Renewing Societies: Interculturalism and the Creative Sojourner

Steven M. Sigler, M.A., M.S.

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work that has not been submitted for a degree at any University.

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Steven M. Sigler
Abstract

From their nascent beginnings during World War II to their good governance and capacity building focus under the Post-Washington Consensus of the early 21st century, international development activities have encompassed a particular world view. This world view, founded on Western historical materialism and a normative perspective, rationalizes “the project” as the predominate form of development assistance and the “expert” or “volunteer” as its agent. Yet this approach to development, although at times successful, has often proved to be unsustainable in the absence of international financing and expertise.

Still, there is an alternative approach available when one recognizes that what the vast majority of people want is security for themselves, their families, and their lifestyles.1 From this approach, the focus of development is shifted away from what people do not have (be it material comforts, infrastructure, or good governance) and sets it on the critical roles culture, individual growth, and informal association have in community development. In this approach, human agency at the interpersonal level becomes critical in the diffusion of social, political, economic, and technological innovation and, accordingly, the decisive factor in poverty reduction. That is to say, development that can address poverty must come from within the social classes that experience it.

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1 I am indebted to Jackson L. Sigler, a retired diplomat and my father, for the words I needed to express this insight (personal communication, June, 08 2006).
To explore how the international development community can act on this alternative approach, this thesis provides a review of the theory, practice, and consequences of international development to the present day and, from that lead, builds a theoretical argument for the individual creative sojourner as a primary messenger of development. In addition, it presents an exploratory case study of creative sojourners in Timor-Leste and, from their ideas and insights, proposes policy considerations for an overseas apprenticeship program that would support the efforts of trades people, agriculturalists, and small entrepreneurs in improving their lives and, in the process, renewing their societies.
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Moreover, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my older brother, Thomas A. Sigler, who lent impetuousness to the journey recounted here at its beginning with his reference to an ostrich egg years ago and Captain Joseph L. Moore, Pacific Fleet Surgeon, United States Navy and his staff for helping me to articulate the essential point of this work at its close. Finally, I would like to express my thanks and love to my family, specifically my wife, Kazuyo, and my children, Cynthia and Christopher, for all their love, patience, and support. They sacrificed far more than I to see this journey to the end with me and for that I am grateful.

In conclusion, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memories of my mother, Ann K. Sigler, for instilling in me a desire for education in the pursuit of knowledge and Dr. Michael A. Booth who gave me a chance to follow an idea.

* My brother said something to the effect of, “Look, Steve, it’s obvious. Say you’re walking in the desert; you’re dying of thirst and have no way to carry water. You look over a sand dune and there’s this guy you’ve never seen before whistling in the sun carrying water in an ostrich egg. You slap your head and say to yourself, ‘Hey! What a great idea!’” (T.A. Sigler, personal communication, date unknown).
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