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Wilcox Hemais, Marcus

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# A post-colonial perspective on consumerist Organizations in Brazil

MARCUS WILCOX HEMAIS<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PONTIFÍCIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DO RIO DE JANEIRO (PUC-RIO) / DEPARTAMENTO DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO, RIO DE JANEIRO – RJ, BRAZIL

## Abstract

This study aims to present, from the postcolonial perspective, a point of view of the consumerist movement in Brazil that is not discussed in the literature on consumerism. Analyzes was performed on how and why Eurocentric patterns of consumer protection were incorporated into the movement and how the adoption of this model resulted in limited advances in consumer protection in the country. The cases of important Brazilian consumer organizations, namely Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste, are presented, discussing their association with international consumerist organizations, with special attention to Consumers International, and how they imitated their consumer protection practices. From the perspective adopted, it is possible to see how the Eurocentric influence is present in campaigns, research, events, comparative tests of products, lectures and exchanges of such Brazilian organizations, revealing how the adoption of mimetic behavior perpetuates post-colonial domination that does not result in improvements to consumer protection in Brazil. There is little literature on consumerism that discusses such geopolitical aspects of the consumer movement, making it difficult to recognize, therefore, that the Eurocentric model of consumerism has more than consumer protection as its priority, since it is aligned with the interests of the Global North, in particular the US, of perpetuating its global hegemony.

**Keywords:** Consumerism. Post-colonialism. Eurocentrism. Consumer defense organizations. Consumers International.

## *Uma perspectiva pós-colonial sobre organizações consumeristas no Brasil*

### Resumo

Este estudo tem por objetivo apresentar, a partir da perspectiva pós-colonial, uma visão sobre o movimento consumerista no Brasil pouco discutida na literatura de consumerismo, analisando como e porque padrões eurocêtricos de proteção ao consumidor foram incorporados ao movimento e como a adoção desse modelo resultou em limitados avanços na proteção aos consumidores no país. São apresentados os casos de importantes organizações de defesa do consumidor brasileiras, a saber, Programa de Proteção e Defesa do Consumidor de São Paulo (Procon-SP), Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor (Idec) e Proteste: Associação Brasileira de Defesa do Consumidor, e sua associação a organizações consumeristas internacionais, em especial à Consumers International (CI), mimetizando suas práticas de defesa do consumidor. A partir da perspectiva adotada é possível perceber como a influência eurocêntrica está presente em campanhas, pesquisas, eventos, testes comparativos de produtos, palestras e intercâmbios de tais organizações brasileiras, revelando como a adoção de um comportamento mimetista perpetua domínios pós-coloniais que, no fim, não resultam em melhorias na proteção aos consumidores no Brasil. A literatura de consumerismo pouco discute tais aspectos geopolíticos do movimento consumerista, dificultando o reconhecimento de que o modelo eurocêntrico de consumerismo tem mais do que a proteção aos consumidores como sua prioridade, pois se alinha aos interesses do Norte Global, em especial dos Estados Unidos da América (EUA), de perpetuidade de sua hegemonia no mundo.

**Palavras-chave:** Consumerismo. Pós-colonialismo. Eurocentrismo. Organizações de defesa do consumidor. Consumers International.

## *Una perspectiva poscolonial sobre organizaciones de consumidores en Brasil*

### Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo presentar, desde la perspectiva poscolonial, una visión sobre el movimiento consumidorista en Brasil poco discutida en la literatura de consumidorismo, analizando cómo y por qué estándares eurocéntricos de protección al consumidor fueron incorporados al movimiento y cómo la adopción de ese modelo resultó en limitados avances en la protección a consumidores en el país. Se presentan los casos de importantes organizaciones de defensa del consumidor brasileñas, a saber Procon-SP, Idec y Proteste, y su asociación a organizaciones de consumidores internacionales, en especial a Consumers International, mimetizando sus prácticas de defensa del consumidor. A partir de la perspectiva adoptada, es posible percibir cómo la influencia eurocéntrica está presente en campañas, investigaciones, eventos, pruebas comparativas de productos, charlas e intercambios de tales organizaciones brasileñas, revelando cómo la adopción de un comportamiento mimético perpetúa dominios postcoloniales que, al final, no resultan en mejoras en la protección de consumidores en Brasil. La literatura sobre consumidorismo poco discute tales aspectos geopolíticos del movimiento consumidor, dificultando el reconocimiento de que el modelo eurocéntrico de consumidorismo tiene más que la protección a los consumidores como su prioridad, pues se alinea con los intereses del Norte Global, en especial de los EE.UU., de perpetuidad de su hegemonía global.

**Palabras clave:** Consumidorismo. Poscolonialismo. Eurocentrismo. Organizaciones de defensa de los consumidores. *Consumers International*.

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## INTRODUCTION

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In its origin, the main premise of the consumer movement, which began in the United States (US) at the end of the 19th century (TIEMSTRA, 1992), was to bring more equality to an unequal relationship between consumers and companies (HILTON, 2009). However, even after more than a century of consumerist discussions, it seems that this hierarchical inequality is far from over, in that companies are as dominant now as they always have been (WENSLEY, 2010). In this context, the belief that the consumer model does not have consumer interests as its main focus is increasingly strong, even in the US, since it favors companies and maintains the asymmetries between the parties (ROTFELD, 2010).

Although it did not fulfill its premise, this US consumer model was the one that won over the world, starting in the 1950s amid the advent of the Cold War (SIM, 1991). This internationalization was made possible due to the efforts of Consumers International (CI), originally called the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU), which globally expanded the concept of consumer democracy, according to which the market should protect the interests of the consumer (THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF CONSUMERS UNIONS, 1991), ignoring the problems of the neoliberal market model (HARVEY, 2011).

In a short time, CI gained international legitimation by aligning its consumerist activism with the precepts of the free market (HILTON, 2009), at a historic moment of conflict between capitalist and communist ideals. More than just protecting consumers worldwide, the priority of expanding this model of consumerism was, for the Eurocentric countries, to combat communism and to strengthen capitalism, and for the US in particular, it was to ensure that country's global hegemony (IKENBERRY, 2009). In this context, consumer organizations would be "part and parcel of this effort" to spread liberal ideals globally, ensuring that, instead of strengthening collective movements in politically regulated economies, there would be an individualization of the demands of consumers, who, in this scenario, would become "partners" of the free market (NATH, 2015, p. 419).

By offering consumption and protection to the consumer as benefits of the consumer movement, it was in the interest of the Eurocentric world to use such concepts to create markets based on neoliberal principles, with the justification that this was the only way to achieve prosperity for all (STEGER and ROY, 2010), in spite of criticisms that neoliberalism was actually perpetuating and aggravating social inequalities (HARVEY, 2011). Consumerism would assume the role of stimulating consumption and improving the relationship between consumers and businesses, thus restraining the class disputes emphasized by communism.

The global expansion of Eurocentric consumer ideals arrived in Brazil in the 1970s, when discussions about consumer protection gained more voice. Although initially there was a concern to ascribe the protection of consumers to the State (MONTEIRO, 2017; STANTON, CHANDRAN and LOWENHAR, 1981), this scenario changed as local consumer organizations began to emerge, adopting a model of consumerism from the US and Europe, in which the individualization of consumers' problems and the concern to provide such individuals with information about companies and their products was a fundamental part of searching for greater equality of power between the parties (ZÜLZKE, 1991). This influence was strongly visible in the actions of the three most important consumer protection organizations in the country, namely the São Paulo Consumer Protection and Defense Program (Procon-SP), the Brazilian Institute of Consumer Defense (Idec), and Proteste: Brazilian Association for Consumer Defense. All three of these organizations were associated with CI, and as a result, CI and other Eurocentric consumer advocacy organizations strengthened their ties with the Brazilian organizations, thus facilitating the replication of consumer practices of the Global North locally. The alignment of Brazilian consumerism with the international movement helped foster free market ideals and solidify US hegemony over local consumer practices, compromising the Brazilian model's ability to effectively protect consumers (RYNGELBLUM and VIANNA, 2017).

The literature on consumerism does not take such geopolitical aspects of the movement into much account. In general, authors from Eurocentric countries report the history of the consumer movement as an uprising in the US in response to the poor provision of business services to consumers, and how, in response, governments created market regulations to control business momentum and to meet popular demands (HILTON, 2009; KOTLER, 1972). In their turn, authors from countries of the Global South helped to solidify such a vision by reproducing this Eurocentric version of history, without reflecting on the important geopolitical aspects contained in it (RAHMAN, 1994; ROCHA, 2000). Thus, it is infrequently acknowledged that consumerism helps to maintain Eurocentric control over the rest of the world and to expand the global hegemony of the US, generating socioeconomic problems, especially in emerging economies, where the hierarchy of power between consumers and companies is even more rigid (DONOGHUE and DE KLERK, 2009). This uncritical position regarding the consumer movement

makes it difficult to understand that global adoption, or, in the present case, adoption in Brazil of a consumer protection model inspired by that of the US, reinforcing the market myth that the model is a protector of consumer demands (WILLIAMS, 2004), denotes a form of postcolonial control, which perpetuates Eurocentric ideological domination over the rest of the world (ROSA and ALCADIPANI, 2013; YOUNG, 2003).

From a postcolonial perspective, it is possible to perceive that the adoption of such a consumer model in Brazil is problematic because it seems to reduce market asymmetries, when, in fact, that is not the case (FARIA, 2006; MORETTI, 2010). Even if it is regulated, the business force that governs markets can hardly be restrained (PERTSCHUK, 1982; SALVATORI and VENTURA, 2012). In 2017, for example, the scandals brought to light in *Operation Carne Fraca*, which disclosed how Brazilian food corporations adulterated the meat they sold in the national and international markets, illustrate this scenario by demonstrating just how much power large companies have over the market and how they disrespect consumers, even after decades of consumerism in the country. Due to such negative highlights, there is a belief that the asymmetry of power between consumers and businesses is far from over (HEMAIS and CASOTTI, 2017a). It is understood that in Brazil such asymmetry is derived from the ability of companies to influence the development of the markets in which they are inserted, either because they have privileged information about the mechanisms present in those markets, or because they have a powerful influence on governmental bodies (LAZZARINI, 2011), consequently giving them a greater advantage in their relations with consumers, who are seen as vulnerable due to their lack of power to deal with such a structure (CHAUVEL, 2000; SOUZA, 2003). For example, although a large part of Brazilian society does know about the existence of the Consumer Defense Code (CDC), few individuals have sufficient understanding of how to defend themselves (LUQUES and LITWAK, 2016).

In light of this context, the objective of this study is to present, from a postcolonial perspective, a view of the consumer movement in Brazil – discussed very little in the literature on consumerism – analyzing how and why Eurocentric and, in particular, US consumer protection, were incorporated by three important Brazilian consumer organizations, and how adopting this model has resulted in limited advances for the protection of the country's consumers. It is hoped, therefore, that the critical perspective used in this study will bring to light a geopolitical dimension largely ignored in the literature, but which is of fundamental importance for understanding why the mimetic practices adopted by Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste have not resulted in less power asymmetry between consumers and businesses.

The rest of the paper is divided into four more sections. The next section discusses the postcolonial perspective and its relation with neoliberal globalization and consumerism. Then, a brief history of CI's global expansion and the promotion of the Eurocentric consumerist model is presented. In the fourth section the Eurocentric mimicry of Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste, and the consequences of such mimetic consumerism for consumer protection in Brazil are analyzed. Lastly, in the fifth section, final considerations are presented.

## POSTCOLONIALISM, NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION AND CONSUMERISM: A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

The development of the US and European consumer movement coincides with the emergence of neo-liberal thinking in the Global North (HARVEY, 2011) and the reaction against it by the Third World, which sought independence from First World and Second World countries, with the objective of developing autonomously (BERGER, 2004). In order not to lose control over their former colonies, the Eurocentric world maintained its influence over such countries by means of economic and sociocultural mechanisms that justified the argument that the Global South should be dependent on the Global North in order to develop. This form of Eurocentric manipulation has been called post-colonialism (YOUNG, 2003).

The postcolonial perspective states that the Eurocentric world holds sway over the rest of the world because the legacies from the colonial period are still strongly present today (YOUNG, 2003). In spite of the territorial emigration and the political emancipation of the former European colonies, Eurocentric colonization still persists through images, forms of thought and symbolic representations previously built by the colonizers (SAID, 1990) and by economic ties, which have maintained the inequality between developed countries and those aspiring to development (BERGER, 2004), thus keeping colonized peoples from acquiring a real independence from their former colonizers.

After living for hundreds of years under violent control, and being subordinated, dehumanized, and dispossessed of their local identities and cultures (FANON, 1963), it is natural for colonized peoples to have difficulty becoming autonomous from their colonizers. Consequently, they end up adopting the predominantly Eurocentric pattern of thought already known to them, which is reproduced in and molded according to their social practices (ROSA and ALCADIPANI, 2013).

Ideological colonization ends up establishing a sentiment of mimicry in non-Eurocentric societies and individuals, that is, a perception that the colonized must emulate the colonizer in order to develop (BHABHA, 1994) by reproducing practices of the Global North, even going to the extreme of adopting a specific dialect used by the colonizer, marginalizing local variations as “impure” (ASHCROFT, GRIFFITHS and TIFFIN, 2002). The rest of the planet’s “admiration” (MEMMI, 1992) for the Eurocentric world causes efforts to be used to reproduce the practices of the colonizers since they are “aspirational” for the colonized (FREIRE, 2016). In other words, mimicry is used as a search for legitimacy in the face of the dominator.

The colonized’s decision to follow in the steps of the colonizer is facilitated by the fact that societies and individuals from the rest of the world have been disciplined by Eurocentric institutions to regard non-Eurocentric regions as places characterized by their ongoing state of backwardness, and their being responsible for setting up obstacles and threats to world civilizational development, rather than being authentic sites of knowledge production (MIGNOLO, 2009). There are several cases where mimicry is employed by colonized peoples – the fields of management and marketing education, for example (ALCADIPANI and CALDAS, 2012; VARMAN and SAHA, 2009).

Mimicry is more than just the adoption of a “higher” model, by which the colonized can be “saved” from their backward state. It serves to dissolve their culture and local identity (MEMMI, 1992). The eliminating of roots tied to the national space facilitates the reproducing of dominant international discourses and practices – excluding the possibility of creating ideological diversity and exposure to different historical experiences – and the maintaining of Eurocentric hegemonic control over the rest of the world’s peoples and their knowledge.

The basis for justifying mimetic behavior, whether in the field of teaching or in socio-economic practices, lies in the belief that knowledge originating in the North is exponentially more advanced, denying attempts at critical thinking or localized self-expression by societies and individuals in the rest of the world (QUIJANO, 2008). This colonizing process leads the colonized to self-depreciation (MEMMI, 1992), as if they were reproducing a vision of the colonizer regarding those under its rule (FREIRE, 2016).

However, the option of adopting mimetic behaviors is perverse because, despite their attempts, the colonized will always be seen as inferior by their colonizers, even if the former use mimicry as an instrument of approximation to the Eurocentric world, and even if they deny their identification with their colonized peers (FANON, 1963). The mimetic process is developed to be continuous, endless, so that aspirants to assimilation have to undergo transformations that they will never be able to complete (MEMMI, 1992). Since they are trapped in a world in which they cannot be equal to the colonizer to whom they aspire so much, and since they can no longer identify with their highly-despised colonized peers, aspirants can never enjoy the benefits of the former or the latter.

It is within this post-colonial perspective, of continuous domination by the Eurocentric world over the rest of the world, that consumerism has been evolving, and has CI and its quest to foment neoliberal global markets as the main diffusing agent. Starting in the 1960s, with the emergence of US-led neoliberalism, whose purpose was to establish that country’s global hegemony in light of the dispute between capitalism and communism, and between the Global North and the Third World (DUMÉNIL and LEVY, 2011), there was a growing argument that free markets are the only road to economic and social development on a global scale (STEGE and ROY, 2010). Hence, countries that once had States as their primary providers for development should dismantle their government apparatus and rely on the autonomy of markets in order to grow. Following what had occurred in the US and Europe, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when they liberated their markets from the presence of the State, countries of the Global South also adopted the neoliberal order. In Argentina and Chile, for example, experiences with neoliberalism could already be found in the 1970s, when both countries were still under military rule (UNDURRAGA, 2015).

Such neoliberal US-led changes had a profound impact on consumer relations, especially in the Global South countries. The advances of neoliberal globalization resulted in the homogenization of consumer tastes worldwide (LEVITT, 1983). Those in the Global South began to have more contact with the consumption patterns of their Global North peers and, consequently, began to imitate their consumer behaviors (GER and BELK, 1996). As such consumers consumed more, there was a growing

belief that markets could protect them, provided they were free of the State bonds, which were so ubiquitous in Global South markets. The increase of companies acting in the market would lead to a growth in offers to consumers, creating a greater sense of empowerment, since they would consume only those offers that served them well, leaving bad providers to be eliminated naturally (ZÜLZKE, 1991).

The understanding that the power of consumers was growing with neoliberal advancements led Global South companies to adjust to this new world order. Now, they were to follow the market orientation model created in the US (NARVER and SLATER, 1990), with the justification that doing so would be the best way to achieve optimal performance (PERIN and HOFFMANN, 2004).

With the supposed strengthening of Global South consumers against companies due to the advances of neoliberal markets, the presence of institutions that represented them, such as consumer organizations, also grew. Starting in the 1970s, movements of this nature began to emerge in several countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Central America, with agendas having little in common with those of Eurocentric consumer organizations. In Malaysia, for example, activists had the priority of enabling markets to help the poor have access to basic goods and services, which, at the time, were already common to consumers in the Global North (HILTON, 2007a). In Brazil, in turn, there was the Cost of Living Movement, created in 1973, which protested against abusive prices at the time (MONTEIRO, 2017), in addition to the efforts of Congressional Representative Nina Ribeiro, considered one of the first Brazilian politicians to show an interest in consumer problems and the one responsible for designing two projects (1971 and 1976), in which he defended the establishing of consumer protection standards (STANTON, CHANDRAN and LOWENHAR, 1981). According to Hilton (2009), the emergence of consumer movements on a global scale was a natural consequence of these societies and was independent of the efforts of the Eurocentric world to help “create” consumerism. According to the author, such local initiatives represented progress in their consumer markets. However, this framework of consumer “independence” changed as CI expanded, fostering its neoliberal model of consumer protection, and as it approached the main consumer organizations in the countries of the Global South, leading them to change their way of acting.

The Global South’s adoption of a neo-liberal Eurocentric model of the neoliberal market as a form of economic growth, and even consumer protection, did not bring the expected benefits. Serious economic crises arose for the region’s countries, with disastrous results for their populations (KLEIN, 2007). The adoption of business models that relied on the market to grow did not generate improvements or greater empowerment for consumers (GAVA and SILVEIRA, 2007), showing that, in the end, such models only helped to increase the hierarchy between companies and consumers – especially those of the Global North and of the Global South (FARIA, 2009), thus perpetuating Eurocentric hegemony (HARVEY, 2011). Market globalization did little to democratize consumption, because such global influences eventually produced more social inequality, class polarization, feelings of frustration and stress among consumers, materialism, and risks to health and the environment (GER, 1997). As Ger and Belk (1996) point out, it is difficult to resist such globalization movements in less developed countries, and, as a result, local culture and identity end up eventually disappearing in an attempt to conform to the standards of the Global North.

In part, the Eurocentric consumerist model promoted by CI on a global scale helped to sharpen the problems experienced in the Global South markets by favoring the defense of free markets concerning the presence of the State in the protection of consumers. Understanding how this consumer organization has expanded globally is therefore important to better understand this picture.

## **GLOBAL EXPANSION OF CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL AND PROMOTION OF THE EUROCENTRIC CONSUMER MODEL**

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It is difficult to dissociate the expansion of US consumerism to the rest of the world from the history of the Consumers Union (CU), one of the most important and long-standing consumer advocacy organizations. The CU was established in 1936, and from that time until 1979, its president was Colston Warne – considered the father of the worldwide consumer movement (SIM, 1991). From the very start, the organization’s focus was to test products in order to educate consumers about the best options available in the market and to denounce companies offering products containing alterations (MAYER, 1989).

Such testing of products helped reinforce the belief that markets could protect consumers by giving them more power to choose only the products that would benefit them, given their greater access to information regarding different available offers (WARNE and MORSE, 1993), even though such empowerment never actually materialized (TIEMSTRA, 1992). A product’s



test results were provided in the organization's magazine, *Consumer Reports*, which in 1972 reached 2 million subscribers throughout the US, giving the CU a prominent position among the other consumer advocacy organizations, and a profound influence on society (GLICKMAN, 2009).

During the 1950s, European businesspersons contacted Colston Warne to assist them in establishing their own product testing organizations mirroring the CU's product testing model (HILTON, 2009). Warne's assistance resulted in the forming of product testing organizations such as Union Fédérale des Consommateurs in France in 1951, Consumentenbond in the Netherlands in 1953, Union Belge des Consommateurs in Belgium in 1957, and the Consumers' Association in Britain in 1956, all with their own magazines to disseminate the results of their comparative tests (HILTON, 2005).

The partnership between the CU and such European organizations led to the creation of CI in 1960, composed of the three consumer organizations in Belgium, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, plus one in Australia, besides the CU itself in the US (WARNE, 1972). When it was created, the international organization established its main objectives: support its members; expand the consumer movement; and represent the interest of the consumer internationally. To that end, it encouraged its members to "organize, lobby and change government policies and regulations" (THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF CONSUMERS UNIONS, 1991, p. 152), thus facilitating worldwide acceptance of the market order.

In the midst of the Cold War, CI's leaders realized that the organization needed to shift its focus and become more politically active in developing markets around the world (MOWJEE, 2012). This global consumer protection incentive was aimed at improving the relationship between consumers and businesses and fostering the growth of global markets, while at the same time weakening the labor movement linked to communism at the time (HILTON, 2008). In a short time, CI helped create consumer protection organizations in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America and Central America.

CI's first expansion target outside the Eurocentric world consisted of the Eastern European countries, with the excuse that it was defending their consumers from communist rule, which had failed to meet their most basic needs (VERDERY, 1996). The international organization helped set up a number of consumer protection organizations, including, in some cases, funding their operations (MOWJEE, 2012), as in the case of Federacja Konsumentów in Poland, considered one of the most important consumer protection organizations in the region (MAZUREK and HILTON, 2007). By the time of the collapse of communism in 1991, CI had succeeded in helping establish consumer organizations in all the former Soviet republics (HILTON, 2009).

After Eastern Europe, CI took its consumer protection model to Asia during the 1960s and 1970s, concerned with containing the communist advances that dominated not only the Soviet Union but China too (HILTON, 2007b). After Colston Warne visited several Asian countries, he was able to establish partnerships with local organizations, especially the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) in Malaysia. Created in 1969, this organization followed CI's consumer model, establishing itself as one of the main pro-consumer forces in the region (HILTON, 2007a). Its first regional director was Anwar Fazal, whose activist role earned him comparisons with the American Ralph Nader, one of the icons of the American consumer movement in the 1960s.

In view of its progress in Asia, in part because of the CAP's success, CI opened its first office outside Europe in the Malaysian city of Penang in 1974 to provide assistance to consumer organizations in the region. In a short time, organizations from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong became members of CI (RHEE and LEE, 1996; WOOD, 1991). The adoption of consumerist ideals in Asia helped to combat the influence of communism in the region as local elites began to demand changes that stimulated greater economic openness, in accordance with the new neoliberal order that was beginning to establish itself in the US and Europe, reducing State power over markets (HILTON, 2009).

After becoming established in Asia, CI turned its attention to Africa and Central and South America. On the African continent, the organization created a task force to assist the existing consumer movement in a number of countries. It then formed an advisory committee, which organized regional congresses in Senegal and Kenya (HILTON, 2009). The problems experienced by African consumers were specific because most of them lived in extreme poverty, with little access to basic goods and services. To address such issues, CI initially had to turn its attention to building basic infrastructure, since such investments were scarce on the continent. In order to organize any type of consumer movement on a continental scale, this initiative was necessary before turning to actual consumer problems (HILTON, 2007b).

Such difficulties resulted in the slow growth of the African consumer movement. Only in the mid-1990s did CI manage to establish a network of consumer organizations across Africa. To continue fueling the movement, a regional office was established in 1994 in Harare, Zimbabwe (HILTON, 2009).

CI's incursion into the Americas began in 1977, when it started publishing its magazine in Spanish (SIM, 1991). Shortly thereafter, it began to collaborate with the Mexican consumer movement in its local publication. More contacts were made with Latin American activists as a result of a meeting held in Curitiba in southern Brazil in 1984. In 1987, CI opened an office in Montevideo, Uruguay, to support the consumer advocacy movements in Latin America and the Caribbean (CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL, 2010).

Like its Asian counterpart, the Uruguayan office promoted a version of consumerism in line with free market-based socio-economic development issues (HILTON, 2009). What was important was to use the consumer movement as a driving force for the economy, helping to grow markets and open them up to international investment, at a time of economic transition, from years of military dictatorship with strong State control, to liberal market systems (PRYLUKA, 2015). CI's assistance in this process, therefore, was seen as extremely important for the Americas (BUITELAAR, 1991). Consumer organizations quickly joined CI, which in 1991 already had more than 20 Latin American members.

Currently, CI has more than 240 consumer advocacy organizations from 120 countries as members. The process of making consumerism an international movement and turning CI into a multinational organization had the objective of protecting consumers worldwide as a way of promoting US market capitalism (LARSEN and LAWSON, 2013) against other political-economic systems, especially communism. Consumerism also sought to help build global US hegemony and secure its postcolonial control over the rest of the world. The way to achieve this would be facilitated by the rapprochement between CI and various consumer organizations around the world.

## **POST-COLONIALISM REGARDING CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS AND ITS EFFECTS ON CONSUMERISM IN BRAZIL**

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In Brazil, a more structured consumer movement began to take shape in the early 1970s (RIOS, 1998), at a time when the military dictatorship was more concerned with stimulating industry than stimulating consumption (SANTOS, 2014). Important for such development were the Cost of Living Movement (MONTEIRO, 2017) and the efforts of Federal Representative Nina Ribeiro, who was responsible for designing two plans aimed at creating consumer protection standards (STANTON, CHANDRAN and LOWENHAR, 1981). Both plans were rejected, however. It was only after the creation of the first Procon in São Paulo in 1976 that consumerist discussions began to attract more attention from governments, companies and society (ZÜLZKE, 1991). In addition, the creation and operation of Idec in 1987 and Proteste in 2001 are also worth mentioning. The one thing these organizations for protecting Brazilian consumers had in common was the influence of Eurocentric consumer organizations, especially CI.

Before discussing the case of Brazilian consumer organizations, it must be pointed out that the whole history of Procon-SP, Idec or Proteste is not meant to be analyzed here. The interest here is only to discuss events and historical moments that characterize the alignment of these organizations with international consumerism, and to discuss how the Eurocentric model adopted by them presents problems. Such information is presented in chronological order to facilitate an understanding as to how this mimetic relationship was constructed. First, the Procon-SP case, followed by the Idec and Proteste cases, will be presented. Lastly, the consequences of the consumerist model adopted by the three organizations will be discussed.

### **Eurocentric mimicry by the Consumer Protection and Defense Plan of São Paulo**

In the mid-1970s, a team from the Department for Metropolitan Affairs and the Planning Department of the Government of São Paulo conducted a study regarding complaints made to newspapers, in order to diagnose the level of consumer dissatisfaction in São Paulo. The team's plan was to implement a consumer protection system inspired by that of the US (VOLPI, 2007). Based on the information collected, the creation of a State System for Consumer Protection was proposed, which, in 1976, became the first public agency of this nature in Brazil – Procon-SP (RIOS, 1998).

Its lack of knowledge about how to act on behalf of consumers led Procon-SP to be influenced by the "practices of international bodies" (ARRUDA, 2011, p. 9), especially those of CI. In a short time, Procon-SP became the main reference in the country in terms of consumer protection, with other Procons being created in several Brazilian states, mirroring the one in São Paulo.



Since its creation, Procon-SP had frequently exchanged information with CI, so it was natural that both institutions formalized this relationship at the time of the 1st International Exchange in 1982 (FUNDAÇÃO PROCON-SP, 2011). This partnership represented Procon-SP's association with CI – until then, it was the only governmental organization and the first Brazilian association to be connected with the international body – establishing a “strong exchange” between the parties (ZÜLZKE 1991, p. 32). The formalization of this partnership occurred at a time when neoliberal ideals were emerging more strongly in the Eurocentric world, ideals that led to the dismantling of market regulations erected in previous decades (ROTFELD, 2010). In Brazil, the same deregulation movement also occurred shortly afterwards, so that when they were instituted, both Procon-SP and the Brazilian consumer movement were in a deregulated environment, favorable to the free market (TASCHNER, 2000).

Given this situation, one of Procon-SP's main concerns from the time of its emergence was to bring more information to local consumers about the products offered to them, to promote their self-defense. In line with the precepts of free choice (in a free market), consumers who are more aware of their rights can, supposedly, deal with corporate abuses and thus choose which companies they want to do business with. Thus, the preparation of Procon-SP information booklets was a first step toward achieving this goal (FUNDAÇÃO PROCON-SP, 2011). The acceptance of such incentives was so positive at the time that in 1980 the magazine *Consumidor*, in Porto Alegre, emerged as the first of its kind in the country, and is still being published today (SILVA, 2015). Although the magazine was not published by Procon-SP, the agency began to collaborate with it in 1986 and to distribute it in its units. Only in 2006 did Procon-SP start to offer its own publication, *Revista Procon*. Even though *Consumidor* initially had a purpose that differed from the one adopted by foreign publications, it changed its policy and began presenting the results of product testing in its editions (ZÜLZKE, 1991).

In 1983 Procon-SP began a process of modernization and growth, with the appointment of Marilena Lazzarini to the Executive Board. The support of the Department of Economy and Planning was important for this objective, in that it started providing the financial and material resources necessary for the agency's operation (FUNDAÇÃO PROCON-SP, 2011). In addition to providing resources, Procon-SP and the Public Prosecutor's Office established a partnership that helped to highlight consumer protection issues and to launch the agency as one of the main consumer entities in the country. Through the partnership, José Geraldo Brito Filomeno – later, one of the authors of the Brazilian CDC – was appointed as the first public prosecutor for consumer protection, and began acting within the Procon-SP unit.

Procon-SP's pioneering spirit, not only in Brazil, but also in Latin America, as an agency dedicated to consumer issues, made it a reference in the region and, from 1993 onwards, it led a movement to harmonize consumer protection laws among the countries that were part of the Southern Cone (FUNDAÇÃO PROCON-SP, 2011). It was important to CI that Procon-SP should receive such prominence, because, by being associated with the international consumer organization, it would help to expand the Eurocentric consumer protection model by means of the free market in Latin America. Since Brazil was the only country at the time with established consumer protection legislation and organizations, it was natural that it should be an inspiration to other countries (GUIDRY, 2002).

In order to deepen the integration of Latin American consumer associations, Procon-SP organized in Brazil the 3rd Regional Conference of the Consumers' Movement of Latin America and the Caribbean, promoted by CI. The conference was attended by representatives from Chile, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay, Cuba and the Caribbean, as well as members of the international organization. The success of the conference led CI to hold the Consumers International Regional Meeting for the first time in Brazil in 1996, again organized by Procon-SP (COSTA, GONÇALVES and MOTA, 2016). By this time, the Brazilian organization was in the process of becoming a foundation, as the result of the passing of State Law no. 9,192, 1995.

After years of association with and support for CI activities, Procon-SP continues to act in line with the recommendations of the international organization. The purpose of this participation is to promote contacts and to follow up on activities promoted by consumer protection agencies affiliated with CI, by exchanging experiences, projects, studies and work, thus fostering knowledge of consumer demands at a global level, as spelled out on its website. Since it was the first large consumer protection organization in Brazil, Procon-SP served as a model for the other consumer organizations that emerged later. By taking inspiration from Procon-SP, such organizations would also, albeit indirectly, follow CI's market ideals. However, as an organization with government ties, it was more difficult for Procon-SP to fully adopt CI's neoliberal consumer model, something that was easier for Idec as an organization that did not rely on government funding.

## Eurocentric Mimicry of the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defense

Idec was created in 1987 by a group of jurists and lawyers with a solid background in consumer advocacy. At the head of this organization was Marilena Lazzarini, who had left Procon-SP in 1986. From its inception, Idec sought to differentiate itself from and fill a gap left by Procon-SP; the organization would be non-governmental and funded by its own resources and non-corporate donations. Its consumerist proposition sought to be inspired “by the experiences of foreign organizations from more-developed countries linked to the IOCU” (PIZZO, 2007, p. 16). Hence, it was not surprising that Idec became a member of CI at its inception, eventually becoming a full member and the only Brazilian organization with this degree of involvement with the international entity.

To begin its operations, Idec received a grant (awarded to Marilena Lazzarini) from Ashoka, an international association that finances entrepreneurs worldwide. This initial financial assistance opened doors to other financial supporters, such as Consumentenbond, the Netherlands’ main consumer organization and one of CI’s founding members. In time, the Consumers Union itself became an important supporter of Idec, as did other US organizations such as the Ford and MacArthur Foundations (PIZZO, 2007).

In a short time, Idec became a prominent consumer organization in Brazil, so in 1988 it was invited to participate on various committees of public organizations and to take part in the hearings of the commission of the National Constituent Assembly responsible for inserting consumer protection into the new Constitution. Such prominence was due to the important personages who were part of Idec. In addition to Marilena Lazzarini, other Brazilian activists also played a prominent role in the organization, among them jurists involved in the creation of the CDC (Ada Pellegrini Grinover, Paulo Frontini and Kazuo Watanabe), leaders from influential non-governmental organizations (Ruth Cardoso, Sergio Haddad and Valdemar de Oliveira Neto), professionals from the journalistic and communication world (Enio Mainardi, Eugênio Bucci and Sidnei Basile), among others (PIZZO, 2007).

Although Idec initially acted mainly through lawsuits in defense of injured consumers, it became strongly associated with comparative tests of products and services, a practice it adopted in 1991. The results of such tests were disclosed in the magazine *Consumidor S.A.*, “published in the format of European and North American publications by consumer associations” (FERNANDES, 1995). The purpose of *Consumidor S.A.* was to carry out and divulge the findings of 3 comparative tests per edition, besides publishing reproduced reports found in international consumer magazines. This was made possible, in large part, by help received from Euroconsumer (at that time called *Conseur - Consommateurs Européens*), which, since 1995, had been providing financial support to Idec – for example, it donated US \$15,000 for comparative tests – as well as collaborating in the training of test technicians through internships in Europe, and in the editorial line of Idec’s magazine (FERNANDES, 1996a). *Conseur* consisted of an association between consumer protection organizations in Belgium (Test-Achats), Italy (Altroconsumo), Portugal (Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa do Consumidor - DECO) and Spain (Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios – OCU) – all associated with CI – to act as a parent holding company for publishing magazines by consumer protection organizations. In its heyday, it was publishing 23 different magazines in 5 languages, with more than 1 million readers, and it appointed itself as “the first multinational of consumer organizations” (FERNANDES, 1996b).

It was common for Idec also to publish specific content brochures that were frequently related to topics developed by CI. Among them, the publication *O consumidor no contexto da globalização* (The Consumer in the Context of Globalization) is worth mentioning, resulting from a seminar held in 1997 by the same name. Highlights in this brochure were the presentations by Louise Sylvan, Executive Director of the Australian Consumers’ Association and CI’s Financial Executive, and Dick Wetensdorp, secretary of CI and president of Consumentenbond. The main issue emphasized by both speakers was the need to unify consumer movements to act globally, with the justification that markets were opening up, whereas States were reducing their activities, thus requiring the presence of other actors to balance the interests of society (BELINKY, 2010).

Idec’s close association with CI allowed the Brazilian organization to qualify its functional body with the “best international practices” of consumer protection. Consequently, several Idec employees were trained in CI-related consumer organizations (PIZZO, 2007). Some had been or still were on CI’s Board of Directors, such as the State Attorney of São Paulo, Marcelo Sodré, who attained the position because he was on Idec’s Board of Directors. The foreign influence was also due to the presence of consultants from other countries in Idec’s daily operations. Among them, it is worth mentioning the work of the American physician Lynn Silver, who brought Idec’s concerns about the health of the population to high government agencies. Silver also helped organize a booklet launched by Idec in 2003, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation (PIZZO, 2007).

Possibly the greatest evidence of Idec’s alignment with CI was the nomination of Marilena Lazzarini to CI’s presidency, a position she held from 2003 to 2007 (HILTON, 2009). In its 50-year commemorative book, CI credits its Brazilian president as

being one of its best leaders, along with other former presidents, including Colston Warne. Her performance is described as “critical to subsequent efforts all over the world to permit informed consumer choice,” and her presidency was marked by a “transition to a more dynamic and high-profile campaigning organisation” (CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL, 2010).

Especialy during the years of Marilena Lazzarini at the head of CI, Idec became increasingly involved with the international organization’s campaigns, research and events, and started to have its support in the development of several projects. The extent of its involvement led the Brazilian organization, in 2007, to be elected as a member of CI’s Board of Directors (INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE DEFESA DO CONSUMIDOR, 2007). It is not surprising, therefore, that international publications point to Idec as the main consumer organization in Brazil (CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL, 2010; SODRÉ, 2015).

## Eurocentric Mimicry by Proteste: Brazilian Association for Consumer Protection

The title of being the largest consumer protection organization in Brazil, however, has long been disputed by another Brazilian organization. Created in 2001, with R\$ 1,000,000 in financing from Euroconsumer – the same amount awarded to Idec – Proteste was basically a replica of Test-Achats of Belgium, specializing in comparative product tests, which would be published in Proteste’s magazine (CRESPO, 2002). Currently, the organization calls itself the largest consumer association in Brazil and Latin America, with 250,000 members. Proteste’s international character is even highlighted in the slogan of its magazine, indicating that subscribing to it provides the consumer with “global assistance.”

Although what they do is similar, in that they both run comparative tests on products, Idec and Proteste are not in partnership, and the possible explanation for this fact is the creation of Proteste itself. In 1996, Euroconsumer made a proposal to Idec to gain control over the publication of *Consumer S.A.*, becoming responsible for editorial guidelines, strategies and goals for all activities related to the magazine. Although the Idec Board was tempted, it was unable to reach an agreement with Euroconsumer, because the board wanted a guarantee that the magazine’s commercial guidelines would be maintained, something that the Europeans did not accept (BELINKY, 2010).

Faced with Idec’s refusal, the alternative for Euroconsumer to operate in Brazil was to create its own consumer protection organization, in this case, Proteste. In order to rely on labor that was already experienced with product testing, Idec officials were besieged – and some were even hired – by Proteste. Idec did not appreciate this and made a formal complaint to CI’s board, of which Test-Achats was also a member. This event led to a deterioration in the relationship between both Brazilian organizations, which have since distanced themselves from each other (NATH, 2015) and have become somewhat competitive (RYNGELBLUM and VIANNA, 2017).

Since Proteste was essentially a Euroconsumer organization, it was natural that a Belgian, Willy Van Ryckeghem, helped found it. Van Ryckeghem was one of the co-founders of Test-Achats and was president of CI from 1975 to 1978, which explains the close relationship between the Brazilian organization and the various European consumer organizations. In addition to CI and Euroconsumer, Proteste is also associated with International Consumers Research and Testing (ICRT), an organization created through collaboration between Test-Achats and Consumentenbond, and which maintains close contact with CI. This association with the research organization allows Proteste to follow ICRT’s methodologies and to have access to the results of its comparative tests so that it can disseminate the evaluations of national and international products in its magazine (RYNGELBLUM and VIANNA, 2017).

Throughout its history, Proteste has always abided by CI’s guidelines, participating in campaigns initially developed by CI. In order to facilitate the alignment of ideas, since 2003 the Brazilian organization has held an international seminar to discuss consumer protection issues by means of market incentives, with participants from Brazil and abroad, especially CI, Euroconsumer and ICRT. In their lectures, foreign activists point out the international community’s main issues of concern, and how consumer organizations in Brazil can integrate with such movements. In general, such concerns lean toward actions about how to encourage market practices, and consumer organizations play an important role in this regard.

## Consequences of the mimicry of Eurocentric consumerism in Brazil

As Hilton (2009) suggests, the consumer movement that developed worldwide, starting in the 1950s, was a natural consequence of the development of consumer markets, and that, even with CI’s strong influence on this process, there were already consumer advocacy initiatives taking place in several countries of the Global North and the Global South even before CI expanded and approached them. Brazil was no exception to this scenario, since consumer actions were being developed locally in the 1970s

to deal with issues of great importance to the Brazilian consumer, whom the State was primarily responsible for protecting (MONTEIRO, 2017; STANTON, CHANDRAN and LOWENHAR, 1981). However, this more “nationalist” and “diplomatic” focus on local consumerism began to shift in parallel with CI’s ties to Procon-SP and, later, to Idec and Proteste.

The association of these Brazilian organizations with CI brought changes to the direction of national consumerism, which began to integrate international consumer ideologies into its activities in order to further encourage the market to protect consumers (RYNGELBLUM and VIANNA, 2017). Issues of interest to the global community – defined by organizations from the Global North with neoliberal agendas (NATH, 2015) – would therefore be discussed by Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste as if they were priorities for the Brazilian consumer reality. Considering that markets in the Global North and the Global South were at different stages of development (PIETERSE, 2000), it was only natural to imagine that consumerist discussions by the former regarding the latter would not deal much with what was actually afflicting less-developed markets (ARAUJO, 2013; HILTON, 2007a). While Global North consumer actions were thought to stimulate the growth of neoliberal markets (HILTON, 2009), such practices in Brazil would be inconsistent with the reality of its market, since, being at a less developed stage, the asymmetry of power between companies and consumers was significant (FARIA, 2006).

Given this asymmetric framework of power, the role of the State in Brazil was considered fundamental for restraining business abuses and for ensuring greater protection to consumers (FILOMENO, 2016). However, with the economic crisis experienced by the country in the 1980s and the adoption of neoliberal principles in the 1990s, consumer demands were placed second on the governmental agenda, while the relations between the government and companies were mixed, increasing the disparity of corporate power over the market (LAZZARINI, 2011). In this vacuum, space opened up for consumer organizations – especially after the creation of Procon-SP – to assume this responsibility, since they should “mitigate the effects produced by the ineffectiveness of the State in the protection of consumer rights” (BRITTO and SANTOS, 2009, p. 265). However, by copying a Eurocentric consumer protection model, these organizations limited how far Brazilian consumerism could advance.

As Nath (2015) explains, in order to weaken collective movements around regulated markets, the consumerism developed on a global scale by CI aimed to individualize consumer demands, making consumers believe that their protection would come through free markets. In essence, one of the main criticisms of the performance model of Procon, Idec and Proteste is precisely its individualization of consumption problems (SILVA, 2012). Such a process is problematic because it gives consumers the false notion that, since both parties are on equal footing, consumers are sovereign and therefore have the power to monitor the performance of companies in order to ensure that they meet consumers’ needs and desires (TADAJEWSKI, 2018).

According to the consumer premise adopted in Brazil, one way consumers could gain more equality vis-à-vis companies would be through greater access to information on the latter. One of the ways this was done – by copying the Global North consumer model – was by disseminating the results of comparative product tests, a practice widely used by both Idec and Proteste. One could say, however, that, rather than supplying information to consumers, such practices solidify the neoliberal idea that markets can protect consumers, since empowered individuals can choose the best among the various products available, based on information regarding their benefits or harm (NATH, 2015). What is perceived, however, is that this Eurocentric reality is far removed from the Brazilian context, because Brazilian consumers are still confused about what is being offered to them when they make their purchases (BROILO and ESPARTEL, 2016); they are not sure how to use products correctly, thus putting their health at risk (SILVA, BARROS and GOUVEIA, 2017); and they feel deceived by and distrustful of companies (CHAUVEL and SUAREZ, 2009). One possible explanation for the persistence of such problems, even after greater efforts to generate information, is that the business community does not feel pressured enough to change solely due to the dissemination of product test results, since such communication ends up being the “only power” (RYNGELBLUM and VIANNA, 2017, p. 169) that consumer organizations like Idec and Proteste have for regulating business activities.

Access to information would also give consumers greater equality of power over businesses since it would provide them with more knowledge about their rights. However, as much as they currently know about the existence of the CDC, few Brazilians actually pursue their rights and complain to consumer organizations when in situations of dissatisfaction (INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE DEFESA DO CONSUMIDOR, 2016). This may explain why there is still a major lack of knowledge about the existence of such organizations, what they do and how effective they are at solving consumer problems (HEMAIS and CASOTTI, 2017b). Upon analyzing the small number of complaints to Procons throughout the country, for example, one can see that disregard for the rights of the consumer persists, since the companies complained against, and the types of problems reported, are invariably the same year after year (SECRETARIA NACIONAL DO CONSUMIDOR, 2016).



Informing consumers is, indeed, an important task that Brazilian consumer organizations should adopt. However, to think that greater disclosure of information is the main way to protect and empower consumers – according to what Global North organizations advocate – and that this will bring about changes in their relations with companies, generating greater equality of power between the parties, is worrying and disregards the fact that Brazilian businesses continually deceive and disregard consumers (FERREIRA, SANTANA and SOUZA, 2017). Even if consumer organizations do educate consumers and disclose business failures, the resulting reactions seem to be very limited when it comes to promoting changes that truly protect those with less power and thus enable consumers to avoid experiencing problems with companies over and over again.

Although the results of adopting the Eurocentric consumer model in Brazil are questionable, mimicry practices by the three Brazilian organizations highlighted here continue. In 2015, the country hosted the CI World Congress, which received approximately 700 participants from more than 90 countries. Seeking to reinforce the Eurocentric concern of stimulating global markets, the congress's theme was: "Unlocking consumer power: a new vision for the global marketplace." The event was so important that, at its opening, the then president of the country, Dilma Rouseff, gave a speech along with the Minister of Justice, José Eduardo Cardozo. Representatives from Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste were present and gave lectures.

According to CI, its choice to hold the congress in Brazil was due to consumer progress and the country's level of economic development, phenomena that Amanda Long, president of CI at the time, believed to be positively related: "It is proven that strong consumer protection can mean strong economic growth" (INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE DEFESA DO CONSUMIDOR, 2014). This logic, which reinforces the alignment between consumerism and market ideals, can hardly be considered as a unique truth, since in the years following the congress, Brazilian consumer "advances" did not prevent the economy from entering into a deep recession.

Continuing its mimicry of Global North consumer organizations, Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste are increasingly involved with a model that shows problems when adopted in Brazil. Because they are the three main consumer protection organizations in the country, they influence the way local consumerism is shaped. However, as long as CI is their benchmark, it is difficult to imagine that they will be able to achieve the much-needed advances so that Brazilian consumers are truly protected against companies.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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This study used a postcolonial perspective to present a view of the consumer movement in Brazil, which is little discussed in the literature on consumerism. It analyzed how and why Eurocentric and, in particular, US consumer protection standards were incorporated by three important Brazilian consumer organizations and how the adoption of this model has resulted in limited advances in consumer protection in the country. The cases of Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste were discussed, showing how the three organizations associated themselves with international organizations, especially CI, mimicking their practices, but without obtaining results that ensure greater equality of power between consumers and companies.

By adopting the postcolonial perspective to analyze the case of the three Brazilian organizations, it is possible to understand that discussions between CI and other Eurocentric consumer organizations with organizations from the Global South have more than just consumer protection as a priority on their agenda. By imitating the Eurocentric consumer model, organizations in Brazil began to involve themselves with their Global North peers in such a way that they could hardly create a kind of consumer defense that was not Eurocentric. This postcolonial process eventually created dependence on the latter with regard to the understanding of what the "right" path the local consumer movement should follow, based on the successful experiences of its foreign counterparts. Through this process, the State, once considered essential in the defense of consumers in Brazil, is no longer called upon to deal with consumer issues, allowing companies to have greater freedom, leaving "empowered" consumers and activist organizations to be responsible for regulating business performance. However, for the Brazilian reality, this model has its problems.

As a consequence of this mimicry by the three consumer organizations studied, the evolution of consumerism in Brazil became more geared toward the individualization of consumer demands – in line with neoliberal precepts – rather than toward advancement by means of the collectivity. Relying on the market to protect consumers, Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste adopted



practices to inform consumers about companies and their products, reinforcing the idea that well-informed individuals could stand up to businesses and become sovereign. In Brazil this reality still seems far from materializing, however. Nonetheless, one should not imagine that the blame for corporate lack of commitment to consumer rights can be attributed to the lack of these organizations' efforts to seek improvements at the consumer level. As analyzed, the three have been performing various activities of this nature since they came into being. The problem, therefore, seems to be more related to the Eurocentric model adopted, which has not been done so as to fully achieve this objective, than to the competence of these organizations to get involved with the consumer cause.

A possible alternative path to this disturbing picture might be the reestablishing of increased involvement by the State in consumer issues – as the pro-consumer movement in Brazil was initially designed – until the local market develops further, and the hierarchy of power between companies and consumers is less asymmetric. Heading in this direction would mean designing a purpose for consumerism that would remove the weight of CI's influence on local consumer actions. Thus, Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste could relegate mimicry practices to the background and begin to develop a form of consumer protection that will offer solid results than those that have been achieved, allowing the conception of a type of consumerism that could serve as a model for other countries – especially in emerging economies and in Latin America, whose market contexts are more similar to Brazil's – thus depending less on that which serves Eurocentric hegemonic interests, especially those of the US, perpetuating the asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South.

Adopting the postcolonial perspective in order to analyze consumerism in Brazil entails a geopolitical dimension not usually found in this literature. It thus becomes clear that the consumer movement has an agenda linked to the interests of Eurocentric countries, especially the US, to maintain their hegemony over the rest of the world, making it impossible for local consumerism to develop so as to fulfill its objective of greater equality of power between consumers and businesses. The vision presented herein avoids the one that shows that the consumer movement is limited to a relationship between companies, consumers and governments, whose objective is to achieve greater equality of power between the parties. When discussing consumerism, it is important to consider larger perspectives that encompass disputes between the Global North and Global South, and between neoliberal markets and other forms of global development, because they are closely related to the formation of this movement. It is hoped, therefore, that in bringing such discussions to light, greater knowledge about the phenomenon in question can be fostered, so as to keep the problems inherent in it from continuing.

By pointing out the postcolonial side of Eurocentric consumerism as practiced by CI and mimicked by consumer organizations in Brazil, it is hoped that this study will help to encourage more questioning about this consumerism model, so as to make alternatives to this mimetic process viable, thus ensuring greater effectiveness in protecting consumers. For this to be possible, further reflection must be made concerning the reasons that have led Eurocentric consumer organizations, especially CI, to expand globally; what its interests are in establishing partnerships with organizations from the Global South; and whether this consumer model actually creates defense mechanisms for consumers – for all the socioeconomic strata of society – against corporate abuses. This study has showed that there are neoliberal interests behind CI's global expansion and that its interest in approaching consumer organizations in the Global South has been a way of expanding such an agenda by fostering free markets regardless of consumer interests. Continuing to discuss consumerism from a Global South perspective becomes important, therefore, because it allows us to unveil this complex phenomenon in more detail.

This study is a small step towards a better understanding of the consumer movement in Brazil and how postcolonial geopolitical aspects are related to this phenomenon. Future studies, therefore, should give continuity to this line of research and bring new insights to the discussion. One suggestion is to carry out case studies involving each of the three consumer protection organizations highlighted here, deepening the findings presented. The ideal, in these cases, would be to use primary data from in-depth interviews with activists from each organization in order to better understand the Brazilian consumer movement, its relationship with the international movement, and how Procon-SP, Idec and Proteste fit within them. Another way would be to search through internal documents, such as the minutes of these Brazilian organizations' Advisory Board meetings in order to construct more detailed narratives about how and why the Eurocentric consumer model was adopted in Brazil. Furthermore, one last suggestion would be to analyze other consumer organizations in Brazil, such as the Brazilian Institute of Consumer Policy and Law (Brasilcon) – created in 1992 by the authors of the draft bill that gave rise to the CDC, which was associated with the CI in 2011, to complement the postcolonial perspective adopted here on the mimicry of the Eurocentric model.

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Marcus Wilcox Hemais

PhD in Administration from COPPEAD Institute of Administration at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; Assistant Professor at IAG/PUC-Rio, Rio de Janeiro- RJ, Brazil. E-mail: marcus.hemais@iag.puc-rio.br