

Margaret Randall. *Exporting Revolution: Cuba's Global Solidarity.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. Illustrations. 280 pp. \$99.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8223-6384-2.

Reviewed by Marcus Oliver Golding (University of Texas at Austin)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

"Exporting the revolution" became a synonym for impending communist takeover in Latin America during the Cold War. The United States employed this old phrase to characterize any action taken by Cuba beyond its borders as a ploy to undermine democracy and capitalism in the "free world." Margaret Randall's *Exporting Revolution: Cuba's Global Solidarity* provides an alternative interpretation of this idea by focusing on the revolution's policy of solidarity with the world. The author asks what has motivated an underdeveloped nation, which has faced an economic embargo for decades, to be generous with other impoverished countries. Her main argument is that the roots of Cuba's global solidarity lie in the New Man created by the revolution after Fidel Castro's victory over Fulgencio Batista. The new regime instilled generations of citizens with such values as selflessness, kindness, and care for the less fortunate. This commitment to social justice explains Cuba's seemingly unique approach to humanitarian aid around the world.

Randall examines Cuba's global solidarity policy by addressing several domestic and international programs launched from the onset of the revolution in 1959 until the second decade of the twenty-first century. She also draws on her own experiences and engagement with these initiatives as she lived and raised her children there for several

years. Randall concludes by arguing that Cuba's solidarity might not be completely driven by altruism but that any capitalist model of humanitarian aid pales in comparison with the example set forth by the Caribbean island.

Central to Cuba's solidarity policy are education and health care. Since 1959 the country's main concern became providing free access to education and health care for everyone on the island. Randall reveals how during the first years of the revolution the government favored quantity over quality of education, leading to deficiencies in the system, such as poorly trained teachers. However, the state soon overcame these hurdles by training qualified professionals and eventually exporting educators to other countries in need of them. As a consequence of these policies, the government eradicated illiteracy from the island while citizens have enjoyed tuition-free education since Castro's power grab. Mirroring its educational breakthroughs at home, Randall shows Cuba's solidarity with the rest of the world through such international programs as Yes I Can. Launched by the state in 2001, this initiative has fought illiteracy in more than thirty countries and has been praised for its effective pedagogic methods by international organizations like UNESCO.

Health care takes central stage throughout the book. The author devotes significantly more time

to explain the country's health-care policies and humanitarian aid to other parts of the world. Randall emphasizes the commitment of the Cuban government to free diagnosis and healing for every citizen. She acknowledges that periods of economic stress have left the island's hospitals bereft of medical supplies. However, the author contends that those obstacles have not stopped Cuba from having a health-care system where everyone is taken care of, every child is vaccinated, and freedom of reproductive choice has been available to all women.

Internationally, Randall exposes how Cuba's need for helping others has driven its citizens to different locations around the globe. From providing doctors and health-care specialists to fight Ebola in Sierra Leone to sending first response teams to regions struck by natural disasters like in Peru and Pakistan, the revolution's humanitarian aid model is characterized by its reach and long-term design. This social mission is complemented at home by other initiatives. The Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) has trained doctors from all around the world in Cuba. The Tarara facility, created originally to treat children with radioactive poisoning from the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident of 1986, serves now as an international post-disaster medical center. Throughout the narrative, the author weaves in testimonies and pieces of literary work produced by Cuban health-care specialists, highlighting their experiences in remote locations.

The rest of the book addresses how the revolution's internationalism has been a key component of its political identity. The Cuban state aided other nations to fight oppressive regimes during the 1960s and 1970s. In that capacity, Cuba served as a training ground for different guerrilla groups from Latin America and Africa, offered shelter for their families, and provided military aid. However, Randall's narrative ignores the fact that many times the Caribbean island participated in initiatives to overthrow democratic governments in Latin

America through direct or indirect military intervention. Cuba's policy of indiscriminate meddling in a country's internal affairs contributed in exacerbating polarization, discrediting democratic forces, and helping to lay the path for authoritarian takeovers. Randall obscures Cuba's fair share of guilt during the Cold War.

In her final analysis, Randall presents key differences between Cuba's humanitarian aid and those of capitalist nations like the United States, Russia, and China. First, its services are never imposed and never respond to invitations from the country in question. Second, Cubans respect and adapt to the local values, system of beliefs, and politics of the host nation. Third, service in these international initiatives is voluntary and stem from the selflessness and solidarity of its own people. Finally, the government does not use the data it gathers in foreign countries for its own ends nor does it advertise a particular form of political regime. These components are what, according to Randall, make the revolution's example worth not only emulating but also preserving. Although the country offers this aid freely, the author acknowledges that in the last decades Cuba has also signed reciprocity treaties with governments that can pay the island for its services. She dismisses accusations that economic profits and political goodwill are behind Cuba's solidarity by arguing that the social benefits experienced by those in need outweigh any other critique.

Exporting Revolution is a well-written book with a clear and fluid prose. The book is engaging and, although chapters do not follow a particular order, the author's argument is not hard to follow. In terms of sources, Randall draws heavily on her experience on the island as well as her network of friends and contacts involved with humanitarian aid. She states that Cuba's situation resists easy analysis and that any interpretation runs the risk of being somewhat biased. Her book does not escape this premise. Although Randall's main argument is important, there are some issues that de-

mand further explanation. Cuba's decision to profit from its humanitarian missions defeats the sole idea of solidarity. Furthermore, the country's support for authoritarian regimes, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, seems contradictory in light of the island's legacy of helping other nations fight tyrannies. These alliances are no different from those created by the United States with right-wing dictatorships in the past. Finally, the appalling lack of political and civil freedoms in the Caribbean country cast some doubts over Cuba's overall interest for the welfare of its own citizens and the people of other nations.

Randall's account does not strive for a more nuanced analysis. It is not her goal. The book serves the purpose of underlining Cuba's humanitarian commitment to the world. The author makes us rethink how foreign aid is conceived and deployed in other countries by focusing on the policies implemented by the Caribbean island. Hers is an interesting contribution to the literature concerned with humanitarian assistance and foreign aid where, in many ways, Cuba's example is unusual.

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