

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN *MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING* MOVIE

Riana Permatasari ¹, Diyah Ayu Permata Sari ²

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Sultan Agung

Jl. Raya Kaligawe Km. 4/Semarang/Indonesia

Email & Phone: permatasari@unissula.ac.id +6285600118401

Submitted: 2018-12-30

Accepted: 2019-07-10

Published: 2019-08-27

Keywords:

Ethnocentrism, Effects of ethnocentrism, Greek culture

Abstract

This study analyzed the negative effects of ethnocentrism in My Big Fat Greek Wedding movie by Joel Zwick. The data were in the form of dialogues and monologues collected by watching the movie, reading the script, identifying the data based on the research problem, and classifying the data. Based on the findings, there were three negative effects of ethnocentrism shown by ethnocentric people. First, ethnocentrism builds a strong belief that their culture is superior to others. Second, ethnocentric people perform high level of egocentrism. Third, ethnocentrism affect inter-cultural communication in negative way. These three negative effects happen because ethnocentric people tend to focus only in group and evaluate other cultures based on their standards.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnocentrism is defined as “the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it,” (Sumner, 1906, quoted in Branner, 2013). This belief means an ethnic regards their own culture is superior and tends to reject other cultures. They will get difficulties to adapt in a new society so that they rarely get involved in the society. Similarly, Sculpin in Communication and Media Technologies Journal (2013) asserts that ethnocentrism results practice of judging of other cultures based on their own values and standards so they will see other cultures as strange or alien, inferior, and immoral. It happens due to the standard used in seeing things exclusively based on their values.

Based on literature, ethnocentrism can bring positive as well as negative effects on the society. Ethnocentrism can give positive effects in which somebody may have extraordinary faith in individual, cultural, country, or ethnic group (Farooq, 2013). On the other hand, a person may see his cultural values as superior ones compared to other cultures then further it is called as negative effects of ethnocentrism (Jandt & Gudykunst, 2004, quoted in Zikargae, 2013).

The issue of ethnocentrism is depicted in My Big Fat Greek Wedding Movie by Joel Zwick. In this movie, Joel Zwick tells about a Greek woman named Toula who falls in love to the man who is non Greek. Toula tries to convince her family to accept the man to be her husband. However, she faces many challenges due to ethnocentrism in her family. Throughout the movie, she is brave to oppose her father as well her family’s belief in which they believe that their ethnic is superior to other ethnics. It makes them very proud of being Greek and want Toula to marry a Greek man. There are other

examples of ethnocentrism in the movie including Greek people should marry with their own ethnic background, should study in Greek schools, learn Greek history, language, and etc. This movie does an outstanding depiction of ethnocentrism of a Greek family living in America and having a perspective that Greek culture is superior and the best culture among other cultures.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that ethnocentrism is a cultural issue existing in the society and may affect negatively to the society. Thus, this study aims at analyzing the negative effects of ethnocentrism in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* Movie. By understanding the negative effects of ethnocentrism, people from various cultural background will be aware of ethnocentrism issue and will not judge other cultures only based on their culture; they will take ethnocentrism in positive ways instead of negative ways.

Discussing about ethnocentrism should start with understanding culture and its relation with societies. Culture itself has various definitions depending on narrow or broad sense. In broad sense, culture includes everything created by humans including artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts shared through language among people at the same time, whereas in narrow sense, culture is defined as a set of rules in which people interpret related to the world (Kameo, 2007). Culture affects many aspects in human life because of their ideas, values, attitudes, and normative or expected patterns of behavior. Furthermore, culture is shared and learnt from generation to generation.

Every society will have different cultures that distinguish them from other society (Oatey-Spencer, 2012). This assertion is aligned with the notion stated by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952 in Oatey-Spencer, 2012) that culture differentiates one group to another because they have different ideas, behaviors, attitudes, and etc. based on their principles and values. People will have different values and norms that further affect them on how they behave and see a certain issue. For example, people in Asian country uphold collective values so that they tend to work collectively in their daily lives, whereas, western cultures tend to uphold individualist values so that they tend to work individually and become more independent compared to Asian people. These different behaviors happen because of different values in eastern and western culture. Thus, culture and society has a very tight relation to each other.

Some experts highlight that culture and society are connected each other dan cannot be separated (Oatey-Spencer, 2012; Haslett & Moray, 2012; & Williams, 1958). Oatey-Spencer (2012) argues that culture is a pattern of rituals, traditions, behaviors, customs, and etc. and society is a pattern of relations; it can be understood that society shares the unique culture among individuals. Culture is inside the society expressed in any human phenomenon including how people interact with other people, how people dress and eat, how people shape environment, etc. Based on the explanation above, it is crystal clear that culture and society are interdependent that cannot be separated each other.

Culture itself also produces belief in a society. One of beliefs existing in the society is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a term introduced by Sumner in 1906 who defines ethnocentrism as “the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Branner, 2013). This view results two groups in which people regard their group as a favorably in-group as the main reference point and other people as unfavorably out-group (Sharma, 1987 in Branner 2013). Because they always use their culture as their reference in judging other culture, they will see other cultures as inferior and unfavorable cultures compared to their culture.

This notion is supported by Hooghe (2008, in Njoroge & Kirori, 2014) who states that ethnocentrism as a “basic attitude expressing the belief that one’s own ethnic group

or one's own culture is superior to other ethnic group or cultures, and that one's cultural standards can be applied in a universal manner." Based on this assertion, ethnocentric people will regard their cultural standards are universal so that they can be applied in many contexts. As a result, there is tendency to evaluate other cultures based on their standards which is unavoidable (Zikargae, 2013).

As its nature of having a tendency of evaluating other cultures based on their standards, ethnocentrism can give negative effects in various ways including positive and negative effects. Farooq (2013) asserts that people will have a very strong faith in individual, country, culture, or ethnic groups if they take ethnocentrism in positive way. On the other hand, if people take ethnocentrism in negative way, it will bring negative effects in the society.

The following are negative effects of ethnocentrism. First, ethnocentrism creates an opinion that their culture as superior one and other culture inferior and bad (Hooghe, in Njoroge & Kirori, 2014; Zikargae, 2013). Jandt and Gudykunst (2004 in Zikargae, 2013) explain that ethnocentrism is a belief in superiority of one's own ethnic and culture and this nature is unavoidable. However, Al-Issa (2013) asserts that there is no society who is not ethnocentric in various degree as they will compare themselves with other people outside their group. However, they may reject or appreciate other cultures based on their perspective.

Second, ethnocentric people will perform high egocentrism in their characters (Hofstede n.d, in Neuliep, Hintz, & McCroskey 2005). Ethnocentric people are more to be egoist because they only think about in group and do not aware of outgroup. In addition, Kameo (2007) says that they will see in group as strong, virtuous and superior whereas out group as weak, inferior or immoral. It is supported by Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005:42) who assert that "Behaviorally, ethnocentric people foster cooperative relations within group members while competing with and perhaps even battling without group members." Thus, the result of ethnocentrism will shape the character to be prejudiced, even ethnic cleansing and discriminated others (Neuliep, Hintz, & McCroskey, 2005). Even, ethnocentric people tend to exclude other cultures.

Third, ethnocentrism will interrupt interactions among people. According to Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005), ethnocentrism negatively influences intercultural communication. They also explain that it will block the inter-cultural communication of ideas and skills among people as ethnocentrism will make them doctrine their own perspective to judge other people based on their culture; it further results problems in communication. In brief, these negative effects happen because ethnocentrism is taken negatively by people.

Based on Chalaria and Georgas (2016), Greek society becomes more and more ethnocentric and racist. It is because they have a perspective that their culture is more reliable than others and this perspective is going through generation to generation as a heritage from their ancestor. There are some examples of ethnocentrism in Greek society. First, Greek people are very religious and go and pray only in a Greek Orthodox Church. Religion is very important for Greek people and they have to be baptized in a Greek Orthodox Church. It is based on their belief that in Greek Orthodox tradition, fighting with satans and demons will start with the baptismal (Apostolides & Dreyer, 2008). Thus, if people are not baptized in a Greek Orthodox church, they are seen for not starting the fight with satans and demons. That is become a crucial reason why Greek people are baptized and pray in a Greek Orthodox church.

Second, Greek society very concerns in keeping their culture so their culture will not fade. Tsolodis (1995, in Makrenoglou, n.d) asserts that a Greek family is a place where Greekness is transferred between generations including "the high rate of language

maintenance, low rates of intermarriage, extended family households and links with the church and ongoing relationships with the country of origin.” Based on this notion, the Greek people must marry with Greek people also and from the same church background. If there is a man who wants to marry a Greek woman, he has to go to a Greek church and be baptized there (Iliopoulos, 2012). Moreover, they will also send their children in a Greek school where Greek people work as teachers. Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (2006) asserts that the staff working in a Greek school needs to be someone who is cultural and linguistically knowledgeable from Greek background. By doing so, they think that their culture will not be destroyed.

Third, Greek people think that Greek culture is the center of anything. One of example is that Greek people has a perspective that all words in this world are originated from Greek language (Zia, 2013). Thus, Greek people have a strong believe that their culture is superior to others and see it as a legacy from their ancestors.

Based on the above background, this study made an attempt to explore the negative effects of ethnocentrism depicted in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* movie.

METHOD

This study belongs to a qualitative study aimed at analyzing the negative effects of ethnocentrism in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* movie because the data used in the study were qualitative data. It aligns with what was explained by Mark et al in which that in qualitative research, the data or information can be gathered from texts, transcripts, field notes, audio and video (Mack, N. et al. :2011). In this study, the data were in the form of dialogues and monologues obtained from the script of the movie. There are four steps in collecting the data including: (1) watching the movie, (2) reading the script of the movie, (3) identifying the data based on the research question, and (4) classifying the data. After gathering the data, the data were analyzed using the underlying theory used in this study which is related to ethnocentrism and its negative effects. Then, the data were reported qualitatively with the references of why the data answered the research question in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* movie, it is narrated about a Greek family in the United States of America. The main female character is Toula, a 30 years old woman living with in Chicago with her Greek parents. Her parents are really proud of being Greek and sometimes exclude other cultures. It is shown in the story in many contexts including in home, education life, as well as marriage. The followings are negative effects of ethnocentrism depicted in the movie.

Believing Their Culture is Superior to Others

Ethnocentrism is a belief of one group is superior to others as stated by many experts such as Jandt and Gudykunst (2004 in Zikargae 2013) and Hooghe (2008). Because ethnocentrism sees one’s culture as the superior one, it has a tendency to make people evaluate and judge other cultures based on their standard (Zikargae, 2013). The following are quotations representing ethnocentrism makes people believe that their culture is the best culture. Toula says, “My dad believed in only two things: that Greeks should educate non-Greeks about being Greek and that any illment, from psoriasis to poison-ivy could be cured with Windex.” Toula’s father named Gus has a perspective that Greek is the best culture so that Greek people have to teach other cultures of how being a Greek. Similarly, the following quotation also depicts how Gus has a very strong faith that his culture is the most preferable culture for all people in the world.

Father: "Toula, there are two kinds of people: Greeks and everybody else who wish they were Greek."

Toula: "Okay. Yes, we know!" (00 : 26 : 06 – 00 : 33 : 33)

From Gus' statement, he shows that he has a strong faith and pride to his culture and assumes that many people want to be Greek. He thinks Greek cultures are the best culture so many people are willing to be Greek and leaving their cultures.

Another quotation representing the depiction of superiority is that when Gus believes that Greek people do many things first compared to other cultures, as follows,

Father: "In the history of our people, the great civilization: the Greeks, now, name three things the Greek did first?"

Toula's sister: "Astronomy, philosophy, and democracy."

Father: "Bravo! Very good." (00 : 04 : 54 – 00 : 05 : 19)

From the quotation above, Gus performs a belief that his culture is superior than other cultures because the Greeks has already did many things first compared to other cultures such as astronomy, philosophy, and democracy. It indicates that Gus assumes other culture as his rivals in terms of civilizations. It is supported with what Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005) explain that ethnocentric people will cooperate well with the group members but compete with other group members.

He also states that:

"When my people were writing philosophy. Your people were still swinging from trees," (00 : 53 : 13 – 00 : 53 : 23).

This statement is conveyed to Ian who is from America and has different cultural background. He does not allow her daughter to marry him because he thinks that Ian is not appropriate for Toula. He judges people from Ian's cultural background are bad indicating when Greek people have talked about philosophy, other cultures have not done anything related to scientific matter. This statement underestimates other cultures and sees other cultures as inferior cultures compared to Greek. Ethnocentric people will see in group as strong, superior whereas out group as weak, inferior or immoral (Kameo, 2007).

His disappointment of Toula's plan for marrying with Ian is also shown in the following quotation. Gus says, "Didn't I say it's a mistake to educate women? But nobody listened to me. Now we have a boyfriend in the house. Is he a nice Greek boy? Oh no, no, no Greek. No Greek, a xeno! A xeno with big long hairs on top of his head." From Gus' statement, he describes Ian as a xeno meaning strange or alien. He judges based on his belief that people outside his culture are strange and not good because he evaluates everything based on his standards. In brief, ethnocentrism makes people have a strong belief that their culture is superior to other cultures.

Performing High Egocentrism

Ethnocentric people will perform high egocentrism in their characters (Hooghe, 2008, and Zikargae, 2013). The following are the quotations representing the high egocentrism. First is Greek people believe that Greek language is the root of other languages (Zia, 2013) as indicated in the following quotation.

Father: "Now, give me a word. Any word, and I will show you how the root of the word is Greek."

Toula's sister: "Okay."

Father: "How about arachnophobia? Arachna that comes from the Greek word for spider and phobia means fear, so fear of spider. There you go."

Toula's sister friend: "Okay, Mr. Portokalos. How about the word kimono?"

Father: "Kimono? Kimono, kimono. Of course! Kimono comes from the Greek word cheimonas. That means winter. So, what do you wear in the winter time to stay warm? A robe. You see? Robe, kimono. There you go. Bye - bye."

Toula's sister friend: "Good-bye, Mr. Portokalos." (00 : 05 : 20 – 00 : 06 : 25)

In the quotation above, Gus argues that Greek is the center of everything especially as the root of the words. It makes him proud of that and seeing that other languages are not as good as Greek language because Greek language becomes roots for many languages around the world. The opinion that one culture as the center of anything is the characteristic of ethnocentrism (Sumner 1906, in Branner, 2013). Second is related to the belief that people should go and be baptized in a Greek Orthodox Church (Bajis, n.d). In the movie, Toula has a boyfriend named Ian who is from another culture and from different church. Her parents do not allow her to marry Ian because of that reason. Toula's parents ask Ian to be baptized in a Greek Orthodox Church if he wants to marry Toula. The Greek people have an opinion that Greek people should go and pray only in Greek Orthodox church. They cannot accept if their son in law is not baptized and prays in a Greek Orthodox Church because in Greek tradition, fighting with satan and demons starts with baptismal (Apostolides & Dreyer, 2008).

Furthermore, high ethnocentrism makes them exclude other cultures from many aspects of life. Zikargae (2013) states that "they do not support because the groups stick to the manifestation of some culture to their ethnic group that excludes other cultural groups." There are some quotations depicting that ethnocentric people will exclude other cultures. First is that when Ian's friend cannot be the best man in his wedding because he is not from Greek even though he is actually Ian's best friend as stated "The best man's part of the ceremony, he's got to be Greek orthodox. So I can't ask you to my best man, although technically, you are," (01 : 12: 38 – 01 : 12: 53). Based on the Greek rules, the best man of the groom should be from Greek origin too so that is the reason why Ian's friend cannot be the best man in his wedding. It indicates that Greek people exclude people from other cultures of being best man in the wedding ceremony.

In addition, excluding other culture is also depicted in school life in which Toula's parents ask her to go to a Greek school.

Toula: "Ma?"

Mother: "What?"

Toula: "Why do I have to go to Greek school?"

Mother: "When you get married, don't you want to write your mother-in-law?" (00 : 904 : 03 – 00 : 04 : 18)

It is also depicted when Toula says, "The pretty girls went to Brownies's. I had to go to Greek School. At Greek school, I learned valuable lessons like: If Nick has one goat, and Maria has nine, how soon will they marry?" From these two quotations, it is clear that Toula should study in a Greek school because her parents ask her to do so even

though she finds it is not interesting for her. Her parents have a very strong belief that their daughter cannot enter non-Greek school because Greek school will be the place where Greek cultures are learned and transferred. In a Greek school, the teachers should be from Greek (Toulla, 2006). It is part of their effort in protecting their culture from other culture. By attending the Greek school, her parents assume that their children will not be influenced by other cultures so that they can instill Greek values in their children.

In addition, her parents also has a prejudice intended for other cultures leading them for not allowing Toula take courses in downtown.

Mother: "What's wrong with Toula going to school downtown?"

Father: "There is drugs downtown."

Mother: "What are you saying? That Toula will get involved with drugs?"

Father: "No, but somebody will say to her. Take this bag down to the bus depot, and she will do it!" (00 : 18 : 10 – 00 : 18 : 54)

This conversation happens when Toula wants to take computer classes in downtown to improve her skill. However, her father does not allow her to take the computer classes because he thinks that it will bring negative effects to her. This kind of opinion also belongs to prejudice as stated by Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005) that ethnocentrism will lead people to have prejudice to other cultures.

Another evidence related to egocentrism is that in Greek culture, women who have not married should work in a family company as stated by Toula "Nice Greek girls who don't find a husband work in the family restaurant. So, here I am, day after day, year after year. Thirty and way passed my expiration date," (00 : 07 : 34 – 00 : 07 : 46). The Greek women who have not married yet are not allowed to work outside the family business. It is also shown in the movie in which Toula should work in her family restaurant because she has not married. Her parents do not allow her to work outside or even increase her skill in other places because it is prohibited for her to work and know about outside life. Her parents think that other group will give her negative influences.

Excluding other cultures does not only happen in religious, school, and working life, but it also happens in marriage. Greek people believe that Greek women should marry Greek men resulting the low rate of intermarriage (Tsolidis, 1995, in Makrenoglou, n.d).

Toula says, "My dad's been saying that to me since I was fifteen. Because nice Greek girls are supposed to do three things in life. Marry Greek boys, make Greek babies and feed everyone. Until the day we die." (00 : 01 : 52 – 00 : 02 : 12)

Being a Greek woman means that they have to marry a Greek man and raise a Greek baby so that they can keep their cultures as the heritage of the ancestors. It is also applicable for a Greek man in which they have to marry a Greek woman as indicated in Toula's statement that "My brother has 2 jobs: to cook and to marry a Greek Virgin."

In short, ethnocentric people tend to be more egoist because they only think about in group and do not aware of other cultures. This fact further results in having prejudice to other cultures, evaluating everything based on their standards, and excluding people from other cultures in their daily life.

Interrupting Inter-Cultural Communication

Neuliep, Hintz and McCroskey (2005) state that ethnocentrism will interrupt the inter-cultural communication among people from different cultures. It is shown in the movie when Gus is talking with the neighbor.

Father: "Mrs. White! You find my mama again? You know, she comes from Greece. The country I come from too."

Neighbor: "For God's sake, I know! Listen keep your mother off my lawn, out of my basement and away from my roof!"

Father: "Mrs. White, come on. Give me a word, any word and I will show you that the root of that word is Greek." (00 : 25 : 24 – 00 : 25 : 53)

This dialogue is between Gus and his neighbor when his mother is astray. He is very proud of his origin and wants everybody knows about his ethnic. However, it does not make his neighbor happy with that because he has already talked about it frequently. It can be seen from the words "For God's shake, I know!" that indicate the neighbor feels disturbing with what Gus explained.

Another problem in inter-cultural communication happens when Toula's family meets with Ian's family. Gus has an opinion that Ian's family is not polite to them by seeing them as strangers as indicated in the following quotation.

Father: "I tried, you tried! We were all nice to them. And they looked at us like we're from the zoo."

Mother: "Costa, please."

Father: "This no work. This no work. They're different people. So dry! That family is like a piece of toast. No honey, no jam, just dry. My daughter is going to marry Ian Miller. A xeno! A xeno with a toast family! I never thought this could happen to us. (01 : 11 : 41 – 01 : 12 : 18)

Moreover, Gus thinks that Ian's family is strange because they cannot fulfill the standards developed by Gus based on his culture. It actually happens because the standard used in evaluating Ian's family is his own culture without regarding the differences of other cultures. It results problems existing in inter-cultural communication among people from other cultures.

In brief, it can be seen that Greek family, especially Gus, show negative effects of ethnocentrism as indicated in the current research about ethnocentrism.

CONCLUSION

This paper finds that there are three negative effects of ethnocentrism depicted in My Big Fat Greek Wedding movie as follows: (1) believing their culture is superior to other cultures, (2) performing high egocentrism, and (3) interrupting inter-cultural communications. These three negative effects happened because ethnocentrism is a belief of seeing one's culture is preferable and applicable in evaluating and judging other cultures.

REFERENCE

Al-issa, A. (2013). *Ethnocentrism*. Retrived from [https:// web. facebook. Com /perm_ali_nk.php? story_fbid= 517663701626934&id=229023970490910&_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/perm_ali_nk.php?story_fbid=517663701626934&id=229023970490910&_rdr).

- Apostolides, A. & Dreyer, Y. (2008). The Greek evil eye, African witch craft, and Western Ethnocentrism. *HTS*, 64 (2), 1021-1042.
- Branner, L. (2013). *The impacts of country-of-origin and ethnocentrism on consumers' product evaluations*. Retrived from https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/34025/1/gupea_2077_34025_1.pdf.
- Chalaria, M. & Georgas, T. (2016). *Exploring Greek education system's Ethnocentric character In Moern Time*. 3.1: 30-46. Retrived from Ebrary. Web. 11 February 2017.
- Farooq, U. (2013). *Ethnocentrism meaning, definition, example and effect on society*. Retrived from <http://www.studylecturenates.com/basics-ofsociology/ethnocentrism-meaning-definition-examples-effect-on-society>.
- Haslet & Moyra. (2012). *Culture and society in Marxist literary and cultural theories*. 1-14. Retrived from <http://www.slideshare.net/abdelazizelhammouchi/culture-and-society>.
- Iliopoulus, C. (2012). *Country report Greece*. Retrived from Ebrary. Web.11 February2017.
- Kameo.R. (2007). *Cross cultural understanding*. Print.
- Mack, N. et al. (2011). *Qualitative research methods: a data colector's field guide*. Retrived from Ebrary. Web. 18 April 2017.
- Makrenoglou, A. (n.d).(2015). *Food, gender, generation and ethnicity: being a good Greek girl?* Victoria: Monash University. Retrived from <http://www.tasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Makenoglou-Anna.pdf>.
- Neuliep, J. W., Hintz, S.M., & McCroskey, J.C. (2005). The influence of ethnocentrism in organizational contexts: Perceptions of interviewee and managerial attractiveness, credibility, and effectiveness. *Communication Quarterly*, 53 (1), 41-56.
- Njoroge, M.W., & Kirori, G. N. (2014). Ethnocentrism : Significance and effects on Kenyan society. *African Journals of Political Science and International Relations*, 8 (9), 356-357.
- Oatey, & Spencer, H. (2012). *What is Culture?A Compilation of Quotations*. Retrived from <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural>, 4 January 2017.
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. (2006). *Greek culture profile*. Castletown Hyde Park Queensland: Diversicare.
- Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of hope: culture, democracy, socialism*. London: Verso, 2-14.
- Zia, H. (2013). *Ethnocentrism-A war provoking issue*. Retrived from http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=8849.
- Zikargae, M. H. (2013). The impacts of ethnocentrism and stereotype on inter-cultural relations of Ethiopian higher education students. *Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 3 (4), 126-148.