# The Impact of Ethnocentrism on the Communication of Young People in a Multicultural Environment

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**Abstract:** *We live in the era of globalization and are witnessing profound economic, political, and cultural transformations. In the context of the continuous process of international integration, the world has separated into two hostile camps: the followers and the opponents of globalism. Against the background of the controversial discussions between the two camps about the probability of success or failure of the globalist plan, there is increasing talk about ethnocentrism. In the present study, we will interpret the concept of ethnocentrism from the perspective of the globalization process, we will elucidate the existing relationships between the phenomena of ethnocentrism, xenocentrism, and cultural relativism; we will analyze the impact of ethnocentrism on the communication of young people in a multicultural context.*
**Keywords:** *EU, globalization, ethnocentrism, xenocentrism, cultural relativism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We live in the era of globalization and are witnessing profound economic, political and cultural transformations. New realities, values, principles, rules, etc. manage our life and activity, influence our way of thinking and acting, challenge us to change, help us overcome the fear of instability, but also the uncertainty for the subsequent day.

In the context of the continuous process of international integration, the world has separated into two hostile camps: the followers and the opponents of globalism. As a rule, the former are representatives of individualistic cultures, who support and promote the harmonious evolution of different economic, social, political, cultural systems, but also the social cohesion, cultural homogenization, transnationalism, cultural relativism, etc. The second camp belongs to anti-globalists, representatives, in particular, of collectivist, ethnocentric, traditional, relatively homogeneous cultures. They appreciate this process as the source of social inequity, the decline of national sovereignty and the disappearance of the traditional state.

Against the background of the controversial discussions between the two camps, about the probability of success or failure of the globalist plan, there is increasing talk about *ethnocentrism*, a phenomenon associated with globalism, which manifests itself in a double sense: an isolationist one, through which ethnic specificity is preserved in a primitive sense and, implicitly, the cultural one; the second, an expansionist one, by which a certain cultural individuality is extended (through imposition, free assumption, aggression, persuasion, etc.) over other areas, regions, ethnic groups, countries, etc. [1] .

In the present study, we will interpret the concept of ethnocentrism from the perspective of the globalization process, we will elucidate the existing relationships between the phenomena of ethnocentrism, xenocentrism and cultural relativism; we will analyze the impact of ethnocentrism on the communication of young people in a multicultural context.

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[1] Zaiţ Dumitru, Globalizare și ethnocentrism/ Globalization and Ethnocentrism, in „Management intercultural"/ „Intercultural Management", vol. 3, nr.4, 1-7, 2001, p. 3, available here: https://seaopenresearch.eu/ Journals/articles/MI_4_1.pdf

## 2. ABOUT ETHNOCENTRISM

*Ethnocentrism* is a response of the opponents of the globalization process, representing a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, which involves value judgments on other ethnic groups by reference to their own values, norms, systems. Originally, the term *ethnocentrism* was used by the Polish sociologist and political scientist Ludwig Gumplowicz in his work "Grundriss der Soziologie" (1885); later, in 1900, the *ethnocentric* determinative is taken up in research by the American anthropologist William John McGee. He considered *ethnocentrism* as an early step in the evolution of the human mind, implying that his own society, the USA, around the turn of the 19th century was not ethnocentric[2].

In 1906, the concept of *ethnocentrism* was applied by Sumner in his work "Folkways". According to the American sociologist, *ethnocentrists* are individuals or certain groups, who consider themselves unique and superior to others, having a careless attitude towards representatives of other cultures. In the same context, Sumner analyzes the terms *in-group* and *out-group*, which he calls two sides of the same coin representing a universal relationship. In the author's hypothesis, the idea of superiority of the in-group and hostility towards the out-group dominates[3].

In social psychology, the main study of ethnocentrism was carried out by Adorno and his colleagues in the classical study "The Authoritarian Personality" (1982). In this study, *ethnocentrism* referred to „group relations generally; it had to do not only with numerous groups toward which the individual has hostile opinions and attitudes but, equally important, with groups toward which he is positively disposed"[4].

In order to realize the essence of ethnocentrism, it should be analyzed from a diachronic and synchronic perspective. No nation, culture or language would have survived in a society devoid of ethnocentric attitudes. In this context, ethnocentrism becomes an expression of the spiritual state (more or less extreme) of the individual or the ethnic collective, which involves anti-globalist opinions, attitudes and behaviors. For ethnocentrists, the history of the nation and the cultural specificity is valuable, because it discerns their knowledge and experiences, it helps them to realize who they are and where they come from, what the value and meaning of life is, what goals and objectives they are going to achieve in order to preserve their uniqueness, originality and specificity, etc. They are focused on their own success, trying to disrupt the globalizing offensive of the economic, political and social sectors and to reject cultural homogenization.

Over time, *ethnocentrism* has had its positive and negative effects. Referring to the positive aspects, we point out its contribution to the preservation of national identity and dignity, the preservation and promotion of spiritual and cultural values, patriotism, the language and history of a nation. As for the negative effects, we note the subjectivism in the tendency to rank cultures based on one's own perceptions, opinions, attitudes, discouraging cultural borrowings, neglecting differences, avoiding dialogue with representatives of other cultural environments, showing skeptical and devaluing attitudes towards them by appealing to

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[2] Ethnocentrism. Reflections on Medical Anthropology, Sjaak van der Geest & Ria Reis (editors), Aksant Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 2002, p. 2, available here: https://www.sjaakvandergeest.socsci.uva.nl/pdf/medical_anthropology/Ethnocentrism_book.pdf

[3] Stela Spînu, The role of ethnocentric and xenocentric attitudes in intercultural communication, in „Administrarea Publică. Revistă metodico-ştiinţifică trimestrială", Nr. 3 (107) iulie - septembrie 2020, p. 37, available here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348442727_The_role_of_ethnocentric_and_xenocentric_attitudes_in_intercultural_communication

[4] Ayşe Dilek Öğretir, Sezai Özçelik. The study of ethnocentrism, stereotype and prejudice: psycho-analytical and psycho-dynamic theories, in „Journal of Qafqaz University", Nr 24, 2008, p. 237, available here: https://www.secretintelligence service.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ethnocentrism.pdf

❖ stereotypes and prejudices;

❖ discrimination;

❖ cultural genocide, etc.

❖ *Stereotypes and prejudices in the support of ethnocentrism*

*Stereotypes* represent blueprints or models, which can be applied in relation to other people, depending on the circumstances or conditions of dialogue. They have a slow, lasting and stable evolution. *Stereotypes* are maintained artificially through three processes: *selective perception* (the observer retains only the passages that are of particular interest to him and ignores the others), *selective interpretation* of data in accordance with the elements of the stereotype, and *confirmation of the rule by exceptions*[5].

*Ethnic stereotypes* are formed and maintained, as a rule, in multicultural environments, where representatives of various ethnic groups are forced to coexist and communicate. Obviously, they perceive the behavior, the way of thinking and acting of the other from the perspective of their own culture, trying to generalize, simplify and reproduce them succinctly (positive, negative or neutral), thus showing a subjective attitude towards others, neglecting what is essential, noticing only the similarities, ignoring the differences.

*Stereotypes* become the core of *prejudices*, which, in turn, represent specific forms of thinking with a negative connotation and defiant attitudes. Prejudices are present in all cultures, being caused by differences in perception of what is new and unknown. They are based on feelings contrary to reason (whether on fear or dislike, hatred or contempt, etc.); they are not based on objective data or personal experience, do not involve reflection or critical analysis; they are devoid of evidence. The causes of forming and appealing to prejudices are determined by the desire to dominate, to be superior towards the one next to you, to impose new opinions by devaluing truths[6].

Thus, ethnic stereotypes, along with prejudices, are specific to ethnocentrism, being used to judge facts, people, realities, at the same time influencing the relationships and behavior of group members, promoting pseudo-morality, subjectivism, discouraging critical thinking and tolerance for diversity and intercultural dialogue.

❖ *From ethnic stereotypes to discrimination*

In the most straightforward definition, *discrimination* is the unequal treatment of similar individuals placed in the same situation but who differ by one or several characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, or other categorical statuses[7]. *Ethnic discrimination* is based on issues of language, religion, nationality, based on individual or collective prejudices and stereotypes, causing unfair or abusive behavior.

In multicultural environments, ethnic *discrimination* can take several forms: *avoidance* (bypassing people belonging to certain ethnic groups, artificially creating difficult conditions for coexistence in the same sociocultural environment), *segregation* or *marginalization* (the intentional concentration and isolation of a minority ethnic group in a certain space, in accordance with certain customs, norms, laws, etc.); *violence* (the use of force and power against members of minority ethnic groups).

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[5]L. Plugaru, M. Pavalache, Educație interculturală/ Intercultural education, Sibiu, Editura Psihomedia, 2007, p. 66, available here: http://www.oportunitatiegale.ro/pdf_files/Educatie%20Interculturala.pdf

[6] Stela Spînu, Șocul cultural, rezultat al persistenței stereotipurilor etnice/ Culture shock, resulting from the persistence of ethnic stereotypes, in „Teoria şi practica administrării publice: Materiale ale Conferinţei ştiinţifico-practice internaţionale", Chişinău, Tipogr. „Print-Caro", 2022, p. 140.

[7] Rosita Fibbi, Arnfinn H. MidtbøenPatrick Simon, Theories of Discrimination, available here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350731562_Theories_of_Discrimination

*Ethnic discrimination* is based on abusive, aggressive, uncontrolled behavior in accordance with individual or collective stereotypes and prejudices about the superiority or inferiority of a culture, ethnic group, etc. Discrimination discerns numerous negative effects, such as: blocking critical thinking, changing behavior, creating barriers to communication, violence, etc. In this context, familiarity with international non-discrimination policies and practices are welcome and useful.

❖ *Cultural genocide – a form of discrimination*
*Genocide* is the most extreme denial of the right to self-determination. It is a twentieth-century expression for an old and odious practice, namely, the partial or comprehensive extermination of a distinct people[8]. Examples of such crimes against humanity are the extermination of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, the massacre of the Jews by the Nazis in the Second World War, the genocide in Cambodia, the Holocaust in Rwanda, etc.

In practice, the destruction of a population often begins with an attack on its culture, especially its language, monuments and religious institutions. *Cultural genocide* has a well-defined structure, being focused on the creation of artificial problems within state institutions responsible for the cultural, linguistic and religious education sector. The application of acts of genocide against representatives of certain nations, ethnicities, races or religions causes strong emotions and devastating consequences, leading to unpredictable, violent behavior or self-isolation.

Referring to the negative effects caused by stereotypes, discrimination and genocide, the "Pyramid of Hate" promoted by the Anti-Defamation League becomes conclusive (Table 1. "Pyramid of Hate").



***Table 1. "Pyramid of Hate"***
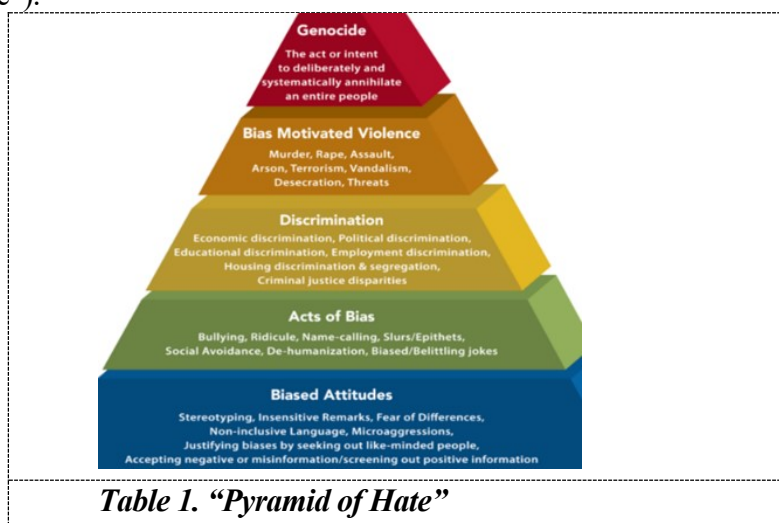
## 3. ETHNOCENTRISM VS XENOCENTRISM AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

*Ethnocentrism* is a phenomenon opposite to *xenocentrism* and *cultural relativism*. *Xenocentrism* is characterized by deviant behavior from traditional values, norms and attitudes, being encountered more frequently in societies in transition, which will withstand several crises (economic, political, cultural, etc.). Xenocentrists, being excited by the expansion of globalism and the desire to improve their social condition, underestimate their own culture, being easily influenced,

[8]Genocide. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination, available here: https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/446

manipulated or assimilated by the representatives of other cultures, whose values, norms and attitudes they consider vital and clearly superior. They support cultural diffusion (including aspects related to religion, food, clothing, etc.), easily adapt to new conditions, tend to an open dialogue with representatives of other cultures, and often become hostile to their own culture.

The increase in the number of xenocentric people in the society speaks of the existence of several economic, political, social or cultural problems, etc., which should be identified and solved by the authorities. Otherwise, xenocentrism will become a reason for citizens to immigrate to another state, considered clearly superior.

Opposite to xenocentrism and ethnocentrism is *cultural relativism*, a phenomenon associated with globalization, which promotes the common good of different cultural groups, favoring and encouraging unity through diversity, gradual changes, mutual respect, honesty, political, economic, religious, linguistic, etc. pluralism, creating an atmosphere based on trust and respect for self and others, support for cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences between groups.

Therefore, *cultural relativism* is the only trend that would support the success of the globalists, would help them achieve their proposed goals; while *ethnocentrism* and *xenocentrism* would represent barriers to an open, successful dialogue.

## 4. THE IMPACT OF ETHNOCENTRISM ON THE COMMUNICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE. CASE STUDY

Young people of different ethnicities have always had a benevolent attitude towards everything new and unknown, positively appreciating the phenomenon of globalization. On the other hand, thanks to this, they have the possibility to continue their studies abroad, to familiarize themselves with new things, to make new friends, overcoming the cultural shock much easier than older people, etc.

In this context, the opinion of young people, belonging to different ethnicities, cultures, religions, about ethnocentrism, xenocentrism and cultural relativism is of interest. Pursuing this aim, we conducted an opinion poll among students, representatives of Romanians and Russians (country of origin – Republic of Moldova) and Indians (country of origin – India), who study at the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy "N. Testemițanu".

According to the answers received (*Table 2. Opinion poll*), the majority of young Romanian-Bessarabians are followers of xenocentrism and cultural relativism; Russian students share ethnocentric and relativistic attitudes, Indian respondents are promoters of ethnocentrism. It is obvious that these trends cannot ultimately contribute to a successful dialogue between young people; they will cause and maintain a social distance.

| Categories of respondent | Ethnocentrism (%) | Xenocentrism (%) | Cultural relativism (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Romanian | 10 | 60 | 30 |
| Russian | 45 | 20 | 35 |
| Indian | 65 | 10 | 25 |

***Table 2. Opinion poll***

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As a result, against the backdrop of discussions about the eventual success or failure of globalism, *ethnocentrism* remains a major challenge for humanity, shared in particular by the older generations. Young people are much more flexible in their thinking, dynamic in their actions and appreciate, in particular, the positive parts of the globalization process. Xenocentric attitudes prevail among students from the Republic of Moldova, which speaks of the persistence of political, economic and cultural problems, but also of their desire to emigrate to states with a prosperous economy and a better standard of living. It is worth mentioning the collectivist and ethnocentric spirit that characterizes Indian students, who prefer to avoid dialogue with representatives of other cultures.

In this sense, intercultural communication and education would serve to overcome ethnocentric or xenocentric behavior, influencing young people's perception of traditional values; it would cause profound changes in attitude and behavior towards diversity.

In order to overcome ethnocentric or xenocentric attitudes and behaviors, the following steps are welcome:

– promoting intercultural education with the aim of developing attitudes, knowledge and skills to understand diversity, to neglect the hierarchization of cultures, facilitate an empathetic, tolerant, efficient and dignified intercultural behavior;

– suppression of prejudices and stereotypes about moral, intellectual, physical, etc. characteristics, attributed to various ethnic, racial and religious groups by trying to know their ethnonym and ethnotype;

– preventing and combating discrimination by implementing anti-discrimination policies;

– learning foreign languages and developing intercultural sensitivity by participating in mobility projects, organizing cultural and scientific events, etc.

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