Privileging Localism and Visualizing Nationhood in Anti-Consumption

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Introduction

Product origin imagery and nationalism have intrigued marketing scholars for several decades. Studies on anti-consumption show that objects of consumption are used as markers of patriotism and nationalism (e.g., Sandikci and Ekici 2009; Varman and Belk 2009; Witkowski 1989). Similarly, studies on Product Place Images (PPI) and Country of Origin (COO) effect have highlighted the role of nationalism in influencing product imagery (e.g., Ger, Askegaard, and Christensen 1999; Papadopoulas and Heslop 1993). Yet, little research has gone into understanding how anti-consumption and product origin get intertwined to produce discourses of identity and patriotism in which localism is pitted against nationalism. In examining an anti-consumption movement in India, we offer an understanding of this elided dimension in extant theory.

Our historical analysis of the relationship between anti-consumption and nationhood in India shows that products are infused with social, economic, and political meanings that emerge from Gandhi's vision of anarchism, a political philosophy that emphasizes anti-authoritarianism, equity, decentralization, and liberty (Gandhi 1997; Godwin 1986; Kropotkin 1970; Wolff 1998). In these movements, meaning laden consumption objects simultaneously become markers of individual freedom, localism, and equality, which are central to the anarchist conception of nationalism. This helps us to differentiate consumer resistance from anti-consumption, which we interpret as a deeper systemic challenge to consumption lifestyle and to consumer culture. Most significantly, in this research we offer insights into how nationalism becomes anti-nationalist in an anti-consumption movement.

Understanding Product-Place-Images and Anti-Consumption

Product-origin imagery has been extensively examined in marketing theory and research. Many researchers have identified the role of the COO effect in influencing consumers (e.g., Papadopoulas and Heslop 1993). They have reported functional as well as symbolic connotations of the COO effect (e.g., Askegaard and Ger 1998; Johansson, Douglas, and Nonaka 1994). Others examining COO have focused on psychological processes involved in beliefs (Erickson, Johansson, and Chao 1984), motivation levels, and

congruency of information (Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran 2000). Moreover, Laroche et al. (2003) have examined subcultural variations and Heslop, Lu, and Cray (2007) and Klein, Ettensor, and Morris (1998) have reported impacts of international crises and animosity in influencing COO effects. In a similar vein, Shimp and Sharma (1987) have developed a scale to measure consumer ethnocentrism and have reported the role of patriotism in influencing buying decisions. While these studies have identified nationalistic imprinting in buying processes, they have predominantly situated product origins at a national level. In particular, we draw upon Askegaard and Ger (1998) and Ger, Askegaard, and Christensen (1999) who have suggested that place or country should be located in specific cultural contexts. Here, Ger, Askegaard, and Christensen's (1999) shift in focus from country to place is particularly significant for our understanding of product-origin imagery. This helps us to critically examine the relationship between place and nation and to offer an understanding of localism versus nationalism.

Within scholarship on consumer resistance and anti-consumption, studies that have dealt with the issues of nationalism, globalization, ideology, social movements, and boycotts inform our study. In important studies of an anti-consumption movement and nationalism, Witkowski (1989) and Breen (1988) provide historical accounts of the non-importation movement in the U.S. during its colonial revolt and highlight the roles of economic and cultural imperialism in consumer resistance to globalization. These understandings of anti-consumption have been further enhanced by the focus on social movement theory by Kozinets and Handelman (2004). They highlight the role of identity politics with a specific reference to U.S. evangelical traditions and elitism in anti-corporate movements. More recently, Cherrier (2009) emphasized consumer identity in political and creative features of consumer resistance. Similarly, Thompson and Arsel (2004) report anti-hegemonic identifications in the rejection of Starbucks and in consumption of local coffee shops among oppositional localists. Varman and Belk (2009) add to our understanding by reporting a nationalist ideology in an anti-consumption movement through which activists try to reject another large global brand, Coca Cola. Sandikci and Ekici (2009) identify predatory globalization, chauvinistic nationalism, and religious fundamentalism as some of the reasons for politically motivated brand rejection. In addition, Lee, Motion, and Conroy (2009) have reported the role of morality in the interpretation of COO cues that are embedded in brands and suggest that patriotic consumers may mobilize against the drain of national wealth.

It is evident from this brief review that product-origin imagery and resistance or anti-consumption are widely discussed issues in marketing. An important aspect that still remains elided, however, in these theoretical developments is emphasis on localism as distinct from nationalism in attempts to influence consumption. While rejection of large multinational foreign brands, globalization, and nationalism have been extensively examined, a more specific analysis of how local products can be privileged over national products in a discourse of nationalism is missing. To overcome this lacuna, we examine an anti-consumption movement in India and offer an understanding of a Gandhian emphasis on localism in nationalism.

Enquiring Product-Origin Imagery and Anti-Consumption

In order to understand the relationship between product-origin imagery and nationalism in contemporary India, we conducted a two-year study of an activist organization we call *Apni Banao Azadi* (ABA) that has been championing the boycott of multinational goods in the northern part of India. ABA with its adherence to Gandhian ideology was founded in 1989 and claims to have stopped multinational firms such as Cargill, Coca Cola, and Pepsi Cola from spreading their operations in the country. Members of ABA regularly hold meetings and rallies, and publish protest material denouncing large corporations. We conducted in-depth interviews with five key activists in the organization (see Table 1).

The interviews were conducted individually and started with 'grand tour' questions (McCracken 1988) about participants' personal histories and beliefs regarding Indian nationhood. Participants were further questioned about the activities of multinational corporations, large Indian firms, and consumer boycotts. All participants in the study have been assigned pseudonyms. These interviews were conducted in Hindi over several days with each individual, in the office of ABA, and were translated and transcribed in English.

We also conducted content analysis of the last five years of *Nai Duniya* (pseudonym)*,* a journal published by ABA, to develop insights into the discursive practices employed by the organization. To understand the role played by consumption objects in the historical construction of Indian nationhood, we conducted a discursive analysis of Gandhi's writings as well. This also helped us to relate the discourse of ABA to the writings of Gandhi that ideologically impel this organization. In addition, we analyzed writings on the Indian freedom movement, consumer boycotts, and nationalism. Our data analysis was ongoing and iterative with simultaneous analyses of historical accounts, interviews, and the journal in a process

consistent with emergent design and the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The coding started with our emphasis on inductively identifying broad data categories in the form of open codes. The next step was to combine the open codes into axial codes and to convert them into selective codes to help us to understand localism in anti-consumption. We continued to simultaneously collect and analyze data until we achieved saturation and redundancy.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Pseudonym	Age (approx.)	Gender	Duration of Interview	Brief Description
Mishra	60	Male	2 Hours	Retired academic and a senior activist with ABA. Editor of Nai Duniya ['New World', translated pseudonym]
Ritesh	45	Male	6 Hours	A full-time senior activist with ABA.
Verma	65	Male	4 Hours	Founder of ABA and a retired University Professor
Pritam	50	Male	2 Hours	A full-time senior activist with ABA.
Balwant	40	Male	45 Minutes	An ABA activist and a farmer

Privileging Localism Through Gandhian Anti-Consumption

The turn of the twentieth century saw a nationalist upsurge in India with widespread protests against British colonial rule (Bayly 1998; Gellner 1983). The economic displacement caused by being reduced to a colonial appendage impelled the first wave of emphasis on consuming Indian products and boycotting British consumer goods during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal from 1905-08 (Bayly 1986). The 1915 entry of Gandhi onto the Indian nationalist stage gave the freedom movement a very specific direction. Gandhi's first significant step in the leadership of the freedom struggle was based on his beliefs about anti-consumption as a weapon of protest. Gandhi deployed this weapon most effectively in the Non-

Cooperation Movement (1921-22) and in the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-31). These movements witnessed a widespread consumer boycott of the British goods in which public bonfires of British goods became common. Thus, resistance to British goods and adoption of Indian products in the Indian freedom movement are illustrations of the influence wielded by consumptionscapes in crystallizing the construction of Indian nationhood.

The recent neoliberal integration of India into the global economy is spurring a resurgence of oppositional neo-nationalist movements (Bardhan 2003). ABA represents one such oppositional activist organization that is encouraging consumers to resist multinational products and support local goods. Thus, consumptionscapes continue to shape the ongoing debate about nationalism in India and a Movement Diary published by ABA in 2008 claims…

> 90% of the Third World markets have been captured by multinational corporations. They have crossed all limits of exploitation and corruption. Poor countries have allowed their bureaucratic, judicial, and legislative functions to be controlled by these corporations. This poses a challenge to our freedom.

ABA interprets globalization as a harmful process and labels multinationals as anti-people corporations. It is common to see slogans such as, "foreign goods cannot be sold in our country," and "Multinationals, Quit India" appearing in *Nai Duniya*. In this attempt to create a nationalist consciousness by resisting consumption objects, ABA is adhering to Gandhi's philosophy in two ways. First, similar to Gandhi's nationalism which entailed a resistance to British goods, ABA is rejecting foreign products. Second, in interpreting the state as an organ of repression, it is echoing Gandhi's belief in anarchist nationalism which was against the creation of a centralized governing authority. Gandhi was a complex historical figure, and his political philosophy was fraught with contradictions of engineering a mass movement with diverse stakeholders. In the midst of these contradictions, Gandhi was ideologically influenced by anarchism as a political philosophy, and he used it to create a specific form of nationalism (Gandhi 1997; Marshall 2008). He was particularly attracted to anarchist anti-authoritarianism and ideals of individual liberty, equity, and decentralization (Godwin 1986; Kropotkin 1970; Thoreau 1983; Wolff 1998). Some historians argue that in the universal rejection of British goods and in the adoption of local goods, Gandhi was attempting to bring together diverse and heterogeneous social groups to constitute Indian nationhood (Metcalf and Metcalf 2001). In this universality of the nation state, however,

Gandhi (1997, p. 189) did not lose sight of the anarchist anti-authoritarian and libertarian goals. He averred: "Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual." Thus, Gandhi believed that India should follow the anarchist principle of minimum centralization and government. ABA offers a similar anti-statist vision of Indian nationalism in its strong criticism of the current Indian state. *Nai Duniya* (2007, p 2) reported:

> The state has succumbed to them [corporations]. It is really a healthy sign that people everywhere are opposing on their own. They are spontaneously getting united and are providing leadership to protest movements.

In addition, one organizer, Verma, alleged, "the government has colluded with businesses. This makes people scared and the state is clearly with these large corporations." Similar to Gandhi's libertarian vision of Indian nationhood, ABA emphasizes voluntarism and empowerment of people. Verma observed:

> If we can make people understand that these corporations are their enemies, then we can make them to participate in boycott. It empowers people because it's a form of non-cooperation that they can control. They can't close these businesses, but they can force them to retreat.

This interpretation of nationalism also highlights the position that diversity and individual freedom should not be destroyed by a strong national state. ABA adheres to this vision of nationalism and another leader, Mishra, argues: "Nation is a community…We do not consider nation as a monolithic entity, there has to be plurality." In this plurality, emphasis is placed on creating a nation state that celebrates equality. Gandhi (1997, p. 160) wanted to create an alternative to the model of nation states developed in the West in which, "nations today are groaning under the heel of the monster-god of materialism. The moral growth has become stunted." Drawing upon this argument, Mishra suggested, "Boycott creates a superior moral fabric." Ritesh added, "Consumer boycott is a powerful tool of protest. But it is difficult to follow. To boycott, consumers need to have high levels of moral strength. Without moral strength, they cannot boycott." This vision of anarchist nationalism in India is founded on a specific notion of morality that is tied closely with anti-consumption and simple living (see Critchley 2007). This has led some scholars to label Gandhi and Gandhian movements puritanical and repressive (e.g., Marshall 2008). For Gandhi

and ABA, however, simple living and rejection of large-scale industrialization are necessary to achieve the anarchist vision of an equal, moral, and free nation state.

In order to achieve the vision of egalitarian nationhood through anti-consumption, ABA created a list of products to be boycotted and prescribed a set of Indian alternatives in the early nineties (see Table 2).

Table 2. Boycott of Multi National Goods by Indian Consumers

Consumer Goods	Don't buy: Goods by MNCs	Buy: Indian Goods
Tea	Red Label, Lipton Tiger, Green Label	Pallavi, Gurukul, Tata Tea, Rahat
Salt	Annapurna, Cargill	Tata, Birla Salt, Bajaj
Toothpaste	Colgate, Closeup, Pepsodent	Prudent, Promise, Neem twig,
Cosmetics	Old spice, Sunsilk, Ponds, Palmolive	Sarvodaya, Wipro, Swastik, Meghdoot, Alikesh
Readymade Clothes	Wrangler, Nike, Adidas, Puma	Readymade clothes available in Indian markets

In this listing, ABA recommends products made by small and large Indian firms to replace multinational products. In recent years, however, ABA's position is characterized by a distinct shift and it is now against large national brands as well. The inclusion of large Indian brands in the ABA's list in a period when India allowed entry to large multinational corporations is particularly insightful. It comes at a time when the state has adopted neoliberal policies and large Indian corporations are perceived to be making significant profits at the cost of less privileged consumer groups. This marks an important shift by ABA to a greater emphasis on localism. Verma explained this emphasis on localism…

> We are against multinationals because they are robbing people of their resources. These firms are large and

concentrate wealth in a few hands. We are against this process. We are also against large Indian businesses. We do not consider Tata, Birla as national.

This shift against large Indian businesses expresses ABA's change in belief that large Indian firms are as exploitative as multinational firms. This move against large Indian businesses brings ABA closer to Gandhi's idea of nationalism in which large-scale machine-based production processes were considered unsuitable for the country. Gandhi's *swaraj* or freedom was an expression of this anarchist influence and was woven around his conceptions of localism through village society and anti-consumption. Gandhi's renunciation was often couched as a Hindu religious discourse invoking past myths and was a path to conquer material facets of rising industrial society (Nandy 1981). Gandhi believed that urban, centrally governed, and large-scale industrial alternatives for production of consumption objects would limit individual freedom for the vast majority of poor Indians living in villages (Ramagundam 2008). ABA echoes this Gandhian belief and Mishra observed, "we are against the use of machinery that dominates human civilization." In this interpretation there in an inexorable link between consumption, mechanization, and an authoritarian state. For ABA the answer to these problems lies in privileging local over national and in creating a nation that empowers consumers and producers from below.

A critical feature of anarchism is economic decentralization and a close linkage between producers and consumers. Following Gandhi, ABA makes this a part of its vision of Indian nationalism and Verma informed us, "There are *Desh* (country), *Videsh* (foreign), and *Swadesh* (own country). We are in favor of swadesh. We believe that swadesh allows local population to determine its own fate." Here, Verma's interpretation of nationalism, defined by his emphasis on small scale decentralized governance systems, closely resonates with Gandhi's emphasis on decentralized village republics. Drawing upon this vision of Indian nationalism, Verma asserts…

> One of the basic principles of Swadeshi is that the distance between producer and consumer should be minimal. Large corporations increase the distance, and the process of globalization makes it worse. In fact, for multinationals more distance is desired. We are for localization of processes. It's the only way to minimize exploitation.

Verma believes that decentralization is necessary for India to become a nation that is accountable to its individual citizens. Explaining this relationship, Balwant observed…

> When small scale local production happens then local populations of consumers and producers gain and exercise control. When large corporations take over production, then profits go to them, and local population loses control. Large corporations can increase prices or remove workers without any accountability.

Here, Balwant suggests that reductions in scale and distance will allow consumer citizens to control production systems for their benefit. Thus, instead of becoming enslaved by large national or multinational corporations as is happening in the current process of centralization, localism will help India to become just and equal. In his village Balwant is an activist against large corporations and organizes meetings to protest against their products. To achieve these objectives, ABA is attempting to create a public radio station, a power generation plant managed as a consumer cooperative, and educational programs to disseminate its ideas of nationhood and consumption.

In summary, we find that consumption constitutes an important site of struggle in the nationalist and neo-nationalist movements in India. We highlight the role of Gandhi and his philosophy in creating an anarchist model of nationhood through anti-consumption. We also emphasize the continuing role of localism in a more contemporary version of Indian nationhood through an anti-consumption movement.

Situating Localism and Anti-Consumption in Marketing Theory

In demonstrating the role of anarchism in influencing an anti-consumption movement we highlight a specific emphasis on localism over nationalism which has not been adequately understood in extant marketing theory. We show that Gandhian anti-consumption movements with a particularized vision of nationalism have historically created discursive frameworks for consumer resistance in India. This approach helps us to understand an anti-consumption movement in a society of the Global South where governance failures, development, globalization, nationhood, large corporations, and private consumption are sutured together in a discourse of protest. This understanding of anti-consumption in a developing nation context is

inextricably linked to product-origin imagery, consumer resistance, and nationalism.

In this research we emphasize the role of nationalist movements in shaping product-origin imagery (POI). In consonance with several studies, we highlight the role of POI in shaping consumption discourses (e.g., Ger, Askegaard, and Christensen 1999; Papadopoulas and Heslop 1993) and also demonstrate that consumption defines and creates national identity (see also Varman and Belk 2009; Witkowski 1989). We add to current understandings of POI in marketing in an important way. We show that a wider interpretation of nationhood is needed to include the sort of localism that we demonstrate in this study. In such localism, a dichotomized understanding of national versus foreign is limiting and we find in ABA a more nuanced interpretation in which buying national brands can be perceived as an anti-national act because of the distance of national mega-brands from localized spheres of consumption.

In this rendering of national as anti-national, we show that extant conceptualizations of ethnocentrism offer a limited understanding of boycott and the foreignness of products (cf. Shimp and Sharma 1987). Similarly, we find the emphasis on nationalism in the conceptualization of foreign product purchase in the animosity model by Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998) to be limiting. Our findings show that national and international are simultaneously perceived to be distant, unaccountable, and exploitative (for a somewhat resonant conceptual perspective in the pages of MGDR, see Fırat 2016). Thus, in this discourse, national and multinational are rejected in favor of local alternatives of consumption and production. This finding has epistemological and methodological ramifications for POI discussions in marketing. The epistemic part calls for a deconstruction of nationalism in product-imagery and to situate social identity, patriotism, and animosity in a field in which actors confront each other with different interpretations of these categories and vie for control (Bourdieu 1998; see also Askegaard and Ger 1998). Our research shows that localism and anti-consumption are deployed by Gandhian activists to reject corporations, markets, and consumer culture connoted by nationalism and internationalism in neoliberal India. In methodological terms, we, to borrow Critchley's (2007, p. 113) phrase, emphasize that an understanding of POI, consumer ethnocentrism, and animosity requires an examination of "interstitial" discourses of protest within a society. Our examination of anti-consumption by ABA is an illustration of one such discourse that helps to deconstruct the myth of nationalism and to uncover a kernel of localism within it.

Our findings also show that the localism envisioned in the anti-consumption movement questions the prevalent hierarchy of nation states

in POI that is based on different levels of development which are invariably calibrated to industrialization and consumption. In this approach, products from the so called less developed countries are inferior as compared to those from more industrialized countries (e.g., Batra et al. 2000). The anarchist anti-consumption critique attempts to subvert and invert this hierarchy by privileging lower levels of consumption and of industrialization. It is evident from our findings that through the anarchist critique, an attempt is made to create a hierarchy based on localization, freedom, and equity within nation states.

In emphasizing the local, Gandhian anti-consumption closely resonates with several accounts of consumer resistance and their emphases on particularized notions of justice, empowerment, and equity (e.g., Lee, Fernandez, and Hyman 2009; Sandikci and Ekici 2009). The anarchist vision of nationhood that influences anti-consumption in this study is a deeper systemic challenge which helps to differentiate between anti-consumption and consumer resistance. It is evident from our findings that the anti-consumption movement examined in this research is not merely looking for localized market-based alternatives as Thompson and Arsel (2004) have found and is not creating alternate enclaves of consumption that are otherwise deeply steeped in a market-based capitalist economy as Kozinets (2002) discovered. Both of those anti-corporate engagements involve consumer resistance, but neither is anti-consumption in the sense that ABA poses a challenge to consumption lifestyle and consumer culture. That is, we are taking anti-consumption literally as involving a significant change away from a global mass consumption-oriented lifestyle toward one that is less consumption oriented (see Dobscha 1998; Lee, Fernandez, and Hyman 2009). In envisioning a state-less state, village societies, anti-machine ethos, and economic decentralization, ABA and similar organizations attempt to invoke Gandhian anti-consumption in order to oppose the thrust of neoliberalism enrapturing the Indian economy and to invoke a consumption simplicity that potentially resonates more deeply in India than in any other part of the globe. Discourses that probe neoliberalism in marketing (e.g., Dholakia, Ozgun and Atik 2021) need to deepen their investigations to bring more nuanced understanding of local, national, and global interplays.

In conclusion, in this study we have offered an understating of an anti-consumption movement that stems from a specific vision of localism in nationalism. Future research should investigate linkages between political, social, and economic dimensions as they influence markets and consumption. A theoretical framework that includes consumers, marketers, civil society groups, and state representatives will help in developing a more

comprehensive understanding of product-origin imagery. In this period of rapid social, economic, and cultural integration of the world through globalization, the ubiquity of nationalist upsurges requires a deeper analysis in marketing theory.

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