

NCLC 102 Global Networks & Communities: Food and Sovereignty
Fall Semester 2010

Shopping Globally - The Geographies of Food

DUE DATE: Saturday following the trip by midnight (90 points)
(either November 6 or November 13)

For this experiential learning assignment, you will visit two supermarkets. The stores will be assigned to the study groups, with each group having a different pairing. A map of these markets is on the course website, and you will be able to complete this assignment using public transportation. However, a car or transportation beyond the CUE bus will enable groups to have more varied experiences.

1. Shoppers Food Warehouse/Trader Joes & Lotte Plaza, Fairfax (reached by CUE bus)
2. Safeway & H-Mart, Fairfax (reached by CUE bus)
3. Wegmans/Whole Foods & Grand Mart (route 29, Fairfax & Centerville)
4. Safeway & Bestway Supermecado, Falls Church
5. Safeway & Bestway Supermecado, Herndon
6. Giant & El Grande International Market, Springfield (Backlick Rd)
7. Giant & El Latino African Market or Food Star Supermarket, Arlington
8. Shoppers Food Warehouse & Lotte Plaza, Chantilly
9. Blooms & Bombay Foods, Fairfax (a back up choice, reached by CUE bus)

If you know of another pairing that is convenient for your group, check with your seminar leader.

Learning Objectives:

- Further understand globalization concepts, particularly deterritorialization, hybridity, homogeneity/heterogeneity, networks, Westernization/cultural imperialism
- Examine the importance of physical place and the cultural value of space
- Analyze how food is packaged and presented so that it is separated from its origins and production
- Analyze observation data and support conclusions with data

Competencies:

- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Group Interaction
- Aesthetic awareness

Part I: Mapping Your Markets (GROUP REPORT, post to PebblePad gateway, 30 points)

For this exercise, you will first observe and analyze the layouts of your two supermarkets. *Check in with the store manager before beginning this assignment.*

Some questions to consider:

- 1) What are some of the major differences and similarities between the two stores that you visited? What do you feel as you enter the grocery?
- 2) Using all of your senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste (if possible)—take note of your surroundings. Does the atmosphere draw you in? Are you energized, bored, hungry, something else? Is it loud? Noisy? Crowded?
- 3) What are some of your comparative impressions upon your first views of each store?

Once you have gotten the “sense” of the place, *construct an annotated, impressionistic map* that shows the dominant features of each store, the relative importance of some kinds of food, and what identity the store seems to be presenting. In addition, *sketch some of the distinct images and features of each location*. The map is constructed by the group, but individual members can add further annotations, comments, and questions.

Some questions to consider as you analyze your visit are:

- Do they sell the same types of foods—what is distinctive and what is the same?
- How does the store organize its products—for instance, is there an aisle for specific international populations? Are foods separated by ethnicity? Religion? Region? Give examples.
- Do both have specialty items like organic vegetables, health foods, etc.?
- What is the balance of fresh, shelf, and frozen foods?
- What part of the consumer market does the store appeal to? How do you know?
- What are the most important differences between the stores for you as a consumer? For you as a student in NCLC 102? Why do you think that this may be?

Part II: Charting Dinner (GROUP REPORT, post to PebblePad gateway, 30 points)

Next, you will chart the geographies and costs of some specific food items and categories. Think of this as a shopping trip for dinner for your group. Pick an item for your meal from each of the categories below. **Create a table for comparison**, using the following guidelines:

For each category listed below, locate a suitable item in your first market and *list it in a column, then respond to each of the five questions regarding that item in the next column of your table*. Then, locate analogous or similar items in your second market; respond to the same questions in the third column. Finally, identify and analyze key similarities and differences below the chart—what stands out? What did you learn from the comparisons?

Item Categories (choose one product for each category)

- 1) Packaged food
- 2) Frozen food (not including seafood)
- 3) Seafood
- 4) Fresh fruit or vegetable
- 5) Dairy
- 6) A category of food you find interesting

Questions for Each Item

- 1) Where is it produced/grown?
- 2) How is it made/grown (standard, organic, natural, etc.)?
- 3) Who produced it—is the brand name part of a transnational corporation?
- 4) What is the cost?
- 5) How is the product presented (packaging, location both in store and on shelf, in-store marketing, etc.)?

Part III: Reflections (INDIVIDUAL ESSAY, 500 words, post to PebblePad gateway, 30 points)

Consider the following questions. Think about the readings (e.g., Wilk, Robins, Tomlinson) from this semester that may help you look at these stores in a new light (e.g. concepts of identity, hybridity, deterritorialization, “magic” appearance of food). Be specific and cite appropriate sources.

- 1) How do issues of personal and cultural identity play out in the store?
- 2) Where and how has globalization had an impact in these stores?
- 3) Did your group have differing reactions to the grocery stores and to this assignment? What were the significant commonalities and differences and how do you explain them?
- 4) How did your group decide on shared and individual responsibilities? How effective was the group-decision making process? What have you learned about your group dynamics that will affect future group interaction?
- 5) What else did you learn from this assignment?