

Group Therapy in Davos

By Mañanita Ochoa

I have just returned from the World Economic Forum. It was there were 16 years back a group of Venezuelans would wake up February 4, 1992 to the news that there had been a military coup in Venezuela. That year the world's anxieties, frozen by the alpine winds, were focused on the integration of the former Soviet Union to the rest of the world and the possible "dividend of peace". Venezuelans' anxieties were filled with years of low gas prices and economic contraction, which made neither rich nor poor happy. The world's anxieties in 2008 have to do with a possible recession in the Western Hemisphere that could infect the rest of the world, since so many people bought homes without money and now have to pay back with mortgages. The rich don't feel so rich anymore and the poor look healthier and happier. The Chinese, Brazilians, and Hindus are well dressed and all smiles in Davos. The Russians feel so comfortable they no longer even use Ushankas. In Venezuela, despite the millions of dollars and euros that have entered the economy in recent years, the existential anguish has accelerated, especially since Nigeria, a country that shared our political and economical anxieties, has shot up like an economic rocket and does not accept, nor has she a reason too, being compared to Venezuela.

Why are we poorer than we were six years ago, if we are richer than ever? Why does Nigeria look and feel better than us? Venezuelans ask themselves. Sigh of relief. It seems Venezuela has finally learned to manage being rich as though it was poor, saying there is no money to purchase milk, chickens, or toilette paper. As Queen Marie Antoinette said before being beheaded: "let them eat cake". We will eat yogurt, jawbreakers, and well...Kleenex tissue paper has to work for something else. Because of the lack of Venezuelans, the conference on chickens and milk, in which President Uribe was going to speak, was cancelled. The Chinese, Brazilians, Hindus, Russians, Arabs and Africans are all eating and drinking more chicken and milk than ever before. They even have money left over to buy American banks on the cheap. Is it because of this lack of chickens and milk that Venezuela has money left over to buy rifles and helicopters? These investments are productive if they are used to invade countries or far away planets, but they don't produce much if the invasion gets complicated like in Iraq or the Falkland Islands.

There aren't very many Venezuelans in Davos this year. I counted three. Maybe it is because we are solving our internal problems without talking to anyone else and we are going to be one of the few countries that is going to grow big time this year, thanks to the blessings of the Virgin of Coromoto, that looks after us even when we misbehave.

The world seems to agree that water and not oil is what's going to be scarce during this century. I think that is good news, since we in Venezuela know a little bit about water scarcity, even though we have the Guri and the Cordonazos de San Francisco which cause massive mud slides. We are experts. Maybe we can finally brag about real

commercial leadership and we can contribute to easing the shared anxiety in this davosian group therapy by exporting the innumerable gallons of water that fill our roofs and hallways. Problem solved: a water tank in each New York skyscraper.

The group in Davos felt a little more relaxed when it concluded that it doesn't matter how high oil prices are, since there are so many southern countries that manage there economies well that the actions of rotten and rock throwing children, no matter where they are or where they come from, or what kind of a recession they produce due to their incompetence and bad-manners, can be controlled and coped with. All the spiritual leaders said with conviction and audacity: "may God bless them", and they all went home happy and inspired.