

BOOK REVIEW

No logo

[Naomi Klein, *No logo no space, no choice, no jobs: taking aim at the brand bullies* Flamingo, London, 2000; xxi,490p,ill, 23cm (incl index); RRP \$A21.95 (softcover), \$A72.95(hardcover); ISBN 0006530400(pbk)]

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Introduction

The current protests about globalisation that follow the WTO summits, G-8 summits and almost any publicised meeting of heads of state, is arguably a movement comparable in size and collective passion as that of the anti-war protests in the late sixties. Naomi Klein has spent years researching and documenting evidence of that theory and she persuasively presents it in her book, *No logo*.

Klein has written a book that documents the marketing strategies of the biggest corporations, the current international economic climate that has produced free trade zones in developing countries that are rife with human rights abuses, and the activism that is a direct response to it.

Her writing is readable and almost chatty, probably an attempt to appeal to those new to the topics within. There seems to be a conscious anti-academic feel to the book, although she has included an appendix with pages of charts to back up the statistics she uses.

The Branding of Culture

Klein begins with a history of corporate 'branding', examining the origins of aggressively marketing an image rather than a product. In the first part of the book, "No Space", Klein documents how with the expansion of branding, corporations start to take over their host culture. When rock concerts, sporting events and other cultural events become synonymous and then inferior to the brand that sponsors it, Klein laments the loss of unmarketed space.

What is interesting about this book is the depth of the analysis that is undertaken. Klein obviously wants her readers to understand the historical importance of the way brands have built themselves up.

The Corporate mythology has it that Nike is a sports and fitness company because it was built by a bunch of jocks who loved sports and were fanatically devoted to the worship of superior athletes. In reality, Nike's project was a little more complicated and can be separated into three guiding principles. First, turn a select group of athletes into Hollywood-style superstars who are associated not with their teams or even, at times, with their sport, but instead with certain pure ideas about athleticism as transcendence and perseverance - embodiments of the Graeco-Roman ideal of the perfect male form. Second, pit Nike's "Pure Sports" and its team of athletic superstars against the rule obsessed established sporting world. Third, and most important, brand like mad.¹

Corporate Mercenaries: The Cool Hunters

Klein carefully documents that the superbrands are only there because they manage to tap successfully into the 'cool' market, and they are aware that they need to keep their finger on the pulse to remain a 'cool' brand. Considering they are marketing to teenagers, and most teenagers are at school on a regular basis, the super brands have a captive market.

Although she does not say it directly, the message Klein seems to be conveying is that she perceives corporations to be the Orwellian Big Brother of the new millennium. As well as in-school broadcasts, ads for brands in North America have also managed to be placed as wrapping for text books.² Perhaps the worst offence of corporate interference in education is the way brands have cleverly cut out the guess work of what kids want to buy by getting them to design ad campaigns.

In New York and Los Angeles high-school students have created thirty second animated spots for Starburst fruit candies, and students in Colorado Springs designed Burger King ads to hang in their school buses. Finished assignments are passed on to the companies and the best entries win prizes and may even be adopted by the companies - all subsidised by the tax payer funded school system.³

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¹Klein N, *No logo no space, no choice, no jobs: taking aim at the brand bullies* Flamingo, London, 2000, p51

²Klein, note 1, p90

³Klein, note 1, p94

A marketing strategy that Klein examines in detail is the ‘ghetto cool’ approach, which ‘feeds off the alienation at the heart of America’s race relations: selling white youth on their fetishisation of black style, and black youth on their fetishisation of white wealth.’⁴ The hip-hop culture has been big business for many of the superbrands for a long time, just as youth rebellion has always been. Of course, the sophistication of marketing now means subcultures are virtually swallowed by the brands that utilise them; another example of brands ‘taking over’ the host culture.

Over the past decade, young black men in American inner cities have been the market most aggressively mined by the brandmasters as a source of borrowed ‘meaning’ and identity.⁵

The real reasons behind targeting hip-hop culture can be historically explained. For some, the real history of ‘cool’ in America has always been African-American influenced, from jazz to blues to rock and rap. ‘The truth is that the ‘gotta be cool’ rhetoric of the global brands is, more often than not, an indirect way of saying ‘gotta be black’.’⁶ This is another way the brands can successfully do market research as well as promotion without paying massive advertising fees.

Nike has even succeeded in branding the basketball courts where it goes bro-ing through its philanthropic wing, P.L.A.Y [Participate in the Lives of Youth]. P.L.A.Y sponsors inner-city sports programs in exchange for high swoosh visibility, including giant swoosh’s at the centre of resurfaced urban basketball courts. In tonier parts of the city, that kind of thing would be called an ad and the space would come at a price, but on this side of the tracks, Nike pays nothing, and files the cost under charity.⁷

In Chapter 8, Klein documents how once a brand becomes ubiquitous, it is able to control cultural references to it through censorship. An interesting example is that ‘McDonalds waged a 26 year battle against a man named Ronald McDonald whose McDonalds Family Restaurant in a tiny town in Illinois had been around since 1956.’⁸

⁴Klein, note 1, p76

⁵Klein, note 1, p73

⁶Klein, note 1, p74

⁷Klein, note 1, p75

⁸Klein, note 1, p178

Klein also uses Mattel's Barbie doll as an example. 'Mattel, for instance, has reaped huge profits by encouraging young girls to build elaborate dream lives around their doll, but it still wants that relationship to be a monologue.'⁹ Mattel is well known for using trademark and copyright laws to gag cultural criticisms and silence unwanted (or more poignantly uncontrollable) criticism. In terms of cultural control over their image, brands have become more and more aggressive, as the stakes have become higher.

As we have seen, the high stakes sponsorship agreements in the sports world first exerted their influence by deciding what logo athletes wore and what teams they played on. Now that control has expanded to what political views they may hold publicly. Daring political stands like Muhammad Ali's opposition to the Vietnam war have long since been replaced by the soft drink radicalism of NBA cross dresser Dennis Rodman, as sponsors push their athletes to be little more than billboards with attitude. As Michael Jordan once commented, 'Republicans buy sneakers too.'¹⁰

Klein shows here how not only has branding led to the loss of unmarketed cultural space, but also a loss of allowance of cultural critiques of the super brands.

No Jobs

In Chapter 9, 'No Jobs', it is explained how branding has made the manufacturing inferior to the actual brands. The outsourcing of manual labour to areas of Economic Protection Zones in developing countries has meant massive job losses in North America. It is in this part of the book that Klein really seems to get passionate. She appears to have a keen interest in international economics and is understanding of the forces that have resulted in the use of sweatshops by most multinational brands. Klein travelled to Cavite, an EPZ in the Philippines, where she spoke to many factory workers. She describes life for these workers:

Regardless of where the EPZs are located, the workers' stories have a certain mesmerizing sameness: the work day is long-fourteen hours in Sri Lanka, twelve hours in Indonesia, sixteen

⁹Klein, note 1, p181

¹⁰Klein, note 1, p186 See also Korten D, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 2nd Edition, Kumarian Press, Connecticut, 2001, p115, 'The \$20 million that basketball star Michael Jordan reportedly received for promoting Nike shoes exceeded the entire annual payroll of the Indonesian factories that made them.'

in Southern China, twelve in the Philippines. The vast majority of the workers are women, always young, always working for contractors or subcontractors from Korea, Taiwan or Hong Kong. The contractors are usually filling orders for companies based in the U.S., Britain, Japan, Germany or Canada. The management is military style, the supervisors often abusive, the wages below subsistence and the work low skill and tedious.¹¹

While this description will hardly be news to most readers, what may be news is that companies like Nike, who have experienced a public backlash because of using those factories, still do use them. What is so important about this book is that Klein delves deeper than most readers would ever do and explains the international economic climate that allows for these free trade zones to operate, and then describes the lives of those people who work in the zones. This is a major strength of the book, it is not too academic to become distant from the subject. Her interviews with the women who work in these factories give it a personal touch. She is able to describe the stark contrast between the glossiness of Nike town and the factories where the merchandise is produced.

Labour groups agree that a living wage for an assembly line worker in China would be approximately US87 cents an hour. In the United States and Germany, where multinationals have closed down hundreds of domestic textile factories to move to zone production, garment workers are paid an average of US\$10 and \$18.50 an hour, respectively. Yet even with these massive savings in labour costs, those who manufacture for the most prominent and richest brands in the world are still refusing to pay workers in China the 87 cents that would cover their cost of living, stave off illness and even allow them to send a little money home to their families. A 1998 study of brand name manufacturing in the Chinese special economic zones found that Wal-Mart Mart, Ralph Lauren, Ann Taylor, Esprit, Liz Claiborne, Kmart, Nike, Adidas, J.C. Penny and the Limited were only paying a fraction of that miserable 87 cents- some were paying as little as 13 cents an hour.¹²

The EPZ's that are estimated to be around 850 (but Klein argues more likely to be around 1000) are spread through 70 countries and employ around 27 million workers. They are set up as an area where goods are manufactured and where there are no import and export duties and

¹¹Klein, note 1, p205

¹²Klein, note 1, p212

often no income or property taxes either.¹³ They were intended to be incentives for foreign investment into developing countries, what that has meant is:

[T]he governments of poor countries offer tax breaks, lax regulations and the services of a military willing and able to crush labor unrest. To sweeten the pot further, they put their own people on the auction block, falling over each other to offer up the lowest minimum wage, allowing workers to be paid less than the real cost of living.¹⁴

In Chapter Ten, 'Threats and Temps', Klein challenges the view of 'McJobs' as purely hobby jobs for kids going through college on their way to bigger and better things. She cites a study that found that '25 per cent of non-management Canadian retail workers had been with the same company for eleven years or more'¹⁵. She also exposes the myth that only young people work in these kinds of jobs, with more than half of the people working in the food service workforce being over twenty five years old.¹⁶ This trend is directly related to the use of factories in EPZ's for the manufacturing of the products and the ability for the company to keep on expanding.

All the brand name retail workers I spoke with expressed their frustration at helping their stores rake in, to them, unimaginable profits, and then having to watch that profit get funnelled into compulsive expansion. Employee wages, meanwhile, stagnate or even decline. At Starbucks in British Columbia new workers faced an actual wage decrease- from Can\$7.50 to \$7 an hour- during a period when the chain was doubling its profits and opening 350 new stores a year.¹⁷

Just like in the factories in EPZ's, brand name retail and food service stores generally shut down after workers unionise. Klein states that there is only one unionised McDonalds in North America, but at the time of writing the company was on the verge of having the union decertified.¹⁸ Of the companies that boasted the highest profits in the

¹³Klein, note 1, p204-5

¹⁴Klein, note 1, p206

¹⁵Klein, note 1, p233

¹⁶Klein, note 1, p233

¹⁷Klein, note 1, p239

¹⁸Klein, note 1, p241

last few years, most if not all were responsible for massive jobs layoffs while the CEO's received massive bonuses.¹⁹ Klein, with her understanding of economics, states the anomaly of economic growth and job losses quite simply.

Corporations are indeed “growing” the economy, but they are doing it, as we have seen, through layoffs, mergers, consolidation and outsourcing- in other words, through job debasement and job loss. And as the economy grows, the percentage of people directly employed by the world's largest corporations is actually decreasing. Transnational corporations, which control more than 33 percent of the world's productive assets, account for only 5 percent of the world's direct employment. And though the total assets of the world's one hundred largest corporations increased by 288 percent between 1990 and 1997, the number of people those corporations employed grew by less than 9 percent during that same period of tremendous growth.²⁰

By Chapter 11, ‘Breeding Disloyalty’, Klein starts to document the wellspring of discontent that this kind of global economy inevitably produces. Microsoft, perhaps one of the most targeted companies at the moment, is experiencing attack from all quarters. Hackers from within the company are becoming more and more common, and computer viruses aimed at crippling IBM's are regular occurrences these days. Despite Bill Gates' well publicised charity spending, he has become a symbolic target for many anti globalism protesters. In Chapter 12, Klein starts to delve into what the blurb on the back of the book promises, ‘Culture Jamming’. After lamenting the loss of cultural space in the beginning of the book, Klein introduces us to those who are fighting back. ‘Culture jamming baldly rejects the idea that marketing- because it buys its way into our public spaces- must be passively accepted as a one way information flow.’²¹ Culture jammers can be graffiti artists who change ads on billboards to the publishers of the slick *Adbusters* magazine, the Media Foundation, who produce “uncommercials” for television.²²

So what can a culture jammer do when their jams backfire on them? Reclaim the Streets. RTS began as a protest against the *Criminal*

¹⁹Klein, note 1, p256

²⁰Klein, note 1, p261

²¹Klein, note 1, p281

²²Klein, note 1, p287

Justice Act in Britain (which was designed to ban raves and eliminate squatting), these impromptu hijacking of the streets became worldwide. These days, they generally coincide with protests against summits of world leaders, mostly G-8 summits but also World Trade Organisation (WTO) meetings. Since the G-8 summit in Birmingham in 1998, protesters can now be guaranteed to follow the summits around the world. The most recent G-8 summit in Genoa, Italy, on 20 July, had massive security surrounding the city with attempts to keep 'known troublemakers' out.²³ It has now become a source of contention amongst civic leaders whether to put their hands up to host these summits in their cities. The risks of violence have become a standard part of the summits. 'The elites who once gathered in peaceful, secluded elegance to chart the course of the corporate global economy now meet behind police barricades with a backdrop of mass protests.'²⁴ An important element to Klein's book is the way she includes street level activism in Western countries and credits it as being far more than just a 'fad', as most of the critics of the protesters call it. She demonstrates how corporate investment in developing countries has led to greater human rights abuses, and democracy in those countries is falling by the wayside as a direct result of corporate intervention.

Conclusion

After establishing quite matter-of-factly the sheer power that the superbrands wield on a worldwide political scale, Klein asks some very simple questions. 'Why, if Wal-Mart-Mart had the power to lower prices, alter CD covers and influence magazine content, did it not also have the power to demand and enforce ethical labor standards from its suppliers?'²⁵ These kind of questions seemingly are intended to be used by consumers in the West against the corporations that are discussed in the book.

In a single image, the brand name sweatshop tells the story of the obscene disparities of the global economy: corporate executives and celebrities raking in salaries so high they defy comprehension, billions of dollars spent on branding and advertising - all propped up by a system of shanty towns,

²³SBS news, 18 July 2001

²⁴Korten, note 10, p287

²⁵Klein, note 1, p329

squalid factories and the misery and trampled expectations of young women, ... struggling to survive.²⁶

Klein makes the point several times throughout the book that these two worlds, the consumer and the producers, are expected by the corporations to be so far apart that they cannot communicate. She shows that is not the case. She also provides a simple, somewhat ideological, solution.

In the twenties and thirties, when the crises of sweatshops, child labor and workers' health were at the forefront of the political agenda in the West, these problems were tackled with mass unionization, direct bargaining between workers and employers and governments enacting tough new laws. That type of response could be marshalled again, only this time on a global scale, through the enforcement of existing International Labor Organization treaties, if compliance with those treaties were observed with the same commitment that the World Trade Organization now shows in its enforcement of the rules of global trade.²⁷

Although dismissed by some cynics as merely the hot topic of the moment, Klein provides a valuable introduction to the issue of economic globalisation and its effects on real people in real terms. It will appeal to the younger reader who relates to the youth targeting by the brands as well as others interested generally in the topic, and it is hoped it will become more than a book that preaches to the converted.

²⁶Klein, note 1, p239

²⁷Klein, note 1, p436