue. This research will reveal which key drivers are unfolded or strengthened through the symbolic claims and which are obscured.

While previous research has assessed symbolic narratives in aid in the global South, they focus mainly on aid from a BRICS member to countries in Africa. Research by Cabral & Shankland (2013), for example, evaluates how the narrative of aid as being

Tonga (Foster & West, 2023).

driven by the sense of “solidarity” in Brazil’s aid to Mozambique is used to mask the real motivation of the aid, which is to improve Brazil’s trade relations with Mozambique, especially in the agricultural sector. The research does not incorporate political, security or social factors as factors that could be masked under the symbolic narratives. Another research by Doman and Pryke (2017) assesses the development of aid to PIC in the last two decades, with a focus on aid from traditional global North donors, such as Australia and New Zealand, thus overlooking the recent development of aid from non-traditional donors (especially non-BRICS member such as Indonesia) to the Pacific. Research on Indonesia’s aid to PIC, such as the one by Wardhani and Dugis (2020), focuses on ethnic similarities as a possible cultural driver behind Indonesia’s aid to PIC, thus absent in evaluating the symbolic dimensions of the aid and its relations to possible political-security or economic drivers of the aid. This research, therefore, will fill the gap by focusing on symbolic claims in Indonesia’s aid to PIC, especially after the establishment of Indonesian AID, and its relations with the real motivation of the aid.

This paper will use a conceptual framework built upon previous literature on symbolic claims in aid in the global South, including Mawdsley (2012) and critical drivers of aid and Lancaster (Lancaster, 2007). The methodology used in this research is qualitative, with secondary data collection. The paper will outline findings related to symbolic claims in Indonesia’s aid to PIC and possible real motivations behind the aid before

analyzing the relationship between the two and how this research can contribute to the broader literature on symbolic and discursive dimensions of aid in the global South.

Literature Review

Symbolic Claims in Aid in the Global South

Previous literature discusses narratives used by donors to aid developing countries. For example, Nye (2005, p.20) argued that developed nations used symbolic gestures such as portraying the aid as being driven by a sense of altruism to enhance its reputation on the global stage. Milner (1999), on the other hand, looked at how symbolic claims are influenced by domestic politics. She highlighted how claims such as aid driven by developed countries’ concern towards human rights in recipient countries are shaped by their internal politics, which prioritises the promotion of democracy.

While Nye (2004) and Milner’s (1998) arguments on symbolic gestures and claims focus primarily on aid from a developed country to a developing country, Mawdsley (2012) looked at the use of symbolic claims in the global South, where a developing country provides aid to another developing country. She viewed symbolic claims as a set of narratives a Southern donor uses to describe what drives its aid to the recipient. The claims often used by the Southern donor include aid driven by solidarity, equality, mutual interest, shared experience, and a spirit of win-win cooperation. The donor reiterates the claims in its official statements, publications and documents, which are disseminated to the public. For this writing, the

author will use the concept and definition of symbolic claims presented by Mawdsley as it suits the nature of Indonesia's aid to PIC (i.e. aid from a Southern donor to a Southern country), and it focuses on how narratives are deployed to create certain impressions of the donor.

Mawdsley (2012) argued that symbolic claims in aid in the global South could strengthen the donor and recipient's "Southern" identity. The symbolic claims can accentuate the sense of shared experience among the donor and recipient as fellow "victims" of repression by the West during the colonialism era and the current unfair international system, thus deepening the sense of Southern solidarity among the two. In some cases, such as in aid from China to African countries, the symbolic claim of "mutual benefit" is used to openly reflect the donor's expectations for the aid to positively impact its economic and trade relations with the recipient (Ibid.).

However, symbolic claims can also obscure donors' national interests. According to Mawdsley (2012), narratives of the aid as being driven by a sense of equality, mutual respect and shared identity with the recipient are often promoted to hide the donor's real political-economic motives behind the aid. The symbolic claims can also mask the development gap between the donor and recipient despite both countries' status as developing countries. In the case of China's aid to countries in Africa, for example, the claims blur the reality of an imbalance of power between donor and recipient and the donor's "superior" position relative to the recipient

(Ibid.). According to Mawdsley (2012), symbolic claims in aid in the global South often hide the donor's intention to augment a sense of "national virility" and to restore national honour through its status as a "donor".

In addition to Mawdsley (2012), other literature has looked at relations between symbolic narratives and donor's national interests. For instance, Campbell (1992, p.61) examines how language in foreign policy discourse represents a donor's national identity. He highlighted how the United States often uses narratives such as masculinity and moral righteousness to justify its intervention in the Middle East. Hansen (2006, p.32) went further by looking at the Bosnian War, where the portrayal of victims through images and narratives influenced the international community to intervene and assist the victims of the conflict. Bleiker (2000), corresponding to Hansen (2006), underscored how narratives could be used to counter existing discourse and dominant ideologies, such as in the case of SSC, where narratives are used to embolden the "Southern" identity and sense of self-empowerment.

Within the broader discourse of symbolism in International Relations (IR) itself, some literature has discussed how symbolic claims shape diplomacy and the extent to which emphasis on the global South creates a distinct view of symbolism in IR. Leheny (1999, p.248), observing the role of historical narratives in Japan's diplomacy pre-World War II, argued that symbols and gestures could be used to shape perceptions of its legitimacy and authority on the global stage. Faizullaev (2013), in accord with Leheny

(1999), argued that symbolism could be strategically deployed to cultivate a developing country's relations, soft power, and geopolitical interests. Linklater (2013, p.72) dives deeper into the dynamics of symbolism in SSC and highlights how narratives are presented to promote an alternative vision of diplomacy that prioritizes dialogue, cooperation and mutual recognition instead of superiority and competition, which are sometimes found in North-South Cooperation (NSC).

Drivers of aid

Whilst it is essential to identify the symbolic claims and their discursive meaning in aid in the global South, it is equally important to analyze the possible vital drivers of the aid in order to assess the discrepancy between claims that the donor promotes to the public and the actual real motivations behind the aid. There has been previous research on possible drivers behind an aid. For example, research by Alesina and Dollar (2000) found that political interests become the primary factor that encourages a country to give aid. From 1970 to 1994, for example, aid by Japan to developing countries in the world was mainly given to countries that supported Japan's stance at UN forums. Another example was aid given by France in the 1990s, mainly distributed to France's former colonies in the global South to maintain its political influence on these countries (Ibid.). Riddel (2014), however, argued that in the 2000s, more countries started to give aid due to economic motivation. In 2006, for example, over 60 per cent of bilateral aid

from developed countries to landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) was tied to aid, which means the aid must be spent on goods or services provided by the donor countries (Ibid.).

While Alesina and Dollar (2000), as well as Riddel's (2014) research, provide ideas of possible key drivers behind aid, it does not look into more profound and more fundamental drivers of aid that could stem from domestic political arrangements of the donor countries. Lancaster (2007) argued that a decision to give aid results from interactions of ideas and values of the elites and the broader public in a donor country. Aid from China to countries in the East Asia region, for example, is strongly driven by the public perception and belief that the country needs to improve its leadership performance and increase its presence in the region (Ibid.).

Besides ideas, three other domestic political factors are influential to a country's decision to give aid, according to Lancaster (2007), namely opinions of the parliament, views of interest groups at the grassroots level in a donor country, and the role of aid agencies in a donor country (Lancaster, 2007). This research, therefore, will use Lancaster's (2007) concept of domestic political factors that shape aid, namely ideas (widely shared values and worldviews among elites and the public in a donor country), institutions (the way the governance structure, electoral rules, and parliaments' opinion influence the decision to give aid), interests (aspirations of private organizations and business communities), and agency (influence of a country's aid agency in decision-making process related to

aid). The author will attempt to assess which of these four factors is the most influential in Indonesia's aid to the PIC and its relations to symbolic claims used by Indonesia.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with secondary data collection. Data used in this research are derived mainly from official Indonesian government documents and statements. Additional data is taken from grey literature (including news and commentaries). This research will first identify symbolic claims used in Indonesia's aid to the PIC before analyzing possible critical drivers behind the aid. The author will then assess the relations between the former and the latter to find out which motive(s) the Indonesian government tries to reveal through the symbolic claims and which is obscured. This research tends towards discourse analysis, focusing on specific texts or statements and analyzing their implicit and hidden meanings. This research intends to contribute to the broader literature of aid narratives in the global South and its functionality to donor countries' real motivation behind aid.

Discussion

Indonesia's foreign aid engagement

Indonesia has been an aid recipient since its independence in 1945. From 1945 to 1998, Indonesia mostly received aid from Western countries, including the United States, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Indonesian MoFA, 2019). With the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, however, Indonesia under-

went major political-economic reform, and its foreign policy priority evolved to demand a more active role on the global stage. Indonesia then started to become a donor to other Southeast Asian countries. Since the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2010, Indonesia increasingly emphasized SSC as one of the key pillars of its foreign aid engagement, mainly through its role as a "donor" (Ibid.).

Previous research on Indonesia's aid and SSC, such as the one by Prabowo (2020), argued that Indonesia's commitment to Southern solidarity mainly shapes its engagement in a South-South and Triangular Cooperation. This argument corresponds with Engel (2017), who highlighted Indonesia's commitment to Southern solidarity and desire to assert itself as a prominent voice among developing nations and as a driver for its involvement in SSC. Winanti and Alvian (2019) dived deeper into the interplay between normative and material interests in Indonesia's approach to SSC. They argued that material interests (i.e. aid to pave the way for market access, investment opportunity and resource exchanges) and geopolitical interests (i.e. enhance presence in the global and regional arena) could also shape Indonesia's decision to provide aid.

Since its establishment in 2019 as a body that managed Indonesia's endowment fund and distributed it as an aid to other developing countries, Indonesian AID has disbursed over USD 37 million to PIC, making it the most significant aid recipient so far, followed by Nigeria (at USD 30 million) and India (at USD 7,83 million) (Indonesian

AID, 2023).

Indonesia's relations with the PIC

Indonesia has provided grants and technical assistance to PIC since 1999 (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). The aid was distributed amidst political dynamics created by the ULMWP, which, since the 1990s, demanded the separation of West Papua from Indonesia (Wangge, 2021). In 2013, for example, several months after ULMWP applied for an observer status at Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)², Indonesia's then president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, paid a visit to Fiji — the first visit by Indonesia's Head of State to the Pacific (Wyeth, 2018). During the visit, Indonesia pledged to increase the value of aid to Fiji to USD 1 billion. In 2016, a few months after seven PICs raised concerns at the 71st UN General Assembly over possible human rights abuse in West Papua, which some media reported as a result of the lobby by ULMWP, Indonesia distributed a significant amount of aid (including a grant worth USD 3 million) to Fiji (Ibid.).

In the following years, Indonesia provided capacity-building training to Samoa and Nauru. Indonesia's effort to promote closer relations with the PIC resulted in a more positive tone for several PICs regarding Indonesia's sovereignty in West Papua. In 2018, for example, at the 50th Anniversary of Nauru, the President of Nauru mentioned that his country fully supported each step taken by Indonesia to improve the prosperity of the people of West Papua (Wangge, 2021).

In 2019, after ULMWP conveyed a petition to the UN Human Rights Chief to demand recognition of West Papua's independence from Indonesia, Indonesia set up the Indonesian AID with an initial fund of USD 1 billion to be distributed to other developing countries. In 2020, Indonesia provided aid in the form of two boats to Nauru (worth USD 2,5 million), grant for school reconstruction in Fiji, and grant for Conference Hall construction in Tuvalu (Ibid.).

Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

According to the Director for Technical Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia (Indonesian MoFA) in 2017, Indonesia's aid to the PIC is driven by a sense of equality and solidarity, as well as the spirit to establish mutually beneficial relations (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). In research by Mooy (2022), her key informant from the Indonesian MoFA added that mutual respect and inclusivity principles also guide the aid.

The official website of Indonesian AID (2023) states that Indonesia, as a donor, sees its recipient as being on equal footing. Indonesia recognized shared challenges among developing countries and, therefore, sought to offer aid that could reduce the development burdens of recipient countries. Indonesia's Government Regulation Number 57 in 2019 also stipulates that aid from Indonesia shall be distributed on a "demand-driven" basis. Countries interested in receiving aid shall convey a detailed proposal to Indonesia on the expected aid areas, their value, and

² MSG is an intergovernmental organization in the Pacific. Its members are Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). The organization facilitates economic and political cooperation among its members (Indonesian MoFA, 2022).

their modalities. Indonesia will, after that, consider providing aid that is most suitable to the recipients' needs (Indonesian AID, 2023). Based on the government regulation, aid from Indonesia shall also be inclusive in that Indonesia is open to receive 'proposal for aid' from all countries in the world. At this juncture, the provision of aid from Indonesia to PIC corresponds to Bleiker's (2000) and Hansen's (2006) argument that symbolic claims in SSC could be deployed to support the donor's interest in differentiating the aid from aid in NSC. The claims of equality and inclusivity represent Indonesia's interest as one of the strong supporters of Southern emancipation in the world, to showcase aid driven by shared responsibility instead of power imbalance, as often found in aid in NSC.

Besides being driven by equality and inclusivity, aid from Indonesia to PIC is often described as driven by solidarity. In 2016, during a speech by Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs during his working visit to PNG, he repeatedly mentioned that Indonesia possesses cultural affinities with countries in the Pacific (Fardah, 2016). Highlighting the fact that over 11 million residents of West Papuan province have the same Melanesian ethnicity as the people in the Pacific, the Minister underscored the importance of intensifying people-to-people contacts, including through the provision of aid by Indonesia to PIC. The Minister also highlighted the challenges faced by both sides due to climate change and, therefore, emphasized the need for Indonesia and PIC to strengthen solidarity and

foster cooperation in relevant areas (Ibid.).

In an interview by Mooy (2022) with an Indonesian AID official, it is gathered that aid from Indonesia to the PIC is also being presented to the public as adhering to the principles of mutual benefit and mutual respect. Highlighting that the funds for aid to PIC are taken from Indonesia's state budget, the Indonesian AID official shared that there is an expectation that the aid will pave the way for stronger economic relations with PIC (Ibid.). The provision of aid procured from Indonesia's local companies could help introduce Indonesian products to Pacific Island people and markets. Further, the informant also shared that Indonesia wishes to increase its international profile by providing aid to other developing countries (Mooy, 2022). In his speech during the inauguration of Indonesian AID in 2019, the Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, mentioned that Indonesia's aid to other developing countries is part of Indonesia's "hands-on diplomacy", through which Indonesia hope to increase its image in international stage by providing the much-needed assistance to countries in the global South (Hutabarat, 2022).

Possible Key Drivers of Indonesia's Aid to PIC

Indonesia's Foreign Policy Principles and the Perception of Public Toward West Papua Issue. Indonesia's foreign policy is guided by the principles of "free and active", which implies that Indonesia will uphold its independence and play an active role in the international arena (Sukma, 1995). In 1955, Indo-

nesia initiated the Asia-Africa Conference, which gave birth to the Bandung Principle³ (Ibid.). According to Indonesian AID (2023), the provision of aid from Indonesia to other PICs is part of Indonesia's commitment, as the pioneer of the Asia-Africa Conference, to strengthen South-South solidarity and to set an excellent example on the global stage of its active role in supporting development in the global South. At the outset, the motive behind Indonesia's aid to PIC corresponds to Engel's (2017) and Prabowo's (2020) argument that the spirit of Southern solidarity could drive aid from a Southern donor.

Indonesia's aid to the PIC is also closely related to the government and the public's perception of the issue of West Papua's independence. Over the past decade, during the tenure of President Joko Widodo, the development of West Papua province become a crucial priority (Fauzi et al., 2019). Over 4,300 kilometres of roads connecting the province with other provinces on the island were built, and dozens of new airports and seaports were constructed surrounding West Papua (Ibid.). The government also repeatedly mentioned in the media that improving the welfare of the people of West Papua is one of Indonesia's main development policy objectives. Besides the government, the public of Indonesia also sees boosting economic and social development in West Papua as an essential matter. Research by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (2017) showed that at least 63 per cent of non-native Papuans in Indonesia support progress made by the In-

donesian government in enhancing connectivity in West Papua. The government's serious attention to improving development in West Papua and the public's support towards this effort might also be one factor supporting Indonesia's decision to give aid to PIC to bolster its broader national objectives of safeguarding sovereignty in West Papua.

Influence of the parliament, business communities, and Indonesian AID in Indonesia's aid to PIC. Besides ideas and values held by the people and government of a donor country, according to Lancaster (2007), a decision to give aid can also be influenced by political institution arrangements and the voices of interest groups and aid agencies. In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, the parliament – which has the mandate to monitor Indonesia's policy-making process, generally supports Indonesia's more robust engagements with the PIC. In 2020, the Indonesian Parliament Working Committee on Pacific Cooperation reiterated its support for providing aid to PIC. It argued that intensified relations could provide an opportunity for Indonesia to share the development progress in West Papua with the people in the Pacific, who often held negative perceptions towards Indonesia (DPR RI, 2020).

Regarding voices from interest groups, civil societies and business communities generally have low interest in Indonesia's aid to PIC. This might be due to both sides' low trade and investment relations. In 2021, for example, the export from Indonesia to the Pacific was only around USD 342 mil-

³ The Principle emphasizes the importance of recognizing sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equality among all nations worldwide.

lion (IIPC Sydney, 2021). This is far smaller than the value of Indonesia's exports to its small neighbouring countries, such as Singapore, Brunei, and Lao PDR, which reached USD 11,8 billion (Ibid). The considerable distance between Indonesia and countries in the Pacific and their geographical features (i.e. scattered over a vast area in the Pacific Ocean) make countries in the Pacific a rather unattractive market for Indonesian products and investors (IIPC Sydney, 2021). This, therefore, is partially contrary to Winanti and Alvian's (2019) argument that aid in SSC could be driven by material/economic interests. With the weak trade and investment potentials in Indonesia-PIC relations, material interests are not the main driver of the aid.

Besides the small influence from the interest groups, the Indonesian AID, which acts as the aid agency that manages funds for aid from Indonesia, also has a small say in the decision to give aid. The Indonesian AID gives an initial assessment of aid proposals from a developing country (Mooy, 2022). The proposals will then be passed on to a joint committee of high-level officials from the Indonesian MoFA, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development Planning Agency to be scored. The scored proposals will then be sent to the Indonesian MoFA for final authorization (Ibid.). The Indonesian AID's authority is limited to the initial assessment and aid distribution to beneficiary countries. The Indonesian MoFA holds the strategic role of authorizing the aid proposal, thus making it likely that the decision to give aid has undergone careful consideration of its relation to Indonesia's foreign policy

objectives.

Relations between Symbolic Claims and Real Motivations in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

According to Mawdsley (2012), symbolic claims are an essential performative tool to aid in SSC. The claims can enhance a sense of solidarity and shared identity among the donor and recipient. It also accentuates the sense of morality, often due to Southern donors' willingness to openly express their expectation for the aid to be mutually beneficial. This is different from aid in NSC, which is often branded as driven by the spirit of altruism but, in reality, comes with many conditionalities and an apparent power gap between the donor and recipient (Ibid.).

In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, the Indonesian government promoted the aid as being driven by a sense of equality, inclusivity, and solidarity (Wardhani & Dugis, 2020). The implementation of the principles of equality and inclusivity are reflected in the Indonesian government regulation, which stipulates that aid distribution from Indonesia shall be "demand-driven". Indonesia seeks to first listen to the voices of prospective recipients and is open to aid proposals from all countries in the world (no countries are exempted). Regarding the claim of solidarity, Indonesia does possess vital racial and geographical proximity with countries in the Pacific (Fardah, 2016). Most people living in Indonesia's Eastern provinces, including West Papua, are Melanesian. Indonesia and PIC also share similar archipelagic features, which makes them prone to climate-related disasters.

Besides the claims of equality, inclusivity, and solidarity, the Indonesian government also promoted aid to PIC by adhering to mutual benefit and respect. The Indonesian government openly expressed hopes that the “investment” it has put in aiding PIC could yield tangible benefits to the Indonesian economy (Mooy, 2022). For example, the goods distributed as grants to PIC (e.g., medical supplies, agriculture, and construction materials) are mainly procured from local Indonesian companies. The aid, therefore, could pave the way for introducing Indonesian products to PIC and open the door for more robust business-to-business engagement (Ibid.). On the political aspect, the Indonesian government openly shared that the aid is part of Indonesia's broader diplomacy strategy to play a more active role in the international arena through its role as a donor. Indonesia seeks to gain a better image in the world by actively assisting development in global South countries (Indonesian MoFA, 2022).

In terms of the possible critical drivers of the aid, as elaborated in the previous section, the ideas and values held by the government and Indonesian people concerning the importance of Indonesia's active role in promoting solidarity among global South countries, as well as the need to support socio-economic development in West Papua, seemed to be one of the influential factors that drive Indonesia's aid to the PIC (Chairunnisa, 2017). This idea and value may result in domestic support for the decision to provide aid to PIC, hoping that this will promote Indonesia's positive image in the world and In-

donesia's development achievements in West Papua. Whilst the parliament supports Indonesia's enhanced engagement with the PIC, including through aid, the influence of interest groups (especially business communities) and Indonesian AID in providing aid remain limited (Indonesian AID, 2023).

In the case of Indonesia-PIC relations, in line with Leheny (1999) and Faizullaev (2013), aid is used to support the Southern donor's geopolitical interests. The aid to PIC is part of Indonesia's more significant diplomacy objectives as a Southern country to uphold its position on the global stage and showcase its ability to perform the role of a “donor” instead of a mere Western country's aid recipient. The aid also emphasized positioning the recipient at a level playing field and highlighting the proximity in both sides' identity, thus allowing for a stronger sense of cooperation of mutual recognition, which is weak in NSC due to the power asymmetry. In line with Linklater's (2013, p.72) argument, Indonesia's aid to PIC under the framework of SSC underscores dialogue and Southern affinity, thus differing it to aid in NSC that often involves competition and depletion of the recipient country's agency of its own development agendas.

What Is Obscured Under the Symbolic Claims in Indonesia's Aid to PIC

Whilst Indonesia promoted its aid to PIC as being driven by a sense of equality and inclusivity, an interview by Mooy (2022) with a key official at the Indonesian AID revealed that Indonesia has a *List of Prioritised Aid Recipients*. While Indonesia is open to

receiving aid proposals from all countries in the world, and the provision of aid will adhere to the “demand-driven” principle, Indonesia will prioritize proposals from countries in this list. Countries in this list have been carefully selected, including by Indonesian MoFA, by considering Indonesia’s current political-economic interest. Countries in the Pacific are included in the list (Ibid.).

Indonesia also used the symbolic claim of solidarity in its aid to PIC. While Indonesia and PIC share some racial and geographical proximity, West Papua has been among Indonesia’s poorest and underdeveloped provinces (Pentury, 2023). While Indonesia promoted the aid as part of its effort to strengthen solidarity with the “Melanesian brothers” in the Pacific, the Melanesians in West Papua and other Eastern provinces in Indonesia have been dealing with the negative impacts of unequal development in Indonesia for many years (Ibid.). The narrative of aid to PIC as being driven by the spirit of brotherhood with Melanesian people in the Pacific becomes weak when one looks at the low socio-economic development in West Papua.

On several occasions, the Indonesian government also presented aid to PIC as adhering to the principle of mutual benefit. While it is true that grants to PIC can pave the way for the introduction of Indonesian products to the Pacific market, the trade and investment statistics over the past five years show a shallow potential for commercial transactions between both sides. Data from The Indonesian Investment Promotion Centre (IIPC) Sydney in 2021 reveal low Foreign

Direct Investments (FDI) flow from the Pacific countries to Indonesia, and vice versa. This is due to the high transaction cost for the movement of goods between both sides and the low population in the PIC, making it unattractive for Indonesian investors (Ibid.). Despite the low economic benefits it could gain, the decision to provide aid to PIC shows that there is more than just an economic motive behind Indonesia’s aid to the Pacific.

When a closer assessment of the timeline of the aid provision from Indonesia to the PIC, it appears that the aid was often being distributed or intensified right after the PIC or ULMWP raised the issue of West Papua independence at international fora. The Indonesian AID was established in 2019, just a few months after ULMWP delivered a petition to the UN to demand more serious attention to the faith of the West Papuan people (Kabutaulaka, 2020). In 2016, Indonesia delivered 100 units of hand tractors and financial aid worth up to USD 3 million to PIC, just a few months after seven Pacific countries raised concern at the 71st UNGA over the alleged human rights abuse in West Papua (Wangge, 2021). Furthermore, the fact that the final authorization of an aid proposal lies at the hand of the Indonesian MoFA instead of the Indonesian AID (Mooy, 2022) shows that aid from Indonesia to the PIC holds a strategic value in supporting Indonesia’s more significant diplomatic objective to influence the PIC.

When considering the findings above that i) the PIC are among countries in the pre-prepared *List of Prioritised Aid Recipients*, ii) weak evidence of the aid as being driven

by a mere desire to strengthen solidarity with the Melanesian race in the Pacific, and iii) low economic benefit that Indonesia could potentially yield from its strengthened ties with PIC, it is evident that Indonesia's aid to the PIC is part of Indonesia's more extensive foreign policy strategy to influence the standpoint or behaviour of PIC over the West Papua issue. This motivation, however, is obscured under the symbolic claims that Indonesia presents to the public, such as that the aid is driven by a strong sense of solidarity and equality with countries in the Pacific, as well as adhering to principles of inclusivity, mutual benefits and mutual respect. These narratives mask the real driver of the aid, which is closely related to Indonesia's intention to tone down PIC's support towards West Papua independence in international forums. While these symbolic claims indeed strengthen the sense of South-South affinity/identity among Indonesia and the PIC, as well as signal Indonesia's openness on the expectation for the aid to bring reciprocal benefits, it hides the critical political motivation behind the aid, which relate to Indonesia's interest to safeguard its sovereignty in West Papua.

Conclusion

The dynamics of aid in the global South are often filled with symbolic claims presented by the Southern donor to the public to create a positive image. However, there remains a debate on the extent to which these symbolic claims truly reflect the real motivations behind the aid.

In the case of Indonesia's aid to the PIC, this research found that Indonesia used symbolic claims, such as equality, inclusivity, solidarity, mutual benefit and mutual respect. These claims are used to strengthen the sense of Southern solidarity and identity among Indonesia and the PIC, which is in line with Indonesia's track record as a country that has long been championing equality among all nations and empowerment for countries in the global South. The symbolic claims also enhance the sense of openness in Indonesia's aid to PIC, in which Indonesia explicitly expressed its hope that the aid would pave the way for stronger bilateral and economic relations with PIC. To this extent, the use of symbolic claims in Indonesia's aid to PIC aligns with what IR scholars described as a Southern donor's effort to differentiate its aid from aid in NSC. Instead of basing the aid on superiority and competition, the decision to provide aid to PIC is consistent with Indonesia's long-standing effort to promote Southern emancipation and a stronger SSC.

However, when a closer assessment is made of these symbolic claims, especially when connecting it to the timeline of aid provision to PIC and the arrangement of responsibility for aid proposal authorization that lies in the hand of the Indonesian MoFA, it is apparent that the aid is a part of Indonesia's more significant foreign policy strategy to influence the behaviour and standpoint of PIC, especially at international forums, on the issue of West Papua. The objective of the aid is closely related to Indonesia's interest in safeguarding its sovereignty in West Papua. This political motivation, however, is ob-

scured by the symbolic claims that Indonesia presented to the public. The symbolic claims mask the critical driver behind the aid and allow Indonesia to maintain its positive image worldwide.

Indonesia's approach to foreign aid could be improved by considering a more equal distribution of aid to other developing countries in the surrounding region. The amount of aid distributed by Indonesian AID to Lao PDR and Timor-Leste from 2020 to 2022, for example, is far smaller than that distributed to PIC. By considering an equal distribution of aid to needy nations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, as well as expanding the aid delivery to new countries, such as Myanmar, currently going through political and human security crises, Indonesia could truly embody its claim as a country that champions South-South solidarity and Southern affinity. Expanding the scope of its aid and creating equal aid distribution in the region would allow Indonesia to balance its internal political-security motive behind the aid with its normative obligations to strengthen SSC and assist development in the global South.

Future research on a similar topic might consider exploring other patterns of relations between symbolic claims and genuine motivation to aid in the global South. The research can also explore other possible real motivations obscured under the symbolic claims (e.g. the donor's security or socio-cultural interests).

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