An Interview-Based Assessment of the Influence
of Ethnocentrism in Business

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Abstract

Although it is natural for the individual to judge other cultures primarily relative to his own culture and social community, frequently this tendency translates into the disparage of other people's values, perspectives, behaviors and lacking acceptance of cultural diversity, while promoting intolerance for out-groups.

Cultural narrowness discourages intercultural and inter-group understanding. Taken to its limits, ethnocentrism can take many negative forms, resulting in discrimination, hostility, prejudice and even aggressiveness, and has many commonalties with stereotyping, racism and xenophobia which later can lead to deep ethnic conflicts, political conflicts, war, terrorism, even genocide.

The paper deals with the investigation of ethnocentrism in business and how this attitude impact different areas of the organization's life. It's also shows the importance of cultural differences and similarities awareness and the role of management in taking advantage of a multicultural environment.

For instance, the manager-subordinate communication may be affected by ethnocentrism. If an ethnocentric manager has out-group members as subordinates, he may view them as less credible than other in-group subordinates. Also, the same thing is likely to happen when the ethnocentric subordinate has as manager a member of the out-group.

Keywords: *ethnocentrism, national culture, organizational culture, multicultural environment, business performances.*

JEL classification: M12, M14, M16.

1. Literature review

According to Levine and Campbell (1972), ethnocentrism, an originally sociological concept, noticed in most social groups, was later dealt with as a psychological construct, depicting the widespread tendency of individuals to identify with their own in-group and simultaneously reject out-groups. Freud (1922) described ethnocentrism as a form of narcissism expanded to the group level: "So long as a group formation persists or so far as it extends, individuals in the group behave as though they were uniform, tolerate the peculiarities of its other members, equate themselves with them, and have no feelings of aversion towards them." (p.33)

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A suitable idiomatic expression for ethnocentrism is "tunnel vision"[1], defined as the narrowness of viewpoint resulting from concentration on a single idea, opinion, to the exclusion of others. Highly ethnocentric individuals believe that their judgment reflects the universal truth of what is normal, right and desirable. The system of beliefs and values of their in-group are regarded as of supreme importance. They perceive the in-group's symbols and values as a source of pride, often despising the other's values. (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000). According to Wood (2009), "Ethnocentrism leads to judgments that difference is not just different, but wrong." (p.173).

The first scale designed to study ethnocentrism, also known as the E-scale, is a series of rating items, consisting of three subscales, pertaining to minority groups (Jewish and Black people) and patriotism. The E-scale studied the perceptions of the white group regarding other groups in the United States during the 1950s. Critics and researchers have argued that the E-scale may not be a valid measure of ethnocentrism. (Forbes, 1985, as cited in Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997, p. 387)

Today, the scale is completely useless due to the fact that it is both outdated and even ethnocentric in its nature. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) developed a generalized ethnocentrism 21-items scale, GENE, in order to assess how individuals regard their own culture. This is a valid and reliable means of measurement, regardless of culture, and includes statements as "Countries are smart to look up at my country."(Dong et al., 2008, p.29).

The results of a study conducted by Neuliep et al.(2005) indicate that ethnocentrism negatively influences interpersonal perceptions within the organizational context, as nowdays wider area of responsibility which is being transferred over to the employees as it is being expected of them to take self-conscious actions (Mandruleanu, 2011). Neuliep et al.'s study indicates that ethnocentrism was negatively and significantly correlated with perceptions of attraction, competence, character and generalized attitudes about out-group managers.

Neuliep and McCroskey (2001) affirm that ethnocentrism does not only affect the perceptions of verbal and non-verbal messages, but also the perceptions of their source. The perception of attractiveness and credibility is influenced by ethnocentrism, and people initiate and maintain communication with entities they are attracted to. Moreover, attraction is a function of the proportion of similar opinions. (Byrne, 1971, as cited in Neuliep et al., 2005, p.45) Therefore, an ethnically centered person who is likely to perceive the members of an out-group as highly different will consider them inferior to those from his own group. If the dimensions of credibility (competence and trustworthiness) are also affected by ethnocentrism, then the individual is likely to perceive the out-group as unattractive and not credible.

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[1] Collins English Dictionary , 10th Edition, HarperCollins, 2009

House (2001) stated that interviewers would rather hire people with whom they may have commonalties and that cultural or ethnic similarity between interviewer and interviewee could play a decisional role in the employment process (Neuliep et. al., 2005). If ethnocentrism affects the perception of attractiveness and credibility, therefore we can draw the conclusion that an ethnocentric interviewer may make biased judgments on these grounds.

Landy and Farr (1980), as well as Kraiger and Ford (1985) have found in their studies that both African-American managers and white managers gave consistently less negative performance valuation to the members of their own races in comparison to those of different race (Neuliep et al., 2005).

However, despite the interest and the scales proposed for measuring ethnocentrism, there is a gap in literature with regards to qualitative data researching ethnocentrism, especially the lack of research on overcoming ethnocentrism in order to help those directly involved and exposed to this phenomenon. Furthermore, the nature of reciprocity in ethnocentrism has not been sufficiently researched. Considering this research niche, we have formulated two research hypotheses: *(H1) Ethnocentrism is reciprocal*, and *(H2) Cultural awareness is critical for overcoming ethnocentrism*.

2. Methodology

The objectives of this study are to examine the challenges faced by the individuals while being in contact with a different culture than that of their own, and the adjustments they made in order to cope with the differences arising from the cultural clash between local and personal values. This study will not highlight only psychological and socio-cultural challenges, but also education and work related challenges. The present research seeks to provide insight in the impact of a foreign cultural environment on different individuals coming from and entering various cultures of the world, as well as means of coping with and overcoming ethnocentrism.

The method used to investigate the stated hypothesis is through qualitative case study. The former is essentially descriptive and provides the means for understanding such complex phenomena and its relationship to external factors. The method provides the opportunities of revealing the essence and understanding the multiple facets of the phenomena, the issue being explored though a variety of lenses rather than through one lens (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Due to the high complexity of the studied phenomenon, the selection of participants plays a critical role in this research. With respect to this, the sample of participants is not of statistical importance, being selected precisely for their direct experience with regards to differences in culture and ethnocentrism. Burns (2000, p. 465) contends purposive sampling is justified *"because it serves the real purpose and objectives of the researcher of discovering, gaining insight and understanding into a particular chosen phenomenon"*. Rather than choosing wide, superficial data, this research seeks to draw detailed and descriptive data, the most

important objective being the potential which each case brings to developing a broader perspective of the studied phenomenon.

A total of six participants were interviewed, both men and women of different age, socio-economic status and educational background, currently living and/or working in a different country and culture than that in which they were born and raised. Although all the participants were specifically asked if they would like to receive pseudonyms instead of their real names, none of them felt this was necessary. The participants were picked in a manner in which unique pairs of cultures could be assessed, although for most of the respondents Romania is either the host country or the country of origin. Furthermore, all participants have lived, worked or studied in the foreign country for more than 12 months. The participants are briefly presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Participants

	Interviewee	Country of origin	**Host country**
1.	Iulia Voicu	Romania	United Kingdom
2.	Sabin Stan	Romania	The Netherlands
3.	Michael Paolo	Portugal	United Kingdom
4.	Monica Dan	Romania	Germany
5.	Adnan Imad	Lebanon	Romania
6.	Larisa Patrascu	Romania	Canada

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the research participants were conducted. The choice of the semi-structured interview over other types was chosen on the idea that participants could answer as freely as they wished, the flexibility of the discussion making easier for the participants to highlight the important experiences in their point of view, as well as allowing the researcher to come up with questions as the discussion went on. The open-ended questions starting with "how" or "why" would provide more meaning to the objectives of this study rather than constraining the participants with only a few choices of answer. The interview questions were specifically designed in order to identify a number of issues. All the participants were asked to describe in detail their experience within the foreign cultural setting as well as the effects on their behavior and adjustments made in order to better cope with the environment.

The interviews were conducted on the Internet, in private chat rooms, due to the physical distance between the researcher and participants. When necessary, the information was translated. Direct quotations of the participants' answers are given in our analysis in order to point out relevant information.

For this study to remain reasonable in its purpose, we have chosen a limited number of participants. Such size of the sample limits the statistical generalization of the findings but, at the same time, facilitates reaching a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in real-life contexts.

The limited amount of time of the respondents made it impossible to conduct confirmatory interviews after analysis. On the other hand, the fact that the interviews were conducted over the Internet, in private chat rooms, and the

information could be re-analyzed as many times as needed, provides sufficient data validity.

In order to understand even deeper this phenomenon, more qualitative researches should be conducted, preferably supported by quantitative data. Further research should include larger samples, and more ethnically diverse. The replication of this kind of research on a larger sample would certainly create important piece of knowledge that will be useful for companies that would like to better integrate expatriates, for governmental institutions that deal with ethnicity-related issues, as well as for overcoming challenges that individuals confront when entering in a different cultural environment.

3.   Results and discussions

The interview analysis revealed the attitudes on ethnocentrism, and the cultural experiences of the respondents, who are generally people involved in the business world, in early career positions. The commented answers are presented below.

The first participant, **Iulia Voicu**, is a 23 year old female, currently working as an Assistant Manager in the Music Industry, with a BA degree in Media with Creative Industries, which left her home country, Romania, four years ago, in order to live in the United Kingdom, searching for a better education.

When asked what she thinks of British society customs and values in comparison to those from home, there were two social aspects she highlighted: intensive alcohol consumption *"They seem to have a very big custom of consuming alcohol at any time possible. The moment there is a celebration there is alcohol everywhere. (..) It was impossible to socialize with British students and make friends as all they could think about was alcohol and therefore going out for a simple cup of coffee to communicate was out of the question."* and parenting *"Romanian students often seem to have a lot more money to spend that the British ones(...) British parents just seem to let their children struggle throughout University and often take up part time jobs in order to afford little luxuries such as going out with friends."*

An interesting attitude came to my attention in this interview, namely the tendency of mingling with other international students rather than making friends with the locals.*"I mostly socialized with other foreigners as they seemed to have a more relaxed approach to the alcohol craze (students from Hong Kong, Greece, other Romanians but as time went by I managed to get involved with British scholars as well."*

The interview revealed that in Nottingham the locals were very friendly and helpful. She responded that instead of being exposed to preconceived ideas of her background, *"(...) people responded with curiosity when told where I was coming from."* When asked about London, which is a much bigger city, automatically providing more room for ethnocentrism, the answer was in

accordance with the previous. *"London is full of foreigners. Most of the people I know were born in Britain but all have different backgrounds in terms of their country of origin. Being a foreigner in London makes no difference. It is such a mixed city that people have learnt to accept and even at times infiltrate customs from foreigners into their own lifestyles. (...) There is a Brazilian carnival every summer in Notting Hill, there are more foreign cuisine restaurants than there are British and quite a significant one, British Airways serve Tika-Masala on their flights which is an Indian dish. "*

Although Iulia thinks of herself as a *"very adaptable person"* which *"likes to embrace different cultures"*, she believes that this international experience has developed her personality in many ways. She understands that it might not be as simple for everyone to adapt as well and fast as she had and further makes some recommendations: *"Coming to a new country isn't easy, but moving to a different city in your own country isn't easy either. You have to adapt to being along for a while until new people enter your life. (...) It is important to be open-minded and not to shocked at what you can encounter. No book, movie or TV show can prepare you for moving to another country. "*

The second interviewee, **Michael Paolo,** is a 22 year old male coming from Braga, a small city in Portugal. Currently a Sales Assistant in the Retail Industry, Michael was motivated to relocate to London, United Kingdom by the financial opportunities he could seize, comparing with those of his own country. *"I am able to try and create a life for myself here."*

His main fears before he moved to the United Kingdom were that he would not find a job and not make any friends. His fears moved rapidly from thought to reality *"I did think people would be nicer than what they turned out to be."* He believed this attitude was partially because he was perceived as a foreigner. *"(...) because of so many foreigners coming into England they don't give us the chance to show them we are nice people and have a lot to offer to their culture and country, however after being here for 3 years, they just seem rude to everyone, it seems to be in their nature."*

When asked what was his relationship with members of his own culture located in the area in comparison with the locals, Michael answered: *"They (Portuguese) were very friendly and kind, always helping me out whenever possible, they were the first friends I made and they helped my adapt better to my new surroundings as they had already been here for a while, I did make friends with some nice British people but at first I felt more comfortable around people who were from the same culture as me."*

For Michael, the most difficult thing to adapt to was communicating with people and trying to get around London. Although he had a good understanding of English, the fact that he was not a proficient speaker posed a few problems over time. When it comes to adjustments in lifestyle when moving to the United Kingdom, Michael seems to have needed to adjust a lot comparing to what he was

used to in his home-culture, especially due to the fact that everything in London happens at a greater pace and level than in his hometown. *" For example there are underground train lines and many bus routes just in London alone, this is unseen where I came from, also people are always busy and there are always special nights out every night if you want to go out partying and drinking with friends. There was only one night out where I came from; this was Friday night at the one and only nightclub disco that was in the city!"*

As perceived by Michael, the most important differences between the two cultures he contacted were family-related and parenting-related. *"Families in Portugal like to sit down together to eat dinner, whereas here in London they will all eat separate at different times. I also think young kids have better discipline in Portugal than in England which is why there are so many crimes committed by youths here and that isn't really heard of in Portugal."*

After almost half a year, Michael decided to attend some intercultural courses, and it seems to have helped him adapt better. Michael believes this international experience enhanced his intercultural skills: *"I believe moving here has shown me a new culture which I have learned from and adapted to which has helped me become a more cultural person willing to try out new things and communicate/live with many different people."*

The third participant, **Sabin Stan** is a 22 year old male, originating from Bucharest, Romania. He moved to The Netherlands, Hague three years ago, now having a BA in International Communication Management and currently working as a Digital Communications Intern in the Chemical Industry.

One thing Sabin was not prepared for when he decided to move to Hague was the attitude of Dutch people.*"I was expecting everyone to be very open and liberal, turns out that most people here are as closed minded as the rest of the world. I was shocked when I first realized how xenophobic and racist Dutch people truly are. It's something that bothers me even to this day."*

Sabin believes that culture shock came in 3 to 6 months of living there, encountering problems with the administrative system. Also, he seems to have been exposed to discrimination and out-group exclusion*: "I (also) had a difficult time getting over the open xenophobia and racism of my new Dutch friends. Something which really shocked me happened when I asked a good friend to take me to the airport for the first time. He said he is happy to drive me there and that I only needed to give him 10 Euros for gas."*

When the interview got to questions regarding the interviewee's relationship to locals, Sabin answered: *"At first I mingled mostly with international students and had little contact with the natives."* He furthermore confessed, *"As time went on, (...) I felt a strong sentiment of rejection coming from the locals. I was somehow put in the same boiling pot of "east Europeans" that the media deemed responsible for things such as an increased crime rate and high*

unemployment. So gradually I became more ethnocentric and started to mingle with my own a lot more.”

Sabin believes that individuals with no cross-cultural skills have no chance of adapting to such a setting. *“I have seen many cases of students that went home after one year because they were either too homesick or simply couldn't fit in and socialize.* The learning experience of living and working with foreigners is not questionable for Sabin. He believes that he gained a much deeper understanding of how other cultures “work”. *“Cultural awareness is by far the biggest factor in overcoming negative behavior and culture shock. Without basic intercultural skills anyone who wishes to become an expat will have a hard time doing so.”*

He also believes that lifestyle adjustments are mandatory in order to fit in. *“Living in another country fundamentally changes you. Different parts of your personality float to the top, and you take on qualities, mannerisms, and opinions that define the new people around you. And there's nothing wrong with that; it's often part of the reason you left in the first place. You wanted to evolve, and to so you need to put yourself in an uncomfortable new situation that would force you to into a new phase of your life.”*

Although courses such as intercultural communication were mandatory first year courses at his University, this does not seem to have made any difference in his relationship with the Dutch culture. When asked if he plans of moving to The Netherlands on a permanent basis, Sabin replied: *“No, I suppose there is no reason to try and settle in a country that does not want you to do so.”*

Monica Dan is the fourth interview participant, a 51 year old female coming from Bucharest Romania, living for the last twenty-two years in Nuremberg, Germany. Monica has a BA in Engineering, currently working as a Design Engineer.

Monica chose to leave Romania and relocate to Germany for many reasons. Besides meeting her husband-to-be, a German citizen, the idea of a civilized life and the rather unclear political situation after December 1989[1] made her decision easier. Her main pre-move fears were strictly work-related. She thought she would not find a place to work, especially in constructions, as many people warned her before she left. *“For a person leaving right after December 1989, what I found here far exceeded my expectations. My fears were unreasonable because I immediately found a place to work.”*

Monica confessed that she had a hard time adapting to Germans' attitude, especially toward eastern Europeans, and the reluctance with which they accepted you. *“Here nobody invited you to their place…Older Germans thought that if you came from the East, you just got off the tree.”* Although their attitude did not seem to change over the years, as time went by, Monica accepted the situation easier.

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[1] The Romanian Revolution marking the end of Nicolae Ceausescu's communist regime.

On the other hand, the new culture matched perfectly the respondent's expectations. Not only the education, general cleanliness, or Germans' moderation, but also the high level of Germans' trust. *"If you make a statement, it is taken as the strongest currency, and no one doubts you sayings! Punctuality, honesty and conscientiousness in everything you do, differ fundamentally between the two cultures."*

When getting to the questions regarding the locals' attitude toward her, Monica admits the locals treated her in a different manner due to the fact that she was a foreigner. *"Of course I was treated differently at the beginning. Germans are not the people to greet you with open arms and many believe that if you come from the East, you are a savage."* When it comes to the adjustments to be made in such a situation, the responded further confessed: *"You either accept and adapt, or go home. Of course you develop a self defense system: if you are ignored, you retreat with dignity, if you are not invited, you do not suffer from this…"*

When it comes to interpersonal relationships, Monica does not claim to have a better relationship with members of her own country better than with Germans. *"Honestly I can't say I feel better around Romanians. I have German friends that are better and more loyal than Romanian friends."*

The fifth interviewee is **Dr. Adnan Imad**, a 46 year old Orthopedic Physician from Lebanon, Beirut, living in Romania for the past twenty-eight years. Dr. Imad moved to Romania during the communist regime, back in 1984.

The criteria on which he chose the country to relocate in were simple, he wanted to live in a country in which the language was descending from Latin/Romance languages, like his own language in Lebanon and he needed a visa in a timely manner. Romania gave him the visa first, and the language's origin was right. He knew nothing else about the life in Romania; therefore he could not worry much, as he should have worried for everything.

The first contact between Dr. Imad and the members of the new culture went very well. *"The first contact was surprisingly good, I was greeted with a high level of tolerance and I didn't feel discriminated against."* Later, as most foreigners, he came across discrimination. The adjustment made by this respondent to such behavior is of different origin than it would naturally be. *'When discriminated, I never left myself intimidated. I reacted with patience and calm, thing I learned from Romanian culture."*

When it comes to cultural differences between Lebanese and Romanians, Dr. Imad believes they are not very different from one another. *"The lifestyles and values of Romanians are somewhat close to those from Lebanon, but their attitudes differ significantly. Romanians are calm and peaceful and they revolt in the last minute when something does not suit their convenience. This is much different from the flash reactions I was used to back in Lebanon."* He further confessed that culturally-wise, Lebanese people are more focused on family. They are close to each other from the smallest problems to the biggest. *"Romanians are less*

sensitive to certain issues or family customs, Lebanese people are not. One's family is the center of the world, the number one priority."

Dr. Imad admitted that he always felt extremely good among Romanians, often better than with people from his own culture. *"I had the best and most long-lasting friendships with Romanian people."* On the other hand, Dr. Imad confessed that he does not regard his culture as superior to the Romanian culture, but believes the Arab culture is somewhat richer. *"Taking into consideration the history and old character of Arab language and the degree of knowledge I have in this culture, it seems like a richer culture, in the sense of the mode of expression, especially in literature."*

Overall, this experience had an important impact over Dr. Imad, allowing him to evolve and develop in an unique matter, proving to be the experience he needed in order to make him reach an equilibrium. *"I had a lot to gain from this experience, I am much calmer, I judge things better, less biased. I am less impulsive and my reactions are much moderated, all of these are thanks to the Romanian society, and I believe this is a great gain for me as a person. "*

The sixth, and last interview participant is **Larisa Patrascu**, a 52 year old female from Bucharest, Romania, with a BA in Hidrotechnical Engineering. She left Romaia seventeen years ago, choosing to move to Toronto, Canada. She is currently working as a IT/QA Manager.

Larisa had multiple motivations to leave Romania, together with her family, but the economical situation was the most alarming. *"If in Ceausescu's times, we had the money but we couldn't buy much, and by much, I mean food, after 1990, we had what to buy but the money just wasn't enough."* Also, Larisa had a moral reasoning behind her decision to leave. *"After 5 years[1] of waiting and hoping for things to change in something better, we were disappointed by the changes. We thought the values will also change, meaning that fair, smart, hard-working people would be promoted and respected. But at that time, it was still more important who and where you knew somebody. (...) I was also fed up with the custom of bribing for everything."* Larisa admitted that another reason to leave was the fear of a new earthquake. *"The building in which we were living was damaged in 1977[2] and nothing was done in order to consolidate it. (...) There were nights in which my husband dreamt of an earthquake, took our baby and got out in the middle of the night outside the building."*

The Canadians' attitude was somewhat incredulous at the beginning, but over time, when the locals got to know them better, the attitude switched to respect. This might have been also due to the fact that they live their lives according to the

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[1] In 1995, the year of her emigration, there were 5 years since the fall of the communist regime.
[2] In 1977, an earthquake measuring 7.2 degrees on Richter scale killed over 1,400 people in Bucharest and wounded more than 11,300.

same set of values. *"Their values are like ours. Fairness, correctness, intelligence, telling the truth and hard working, these are recognized values."*

The initial relationship between the locals and Larisa's family was interesting. *"Canadians knew that the easterners are "well-schooled" and the first question they asked was "How many foreign languages do you speak?" They were nice and kind but they also knew that at the beginning we would accept anything as a job and payment."*

When assessing the differences between the two cultures, Larisa managed to find some dissimilarity in education. *"I thought we are more educated than them, especially when we saw what out child was doing at school until the 8th grade, comparing to what we were used to."*Also, Larisa believes that the long history of the Romanian people is a certain advantage over the Canadian culture.

Although, as Larisa confessed, there is an almost mutual understanding of not discriminating in Canada, some signs of positive discrimination arise: *"At some jobs, "other skin colors"have priority in hiring, over the "white skin" people."* Larisa has also been exposed to prejudice and discrimination, for instance when moving to a new neighborhood. *"<Ah, gypsy!> This hurt. I thought perhaps other before me made them think like this. But I wanted to prove them wrong and I managed to change their attitude. The neighbor that called us gypsies praised us around the neighborhood after only a few months."*

Larisa's family's relationship with other Romanians in Canada is a good one. *"We didn't get involved in many Romanian actions, like singing in the choir or taking part in groups that organize picnics around Romanian churches, but we always tried to help newcomers to find a place to work. (...)Still, it's like we are between two worlds: Canadian friends, Romanian friends."*

4. Findings

The motivation to move and settle in a foreign setting varied from individual to individual, ranging from objective simple factors to more complex, subjective factors. The respondents were motivated by financial opportunities they would not have in their own country, the better education they could not find elsewhere or by the pure wish to live a civilized life. Other respondents ran from the unclear political and economical situation of their country. Subjective factors such as one's fear of earthquake, or running away from a society with toxic customs were also driving forces. Each one of them tried to find a place that would suit better their expectations.

The main pre-move fears of the respondents were social and work-related. The fear of not finding a place to work and not making any friends seem to have been the main fears of our respondents. The latter can be translated in the fear of ethnocentrism. This shows the awareness the respondents have with regards to culturally determined differences that might jeopardize social relationships.

When assessing the important differences between the home and host country, several aspects were highlighted, all respondents illustrating cultural clashes. From "disturbing" customs such as intensive alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom or asking money for favors in The Netherlands, to differences in the way locals perceive family and parenting. The attitudes of the locals were also perceived as different. The reluctance in acceptance of the Germans, the open xenophobia and racism of the Dutch, or the patience and calm of the Romanians, all of them were perceived by important by the respondents.

When in an international setting, the in-group favoritism does not seem to apply to the members of the home culture, relocated in the host culture. Only one (Michael) out of the six respondents confessed that he felt more comfortable around people from the same culture as him. Another respondent (Larisa) admits she enjoys helping other Romanians in their Canadian experience, but that she does not interact with them regularly. All of the other respondents did not seem to foster any kind of in-group favoritism, two of them admitting to avoid them as much as possible.

An unexpected attitude arose from the interviews. Iulia and Sabin, although open-minded people who like to socialize and meet new cultures, showed a tendency to mingle with other international students rather than making friends with the host culture's own members. This can be perceived as either a consequence of the locals' ethnocentrism, either as a different type of in-group favoritism, the respondents having a sense of belonging to a group made of foreigners, or both.

At this point of the study, the understanding of the Hypothesis 1 (**Ethnocentrism is reciprocal by those who receive it**.) and Hypothesis 2 (**Cultural awareness is critical for overcoming ethnocentrism**.) is facilitated. For this to be well-illustrated, the cases are presented individually.

In Iulia's case, the interview revealed that she does not seem to have an ethnocentric attitude. The Londoners' diverse backgrounds and multicultural society responded alike, ethnocentrism free. *Hypothesis 1* is supported in Iulia's case. *Hypothesis 2* is also supported by the case, but in Londoners' attitude. As Iulia recognized, the constant exposure to foreigners, and the increase in their cultural awareness, seems to have built a real multicultural city, in which the society not only accepts foreigners, but also infiltrate foreigners' customs in their lifestyles.

From Michael's interview, a medium degree of ethnocentrism can be observed, resulting from the degree of in-group favoritism he seems to foster. He admits to think of Portuguese culture as superior, and to feel more comfortable among other Portuguese than English people, which he does not seem to like and which did not treat him according to his expectations. *Hypothesis 1* is supported in Michael's case, as to his ethnocentric attitude was responded with ethnocentrism. *Hypothesis 2* is also supported, as the intercultural meetings he attended helped

him overcome the challenges he came across, and now seems to be a less-ethnocentric, well-integrated individual.

We can easily see from Sabin's interview that although he does not seem to foster in-group positivity, the degree of out-group negativity is high. Even if Sabin was open-minded and was aware of the fact that cultural differences are not necessarily negative, the Dutch did not seem to agree. They fostered out-group negativity and in-group positivity repeatedly, until the level of rejection made Sabin become more ethnocentric, and even got to foster the in-group positivity he lacked at first. *Hypothesis 1* is supported in Sabin's case. *Hypothesis 2* was not supported in his case, as the rejection of the Dutch and their open ethnocentric behavior made it impossible for them to cooperate.

In Monica's case, there is no sign of in-group positivity or out-group negativity. She believes that her own culture is in no way superior to the culture she entered in, and her answers reveal some kind of out-group positivity. Although she admitted to have been treated differently because she was a foreigner, *Hypothesis 1* is supported in Monica's case, her lack of ethnocentric behavior keeping her away from the consequences of an ethnocentric relationship. *Hypothesis 2* is also supported, as her open attitude to cultural differences, made her cope very well with the culturally-driven challenges, the international setting turning into a home for the last two decades.

Although Dr. Imad believes that his culture and customs are somewhat superior to those of Romanians, he also believes that Romanians' attitudes are better than the Lebanese'. The society greeted him with respect and positivity and this is how he responded. *Hypothesis 1* is supported by Dr. Imad's case. *Hypothesis 2* is also supported in his case, as the means of overcoming the discrimination to which was exposed to, was responding with the attitude learned from the host culture, leaving aside his culturally-bound normal attitudes and embracing the new one's.

Larisa could not have positive attitudes towards her culture, as she ran away exactly because of its members' customs and mindsets. She regarded the new culture as matching her set of values, and she believes she found what she was searching for. Canadians seem to have treated her mainly with respect. *Hypothesis 1* is supported in her case. *Hypothesis 2* is also supported, Larisa's understanding of culturally-bound visions, allowed her to respond in an intelligent manner to the localized forms of ethnocentrism she was exposed to, and eliminate them.

In all six cases, *Hypothesis1*, claiming that ethnocentrism is reciprocal to those that receive it, was fully supported. When the individual fostered ethnocentrism, so did the society, and when the society fostered ethnocentrism, eventually so did the individual. When ethnocentrism was not present in one of the instances, it dragged reciprocity. *Hypothesis 2*, according to which cultural awareness is critical in order to overcome ethnocentrism, was fully supported in five out of the six cases, the individuals and even a whole society (London), did not

leave themselves blinded by their own cultural perspectives and managed to overcome ethnocentrism. In the case where Hypothesis 2 was not supported, the culturally aware individual was overwhelmed by the locals' ethnocentrism, showing that this cannot help overcoming high degrees of ethnocentrism.

Conclusions

It is undeniable that we live in a world with a high level of interaction between people from different cultures. Nowadays, the only societies left "untouched" by foreigners are isolated tribes. Elsewhere in the world, foreigners are in the search for a new culture to perceive as home and whole cities are made mostly of people with diverse backgrounds. Although the present society claims to be steering away from ethnocentrism, the reality suggests otherwise. Instead of a policy of multiculturalism, we constantly observe cultural clashes between local and foreign values that often translate into conflicts.

As migration follows an upward trend and the interactions become more frequent, so does the ethnocentric thinking. Due to different upbringing and cultural background of individuals, it is inevitable to find inconsistencies in terms of cultural understanding. Although ethnocentrism has been regarded as both functional and dysfunctional aspect of one's relationship to culture, being a double-edged sword, beneficial to a certain extent, the consequences deriving from ethnocentric attitudes are of great importance, mainly due to the negative influences on communication and interaction between people from various cultures.

This study helped uncover patterns relating to cultural adjustment and cultural dissimilarity, covering the contextual conditions. After analytically examining the collected data from the participants' interviews and exploring the participants' experiences, the case study helped provide a better insight in the impact of a cultural foreign environment over individuals and the challenges they confront when embarking on such journey. All the motivations, fears, challenges and perceived differences found in the respondents' interviews were in accordance with the existing literature on ethnocentrism which claims that all individuals are ethnocentric to a certain degree. Some of them fostered both in-group positivity and out-group negativity; some fostered none of these or only one. Others fostered out-group positivity or in-group negativity. Still, the nature of reciprocity of ethnocentrism was found in all cases. To ethnocentrism, people respond with ethnocentrism.

Moreover, cultural awareness has been found as an effective means of overcoming moderate ethnocentrism or its "softer" instances such as discrimination and prejudice, and it seems to facilitate the understanding among people from different cultures. The answers were consistent and seemed to head the same direction, although no two persons were coming from and entering the same cultures. Their ages, durations of stay and education were different as well.

Tolerance, empathy and respecting others' cultures can make interpersonal relationship harmonious, building bridges over cultural gaps and steering towards a world of rich diversity that instead of downgrading other cultures and promoting prejudice, glorifies the cultural diversity the world has to offer.

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