

rites and responsibilities

A DIALOGUE SERIES ON SOVEREIGNTY, AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL



“POWER AND RESOURCES”

A CONVERSATION WITH SIDNEY JONES

MAY 2010

In May of 2010, I sat down for a conversation with the legendary human rights advocate [Sidney Jones](#) of the International Crisis Group. Jones and I had just come out of an intense [two day](#) workshop at the SSRC on religion, peacebuilding, and development in Mindanao, organized in conjunction with the SSRC’s project on religion and international affairs. Participants in the workshop included scholars and peacebuilders from the United States, Mindanao, Japan, and Indonesia.

David Kyuman Kim

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David Kyuman Kim: This is David Kim from the SSRC's Program on Religion and the Public Sphere. And I have the pleasure of engaging in a conversation with Sidney Jones from the International Crisis Group, in a segment for the Rites and Responsibilities series for The Immanent Frame. We have just come out of a two day SSRC workshop on the crisis in Mindanao, funded by the Luce Foundation, and part of the SSRC's project on religion and international affairs. Sidney, before we get into your work, and because the conversations from workshop are still fresh in our minds, I'm curious to hear your perspective on and your characterization of what the Mindanao crisis is. Speak, if you would, as someone who's been involved with the Mindanao crisis for some time. How would you describe the situation to someone who knows nothing about it?

Sidney Jones: I would say that, in some ways, we're dealing with a fundamentally ethno-nationalist insurgency, but what makes it so much more complicated than many other areas is that there are several insurgencies going on at the same time, including the old Communist insurgency, which spills over into Mindanao. We have three guerilla groups that identify themselves as Moro, plus the NPA [the National People's Army, the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines], which is still active. We also have three different peace processes going on at the same time, and any success on one track will have negative implications for the others. So, trying to fit all those things into some kind of overarching peace process is extraordinarily difficult. And on top of that, even if you were to settle all of those insurgencies, you would still be dealing with clan conflicts and structural problems of warlordism and feudalism, which would continue to account for what is currently 30 or 40 percent of the violence in Mindanao even if you got the peace processes signed, sealed, and delivered. So, that's what the crisis in Mindanao is about.

DKK: As you know, the Rites and Responsibilities series is focusing on questions of sovereignty and authority and religion. And among the things that the folks in the workshop seemed to be wrestling with was how to account for the religious factors and influences in Mindanao. You yourself had varied portrayals of the religious factors and influences, specifically, your insistence of not wanting to stick to an account in which the portrait was primarily about the disputes between Muslims and Christians. How would you describe the role that religious groups play, that religious actors play in Mindanao? What language would you use to describe them? What are the inadequacies of the characterizations that have been put forth?

SJ: There's no question that there is a fundamental issue of religious identities involved. But it's also true that the fundamental conflict is not religious. It's about control over power and resources. And that control issue extends beyond Christian and Muslim communities to different ethnic identities among people who are Muslims. It also, like many of the conflicts in Indonesia, has an overlay of "indigenous-versus-migrant." Some of these fundamental power relationships relate to people from upland areas in Mindanao who have been displaced by people from northern parts of the Philippines, who are mostly Christian, coming in and taking over land and political power from the Muslims themselves. The problem, for instance, in the agreement that failed in August 2008, which was trying to define "the *Bangsamoro* homeland," was that the MILF [the Moro Islamic Liberation Front] was basically including *Lumads*, or indigenous people, in their definition of *Bangsamoro*. And the *Lumads* objected to this! They didn't want to be part of the *Moro* concept of who was defined as a *Moro*. They wanted a separate identity. There were very definite ancestral land issues that were at the root of why they wanted a separate identity, and the MILF didn't understand, or didn't appreciate it fully. So that's another part of the complexity of the whole process. And it's why it's a mistake to see this conflict as "Christian versus Muslim," or to believe that appealing to religious leaders, such as the Catholic Church or Muslim *ulama*, will somehow be able to settle it.

DKK: As I hear you describe it, and also and on my reading of the white paper that [Myla Leguro](#) and Scott Appleby wrote for the workshop, there seems to be a structural problem that is fed by religion. Right? In other words, there is the structural problem that determines which groups are recognized, and which are not recognized. I think you objected at one point, in your response to their papers, saying "Well, it's not even simply questions about conversion, but it's claims about re-version."

SJ: Yes.

DKK: Which is to say, it is a set of disputes over claims about original identities, originary identities. And these disputes involve appeal to religion to fortify the respective claims about identity. I guess I'm a little stuck, then, on the following. It's one thing to say, "Well, there are all sorts of mischaracterizations of and misuses of religious identities." But there are certainly resources in religious communities and religious traditions that could be used as sources of resistance—sources that don't have to be subsumed under the broad dichotomy of "Muslim v. Christian."

SJ: Yes, let me give you a couple of examples. We had a major massacre in Maguindanao, in central Mindanao, in November 2009, in which one clan killed fifty-seven people—actually, fifty-eight, but one victim was never identified. And there was a sense that, first of all, it was Muslim-on-Muslim violence, in that this one clan leader carried out the massacre as a way of sending a message to his political rival, who was head of another Muslim clan. But there were thirty journalists killed in the process, and most of the journalists were Christian. And some of the Muslims in Mindanao were saying, "If there hadn't been Christians killed, this issue never would have gotten the international attention it did, because there's a sense that Muslims are always killing Muslims. So it would have been a horrendous massacre, but it wouldn't have gotten the same level of attention."

DKK: There's a difference in the moral indignation or moral valence in the global community in response to violence against Muslims versus violence against Christians.

SJ: Yes! And then, afterwards, I was talking with the Archbishop of Cotabato, who was saying that there was a sense among his parishioners that the massacre intensified stereotypes of Muslims as violent.

DKK: Hm.

SJ: And therefore it would intensify resistance to any peace agreement that involved power-sharing with the *Bangsamoro*. So, in that sense, there was definitely a religious element, and stereotypes, involved, and it suggested that there was a role for the church, for example, to try and diminish the force of those stereotypes.

DKK: Yes.

SJ: But it was also true that there was a clear issue of clan rivalry among Muslims that wasn't necessarily going to be able to be addressed by Islamic *ulama*. One of the people at this workshop was saying last night that he is a victim of one of these blood feuds among Muslim clans, or between two Muslim clans, I asked him if there was any way that the *ulama* could play a role in settling those feuds. And he said "No, because the *ulama* are all situated within the clans. And they wouldn't accept somebody coming in from outside the clan." So where is the role of religious leadership in settling that aspect of the violence in Mindanao? And it's a critically important part of the violence, because the clan structure perpetuates it.

DKK: But when you say "religious leadership," do you mean local religious leadership? Do you mean transnational religious leadership?

SJ: When I talk about religious leadership in Mindanao, I'm talking about local leadership—except that there's a big difference between the Islamic and the Christian leadership, or at least the leadership within the Catholic Church. And I think it's also important to underscore that inasmuch as we've been talking about Christians, we've only been talking about Catholics. There is also the whole issue of Christian evangelicals, which is a growing community within Mindanao, and their impact has been completely ignored. But when we talk about Catholic leadership, we're often talking about priests or bishops who come from outside the community. The Catholic Church has a way of posting priests where they're not necessarily native sons. But within the Islamic clergy, if it's fair to use that term, there's no tradition of having anybody from outside the community. And not only that, but one's sphere of influence is much, much more limited than that of the equivalent role of a priest in the Catholic Church, because the priest, by definition, is part of a broader hierarchy. One of the problems I often see is that Catholics tend to view their Muslim counterparts in their own image, and to assume that Muslim leaders have the same ability to exercise this hierarchical chain-of-command structure, down to the village level, that the Catholics do. It's

a huge mistake to see it in those terms—and it's one of the weaknesses of the Bishops-Ulama Conference—because they're not equivalent.

DKK: Right, they're not equivalent. And you know, one of the things I hear you arguing is against the ways in which a political situation is beholden to certain kinds of ideal types.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: There is the ideal type of the bishop, or the Catholic model that makes judgments about who qualifies as a religious leader. And in the case of Mindanao, a Catholic bishop assumes that he has a counterpart on the Muslim side, with a comparable sphere of influence and power.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And, as you noted, there is the x-factor of evangelical Protestants.

SJ: It was one of the issues that didn't come up in the workshop discussion, but I would really like to know where the evangelical Christians fit in—if indeed they can be seen as a coherent group. Because in many parts of the world, they take a very conservative position in support of existing power structures.

DKK: Right.

SJ: So, I don't know what role they're playing in Mindanao, or whether they could conceivably have a role to play in the peace process. But it's interesting that they were totally left out of the discussion. And yet, if you go to central Mindanao, you see evangelical churches all over the place. One of the most expensive-looking churches in Cotabato is the Mormon church.

DKK: That is interesting.

SJ: Yes!

DKK: What role do they play in the landscape of violence?

SJ: I don't know! That's one of the question marks.

DKK: Right.

SJ: Also, I think that in the workshop discussion we ignored—and this is something I also tried to bring out—some of the changes that are taking place within the Muslim community, in terms of identification with transnational movements.

DKK: Right.

SJ: And I think that one of the participants, who was critical of my interventions on that point, is in a state of denial about the presence of extremist movements. They're very small. They're fringes of fringes of fringes. But I think you ignore the extremist element at your peril, because they can end up having a disproportionate influence, even though their numbers are tiny.

DKK: Because the extremist fringe serves as an exception that makes a rule?

SJ: Yes. And also because, if you look at where extremism is coming into Mindanao, it's coming into part of the insurgent movement. If, for example, we end up with a group of disaffected MILF members, say, who are growing weary of this unending peace process that never produces results, that never produces a power-sharing arrangement, as they've repeatedly been promised, and at the same time keeps young men who've been trained to do military action out of military action, without giving them any kind of jobs, there's a likelihood of a splinter group forming. And the group most likely to break away is the group with

the most transnational contacts. That's where I see the danger of ignoring extremism, because that's where it's located within the insurgent movement.

DKK: You have done a lot of work on these transnational terror groups, particularly Jemaah Islamiah. When I read your paper on them, I was struck by your argument that there is an under-appreciation for the complex and actually quite effective infrastructure that this group has.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And that they have a broad geographical range that's under-appreciated.

SJ: Well, it's not just that. In fact, it's not Jemaah Islamiah that's the issue: the Philippine government takes any foreign jihadi from Southeast Asia and brands it as "Jemaah Islamiah." And, in fact, we've seen, since about 1994, maybe, a mixture of different groups coming into the Philippines. There have been elements of the Darul Islam movement, which is a movement that started out as an insurgency in Indonesia. There's a group of people from an organization called Kompak, who wanted training in Mindanao to fight Christians in Ambon, or in Poso, in Central Sulawesi. And you've had JI members, but of two kinds: people who, from about 1994 to about 2005, went into Mindanao for training as part of an alliance with the MILF, but also the JI fugitives, who didn't join the organized Jemaah Islamiah, which had a tactical alliance with the MILF, but who were just fleeing justice in Indonesia, and in some cases Malaysia. They ended up in Mindanao, and instead of joining their fellow JI members became almost an uncontrolled unit, which was much more interested in continuing the bombing actions and looking for a way to fight the jihad. They were not interested in training, not interested in building up the Jemaah Islamiah structure in Mindanao, but actively looking for action—on a war front. And they started out by joining the MILF in operations. And when the MILF expelled them, in 2005, they ended up with the Abu Sayaaf.

DKK: Right.

SJ: But they kept their allegiances with some commanders within the MILF. And another part of the complexity is that the MILF doesn't have complete control over all of its component parts, in a way that, again, makes it difficult to come to an agreed settlement, but also will actually make it even more difficult to enforce an agreement if you ever get one.

DKK: How do you assess these groups in terms of what their relationship is to local populations? To the national government? We're talking about the Philippines now, the Southern Philippines, but I also want to get to Indonesia. The situation you just described—these unwieldy, complicated forces and factors that are hard to fit into existing conceptions about representation and democracy, such as particular conventions we might use to think about party politics. That sort of thing. How do we, as outsiders, understand, what's going on? Going back to the question I asked you earlier, what are the general lessons you've learned about what seems to be a very intractable situation in Mindanao?

SJ: I think you can look back to the period when there seemed to be progress in addressing many disparate component parts of the problem together. And that took place during Fidel Ramos's administration, when it was as though, for the first time, someone in Manila understood not only that there were many different parts of the puzzle that had to be addressed simultaneously, but also that you needed political will from the center to marshal the resources to make something happen in Mindanao. And it was at that point that we got simultaneous progress on the MNLF [Moro National Liberation Front] and MILF front. There was an effort at rehabilitation and construction. There was a period of real optimism. And then Ramos left office, and we got a complete loser of an administration with the Estrada government, under which all of the pieces put in place by the Ramos administration fell apart. There was no more political will to see this happen. And one of the tragedies of the Philippines is that every time you think something is going right, it collapses. And one of the reasons that I was pressing at this workshop for discussion on the aftermath of the recent [2010] elections is that, for the first time since Ramos left office, there's actually a sense of "can do-ism" in the Philippines. And it's not just because you've got this untested man, Noynoy Aquino, in power—who is considered honest or at least given the benefit of the doubt, even though he's the scion of a political dynasty—but also that the Philippines carried out an election, with a brand new, automated system

that was designed to overcome one fundamental reason for electoral fraud in the Philippines. And it showed that the Philippines, which has a reputation—not just at home, but in the region and internationally—for never getting anything right, could identify and come up with a solution. This meant less violence in the period immediately before the elections than we’ve seen in a long, long time, and also helped eliminate fraud in counting, even though it didn’t eliminate some of the intimidation leading up to the polls. But it showed that you could actually address a very serious, seemingly intractable problem in the Philippines. And there’s a sense that, if you can do it on that front, maybe you can do it on other fronts as well. That’s why, if you could only get people to understand that there is this window now to build on that euphoria and optimism, you could accomplish things that you might never, *never* think of accomplishing if it were back to business as usual. One of the things that frustrated me about the conversation here is that the Filipinos themselves, the people living in Mindanao, are convinced that you really can’t address some of these issues, that there isn’t any way to make dents in clan politics, and that all you can do is identify the good clans as opposed to the bad clans. Whereas, in fact, there is much more that you could do, and that the president could do with a few strokes of the pen, using executive orders to implement changes in policy. Why doesn’t it happen?!

DKK: Well, I hear in your frustration a strong desire for change among the Filipinos, among the people of Mindanao. And yet, there appears to be a paradox being, namely, that there are also what we might call traditions or habits of thinking and expectations. You know, that “Well, we’ve always done things this way,” or “Those clans will never change.” Or “This is just what we do.”

SJ: Yes.

DKK: I’m curious about triggers for intervention here? What might the triggers for change be? I mean, you asked, very boldly and baldly, to the workshop group: “Well, if this is an occasion for change, why not think bigger?”

SJ: Yes.

DKK: Right. And this was an occasion in which we had change agents literally in the room together.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And so what’s keeping them from thinking bigger? What’s keeping folks from saying, “Well, there’s a natural opportunity in front of us to change how we do things.” It’s a structural opportunity. It’s a political opportunity. It may even be a moral and religious opportunity.

SJ: I think it may be that you’ve got to have people from outside Mindanao advising the new president and his cabinet on what needs to be done. For example, you’ve got a terrific new social affairs secretary, who’s got a very deep base in the civil society movement. And if she and some others could be brought into a small group to come up with solutions for Mindanao—even though she’s somebody who’s seen it all in terms of Philippine politics—maybe that kind of group would actually do a better job of thinking outside the box than people who are just immersed in local Mindanao politics.

DKK: What’s her name?

SJ: Corazon Juliano-Soliman.

DKK: As someone who did not know anything about Mindanao prior to this week, I could not quite get clear what the hopes and aspirations were for the players in the room.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: There was a lot of talk about peace. And there was a lot of talk about conflict resolution. And an occasional mention of autonomy. But, in all honesty, I could not get clear from the conversations what were the political aspirations, what were the civil-social hopes. Do you have a sense of what they are?

SJ: Well, again, it depends on whom you talk to. If you talk to members of the MILF, they want a power-sharing arrangement that goes way beyond any autonomy arrangement that currently exists in Southeast Asia. And the only way they can achieve that is by some change to the constitution that would recognize that difference. So, you can get a very clearly articulated position of aspirations if you talk to the MILF. It's not clear to me that some of the people working on peacebuilding are actually supportive of that level of autonomy. All they're interested in is trying to bring Christian and Muslim communities together, as though that were the only part of the problem. And I think the problem is much bigger than that.

DKK: Right. You had quite a bracing line in your response to the white paper, when you said, "Inter-faith dialogues have always struck me as a colossal waste of time." And are the limited political aspirations the reasons why you said this?

SJ: It's one of the reasons why, yes. Now, I base that high degree of skepticism on the interfaith dialogues that I have seen in the Indonesian context. And there's much more belief in them—and belief in them is a good thing—in Mindanao, where you do have almost complete ignorance, particularly on the part of the Christian population, of what Muslim, and Moro, aspirations are all about. But, part of the difficulty is that interfaith dialogues, by definition, are about religion, whereas, in fact, the source of the conflict, or of one major part of the conflict, in Mindanao is a political movement. And half the time when we're talking about peacebuilding, it's not between Christians and Muslims! It's between a population identified as Christian but in fact representing vested interests versus a political movement for a *Bangsamoro* homeland in some form or other, though it's often not very clearly defined. So, it's as though it's a dialogue of two religious parties about a conflict that's not fundamentally religious.

DKK: Back to the reversion to ideal types, right?

SJ: Yes.

DKK: So what you're talking about is the politicization of religious identities.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And this may have been a result of self-selection, in regard to the participants in the workshop, as certain folks were chosen or invited to join this conversation. And they may not be representative of the most effective change agents in the region. I can't speak to whether that is true or not, but it does raise one of the themes that came up in our conversation about the poverty of leadership.

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And you and I talked a little bit this morning, on the way over to the meeting, about how, even as you might have aspirations for change, and even with a new, centralized Filipino government—whether it's a federation, or whether it has autonomous regions, and maybe this is cynical, but one way to read the inter-faith dialogue is to say, "Well, we're leaders. And one way to present ourselves as leaders is to say that we're involved in this structural situation, which is an inter-faith dialogue."

SJ: Maybe. But I think you're right, in that, if you had an infusion of new blood and new leadership that wasn't mired in just trying to move the incremental process one tiny step further than all the incremental processes that preceded it, you could make change.

DKK: Right.

SJ: But the negotiating team for the MILF, for example, is the same team that's been in place for a long time, which sees progress in terms of getting a little bit more than in the last agreement reached. They aren't coming up with genuinely new ideas for identifying the obstacles or coming up with a solution that's qualitatively new and different, to force the government into a position where they themselves have to come up with something new and different. It's not completely stalemated, but it's stale.

DKK: It sounds stale! It also sounds like an impoverished sense of political options. I was going to ask whether you thought this is an instance of a failure of imagination. Is it a failure of political imagination? It sounds like it's a failure of some kind.

SJ: One interesting difference in the case of the Aceh agreement—which, granted, took place under very special circumstances and can't be replicated in Mindanao, probably—is that Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president who was the mediator, basically said, “The ground rule for these negotiations is that nothing is agreed unless everything is agreed. So, no incremental agreements. Either everybody agrees on all aspects, or we have no agreement at all.” The Philippines has had something like seventy-three partial agreements so far—and counting!—while always saving the hardest for last.

DKK: Hm.

SJ: And it seems, almost, as if there's been a tacit recognition that “we may never get to a comprehensive pact, but at least as long as we're talking, as long as we can stretch and drag it out, at least we're not actively fighting.” And that may appear to be the best you can get—but does it have to be the best?

DKK: Yesterday, one of the workshop participants said something like, “Well, you know, here you have a post-colonial situation that's really a colonial situation.” I think [Jo-Jo] had mentioned the phrase “Imperial Manila.” It seems to me that if you can effectively teach and popularize the phrase ‘Imperial Manila’, you're making progress, right?

SJ: Yes, yes!

DKK: It reminds me of old Leftist ideas, like “Revolution is always good,” the Maoist idea that the constant revolution is always good. That's kind of an impoverished view as well. Someone else in the conversation—I can't remember if it was Bob Hefner who said it—brought up the comparison to Native Americans. I kept thinking of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, in which no one was telling A. Phillip Randolph or [Martin Luther] King, “By the way, the majority of Americans agrees with you, so go get ‘em!” Right? There was a heroic quality both to the small actions, as well as the larger scale actions. It sounds like that's part of what's missing in Mindanao.

SJ: Yes, I think it is. But even if you had new and charismatic leadership within the MILF, you'd still have to deal with the MNLF and the Abu Sayyaf and the NPA and everything else! And that's one of the reasons why there's now an effort—especially on the part of some of the donors funding peace activities, but also within some parts of the Philippine government—to try and say, “Now is the time to bring convergence to all of these strands. Rather than having separate peace processes with the NPA, the MNLF, and the MILF, we've got to find a way of getting people—all of these people—to agree on common goals that can be negotiated as a group with the government.” Now, there's no way to bring the NPA together with the two Moro groups, but there should be a way to bring the two Moro groups into a common position. The MILF will say, “No way, as long as Nur Misuari is still around,” and Nur Misuari will never agree to joining forces with the MILF. One interesting aspect of conflict resolution in Mindanao is Indonesia's role. Indonesians are represented in two forms in the mechanisms of conflict resolution for the MILF: they've got representation through a nongovernmental Muslim social organization called Muhammadiyah, in something called the International Contact Group, which is a very interesting joint government/nongovernmental group that takes part, as an observer, in the Malaysian-brokered talks, and that was designed as a way of keeping both parties honest. And the Indonesian government has been invited to take part in the international monitoring team that monitors violations of the process. So, if the Indonesians are involved in trying to broker a new MNLF process and also have this position within the MILF peacemaking structure, is there some kind of role a creative approach they could play in merging the two?

DKK: That's interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it's turning to a regional power for help as opposed to, say, the UN, or to the EU or to the US.

SJ: Well, there's a precedent for it, because the Indonesians had brokered the '96 agreement with the MNLF. But precisely because of that, and precisely because the Indonesian government was seen by the MILF as having "sold out" to the Philippine government, up until very, very recently, the MILF wanted nothing to do with the Indonesians. So it was a real step forward that they invited them to take part in the international monitoring team. But it remains to be seen whether there will be good enough leadership on the Indonesian side of the peace-brokering effort to be able to figure out where points of convergence might lie.

DKK: I want to go on to talk a bit about your career. In your experience and in your estimation, what are the best strategies to foster trust? Given what you described to me, particularly in regard to, say, the Indonesians serving as a third party, negotiating, and a situation in which there is a loss of faith or trust amongst groups in which peace is at stake, how do you not just foster trust but maintain it? Because of these legacies, these long memories that these political groups have, I would think that you have to somehow convince players that someone with good will in the Indonesian government can be an actually trusted person.

SJ: You do it through personal relationships. And one of the reasons that Muhammadiyah, this social organization, was brought into the International Crisis Group is that one of the negotiators for the MILF has a long-term friendship with the current head of Muhammadiyah. That's how it works. And I think you could find enough personal connections to provide that basis of trust. But it would require more interest and creativity on the part of Indonesian government leaders than exists at the moment.

DKK: And amongst those networks, those personal networks, are there people and organizations that are helping to identify and cultivate effective social networks?

SJ: I don't think there's enough of it. This is, again, one of the things that I think could be done by people who call themselves professional peacebuilders. That is, it's more than just building relationships of trust on the ground at a local level. There also could be work done to foster some of these relationships at a regional level, where you could lay the groundwork for a more effective mediation role, for example. And if you look at where and how these personal relationships are fostered, it's by going to school together and the like. The original MILF-JI relationship came out of training in Afghanistan together. The relationship between the MILF negotiator and the head of Muhammadiyah was fostered through long-term participation in interfaith dialogues—which may say that there's a role after all for interfaith dialogues!—and so on. But I think that looking for joint training opportunities, where you can pull together younger individuals, say, in a way that could foster these relationships of trust down the road, would be something quite useful to do.

DKK: You've had a long and storied career in the human rights community, which is still going strong, as far as I can see. How would you self-characterize the work that you do? For someone who didn't know the International Crisis Group, or didn't know Human Rights Watch Asia, or didn't know Amnesty International, and so on, how would you describe your work to them?

SJ: I guess I would say that I've spent a large part of my life trying to find ways to prevent violence toward innocent people. When I was working in the human rights field, it was to prevent violence—largely by the state, but also, in cases of internal conflict, by non-state actors, mostly insurgent groups—toward civilians. And with International Crisis Group, it's still trying to prevent violence, and to prevent conflict, but in a way that more involves helping people to understand the context in which violence is taking place.

DKK: So you see yourself as a kind of intermediary, or someone who enables human rights work?

SJ: It's less human rights work now. Crisis Group enables policy interventions of a kind that go beyond human rights work, per se, toward more general conflict management and prevention. Or, in the case of the work I've done on extremism, it enables interventions that may enhance the ability of donor governments, or, indeed, states where these extremist movements exist, to take action that will reduce the ability of these groups to act. It's always difficult to figure out where, or on what, you have impact, or what the causal relationship is between analyses that we write and that impact. But even explaining, just for example, how people accused of terrorism were operating and recruiting in prisons, communicating with one another, and

holding religious study sessions by speakerphone from one prison to another prison, helped, I think, spur interest in prison reform more generally, which is going to have a benefit beyond anything that has specific connections to extremism.

DKK: Right.

SJ: And by explaining how the groups that are operating in Mindanao, for example, include not just Jemaah Islamiah but are broader than that, you can at least make some of the Philippine agencies aware that they've got to have more communication with their Indonesian counterparts in order to be able to understand some of the different movements back and forth, even to be able to ask the right questions if they manage to arrest one of the people involved. So, it's complicated, and I guess one of the difficult things for me has been watching how I've been seen, how the perception of me has changed from being someone on the good side to someone on the dark side, whereas, in fact, I don't think I've made that shift.

DKK: Who's making that judgment, indicating that you have made a shift from the good side, the sunny side to the dark side?

SJ: Well, it's actually some of the extremist groups themselves. When I was at Amnesty, in the mid-eighties, one of the groups whose cases I took up were people who'd been in prison for subversion on the grounds that they were advocating for an Islamic state. And we regarded that, and I regard that still, as a legitimate exercise of freedom of expression.

DKK: Right.

SJ: And none of these people, at that time, were directly involved in violence. But fast-forward to 2001, 2002, and several of those people became involved in Jemaah Islamiah, for example. So I became vilified by that particular group, but I didn't have such a problem with that. I had more of a problem with some of the people in Aceh and Papua, where I'd been working on human rights abuses within those communities. Once I moved to International Crisis Group, and I was able to move beyond strict human rights analyses and look at their roles in the ongoing conflict more generally, it was easier to identify some steps that these groups were taking that were actually counterproductive, or were themselves leading to potential for violence. And we called them on it, and this was seen somehow as a betrayal.

DKK: It almost sounds as if it's like a very long-term relationship you might have with someone.

SJ: [Laughing] Yes, yes.

DKK: You know: you have this kind of intense romance, as it were, in the beginning. But as your relationship matures, the terms of the relationship change.

SJ: Yes, though it's not just as the relationship matures, but as political dynamics change. In Aceh, for example, relationships during the conflict, in documenting what was happening during the conflict, changed dramatically when the same group that was the subject of serious human rights abuses became the group in power, with responsibility for running the government. And if they're not running the government the way they should, or if they're involved in corruption or other aspects, and you call them on it, it's not so much that the relationship on a personal level has changed as that the political dynamics have changed: the victim has become perpetrator. So, it's just a shift that I've had to deal with. And it is partly the intensity of having worked on Indonesia since 1977.

DKK: Can you, before we talk about your relationship to Indonesia, which I realize we could spend many, many hours on...

SJ: Yes.

DKK: I wonder if I could press you a little bit to put a finer point on how you would self-characterize. At one point, you said you slid "past advocacy."

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And that was, as I have in my notes, you self-characterize as “advocacy plus audience.” I think that was a line you used. Right?

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And so, I’m curious: Is there something about not just the concept of advocacy, but the practice of it, that you find an aversion to? Is there something about advocacy that doesn’t jive with the kinds of strategic work that you want to do?

SJ: No! I think the advocacy is the most satisfying part of all the jobs that I’ve had. And if there’s a shift from the human rights work to the conflict prevention aspect that isn’t fully satisfying, it’s that, in some ways, I got direct daily satisfaction from the human rights work—even if one couldn’t change things immediately—from giving a voice to people who otherwise wouldn’t have one. And that was enormously satisfying.

DKK: Of course.

SJ: In the broader conflict-prevention work, you don’t have the same visceral sense of satisfaction, and there’s not the same direct connection between an individual and an outcome, I guess.

DKK: I think about this a lot. The romanticization of the activist. And what an activist should do in light of this kind of romanticization. What the activist should aspire to, dream about, represent, and the like. You talked about your own changing representation to these various audiences. Right?

SJ: Yes.

DKK: Do you find that there are limitations to human rights work now, because of the ways in which human rights work has been co-opted by NGOs or different organizations? I suppose I’m trying to figure out what the current standing is of human rights work for someone like yourself who’s been doing this kind of work for a very long time.

SJ: I think there are a number of challenges. One is that the whole concept of human rights got so broadened that it became much more difficult to say concretely what rights were. When I was at Amnesty, it was clear that we worked on behalf of political prisoners, arrested for defense of their beliefs, as long as they didn’t advocate violence.

DKK: Right.

SJ: Again, even when you couldn’t change things, all those letters from members of Amnesty around the world gave enormous hope and encouragement to people who were in prison. I had two friends, journalists in Indonesia, who were imprisoned, and they had a competition to see who got the most letters from Amnesty International! One got four thousand—you know, they had these stacks! And I never knew that until after the fact, but the idea that they weren’t forgotten was extremely important. But that was a very, very narrow definition of rights. And then, when you move into the broader conflict sphere, it’s a challenge to figure out what the policy interventions are. It’s broader than just human rights-focused work, and it’s a real challenge to come up with policy recommendations that are both pragmatic and aspirational, because you don’t want to focus only on what’s possible -- you want to push the envelope beyond what people believe can be done.

DKK: That’s very interesting. Going back to your response to Myla and Scott’s white paper, you said, in effect, “Well, the Filipinos have long been good on rhetoric, but not very good on action.”

SJ: I worked on the Philippines for Amnesty as well, and it was always the most incredibly frustrating place. And it wasn’t just that there was so much rhetoric about peace and justice and so on, when the

injustices and the conflict were so pronounced and it wasn't clear that anything was actually moving. It was deceptive because you had so much accessibility in terms of language, with so many people speaking English, but you weren't communicating. You had the ability to meet with anybody, you had access to government officials, you could have a dialogue—and yet, you were operating from two very, very different cultures. The words exchanged weren't interpreted in the same ways by the people having the conversation.

DKK: So it's not just that you weren't communicating, but there was a perception that you were communicating, but that nothing was actually getting done.

SJ: Yes. And I don't know how much that problem exists within Filipino society itself. But it was enhanced by, or rather exacerbated by the fact that communication was so easy.

DKK: That's ironic.

SJ: Yes, it is.

DKK: Right. I want to come back to this question of language, but let's talk a bit about Indonesia. Talk, if you would, about your relationship to the country. You've spent a long time there. You've had a complicated relationship with the various governments there. At one point, you were exiled from the country. Having since...

SJ: Three times.

DKK: Three times!

SJ: Yes.

DKK: Okay. So, how does a girl from Albany find her way to Jakarta?

SJ: It was a complete fluke. But in some ways it was the best fluke that ever happened to me. I did Middle Eastern Studies at university, and I was on the verge of going to Lebanon to do a dissertation on Kamal Jumblatt and the Druze. But I just decided that I wasn't ready to do a dissertation and I was going to apply for jobs instead. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had no idea what I would be able to do. So, there were three jobs I applied for: one was as an editorial assistant for *TV Guide*; one was as a kindergarten teacher in the Gaza Strip, with the Quakers; and the third one was at the Ford Foundation, for a position working on the Middle East, but out of New York. And I thought I didn't have any chance of getting that. But because somebody I didn't respect, at the University of Pennsylvania, where I was a graduate student, had applied for that job, I thought, "If he has the gall to apply, I will too." And I came in second for that job, as it turned out, but they asked me if I'd be interested in discussing jobs in either Jakarta, Bangkok, or New Delhi. And I figured Jakarta had the Islamic connection, so that was the only one I had any chance of even trying to understand.

DKK: Huh.

SJ: So, I went back and got out a handbook—I had no idea about Indonesia—I got out the State Department handbook on Indonesia and memorized the names of the islands, you know, read a little bit about the history, and then went back in to talk to the people at the Ford Foundation. And one of the people who interviewed me talked to me for forty-five minutes in social science jargon, and I didn't understand a word. I just kept nodding and encouraging him to go on. And he gave me this glowing review, apparently, and I got the job! They sent me to language training for three months, and then I went off to Indonesia, and I never looked back. I've had a series of wonderful jobs, but that particular job—being in charge of all the small programs for which there wasn't a full time program officer—was probably the best. It was everything from preservation of the traditional arts to Islamic education to development of provincial law faculties to support for public interest organizations.

DKK: Wow.

SJ: So I had this fantastic exposure to a whole variety of different aspects of Indonesia all at once. And from that point on, I did other things but I always kept coming back to Indonesia.

DKK: Well, what was it and what is it about Indonesia that captivated you?

SJ: Maybe it was the mixture of different developments, of all of those areas I just mentioned—it was support for the public interest organizations, which involved legal aid and human rights organizations, where these incredibly brave people were using very subtle techniques to challenge an authoritarian government. Most donors at that stage were focused on building government institutions. And I began to realize that the only way that change was going to happen in Indonesia was if some of these people, with their thought and commitment and determination and bravery, actually got more political space. So, my love affair with Indonesia, I guess, began with the people who were on the frontlines against the Suharto government.

DKK: Right. So, how have your views, then, about development and aid changed? You confessed as not knowing a lot when you first started doing this.

SJ: Well, in a funny way, it's come full circle. Because, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when many of these governments were run by authoritarian leaders, the right thing to do was to give assistance to people who were trying to change the system, and it was wrong to put up barriers—as many donor agencies did at that time—against any kind of political involvement as a condition for receiving aid.

DKK: Right.

SJ: Political involvement was the only thing that was going to change these societies and chip away at the authoritarian structures. But it's also true that if you look at where interventions have made the most difference, it's actually not so much in small grants to NGOs as in institution-building.

DKK: Hm.

SJ: So, I think the challenge for many people in the development field is to pick the right institutions to develop, or to know when the political dynamics have changed such that the nature of grant-making has to be changed as well.

DKK: In listening to the conversation, both yesterday and today, when the workshop participants were talking about development and peace-building, it almost seemed like their economies of scale were a bit off. The arguments tended to tilt either to advocacy of development and aid on a very small scale, or, on the other hand, as someone asked at some point, "Well, what about development and statecraft?"

SJ: Yes.

DKK: And I was thinking, "Well, there's a huge spectrum between the two." And what I think you're identifying as institution-building is not just a pragmatic but an effective and insightful mode of development.

SJ: Sure. But I've been out of the development field for a long time now, and the whole field has progressed dramatically. I think some of the work that Peter Bartu is doing in Mindanao, for example, is critically important. There's been a lot of waste—everybody agrees there's been a huge amount of wastage in a place like Mindanao—but, actually, there's always a huge amount of wastage in the immediate pre- and, even more, post-conflict stages, when there's always an enormous growth of NGOs as a result of the huge amount of money available for post-conflict reconstruction or post-conflict development. You look at Cambodia, at East Timor, at Ambon or Aceh, in Indonesia, and there's a mushrooming of NGOs overnight, many of which end up being next to useless.

DKK: Right.

SJ: And they grow up because there's donor money available to fund them. And you have to figure out how you fund the right people, so that you can actually rebuild in a useful way. But, also, all of these post-conflict areas face the problem that you get donors going in to help out with post-conflict situation and absorbing the best and brightest of the NGOs as interpreters and administrative staff, taking them out of their own institutions in a way that distorts the civil society picture.

DKK: We've been talking for a bit now, and I don't want to overtax you, but I did want to ask you about a couple of things. Just go back a little bit, about language, especially these categories in play about "peace," "security," "democracy," "justice," and even "autonomy" and "freedom." You know, I always tell my students not to pose either/or questions, but I'm going to do that anyhow: Is it the case that these categories I just mentioned, much like the human rights discourse that we were talking about earlier—that the rights discourse has become diffuse, or has become diffused into other areas—do these categories actually do less good, achieve less than we think they do? Take the example of political mobilization. Are these categories generating positive political mobilization, especially in regard to producing more Sidney Joneses in the world?

SJ: I think that oftentimes the use of these broad terms obscures more than it helps in actually identifying concrete interventions that can work. And that's my frustration, I guess, with some of the peacebuilding rhetoric. I want to say, "Well, what exactly are you going to do?"

DKK: Right.

SJ: I mean, how can you take the idea of justice, for example, and actually improve a very corrupt legal system?

DKK: Right.

SJ: And where can you begin the process of judicial reform, for example? In Indonesia now, but also to some extent in Mindanao, there's talk about truth and reconciliation commissions. It's fine to have a commission, but what are you actually trying to achieve by setting up that commission? And have you actually thought through some of the costs and benefits that might come about from having such a commission? There's an assumption—and I agree with it—that if you don't deal with past abuses, sooner or later they're going to come back to haunt you.

DKK: Right.

SJ: But I also believe that the question of sequencing, of when you make a move to establish such a commission, is very important. And there's pushback, always, from the people who are seen as the major perpetrators.

DKK: Mm-hm.

SJ: And you've got to factor in what the likely response will be, and what the costs of that pushback are going to be. Oftentimes it's just seen as an unalloyed good to have a truth and reconciliation commission, and I don't think that goes far enough.

DKK: But there's also the opposite threat, right? Where the pragmatists in the room, say "Well, show me the stuff. Show me the consequences. Show me the effects." That response can potentially become deflating.

SJ: Yes, it can be. It can be. And I think that in some cases you have to have some people who believe in something deeply enough to get it off the ground even when the obstacles are overwhelming.

DKK: Right. So, here is where I want to end. At one point, I think it was yesterday, that Al Stepan referred to you as "True North" Sidney. [Sidney laughs] And there is something very striking about the truth-telling

that you engage in! Having never heard your voice until this meeting—and you have quite a voice, both in terms of the words, but also, I noticed, in the tone and timbre of your actual voice. There is a clarion quality to your speaking voice. I wonder if the development of your voice is the effect of being a woman in often male-dominated contexts, where you have to speak with a certain kind of clarity, and a certain kind of pitch. Is it to be heard?

SJ: Well, the funny thing is that when I joined ICG, Gareth Evans was President, and when we had our first senior staff retreat, sitting in this room around a large table, and we were each explaining our different programs. And when I began to talk, he said, “Sidney! Sidney! Tone it down! You don’t have to speak so loudly!” And I have a reputation now for being louder than any other person in the room! I don’t know how that developed. I think it was just being in room after room with bad acoustics, where I had to shout to be heard!

DKK: Well, when I hear you speak I hear the voice of conviction. A number of people in the room told me about the threats that you’ve endured. So I guess the question I want to end with is to ask you where does that courage and conviction come from. Not just where does it come from, but what sustains you in doing this work? You’re clearly a long-distance runner, in conflict management and conflict resolution, but also in human rights work. If we go back to the question I asked you earlier about self-characterization and you think about your strenuous and powerful efforts to try to prevent violence to the least among us, to the innocent, I do wonder what sustains you.

SJ: I’m not sure. I suppose just the notion that I’m contributing something, I guess. It’s the feeling that I’m using whatever skills I have for a good cause, at the end of the day.

DKK: Mm-hm.

SJ: That’s it.

DKK: That’s a pretty good answer. Thank you, Sidney, for your time.

SJ: Thank you.