

FORAGING FOR FREEDOM

A graphic story based on Anna Tsing's
The Mushroom at the End of the World

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Transforming Research Into Graphic Form
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IT'S MATSUTAKE SEASON AGAIN.

THE FOREST IS BUSY WITH FORAGERS LOOKING FOR THIS RARE MUSHROOM...

SO THAT IN THE EVENING THEY CAN SELL THEM IN MAKESHIFT MARKETS...

...AT ENORMOUS PROFITS.

BUT WHAT IS IN A MUSHROOM?

WHAT BRINGS US ALL HERE...

TO THIS REMOTE FOREST IN OREGON?

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE CITIES...

...AND CHOOSE TO LIVE PRECARIOUS LIVES AT THE EDGE OF SOCIETY?

AT NIGHT, PICKERS SET UP CAMP AND SOCIALIZE.

GOD, I'M TIRED. HOW DID WE
END UP HERE ANYWAY? EH, DARA?

WELL, I HAD NOWHERE TO GO.
WHO WOULD EMPLOY SOMEONE
LIKE ME?

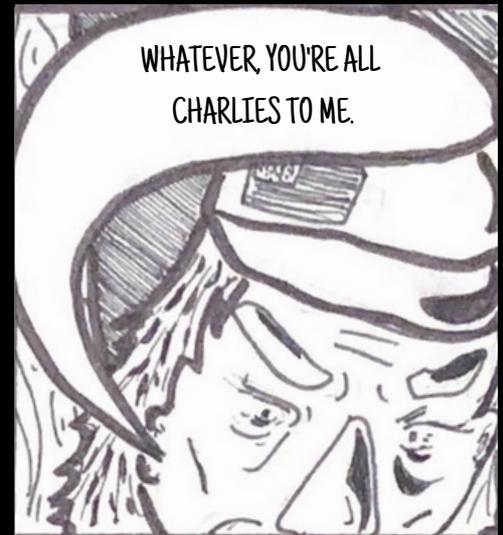
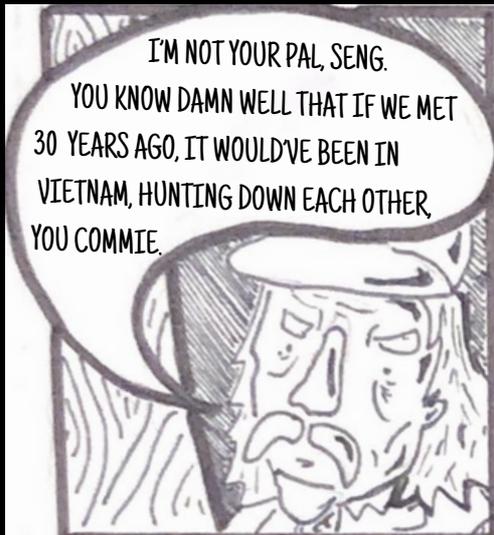
BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE
MONEY, YOU KNOW?

AFTER I STEPPED ON THAT
LANDMINE IN CAMBODIA, I WAS
LOST. IMMOBILIZED. IT WAS HERE
WHERE I STARTED TO HEAL.

WHERE I REGAINED MY MOBILITY.

FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT - I
ALSO HAD TO ESCAPE MY COUNTRY. THEN I
GOT FED UP WITH MY BOSS HERE IN THE
US AND DECIDED TO FLEE THE CITY.

LEAVING MY FAMILY BEHIND WAS THE HARDEST
THING I'VE EVER DONE. BUT AT LEAST...
...THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES HERE.



THE LAND OF FREEDOM.

AS IT TURNS OUT, PICKERS NAVIGATE THE FOREST THROUGH A MAZE OF DIFFERENCES,

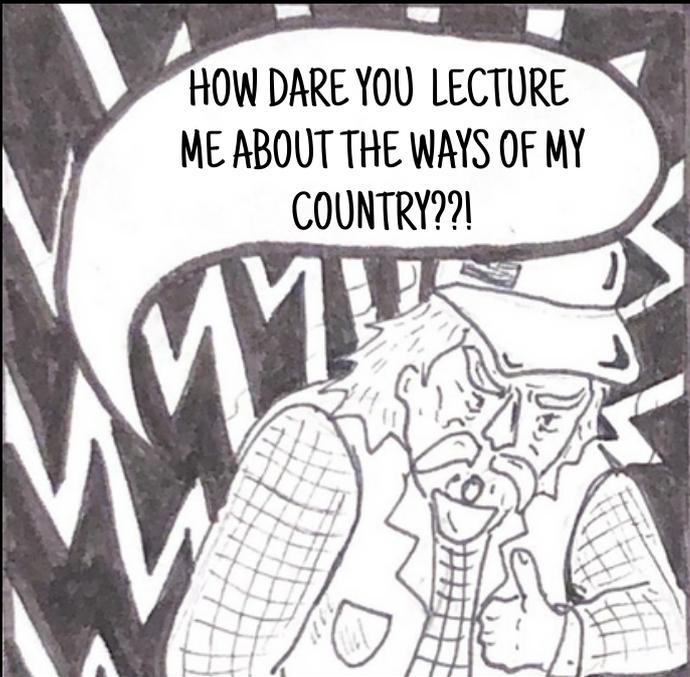
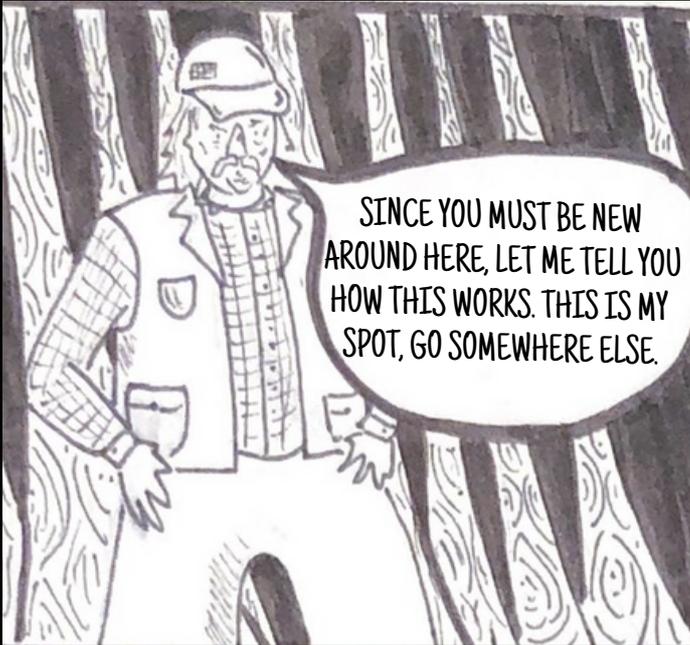
HAUNTED BY THE GHOSTS
OF THEIR PASTS.

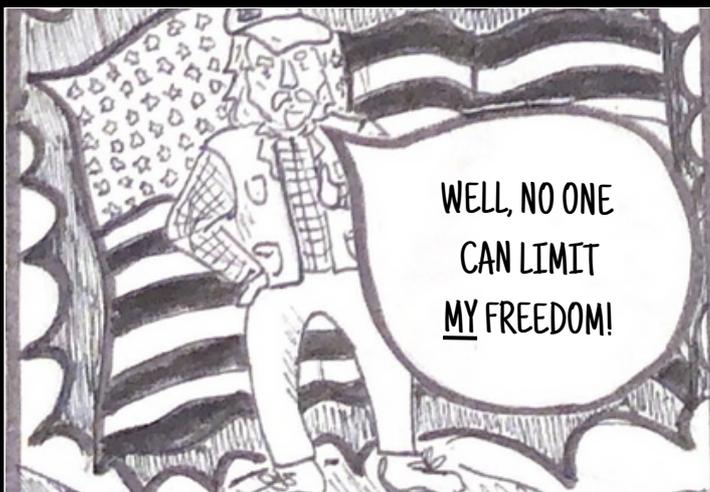
BUT EVEN AMONGST
THEIR DIFFERENCES...

...A COMMON VOCABULARY OF FREEDOM SEEMS TO HAVE EMERGED.

IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE THERE IS A CHANCE
TO BE FREE HERE FOR EVERYONE.





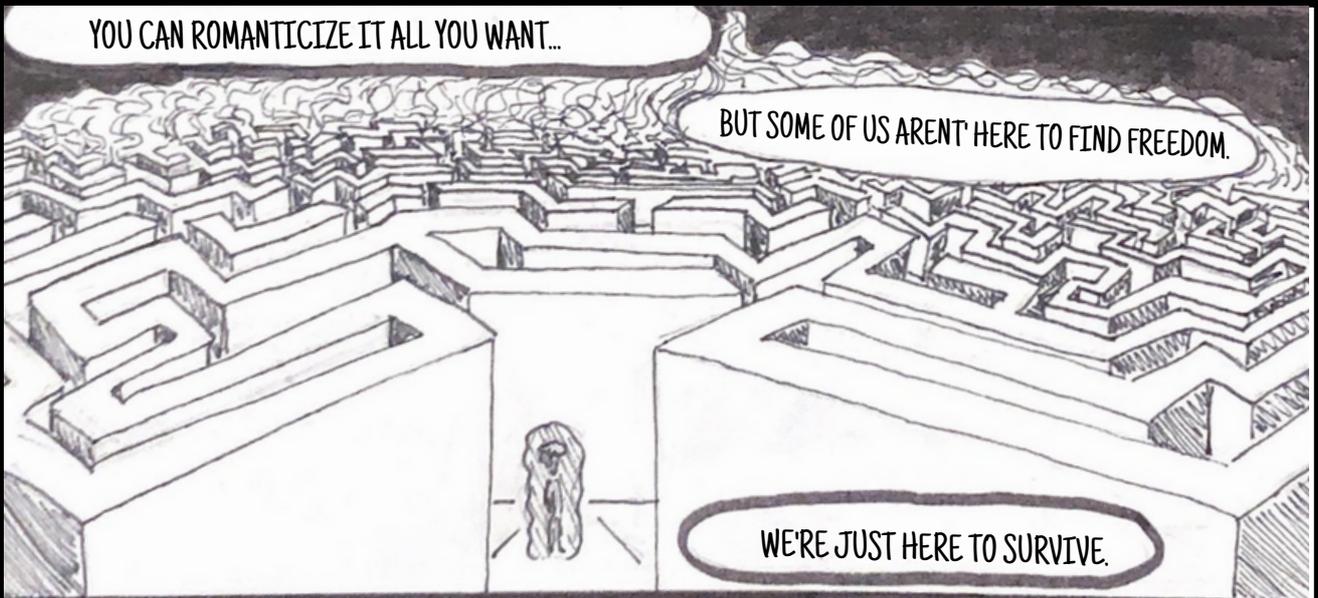




FREEDOM?

HOW IS THIS BEING FREE?

WHAT FREEDOM ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!



YOU CAN ROMANTICIZE IT ALL YOU WANT...

BUT SOME OF US AREN'T HERE TO FIND FREEDOM.

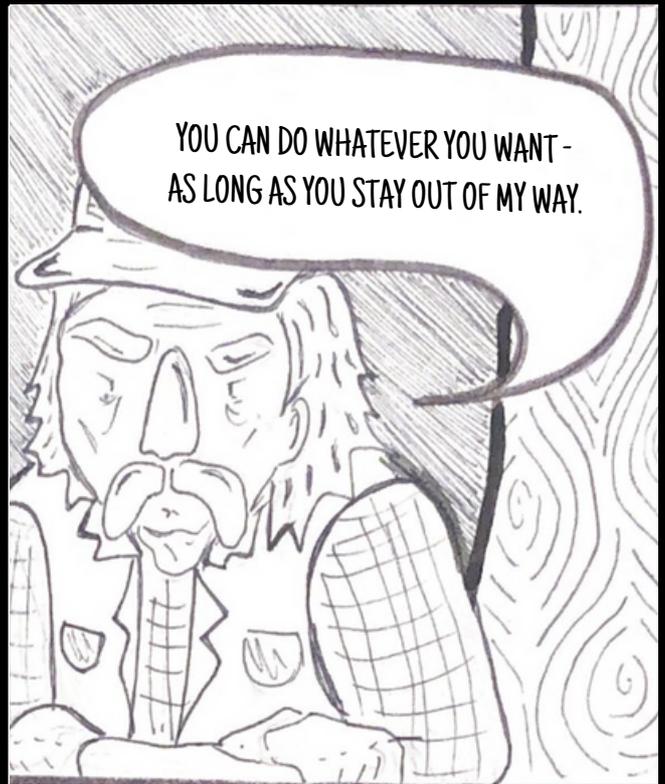
WE'RE JUST HERE TO SURVIVE.



HOPING THAT AT THE END OF THE SEASON, WE CAN MAKE IT BACK HOME...

...AND SEE OUR FAMILIES AGAIN.





Afterword

"Latino pickers tend to be undocumented migrants who fit mushroom foraging into a year-round schedule of outdoor work. During mushroom season many live hidden in the forest instead of in the legally required industrial camps and motels where identification and picking permits might be checked. Those I knew had multiple names, addresses, and papers. Mushroom arrests could lead not just to fines but also to loss of vehicles (for faulty papers) and deportation. Instead of sassing the law, Latino pickers tried to stay out of the way, and, if caught, juggle papers and sources of legitimation and support."

(Tsing 2015:94)

As of 2020, there have been an estimated 108 000 undocumented immigrants in the state of Oregon, 77% percent of whom are Latino migrant workers. The economic productivity of the state heavily relies on the manual labour of predominantly Latino migrant workers, and as the state's key industries already face severe labour shortages, they could not function without the economic contributions of migrant labourers. The agriculture and forestry industries of Oregon have the highest share of migrant workers (28% of all industry workers) - many of whom are undocumented labourers. Immigrant labourers also make vital contributions to the economy through taxes and consumption.

At the same time, it is also these Latino workers whose living conditions are the most precarious and vulnerable: with limited to no access to social and health services, subject to racial discrimination and exploitative employer practices, harrassed by the policies and practices of immigration enforcement, and facing the highest risk of detainment and deportation.

In Oregon, every year, tens of thousands of undocumented workers and their family members get caught up in webs of precarity, having to endure the psychosocial, financial, emotional and ontological costs of global capitalism's structural injustice.