

The Art of Lying
By Mañanita Ochoa

There is no greater art than that of telling lies. It is wonderful myth inspiring lies that motivate us to achieve great things. The Greek and Roman gods have been in our minds for thousands of years and have urged us to embark on great adventures and achievements we would have never thought of, were it not for so many imaginary tales. Myths give flight to the imagination and make us transcend obstacles with grace and determination. Everything is possible in the realm of myths. But it takes a great artist to transform a lie into a myth, and in the difference between lies and myths in the contrast between mediocrity and greatness in individuals and communities. Both the liar and the mythmaker must be ready to manage shortages with a criterion of abundance, which is harder to do than the other way around. As my friend Susi mentioned, a myth is noble, a lie is not. The mythmaker convinces himself of the lie even more than those listening to him; while the liar tries, he knows what he says is a lie and tries to trick others for his own benefit, a conduct even less respectful than that of disreputable bacteria.

Like everyone in Venezuela, the first lie I ever heard in my life was that we were rich. I believed it wholeheartedly and didn't understand why they wouldn't take me to the beach or why we didn't have a pool at home, when so many others had water around them. One summer my grandparents rented a modest house in Puerto Viejo, which had a marvelous cement water tank in the backyard. This water tank became an Olympic pool for me, and I remember that summer with my grandmother Mamanina as one of the best in my life. I no longer doubted that we Venezuelans were rich. A myth so wonderful that makes us think we are almighty when we can't even produce skateboards for export! The second lie I heard later. I heard we were a democracy. A democracy was a system in which we could all aspire to a better life through work and merit; we all had freedoms, and individual and collective rights that do not exist in totalitarian regimes.

In the meantime, as time passed, instead of producing nearly a barrel of oil per Venezuelan a day, we produced $\frac{3}{4}$ of a barrel per 10 Venezuelans, and we have added two million Cuban, Colombian, Chinese, Arab and Martian brothers to our list of Venezuelans over the past six years. Like Brad and Angelina, we added to the brood because we were rich. That means between two and six dollars a day for each compatriot. That's not even enough to go to Puerto Viejo on vacation. But we continue to hear that we are rich, and since we are ashamed of being called rich, we go around giving away billions so that our neighbors won't throw stones at us or rob us. The same happened to the noble Russians that migrated to France, since they felt rich until they had nothing left but a few things to sell in order not to starve to death. In Venezuela the only ones that are rich are the government and a group of crooks that are close to the Commander-in-chief, because all the oil revenues go to one person, the current President, who spends it how he pleases. Not even the Saudi Sheiks or the Queen of England have this much power.

Venezuela is neither rich nor a participatory democracy, but both of these lies turned into myths keep us inspired. Rich countries are those that produce goods and services at a higher rate than that of their reproductive growth. Venezuelan production per inhabitant

is pitiful and in decline. A democracy is a country in which the government does not take advantage of its citizens and citizens are active participants in the government's decisions. The Venezuelan government's abuses are big and small. The small abuses are the long lines to buy chickens or milk and the shameful tips one must give to get a driver's license. The big abuse is that haughty politicians have the power to control the oil revenue and spend it as they please. They are accountable to no one, and they allow wide-spread corruption. The oil, the small amount we now produce per inhabitant, belongs to each of those inhabitants and should be distributed in this manner, just like in Alaska and Norway. If each inhabitant receives each day the benefits of having been born on this soil, each inhabitant could vote with his/her money as he/she pleases. It would be miraculous and moving to see the amount of boutiques, gyms, bakeries, schools, clothing factories, electronics stores, consumer goods, production goods, and boxes that would appear, if Venezuelans could vote freely and daily with their money without having to brown nose and tolerate their rulers.

It seems absurd, but Venezuelans are so caught up in their own myths, that even to the most democratic amongst us, the idea of giving oil revenues directly to Venezuelans, with out going through demagogic intermediaries, seems like a naive idea. Governments are good when rulers have to earn their keep carrying out their term, even if it only amounts to mediocrity. Governments are bad when they receive their keep like a rich boy and gain support by handing out alms. The art of lying transformed into a noble myth inspires us to dream and better ourselves, but in the long run they are generally abused by lying leaders.

The art of truth is so fundamental and supreme that it inspires true greatness. The Venezuelan truth is that oil revenues are not as large as they used to be, and that if we do not begin to divide them up effectively and equally, Venezuelans will never learn to be free and responsible with their riches, be them small or large. The art of truth can even break the marble that covers the true beauty of the country and allow, as Leonardo would say, the work of art of our genuine and noble destiny to come to light.

The art of truth and the true democracy would make us courageous, productive and rich. Truth and excellence are the greatest myths we can aspire to. To protect borders against drug dealers and terrorists is a noble and constitutional endeavor. To protect borders in order to manipulate lies and turn them into myths is a shameful act and an assault on the memory of our liberators, those that have inspired historical myths and motivated so many to become better people.