

## *Foraging at the Edge of Capitalism*

*Marlen Eckstein*

In this moment of economic and environmental breakdown, an unexpected source of income has risen in global importance: foraging. In Tibet and Nepal, scores of collectors rush to the mountains each spring to collect yartsagunbu – a rare mushroom more valuable than gold. In Siberia, “tuskers” scavenge for woolly mammoth ivory in the thawing permafrost. From Amazonia to Congo and Mongolia, artisanal miners extract precious minerals where transnational conglomerates have left or have not yet obtained a license. In the US, “Amazon nomads” tour foreclosed shops and sell their bounty online.

Broadly understood as practices of collecting, scavenging and gleaning, foraging is a global phenomenon of our times. However, it only gains patchy attention in mainstream debates on conservation and development. What is missing is a conceptual understanding of foraging as a basic mode of subsistence and a form of socio-environmental entanglement. The objective of this project is to take on this task and work towards a comprehensive political ecology of foraging in the Anthropocene.

The project is timely. In the aftermath of the world financial crisis between 2008 to 2011, foraging has gained in importance around the globe. In an era when the dream of a middle-class life based on a stable, salaried job no longer seems viable, and in places where the welfare state is under pressure, has never existed or has vanished, foraging is often the only avenue to upward social mobility. At the same time, the climate crisis and concerns for the rapid loss of biodiversity are raising the urgency for environmental conservation. To understand the evolving frictions at this interface is highly relevant at this historical moment – both in academia and beyond.