**Name: Laiba Fatima Khan**

**Student ID: Lk04067**

**Response to:**

**The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins**

**(by Anna Tsing)**

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing is an American professor of anthropology whose main focus and interests include topics from Feminist Studies, the Anthropocene, and Globalization. *“The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins”* is a multi-specie ethnographic study of matsutake mushrooms and their ecology, in which Tsing questions some very problematic yet very common ideas of the modern-day capitalist societies.

One such idea is that of ‘survival’. In the current world that believes in unlimited growth and progression, survival is considered a synonym for conquest and expansion. To survive, one has to save himself by fighting with others to stay alive. This also gave birth to the concept of ‘survival of the fittest’. This idea of survival is quite wide-spread in the modern world, promoted through fantasies and fiction like novels, and TV shows etc. where the hero fights the villain to survive, or good survives over the evil. This problematic concept of survival troubles academia as well.

Anna Tsing, however, does not agree with this idea and suggests that survival means all species staying alive with the help of livable collaborations. Here, collaboration is working towards the difference, which leads us to contamination. And contamination happens when different groups come together and merge to create something bigger than the sum of their individual impact.

Anna’s idea of survival based on collaborations and contamination is quite interesting in the ethnographic context. When she says “without collaboration, we all die,” it makes a lot of sense. Different species that constitute a certain ecosystem are all dependent on each other and they collaborate with each other to survive in the environment.

These collaborations or symbiotic relationships among species can be observed in our very own surroundings. The matsutake mushrooms form symbiotic relationship with pine trees. There is a strong coordination between plants and fungi. The mycelium maintains the soil and even warns the forest species if a climatic change is about to happen. The old giant trees also play a great role of protecting and nursing the younger, smaller trees in the forest. The collaborations are found between species and their environment as well. After the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima in 1945, the first life that appeared on the destroyed landscape was matsutake mushrooms, since fungi have the ability to produce their food using radiations, without depending on light.

The importance of collaborations and contamination also makes us understand why Anna Tsing puts great emphasis on acknowledging precarity, the condition of being vulnerable to others. The nature of our world is precarious, everything is in flux, including our ability to survive. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Thinking through precarity changes social analysis. A precarious world is a world without teleology. Indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening, but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible.