

THE DESTRUCTION OF SOIL ROOTED WITH CULTURE

Isabella Avila

High School for the Creative & Performing Arts, Class of 2021

My parents migrated to the United States from Venezuela two years before I was born, in 2001. My father, José, came from a family of four sisters, but was raised alone by his grandparents, my *abuelo*, Santo, and *abuela*, Isabel. He was the youngest and only boy in his household. He's a father, in the way that fathers are, serious situations are seldom completely serious. He's about 6'2" and bear-like, with large hands that coat mine like an oversized jacket. He lived in Valencia for most of his life, where mountains bordered the city and sheltered it from the other nearby places. My mother, Gladis, grew up with both half and full siblings and a loving mother. She's stern and ambitious. She's very good at getting her way, but then again, she is a mother and that is how mothers are. They both have a determination to always do what's best for their family, even if that includes leaving some behind.

My mom grew up in the city of Maracaibo. Venezuela, being in South America, was humid more than anything else. Unlike Valencia in which it would rain for six months and be sole of sun, Maracaibo was mostly sun. Farmers farmed and grew crops under the immense heat, they plowed wood and fertilized soil as beads of sweat ran down their foreheads and their organs ached for water. As time went on, and more greenhouse gas emissions were released into the air, temperatures increased, causing Maracaibo to go through frequent periods of drought. Water became a scarcity amongst the community. The president ignored the pleas from his people begging for water. In America, it is common to have ice cream trucks ride down the streets in the neighborhoods, searching for children who hope for a popsicle or ice cream cone. In Maracaibo however, they had water trucks with hoses attached to the vehicle that would fill up their man-made water holes and plastic containers with water. My mother's family was a big one, few of them being employed. Thus, most of her family's income went towards affording water.

However, in 1999, the state of Vargas flooded, specifically damaging the neighborhood of Los Corales. The state went through ten straight days of heavily rained hell. They experienced harsh and strong mudslides that destroyed homes and cities, ruined the lives of families, and killed off a good amount of their population, an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 people lost their lives. In turn, the people revolted. Like the waves, people flooded the streets in protests. For the families experiencing loss and homes experiencing damages. The people said this was God's way of punishing the population, that Chávez was to blame. Nevertheless, he was re-elected and Caracas never recovered.

While Caracas was underwater, my dad went to Philadelphia in February of 1999, then he came back months later for my mother. He told my mother about America. How much safer it was here. Though neither of them wanted to leave their families behind, immigrating was the best choice. My mom packed lightly, with little clothing and a photograph of her parents. She left behind the household in which her beloved mother, younger brother, and his two children lived. They took the seeds of their cultures, beliefs, and heritage, to plant in the sweet soils of America. They had two daughters, me, born in 2003, two years after their arrival, and my little sister four years later. They do the best they can to uphold the culture and stabilize tradition.

Venezuela still faces a crisis, one that is heavily based on politics. However, what we fail to realize is that while the foreground of the political crisis becomes more apparent, the crisis of climate begins to surface as well. With the increased number of droughts and electricity cuts that leave Venezuela without power, my family, and the families of many others, are in danger. Not only that, but plenty of families in South America feel disconnected to their loved ones in the U.S. droughts and insufficient governments are an immediate danger to Central American populations. Children are fearful, families are desperate, and the most immediate and convenient solution is immigration, no matter the means. Many families have to pick up their lives and move to the U.S. out of fear for future and existing generations. They have to leave due to corrupt governments, poverty, shifts in climate that lead to widespread droughts or floods. Or in my family's case, all of the above. But how do we ever expect the children of immigrants to explore the soil in which their heritage lies, if it's dried out?

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