

The Diaspora Effect: The Influence of Exiles on Their Cultures of Origin

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We examine the influence exiles have on the cultures left behind. As people break from the familiar routines of country or organization, they look forward to their intended destinations, but also backward to the homes they are leaving. It is that backward glance that we suggest may have powerful reverberations.

Today, about 100 million people live outside their native lands. These exiles constitute significant percentages of current populations in countries throughout the world, ranging from over 20 percent in Australia and Luxembourg to less than 5 percent in Japan and Spain (*The Economist*, 1997). The population dispersals that resulted in these exile populations represent on-going processes with enormous implications for economic development and cultural change. Indeed, the development of distinctive civilizations depends largely on the knowledge and experiences carried across boundaries by members of different cultures (Kotkin, 1992). Much attention has been paid to the effects of exiles on cultures of destination, particularly the impact of migrants from poor countries on the economies of rich countries. Less attention, however, has been paid to the long-term effects of such patterns of migration *on the cultures of origin*.

In this paper we ask: How do exiles affect the cultures they have left? Because this phenomenon is most apparent in examples of national culture, we begin our discussion at the national level, looking at the influence international sojourners, refugees, expatriates and other exiles have on their home countries' cultures. We build on these national culture trends to suggest parallels with organizational cultures and the influence organizational exiles exert on the organizations they leave. The diaspora phenomenon holds vital implications for organizations faced with the continuing patterns of downsizing and turnover.

Throughout this discussion, two concepts are stressed: *virtual culture* and *cultural capital*. Virtual culture refers to the ever-changing set of beliefs, values, behaviors, and performances that help define ethnicity for the community of interconnected world-wide individuals who feel attachment to an ethnic group such as the Koreans, the Irish or the Jamaicans. By the concept of cultural capital we refer to the endowment that each person inherits as a member of a particular ethnic group or sub-group (cf. Bourdieu, 1986). From our perspective, people are active agents who create and recreate the cultural forms that shape their thoughts and actions. The paradox of culture is that what is taken for granted is at the same time actively reproduced. The example of one important aspect of cultural capital, namely language, is helpful: speakers of English inherit the cultural legacy that constitutes the English language, yet within the inherited architecture of possibilities that the language provides, English speakers actively innovate to produce sentences never before spoken and constructions once considered ungrammatical. The possibilities of innovation and change in language as with other aspects of cultural capital are heightened, we argue, as exiles confront environments in which cultural legacies are different from those they have taken for granted. Exiles, compared to natives, are, we suspect, inevitably more self-conscious consumers and producers of cultural products and behaviors.

Countries, such as Ireland, are geographic, political and legal entities, but their cultures extend beyond such boundaries to encompass the virtual community of people who identify with the culture. For 150 years young Irish people have tended to migrate from their homeland to other countries. As a result of this diaspora there are far more people of Irish descent outside of Ireland than living in Ireland. The population of the 26 counties making up what is now the Republic of Ireland has substantially decreased since the great famine. The largest festival of Irish music in the world is held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin every August. The choreographer and principal dancers of the much-acclaimed Irish theatrical production *Riverdance* were children of Irish immigrants to America. These examples raise the question of what constitutes Ireland and Irish culture. The massive and continued emigration from Ireland has helped create a virtual Ireland connecting those living within the political boundaries of the country to exiles and descendants living around the globe who identify with and contribute toward a virtual Irish identity (O'Toole, 1997). Similar patterns exist for other cultures. For example, the increasing emigration patterns of the Japanese over the last three decades led one Tokyo executive to comment that soon, «there will be no Japan, only Japanese» (Kotkin, 1992, p. 12).

Swidler (1986) refers to the "toolbag" of culturally specific skills and abilities emphasized and developed within each cultural grouping. When exiles leave their home culture to join the culture of another nation, they bring with them certain aspects of the home culture as part

of their approach to life. This cultural capital can consist of values, skills, training, language, customs, life experiences, and other socially learned behaviors and attitudes acquired through intense interaction with members of a specific cultural heritage. Exiles from the home culture are, in a sense, ambassadors carrying with them the culture's toolbag of assorted attributes into new environments. As ambassadors, their endeavors are likely to be followed closely by those left behind for clues as to what changes are made to the common toolbag that cultural members carry. The successes and failures of members of the diaspora are likely to be read as providing evidence for how well a representative from one specific culture can do in a different context.

For example, an academic trained in one country's system of higher education who achieves success in another country may be watched by ex-colleagues anxious to assess the value of their own cultural capital in a different and perhaps more lucrative market; and nervous about the apparent compromises that may be necessary in order to get ahead in a different cultural milieu. Exiles are watched to discover what compromises with their heritage they submit to, and what successes and failures they meet with. Gibson Burrell recently described the reaction among ex-colleagues in Britain to the successful emigration of the British academic Gareth Morgan to North America. Under the heading «Meanwhile, back in Europe,» Burrell (1996, p. 652) writes: «The development of Morgan's position was carefully watched by his ex-colleagues in Lancaster where there was a ready willingness to attribute his obvious intellectual movement to cultural and institutional pressures.» Here we have direct evidence of how carefully those left behind monitor every change in the thinking and behavior of a prominent exile.

INFLUENCING THE HOME CULTURE

When someone leaves a culture, the ties to that culture are usually maintained. Exiles keep in touch with friends and relatives who remain, and they often create communities of the displaced to help retain their sense of attachment and identity. These visible exile communities often serve as fertile locations for the development of hybrid cultures, that is, cultures that incorporate elements from both the home and host cultures. For example, Korean communities in the U.S. tend to form around immigrant Protestant churches which simultaneously help immigrants maintain ethnic attachment and help them adjust to a distinctly Western set of values (Oh and Kilduff, 1997).

Exiles, as they go about their daily rounds, struggle to employ their toolbags of cultural competencies in new environments. News of these struggles, and of transformations in culture, are communicated back to the homelands through the extensive networks that immigrants tend to maintain. Thus, Chinese people in China hear about the success of the

overseas Chinese in entrepreneurship, politics, and a range of other fields, and conclude that people like themselves, with similar cultural capital to their own, can succeed in these fields despite the hardships of having to struggle against language barriers and other obstacles. Such exemplars can become beacons for change, especially to the extent that they continue to communicate with and visit their home countries, bringing news of different ways to pursue careers and deploy resources.

In a similar fashion, well-publicized failures, such as the case of the British nanny recently found guilty of manslaughter by a Boston court, can serve as negative exemplars, dramatizing differences between superficially similar cultures, and warning people to avoid certain types of trans-national careers.

Diaspora at the national level occurs for many reasons. As in the case of the Irish dispersion, many exiles are forced from their home cultures by exigencies over which they have no control. Famine, war, and enslavement are three of the major instruments of depopulation at the national level. Those forced to leave under such circumstances often experience a profound sense of personal loss similar to the death of a loved one. It was customary in Ireland to conduct an "American wake" for family members planning to emigrate to the U.S., a wake that resembled «a somber preparation for a death» (O'Toole, 1997, p. 159). Not all exiles leave with such profound forebodings. Some people willingly depart their home cultures to pursue economic or educational opportunities, often with the intention of returning home once they have achieved financial security or completed educational plans.

Perhaps the most obvious influence occurs when an exile becomes famously successful outside the home country, thus helping to redefine how cultural capital can be used. When the people of Ireland (or any country) see someone of their own cultural heritage achieve a high level of success in another cultural milieu, their own ideas of how they themselves can succeed may be changed. One of the defining moments of modern Irish transformation occurred when the young American President John F. Kennedy arrived in Ireland in June, 1963, and was met at the airport by the elderly Irish leader Eamonn de Valera. The contrast between the urban, sophisticated Irish-American Kennedy and de Valera, the champion of a traditional, rural Ireland based on small farms and Catholicism could not have been greater. The subsequent Irish lurch toward an urban-based economy that embraces internationalism and modern technology may have been spurred by the realization of the multiple possibilities inherent in Irish identity. In a more recent example of this phenomenon, the Chinese American governor of Washington State, Gary Locke, returned to his home village in China in 1997, and attracted enormous interest from Chinese villagers because he represented a type of success that suddenly seemed achievable (Locke, 1997).

Although many exiles never make it back or visit only for a brief time, some do become returnees to the home culture. Estimates place the return rate for European immigrants to the United States during the 19th century as high as 40 percent (Sowell, 1996). Close to a third of Chinese students who study in the United States return to China at some point after their studies (Ning, 1997). These returnees bring with them not only financial capital from their work in other countries, but cultural capital in the form of different skills, practices and values that may bring them into conflict with those who stayed at home. These returnees represent a force for change in the cultures to which they return.

At the national level, a recent example of this "return of the native" phenomenon has been the transformation of Irish business by the Irishman Tony O'Reilly. O'Reilly is one of Ireland's most celebrated figures. As a young man, he found lasting fame as a member of the Irish rugby team. He went on to successfully transform the marketing of Irish dairy products to Europe (see O'Toole, 1997, for a case study of O'Reilly's career). After leaving Ireland and coming to America, he joined the Heinz Food company and rapidly rose to become CEO. His influence within Ireland has been unparalleled. His emphasis on the importance of brand names has transformed business thinking in Ireland. For example, O'Reilly bought the struggling Waterford Crystal company and used the brand to market not just crystal but a range of related consumer products. O'Reilly's influence has been instrumental in changing Ireland's relationship with multinational corporations (MNCs). Once regarded as threats to Irish sovereignty, MNCs are now seen as vehicles for the success of the Irish economy, and institutions that offer careers to upwardly mobile Irish people like Tony O'Reilly. Partly because of the example of Tony O'Reilly, there has been high consensus in Ireland on the wisdom of moving away from an agricultural and rural-based economy to a services-based economy hosting the activities of numerous international corporations, such as Abbott Laboratories, Apple Computer, GE Capital Services, IBM, and Netscape Communications.

China provides another example of the influence of returnees on the home culture. Beginning in 1978, Deng Xiaoping provided the opportunity for international study to an elite core of Chinese nationals. Since then, a quarter of a million Chinese students have traveled to the U.S. for educational opportunities (Ning, 1997). As described by one of those past exiles, this mass movement overseas has the potential to greatly influence China and its culture:

«Some have come home to ministerial posts; others hold important jobs in academia, finance and business. I am not sure whether or not they will be the country's next leaders, but their influence could profoundly change China. While most returnees don't see America as an absolute model for our country, our experiences made us see that there are alternative ways for China to develop and for us to lead our

personal lives. Being in the United States made us realize that things in China can be different.» (Ning, 1997, p. 38)

As exiles interact with people in cultural contexts new to them, they often find it necessary to modify their toolbag of cultural preconceptions and skills. New environments impose new demands, such as different language skills, different etiquette patterns, different culinary possibilities, and different child-rearing customs. To the extent that exiles do modify their cultural practices, hybrid cultures are likely to arise. These hybrid cultures are not necessarily superior cultures, they are simply different from the existing cultures from which they borrow. Thus the culture of French Canada or of English-speaking North America is not necessarily superior to that of France and Britain respectively. But these new-world cultures are different in numerous aspects from their old-world parallels. These hybrid cultures can have enormous impacts on exiles' cultures of origin for the reasons already outlined.

In a sense, such hybrid-cultures compete with home-cultures for population and cultural preeminence. To the extent, for example, that two cultures share a common language, then writers have access to both populations. There is a competition to capture people's imagination, to define what it means to be a speaker of, say, English or French. Some members of the old culture may deplore what they perceive as an undermining of cultural standards by exile communities, whereas other elements of the old culture may welcome the same cultural trends as reviving shared cultural practices. One of the puzzling phenomena for Americans traveling abroad is the combination of the world's fascination with all things American and blunt disparagement of American influence. American popular culture is the hybrid culture par excellence, drawing its influences (as well as its immigrants) from all over the world. The United States, more than any other country, can be regarded as a vast experimental cultural hybrid. The unparalleled success of American culture around the world is a testament to the patterns of reverse influence that we discuss in this paper.

DIASPORA AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

At the organizational level, as at the national level, departure from a culture does not necessarily signal that all ties are broken. Organizational exiles keep in touch with friends who remain, and they often create communities of the displaced to help retain their sense of attachment and identity. Important to the examination of organizational exiles is the context in which the diaspora occurs. Mass migration from an organization usually occurs either by force or by routine. Forced migration involves layoffs and downsizing, whereas routine migration involves graduations and the completion of a fixed period of service. It is insightful to look at each diaspora context separately, keeping the

previously defined notions of virtual culture and cultural capital in mind as concepts helpful in understanding the influence organizational exiles have on the cultures they have left.

FORCED DIASPORA

In the corporate world, downsizing is often the trigger that leads to diaspora and the creation of exile communities. For example, downsizing at Digital Equipment Company (DEC) has created an exile culture of those people who identify themselves as "Deckies" but who no longer work for DEC (Johnson, 1996). These DEC exiles maintain their own network, tend to hire each other, have created a newsletter and homepage, and generally keep alive the original DEC spirit. One noted DEC exile is, indeed, the founder of DEC, Ken Olsen, who was removed from his job in 1992, but who continues to comment on the missteps of the managers who replaced him:

«In the former Digital world, Mr. Olsen's ouster cemented his position forever as the voice of what was Digital and is no more. He has used the position like a bully pulpit. 'The culture, it's mean, it's cruel, it hurts,' Mr. Olsen said in an interview in his office... 'But everybody being that mean and cruel is going to get in trouble, and only the good ones will survive...'» (Johnson, 1996, p. F11)

Ex-Deckies have created a virtual culture outside the company showing how the culture of a company, like the culture of a country, can survive exile from the original culture. We are reminded of the legendary Japanese soldier who retained his loyalty to his army division during 40 years of hiding in the jungles of the Philippines; people can continue to feel part of the organization even though their official membership has been severed.

However, does this continuing loyalty on the part of organizational exiles have any effect on the functioning of the organization? We saw that at the national level, exiles do influence their home country and its culture, both by returning as a "living example" for all to see and through maintaining ties with relatives, friends, and acquaintances left behind. In organizations, too, those who remain behind when others leave, either voluntarily or through lay-offs, may continue to be influenced by the successes and failures of their ex-colleagues. We know that those who leave tend to pull others with them out of the organization (Krackhardt and Porter, 1986). In a recent vivid example of this phenomenon, nearly the entire managerial staff from the Detroit region of American Express Financial Advisers resigned following the resignation of the office's top manager, who immediately hired his ex-colleagues at his new money-management firm (Frank, 1997). We can expect this snowball effect to be enhanced when ex-colleagues are perceived to find attractive jobs quickly and to be dampened when attractive new jobs prove difficult to find. Those who stay behind may

use the experiences in the job market of their ex-colleagues as a form of vicarious learning to discover what would happen if they themselves dared to throw their hats into the ring.

There are also examples of cultural influence from forced organizational exiles who have returned to their organizational culture of origin. One recent example is the forced resignation and later return of Steve Jobs of Apple Corporation. Jobs was one of the founders of Apple, and as such, one of the most influential business people in America. Jobs was forced out of his position by John Sculley, whom he had recruited from Pepsi. After several years pursuing other business interests, Jobs returned to Apple as Chairman of the Board, and was recently named the Interim Chief Executive Officer. Yet, instead of pursuing his original 'Apple-against-Big-Brother' management philosophy, Jobs has pursued a more cooperative strategy. His years outside of Apple appear to have taught him the value of business partnerships. He created short-lived strategic alliances with companies to make Macintosh clones, settled a long-simmering dispute with arch-rival Microsoft, and convinced Microsoft to become a non-voting investor in Apple (Booth, 1997). These drastic changes have dismayed many Apple employees and enthusiasts, but signify the changed culture that Steve Jobs, the exiled leader now returned, believes is necessary for Apple to survive. Although these examples of forced exile are most often the ones to make the front page of the local paper, they are not the most common form of organizational diaspora. Many organizations throughout the world practice a form of routinized diaspora as a natural part of their existence and survival. Examination of the exiles from these organizations illuminates a different, more deliberate, form of influence resulting from organizational diaspora.

PLANNED DIASPORA

Many organizations expect their members to leave after a fixed period of years. Two examples are educational institutions and the military. Although people routinely graduate from these organizations, they continue to identify themselves with the institutions. One of the most striking examples of continued organizational loyalty occurs at the end of concerts performed by the U.S. Marine Band. The finale is often a medley of the anthems of the different branches of the armed services. As each song is played members of the audience who, up until that point passed as ordinary civilians, suddenly shoot upright on their feet to identify themselves as continuing members of the Marines, the infantry, the navy, and the airforce.

Similarly, the graduates of educational institutions are renowned for their fierce loyalty to their alma maters, exhibited not just at football tailgating parties but in a range of behaviors. Some of these alumni behaviors strongly affect the operations, finances, and policies of the universities concerned. For example, following the controversial interpre-

tation by the Texas attorney general that federal law forbade the consideration of race in the distribution of scholarships at state universities, the University of Texas Ex-Students Association began raising money to privately fund scholarships promoting racial and ethnic diversity. This alumni group planned to distribute more than one million dollars immediately to keep minorities on campus (Raspberry, 1997). University alumni can be powerful members of universities' virtual cultures even if (like the Texas Ex-Students Association) they have no legal connection to the university.

These routinized versions of organizational diaspora generate a vast network of potentially loyal exiles capable of exerting influence on the organization's culture. Some organizations tap this resource and attempt to manage it through establishing alumni organizations, monthly newsletters, and annual get-togethers. Other organizations neglect this extra-organizational network, and thereby fail to benefit from the tremendous knowledge and resources that such virtual cultures contain.

IMPLICATIONS

What, then, can an organization do to manage the diaspora phenomenon? One possibility is to change the organization into a diaspora entity, deliberately designed to encourage people to carry parts of the common cultural capital in new directions. Something of this kind has been accomplished by the Virgin group of companies under the chairmanship of Richard Branson. Under the Virgin group's financial umbrella, Branson encourages employees to start their own companies, draw on Virgin expertise and backing, but strike out in new directions unthought of by top management. (The Virgin name itself signifies a refusal to let inexperience prevent exploration into new business areas.) The success or failure of Virgin "intrapreneurs" powerfully affects the culture of entrepreneurship within the company, providing examples to others of what can be accomplished. To the extent that these new Virgin endeavors flourish, they open up new career opportunities for existing Virgin employees. Further, intrapreneurs' ventures into new business areas provides new cultural capital to the Virgin group as a whole. Thus, the Virgin group benefits from exiles who have been trained in the Virgin culture, but who want to be independent business owners. The Virgin group has come to encompass hundreds of small and large companies united by a common but dynamic culture emphasizing entertainment, challenge, and youth (Jackson, 1995).

Not everyone can leave a company and still work under the same corporate tent, of course. The more usual experience is for individuals to move on to another organizational entity, as research on the "boundaryless career" has emphasized (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Habitual exiles may have careers that resemble that of temporary workers. But

because many of these habitual exiles will tend to occupy high-level positions in companies their departures may cause more disturbance to organizational cultures than that of other temporary hires. When, for example, a company president moves on to another opportunity, those left behind may feel a sense of collective loss toward someone who, for a time, personified the organization. Incoming replacements may find themselves struggling to win loyalty and dedication from employees still attached to the previous incumbent.

To some degree, the boundaryless careers of highly paid employees may threaten the very notion of fixed organizational boundaries. Already in Silicon Valley, the network of programmers and other computer professionals has become more important as an economic resource and as a job market than any particular organizational entity. The diaspora effect in this industry is an every-day experience, with highly-specialized workers frequently updating their cultural tool-bags by moving on to new employment opportunities. As one executive commented:

«Here in Silicon Valley there's far greater loyalty to one's craft than to one's company...A company is just a vehicle which allows you to work. If you're a circuit designer it's most important for you to do excellent work. If you can't in one firm, you'll move on to another one.»
(Saxenian, 1990, p. 97)

Within this Silicon Valley industry, loyalty is to the individual's network of contacts rather than to any particular organizational configuration. Similarly, the rigid organizational control that once characterized the Hollywood movie industry has been replaced by networks of small teams of professionals for whom reputation, not organizational affiliation, is the key to continued employment and success (Baker and Faulkner, 1991). In these industries, therefore, we see exile status as the norm, and creativity is fueled by a constant interchange between people crossing physical and legal boundaries in pursuit of opportunity. In Hollywood, as in Silicon Valley, people of all ethnic, national, and organizational backgrounds meet to work together in ever-shifting alliances. The images from Hollywood that are beamed around the world are created by exiles from around the world.

We have outlined the case for considering the influence of exiles on cultures of origin, but have talked little of research because there has been little work done on this topic. At the organizational level, we think the diaspora phenomenon has implications for understanding organizational learning. Organizations that consistently strive to learn from those who leave the organization are likely to create vibrant virtual cultures that extend the antennae of the organization in unforeseen ways. By contrast, organizations that shun virtual cultures, creating fortresses of "official" members who are forbidden to speak to those who have left, may be depriving themselves of valuable resources. Virtual cultures that flourish around and between organizations can be rich

environments in which ideas can be tested, contacts developed, and careers established.

In conclusion, organizations that nourish their virtual cultures may be repaid in the form of enhanced cultural capital, as exiles contribute ideas and other resources. Organizations in touch with their virtual communities may be more open to change relative to cultures closed to the examples and communications of exiles. In terms of future research, we clearly know little about the process by which people or organizations adopt certain elements from exiles. What powerful schemas drive our perceptions of those who have left us behind? How do we react to cultural brokers who return from afar bringing strange news and outlandish fashions? What prevents the homogenization of cultures and how do we explain the persistence of differences across nations and across organizations? As people break from the familiar routines of country or organization, they look forward to their intended destinations, but also backward to the homes they are leaving. It is that backward glance that we suggest may have powerful reverberations.

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