

NARRATOR

Globalisation is making the rich world even richer, but billions are locked out – they're living on the edge between the rich world and the poor. They face tough choices if they want to join the party.

Globalisation gives the poor a chance to migrate and work for the rich – they're called 'economic migrants'.

But in one country the economic migrants are the middle class. Men and women like Yurani and Florencio must decide: should they stay or should they go?

Caracas, in South America. From high up, Venezuela's capital looks an idyllic, prosperous place. But this is a divided city, where rich and poor jostle together unhappily.

Caught between them, the middle classes face a difficult choice. Many claim their President's taken a wrong turn trying to eradicate poverty; they fear he'll turn into another Fidel Castro. They wonder if they should quit while they can.

Venezuela's biggest children's hospital. Looking after these kids is 27 year-old Yurani Gomez Gutierrez, a junior doctor. She's passionate about her work and dedicated to the hospital - but life in Caracas is tough.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Maybe the city will seem happy, but it's not. There's too much violence, too much robbery – insecure; you can be kidnapped, you are stressful all the time. So I think that it's not happy – for me it's not, and I feel that the people around me sometimes they are not happy.

NARRATOR

Like many professionals in Venezuela, Yurani is thinking about going abroad to work. Hundreds of thousands have already gone – including her two brothers.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

My brother has gone, that's right. They leave the country for a better way of living. They have a family, they have to support the family; they found in another country better education for their children, their children can walk in the street safely, they can live safely in other countries.

Venezuela, it will always be my home; even if I go to another country it will always be my home.

NARRATOR

But it's not just love of her country that would make quitting a tough call. Yurani's father is very sick with cancer, and she wants to be near him.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Even when I work so much and I go home only for a few hours I can see my dad every day, and that's great. In another country I can't do that, I would be calling every day on the phone: 'Dad, Dad how do you feel?' I prefer to stay here until he becomes better... which I don't think so, or until he dies.

NARRATOR

Across town, one of Yurani's best friends, Florencio Quintero, is about to read one of his poems. This gathering of young Venezuelan poets is funded by the government. Among the appreciative audience are his family who've all been wrestling with the middle classes 'stay or go' dilemma.

When not composing poetry, Florencio works as a sychiatrist in a public hospital. He helps patients in crisis, now he's facing one of his own. Of the 67 doctors Florencio trained with, 50 have either stopped practicing or left the country, becoming part of Venezuela's middle class 'brain drain'. Florencio loves his job but finds it hard living on his salary, despite double-digit inflation, he hasn't had a pay rise in three years.

Florencio Quintero

I am 27 years old, I am a medical doctor and still living with my parents because I don't have enough money to pay for my own place. So it's really quite difficult, the salaries are very, very, very low and the cost of life is very high; so you have like a paradox there, a contradiction.

NARRATOR

Florencio has made plans to practice as a doctor in Spain if need be. But he's still torn. And there's much that keeps him in Venezuela.

Florencio Quintero

'Should I stay or should I go?' Er, well I've been thinking that so many times, especially when I focus on the material aspects of living here. But also we have a lot of beautiful things here in my country.

NARRATOR

Should they stay or should they go? Florencio and Yurani's dilemma isn't just that of professionals tempted by better salaries in the developed world. It's also provoked by their President, Hugo Chavez, and his ideas on fighting poverty.

Chavez was voted in as Venezuela's president in in 1999. It's been a troubled period - the rally we filmed the anniversary of a failed coup against him.

Like some other leaders in Latin America, Chavez sees Socialism, unfashionable elsewhere, as an to globalization. And oil-rich Venezuela has the cash to do something about it. Industries are being nationalised. Chavez has close ties with Castro's Cuba, and some say he wants to remake Venezuela in its image. The rhetoric is all class warfare: Us and Them.

His supporters (in Socialist red) are known as 'Chavistas'. They're mostly drawn from the millions who live on a few dollars a day. For these people, the idea of leaving the country would seem bizarre.

Chavistas

Chavez! Fidel! Chavez, Chavez, Fidel!

NARRATOR

But for many of Venezuela's middle classes, Chavez is viewed with suspicion or hostility. They worry about his 'Cubanisation' of the country. Few of them vote for him anymore.

We brought Florencio's family together to watch Chavez's Sunday show – maybe it would help them decide whether to stay.

'Alo Presidente' can run for up to ten hours. But it's cancelled at the last minute – the president has a cold. The family try to hide their disappointment – they're not exactly regular viewers.

Florencio Quintero

We are pretty sad, because we have... we were hoping all, all this week along to come Sunday to join as family...

Jose

And see Chavez.

Florencio Quintero

And see Chavez talking and talking and talking.

Jose

And get the knowledge and the wisdom...

Florencio Quintero

Of this enlightened man.

Jose

Yes.

NARRATOR

Florencio's parents are also doctors. And once they were big Chavez supporters. But Jose became so disillusioned he did leave the country. Problem was, he found America even worse.

Jose

I went to the States, I studied, I presented an exam, an exam which I passed to be able to work there as a surgical attendant...

Florencio Quintero

Assistant.

Jose

Assistant. And I then decided that I don't like the way they live and it was a problem for me to leave my wife and my family. They didn't want to leave, so I came back and, and forget the thing and we say ok we're not going to have this guy forever...

I hope.

NARRATOR

So the family understands Florencio's dilemma. They'll support him if he stays or if he goes.

Olga Figueroa de Quintero

I don't have anything against him leaving the country. Obviously you always want to have your kids around but I think that it is good to know other countries and do something else. However, as a family I don't think that we are going to be better that we are now if we decided to go abroad. Not even as it is now in Venezuela.

NARRATOR

Back at the children's hospital. For an oil-rich country, the public hospitals here can seem very run-down. Yurani is doing her rounds. Yurani loves working here, but worries that some patients suffer unnecessarily.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

I feel sometimes that people who shouldn't die, die. People who could be rescued, they are not. And I can't do that anything for that, I feel that I can't do anything because I don't have the medicine, I don't have resources...

NARRATOR

But today Yurani has good news for one of her patients, seven month-old Lian – here with mum, Lina. Lian is well enough to go home...

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

That's perfect, bye bye, hope you come and visit me.

NARRATOR

Picking Lina and baby up: her mum Betty. Betty fled the troubles in neighbouring Columbia. She's now a Venezuelan citizen, thanks to a Chavez reform. Stories like hers, a strong argument for doctors to stay. Betty lives in a squat in

Caracas with her six children, her grandchildren, her husband, her sister and her nephew. She's learnt to read, thanks to a Chavez government scheme, and her family now has more free healthcare. She has high praise for doctors like Yurani, and the service they provide.

Betty Roblez

My grandson was in the children's hospital for 13 days and he received good attention, like the tests which were done, and his food. The doctors were taking good care of him and doing the follow up, interacting with the relatives to know how the baby was doing. He got his treatment without interruption. In my opinion it has improved 100% because now there are things that we didn't have before.

NARRATOR

Betty's daughter says it's Hugo Chavez who has helped improve their lives so much.

Linola Fontalvo

I don't see him as a bad president but a good one. Nothing is perfect, but I wouldn't say that everything is falling apart either. He has done many good things for us, for all Venezuelans.

Betty and Lina aren't alone in supporting Chavez – it's rare you hear a word spoken against him here in the barrios. The rich, with their dollar accounts and Miami villas, find it easy to leave. For middle class professionals who care about the poor it's a tougher dilemma. So could Yurani and Florencio be convinced?

We brought them along to see socialism in action. Supporters say places like this community centre, in Caracas's biggest slum, bring much needed services to the poorest. Yurani and Florencio get a full guided tour – and some hard-sell – on how Chavez is making life better for the people.

Built on a derelict site, the centre houses a modern health clinic, workers' co-operatives, adult education classes and a subsidised supermarket. It's all funded directly by a Petroleum Ministry rich on high oil prices.

The director, a former teacher, is a true believer.

Omar Orsini, Centre Co-ordinator

Until not long ago all that oil money was used to benefit the elite, they enjoyed all the resources and the majority could only see the leftovers or small bits of that wealth.

What we want is to have a society where everyone improves.

NARRATOR

Alongside the free services and training, there are classes on socialism. And there are Cuban revolutionaries here too. The nurse leading the morning exercises for the elderly, for example, and this doctor, one of over 3,000 in the country.

And these textile workers, according to the government, are 'combat troops' in the 'battle against capitalism'.

Omar Orsini

Sometimes we use some expressions more linked to the military field than to the political field. However, that is not surprising because we believe that politics and the military share the same ground but that politics is just another means to achieve our goals. That is part of the war that we have.

NARRATOR

Our two doctors are impressed with the Centre. But there are concerns too.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Good they have nice clinics, they have resources – very clean, very pretty. Why, I don't understand, the government can do this with these new clinics and they can't do the same with the hospitals, with the old ones where I work, where Florencio works.

NARRATOR

For Florencio, the worry is that centres like these are as much about indoctrination as education.

Florencio Quintero

For example, when I was talking to them, then one fellow started to argue with Yurani, and he said, well, because we have white and you have black those are the only two conditions – you are against the revolution or you are for the revolutionary persons. And I don't think that's quite real. Life is made of grey tones.

NARRATOR

It's not all regurgitated Castro here. Chavez supporters say they're trying to find a 'third way', a distinctly Venezuelan response to globalization. Their model not so much Castro as

Simon Bolivar, the man who liberated much of Latin America from Spanish rule. His former house is one of Venezuela's big tourist attractions – with around 400,000 visitors a year. According to curator Berta Vasquez, Bolivar is as much a part of the present as the past.

Bertha Vásquez, Bolivar Museum, Caracas

Bolivar creates a link with our past heroes' ideas. He has brought us back to our Venezuelan roots, helping us understand that before Bolivar there were nationalists and independence ideas.

NARRATOR

Bolivar's image has escaped onto the streets, where it's almost as prevalent as that of Chavez. The government cites him often as inspiration for its policies.

Andres Izarra

The ideals for which Bolivar fought are pretty much well alive. We're still fighting for social justice, we're still fighting to be equal, we're still fighting to be independent, we're still fighting to have sovereignty over our own natural resources. And the same with the struggle to be able to come to a united Latin America, united South America, that can stand itself up in front of the world.

NARRATOR

But, say critics, the President is simply appropriating the past for his own purposes.

Teodoro Petkoff, opposition politician

Of course Chavez manipulates the history of Bolivar. He presents himself as the, as the reincarnation of our Simon Bolivar. But everything is bullshit. He even he put in mouth of Bolivar phrases that he invents. He says, 'Bolivar said...!' and then he says what he wants. He rewrites the history of Bolivar.

NARRATOR

But Chavez is simply the latest to interpret Bolivar and his ideals for his own purposes. And sympathizers say a Bolivarian revolution would at least be a Venezuelan response to the bland uniformity globalization can bring.

It's evening, and Yurani is shopping at her local supermarket. But she's finding it tough to make ends meet. Ideology may be one reason the middle class choose to leave Venezuela, but the high cost of living doesn't help. And it's not just luxuries.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

For me it's difficult to find...to buy the same things that I used to eat. For me that I am professional, I can't imagine what is that for the poor people who don't have the same salary that I do.

NARRATOR

What Yurani really wants is fresh milk.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Where is the milk, the fresh milk?

1st Woman

It should be here.

2nd Woman

It's already gone

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Oh, so it's gone? Thank you.

NARRATOR

It's over a year since she's seen any. Instead powdered milk, but at a luxury price.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

I found this milk, which is not fresh milk, you have to prepare with water. It is expensive.

Interviewer

How much would you pay here, in dollars, for this?

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

Eight dollars... for this. It is less than one kilogram, less than one kilogram as you can see. Eight dollars.

NARRATOR

Like Florencio, Yurani has to live with her parents to make ends meet. Much as she loves them, she'd like her own home. But she can't begin to imagine raising a family when costs are so high. Her mother's already seen two sons leave for London and Japan yet she hopes Yurani will also seek a better life abroad.

Yurani's mother

I wish you could go abroad. I can't see a good life for you here. Even with all the studies that you've achieved, I worry you'll be stuck here forever.

NARRATOR

Parents urging their children to leave: dilemmas all around.

The Government admits hundreds of thousands have already left Venezuela. Not our fault though, it says, like other developing nations we can't compete with rich countries tempting our professionals away.

Minister

They're going because better salaries abroad. You see in Spain there's a lack of doctors and they're paying doctors and they're importing doctors and they're paying very good salaries. They're finding more advanced societies abroad, and especially the economic stimulus, it's very important. We are not able to pay those doctors what we pay here in their professional career, but you see that those doctors have had a free education in Venezuela so we're in a way subsidizing the development of the rich countries.

NARRATOR

But would leaving really be practical for our two doctors?

They've come to see Michele, a middle class professional who is doing fine. Ironically she's doing fine running a website, 'I want to leave dot com', full of information about how to emigrate.

Michele Carezis, mequieroir.com

When we started we used to have 15,000 er hits per day and now we have 60,000 hits per day.

Florencio Quintero

So triple hits, right?

Michele Carezis

Yes. Yes.

Florencio Quintero

Where is the place that Latin Americans wants to go?

Michele Carezis

Oh, the US of course.

Florencio Quintero

Yes.

Michele Carezis

Then Canada and Australia, and then Spain.

NARRATOR

For Yurani, there's a shock. Most Western countries won't accept her doctor's qualification. She would have to start work as a nurse.

Michele Carezis

Maybe you have to go to one country and you have to start working as Paramedics, maybe you have to start working as a paramedic. And then you can grow...

Florencio Quintero

And get into working...

Michele Carezis

Uh huh, and start working as a doctor.

Florencio Quintero

As a doctor, ok.

Michele Carezis

Yeah sure, you have to do a lot of sacrifices and the path is not easy at all. You have to be very, very sure on what you are doing, but at the end you will receive er good things, at the end it will be worth.... the sacrifices.

NARRATOR

Throwing away years of their specialist training as doctors – it's a tough call. For Florencio it's a political decision. He's still hoping Venezuela can find social justice without socialism and class warfare Cuban-style.

Florencio Quintero

If here the business is heavier and we don't have enough freedom and really begins to be a socialistic place like Cuba, then I will get out of here. But right now, as the picture is right now, I choose to stay in my country.

NARRATOR

Meantime Yurani is still thinking very seriously about going. She could choose to go at any moment.

Yurani Gómez Gutiérrez

That's a particular decision that everyone has to make referring to his own desires, your own wishes. If you wish money, of course, maybe it's very good to leave the country. If you don't, if your preferences are about family, love, friends or whatever, maybe you should think about staying. It's a personal decision, very particular for everyone.