

Jacalyn Barrella

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The Rebellious Amazon

A fisherman's municipality in northeastern Brazil known as Igarapé used to provide homes to many more people than it does today. There are also three lakes that provide a main food source for the people. This is an area of Brazil that lives specifically by the occurrences of the rainy and the dry seasons. During the dry season the area is very hot, so the people, the Caboclos, welcome the rainy season. The rain causes the Amazon River to abundantly overflow, turning the surrounding terrain into its own aquatic world. To my surprise, the Caboclos live above these flooding areas, creating a life on stilts and boats. However, in 2009 many people fled the area, moving to a nearby dry town in result of a destructive storm. The rain caused the water levels to reach a record high of eight meters. The Caboclos were in fear for their lives.

For a few years the people of Igarapé have been struggling to adjust to the changes in the seasons they have been encountering. Rather than a specific dry and a specific wet season, they have had early storms, bringing the wet season with no warning. This disruption in the seasons and the increase in water levels are due to climate change. Willie Barretto Mercado, a scientist at the center of research for the biosphere and atmosphere in the Amazon, explains how El Niño and La Niña are dissipating the border between seasons. He noted that, due to climate change, these weather phenomena happen nearly every year rather than every eight years, creating harsh conditions for people to live. Regardless of all the issues, an intriguing local woman Marlene, who has been hired by the state as the area's "doctor," refuses to leave. Marlene not only loves her home, but she aids the local people in times of sickness. There is even a man she visits every day in order to administer his medication. Marlene grows her own medicinal plants in order to offer the people an alternative to expensive market drugs. She has a life here and leaving would cause her great dismay. Luckily, there are people who aid the locals in adapting and improving their homes and inhabited environment.

As well as the storms, Igarapé has also been dealing with the effects of deforestation and the decrease in available fish. One of the inhabitants of Igarapé talked about a time of great deforestation to clear space for growing crops. After that, he noticed the growth rate of plants decreasing. This is because the lack of tree roots caused the soil to loosen and wash away with the rainy season. Mercado notes that without trees, water penetration into the ground is

nonexistent, causing a flood of sediment toward the rivers and lakes, destroying fish habitat. Without trees, there are ultimately less fish, which has been catastrophic for the livelihood of the local people. On the plus side there has been efforts of reforestation using a plant similar to bamboo. Although they cannot change the weather patterns these efforts have been hindering the dangerous waves of the storms and helping to revive the fish habitat.

I find it rather noble of Marlene to stick around as medicine woman in the harsh conditions at Igarapé. Living atop water seems very strange, coming from the very conditioned and standardized world of the United States. To most people, that would be not only impossible, but also undesirable. It is a very unique way of living, especially because it is based off of the fine balance of the seasons. It is very risky, although the people have been doing it for a very long time with no problem. It is a shame that climate change is altering the traditional living patterns of the Caboclos. Climate change is only something lightly understood by Americans. Yes, the word gets tossed around, but who actually understands it and its sources? On the other hand, these people are literally watching their environment alter before their eyes: they are directly watching the climate change take place. I cannot even imagine what they are going through, having to leave their homes and adjust their very traditional ways of living.

It is hopeful that there has been action to help the environment at Igarapé, however, deforestation is not the only problem: reforestation will not stop climate change. Yes, the inhabitants are increasing their living situations by reforesting the area, but this solves no problem of climate change on a larger scale. Climate change is the result of excessive destructive human activity around the world. It is going to take the cooperation of the world in order to make quick and hefty changes. It will also take lots of education and understanding of the workings of earth's balancing systems. A great example of this is the children of Igarapé. Marlene's daughter, a school teacher, took a trip with her students and taught them to plant the bamboo like herb, which is useful in reforestation. This is the type of education people need in order to create a world where we can maintain a balanced environment.