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Venezuela and When People Are Forced to Eat Shit!

By Andre Vltchek
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In a powerful short novel by the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, “No One Writes to the Colonel” (*El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*) set during the period of “La Violencia”, an old retired colonel struggles to survive, forgotten by the government which promised him a substantial pension some fifteen years earlier. The state is corrupt and brutal, and it had abandoned almost all of those who had fought for the country during the fierce “Thousand Days’ War”.

And so, no one writes to the colonel. No letters, no envelopes with his pension are arriving. The old man and his wife are living alone. Their son had died a few years earlier. Their savings are gone. There seems to be no hope.

The colonel has a rooster. It is a mighty fighting cock. He trains it; the bird is his only chance of survival, it is all that he has left, as well as his pride. At the end of the story, he is approached and offered money for the rooster. He turns the offer down. He would rather go hungry, but he will not be humiliated!

His wife approaches him, asking whether he sold the rooster. He tells her that he did not.

Horrified, she asks: “But what are we going to eat?”

He replies to her, slowly and honestly: “We will eat shit!”

The Western mass media is now overflowing with stories about the people of Venezuela, collecting rotten fruit, even garbage, in order to fill their stomachs.

Many of these stories are grossly exaggerated, but it is true that millions in Venezuela are suffering.

Once again, the country has been betrayed by its elites. As Chile was before the 1973 coup, as Brazil was just a short while ago. The elites in Latin America are only loyal to their Western handlers, never to their own people.

There is capital flight, and there is an artificially created deficit of many basic commodities; medicines and food products. The goal of the 'opposition' backed by the United States and Europe is simple, and clear: to choke the revolutionary process, to discredit the legacy of Hugo Chavez, and to grab power again, while re-introducing neo-liberal dogma.

But the majority of Venezuelan people do not support the 'opposition'. Of course, not everyone is in agreement with the policies of President Maduro, but a return to the capitalist past is not what the nation desires.

And that is why Venezuelans are forced to eat shit!

I am not sure what the maternal side of my family ate during WWII, during the 900 days of the Siege of Leningrad.

My grandmother and my mom survived, while almost all of our other relatives vanished.

The city was surrounded by German troops. It was bombed day and night, savagely. And the only food supply route was open during the winters, over the thin ice covering the Ladoga Lake.

There was mass starvation in the city. But against all the odds, Leningrad stubbornly refused to surrender.

Everyday, my grandmother went to the frontline, to fight the Germans, and to dig trenches. The Nazis dropped millions of leaflets spiced with disgusting humor: "Dear damsels, stop digging your little holes. Over your holes, our tanks will soon be passing."

They did not pass! The 'damsels', including my grandma, were gentle-looking, opera and ballet going, poetry reading romantics, but in their core, actually, extremely tough and determined Russian women. And they were not going to surrender, until the final victory – after all, they were defending their beloved city, their motherland and humanity.

Almost half of the population of the city was killed, or starved to death. People were collapsing in the middle of the streets. But Leningrad stood tall, defiant and proud. A city of countless theaters and museums, one of the most beautiful cities on Earth, a refined metropolis, suddenly hardened itself and prevented the Nazi hordes from entering its streets and embankments.

“People were forced to eat corpses, grandma?” I asked once, when she was still alive.

“Yes,” she replied. “Your mother and I never did, but some people... yes; they had no choice. We ate plywood and glue, if we were lucky to find some. Or we ate nothing...”

My grandmother was decorated twice, for her extraordinary courage at the front. She was decorated as a soldier, as a Soviet soldier (although she had absolutely no military training), not as a ‘damsel’.

Finally, the blockade, the siege was broken. A few weeks before, my grandmother and my tiny mom were evacuated over the Ladoga Lake. My mother looked like a skeleton, with an enormous belly of a child suffering from malnutrition sticking out. I was told that when she was brought to a first aid center that was full of medicine and food, she began moving, as if possessed, trying to grab and stuff into her mouth all she could put her hands on. Three adults had to hold her and drag her away. Her food intake had to be increased gradually, or otherwise she would have died.

Once, my grandmother told me: “It is no shame to eat shit! It is much better than to betray... But it is a terrible crime to force people to eat it!”

During that same war, in approximately the same period of time, my paternal, the Czech side of the family had full access to sausages, tenderloins and other foodstuffs. The Czechs had been collaborating with the Nazis, and they were generously rewarded for their efforts.

From my early age I was absolutely clear where my allegiances lied!

Leningrad and Russia have always been my love, my identity, and my motherland. Often remote, often hidden far away, over the horizon, but Motherland nevertheless! Just as my Russian, maternal grandmother was perhaps the most important woman in my life.

And whatever I later became, whatever I am now, was formed during those days of determined fight against the evil, during the Siege of Leningrad, which took place decades before I was even born.

Last week I was working in the Russian Far East, in Kamchatka, Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. I flew there from Tokyo, and stayed longer than I originally planned. I was trying to document the tremendous progress that this part of the country has registered during the last decade.

Just as during my lengthy visit to Brazil in 2015, I refused to meet intellectuals and ‘elites’. I spent time discussing Russia and the world with sailors, fishermen, and truck drivers – the most common folks.

Venezuela was bleeding. Every day, I read the news, and searched for the latest developments in Latin America.

I kept stumbling over the most cynical reports coming from the Western mass media outlets.

They were celebrating! They were openly calling for an invasion to depose the government. They were getting hyperbolic about ‘absolute chaos’ in Caracas.

It was extremely sad reading. It was actually disgusting. These scribes had no higher principles, no understanding of duty or of sacrifice. They were getting paid well and, intuitively, they simply knew what they were expected to write. Their ‘culture’ was extremely low.

They had absolutely no clue that it is much more glorious to eat shit than caviar, if you are doing it in order to defend your ideals and your beloved country.

Because these men and women from the Western mainstream have no ideals left, as they hardly understand the meaning of “love” or pride, anymore.

But those Russian workers I spoke to, they understood perfectly well what was going on more than 10,000 kilometers away, in Venezuela, as the colonel from the novel of Garcia Marquez would understand, and as my grandmother most definitely would.

It is actually all very simple: you stick to your principles, no matter how tough such decisions might be. Or if you don’t, your life is finished, thoroughly meaningless: your life as a person, or the life of the entire society.

In the West, in the epicenter of imperialism, a colonialist mentality and savage consumerism has made all basic ideals of humanism thoroughly irrelevant. Ethical principles have become the laughing stock of the official propagandists who are busy spreading nihilism all over the planet. That is why people are so confused and that is why life is so empty. It is empty in the Empire itself, and in its ‘client’ states that are shamelessly whoring, betraying and selling their own people and all that is above and under the surface of the Earth.

That is why re-visiting the great books written by people like Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Maxim Gorki, is so essential, in this dark time and age.

No one wants to eat shit. Nobody wants the people of Venezuela to eat shit!

But if the choice is between tenderloin as a reward for betrayal, and rotten vegetables to sustain you while fighting your treasonous elites and an indirect foreign invasion, in a ‘normal’ society the choice is obvious!

And then, after victory is finally achieved, for those who are forcing their own proud patriots to eat shit, there should be no clemency, and no forgiveness.