

# **BOROUME AT THE FARMERS MARKET PROGRAM**

*by*

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For the “Studies in American Culture: American Literature and the Environment” course I participated in a service-learning project with the Boroume at the Farmers’ Market Program. This project’s main objective is to collect the surplus produce from the sellers in some of the most important markets in Thessaloniki, including the one in Ano Toumpa, the one at which I volunteered. This essay discusses the importance of this initiative and its connection to the course content and objectives.

The “Boroume” (Μπορούμε “We can”) project involves volunteers visiting the Farmers’ Market at the end of their day, aiming to collect unsold products that are not needed by the producers, who are willing to donate them. Such products mainly include food provisions, from lettuce and zucchinis to eggs and fish. Having collected the necessary supplies we transfer them to specially designed areas from which they eventually end up at numerous organizations, such as orphanages, aid institutions, and rest homes. Particularly, under the program in Ano Toumpa, we have the opportunity to witness the tangible results of our voluntary work, as we ourselves transfer the supplies to the soup kitchen of the local parish. As a result, we had the chance to see and experience the gratitude of the interested parties. I am inclined to believe that the Boroume at the Farmers’ Market Program is a highly important and interesting initiative, as it focuses mainly on the appropriate use of all land resources, expanding at the same time its reach to cater to our fellow human beings, especially those in need. Through this contact with products of the earth and their importance for human beings, I was also given the opportunity to experience myself the ideas and feelings described in a number of the texts analyzed in class belonging to the genre of environmental literature.



*Fig. 1: This picture depicts some of the surplus gathered in our supermarket carts, including onions and leeks (author photo).*

First of all, the Boroume project focuses primarily on the collection of the surplus left from the producers. The volunteers' job is to gather these leftovers and, in this way, to contribute to the best possible conservation of natural resources. One could easily argue that we act like Mary Austin's "The Scavengers," a category of birds including buzzards and crows, whose main role in the natural environment is to eat the carrion found in nature and eliminate any trace of their existence. As Austin argues "It is doubtless the economy of nature to have the scavengers by to clean up the carrion" (135), making room for the other living creatures to live and thrive. Exactly like the scavengers we attempt to scavenge the leftovers of food that would be wasted and allow new products to be cultivated. Besides, "the scavengers found in nature are unable to cleanse the earth from man's surplus, a surplus so extended that disfigures the true colors of our environment" (Austin 139). Therefore, the volunteers act as the scavengers in our city, removing the leftovers and protecting the nature surrounding us.

This city environment is considered by many impossible to co-exist with the natural countryside, being polluted and destructive. However, it is an undeniable fact that we, the citizens of our city, ought to be the first to take action and render the accord between the city and the countryside tangible, since "big cities need real countryside close by" (Jacobs 363). Visiting the Farmers' Market every week, one is in the position to become familiar with the producers and their daily life near nature. One is capable of understanding the interconnectedness existing between these two entities and of comprehending the priceless, direct and indirect, contribution of nature in our everyday life and habitudes. As Jane Jacobs vividly highlights "lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration" (364). This city's inhabitants breathe in peace with the nature surrounding them and appreciate its irreplaceable contributions. It is of vital importance for all the citizens to comprehend the close relationship between the city and the countryside, and through this volunteering program I witnessed the importance of this strong connection.

Moreover, the peace existing in our relationship with the natural environment primarily results from our respect towards earth. Participating in the Boroume initiative I was given the opportunity to understand thoroughly the importance of this respect, realizing that all the essential elements for our survival originate from the earth. Thus, I am able to assimilate William Cronon's perspective concerning the awe of Native Americans towards nature, indicating that "people ought to respect plants and animals because the cycle of life of these creatures determines the survival of human species" (636). By gathering the surplus and the potential food resources from the producers' market, I was capable of appreciating the interrelatedness of plants and humans and an understanding of nature as something sacred, providing food and provisions for the human species. This respect constituted the driving force behind Native Americans' effort to ensure the survival of all species and to "reduce their impact on the land" (658), a mentality completely different from the first European colonizers and the modern European and American citizen. Through my experience in the producers' market, I have had the chance to acknowledge and cultivate further this mentality, that of respecting and protecting our earth and of appreciating and preserving the natural resources provided.

This attitude was further enriched as I began to understand more intensely the importance of the interconnection between humans and nature. As Friends of the Earth indicate "everything depends on everything else, all life is the same life, every effect is a cause, nothing can happen

by itself.” (502). Within the spirit of volunteering we are given the opportunity to give to our fellow human beings. By gathering the leftovers we are contributing to ensure food for those in need, rendering evident that the survival of one solely depends on the survival of the other. The need for everyone to comprehend this becomes even more urgent, taking into consideration the fact that “nothing in earth is unlimited, as roundness means limits” (Friends of the Earth 502). By gathering the surplus of the producers we make sure that no natural product is wasted, contributing to the maintenance of balance in our planet and in our relationship with other species.

The most important aspect of my volunteering work, however, is certainly the fact that through this project we have had the chance to witness the true meaning underlying the notion of education—specifically, the aim of building integrated personalities with a cultivated sense of sensitivity and responsibility towards all the other living organizations, including earth. As Stephanie Mills highlights, “one of the advantages of college education is the fact that for four years one has the potential to occupy himself with the issue of human survival on this planet” (471), an urgent responsibility of every human being. Through this effort to gather the surplus left from the producers, providing at the same time to people in need, we slowly contribute to the survival of our race and the future of our planet, being “a few desperate individuals, lobbying to save the human race” (Mills 472). Thus, through this program I was given the opportunity to experience Mills’s words and appreciate the real essence of education.

Therefore, I am inclined to believe that the Boroume at the Farmers’ Market Program is a highly important and interesting initiative, as it focuses mainly on the appropriate use of all land resources, expanding at the same time its reach in order to ensure food for our fellow human beings, especially those in dear need. Taking part in this project constitutes a unique experience for me, as I realize, through this process, that it is every resident’s responsibility to act in order to ensure a clean and healthy local environment. At the same time I have been given the opportunity to comprehend fully the course content and ideas, appreciating in a unique way the experiences of the writers referred above. I feel very proud that I have the chance to take action for the protection of the environment, by raising ecological awareness, and at the same time to offer a helping hand to people in need. Through this project I feel that modern humanity is in the position to assume the responsibility, to act as an example, to be imitated, and to spread the message: “Think globally, act locally.”

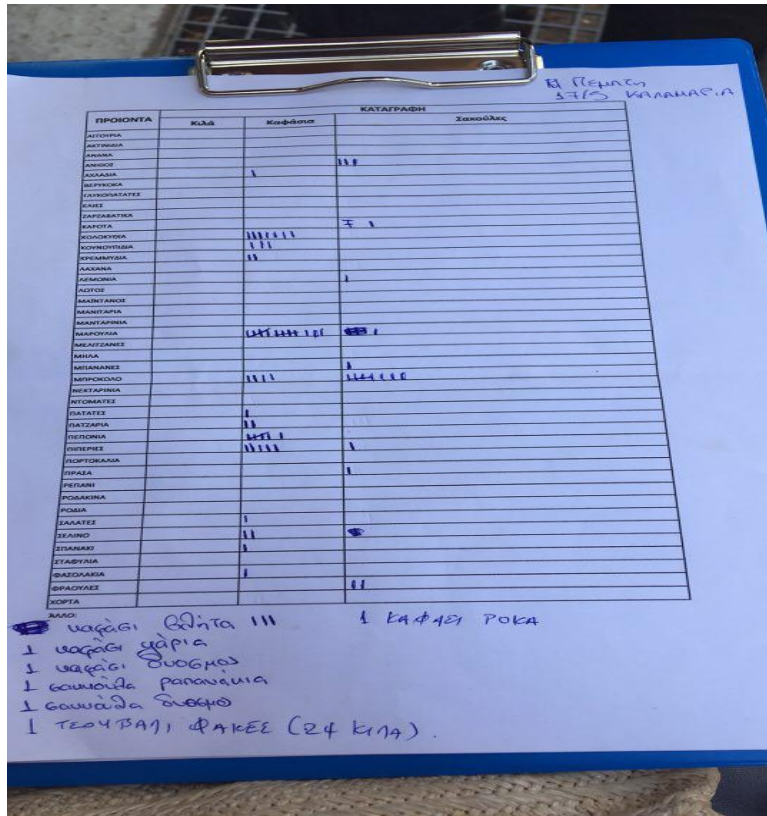


Figure 2: This picture indicates the process of recording the surplus during one of our volunteering days.

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