

Margaret Randall, *Exporting Revolution: Cuba's Global Solidarity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2017). 280 pp. Hardcover \$99.95, Paperback \$26.95.

In a chimerical United States of America, an imagined community more just and more open, Margaret Randall would be a national treasure. In another world where UNESCO designations of cultural, historic, and natural resources were extended to individuals, Randall would get her due, part of the global matriarchy. For now, in the country of her birth, poet, essayist, and political activist Randall is a prophet without honour, or at least the honour she deserves. Sadly, under-read and under-appreciated, Randall has nonetheless long used, at the risk of overextending a metaphor, the pulpit she has (90-plus books, countless articles) to reach audiences. This book could reasonably be read as a series of sermons, perhaps primarily for the faithful, which is probably neither what she intended nor necessarily what academics are looking for. If Randall's personal and public politics (and years living in Cuba) clearly inform this work, they do not detract from it.

Despite the somewhat convoluted style—the text is neither chronologically or thematically coherent—this book may be best read as a piece, holistically, the sum greater than the parts. As a whole, the book presents a powerful and persuasive (choosing, at times, persuasion over precision) case for the ongoing importance of the Cuban Revolution globally and locally some 60 years on and inevitably, if only by comparison, a compelling indictment of its imperious, presumptuous, overreaching neighbour 90 miles to the north. The Cuban Revolution, against all odds, still matters and seems likely to continue to do so. Randall's book offers a glimpse as to why.

Although the strength of the book is as a unified whole, some chapters are worth noting. Chapter five highlights Cuba's role in African national liberation struggles and poignantly notes that a ship which delivered arms to Algeria in 1961 returned to Cuba with wounded people and orphans, the start of a Cuban tradition of bringing in and caring for others. This chapter ends with a discussion of Cuba's critical and crucial role in Angola's national liberation struggle/revolution and several chapters later we encounter the moving memoirs of a member of the people's militia, not Cuba's Armed Forces, who fought there. The next two chapters are captivating oral histories about teaching physiology in Ethiopia and serving as a doctor in Zambia. Chapter eleven provides a useful overview of Cuba's hugely successful global literacy efforts based on their impressive 1961 *Yo Si Pendo* campaign, while chapter twelve explores Cuba's stunningly effective export of its remarkable health-care system and its extraordinary results. Both of these, it merits mention, have

been comprehensively and more convincingly (if less poetically) covered by other scholars in numerous books and articles.

Randall is no longer the lonely voice she reasonably, given her life and times, imagines she is. Her reclamation effort is earnest and heartfelt, but globally most of the world knows: across the Global South, Cuba is an inspiration and an aspiration. Only the most churlish deny the success of the revolution in areas such as education, health-care and medicine, housing, and the like. Around the world people have practical, everyday experiences with Cuban teachers, engineers, doctors, and nurses. At times it feels as if Randall is fighting unnamed foes. The citing and sourcing of academic materials is sparse; one could create a parlor game: Dominguez and Mesa-Lago here, Pérez Jr. there, Pérez-Stable everywhere. Perhaps more important are the foes who populate the US foreign policy apparatus and the Cuban-American National Foundation to whom politicians all over the US improbably vestigially genuflect. These people are aging and irrelevant, passed by time, fighting sad, desperate rear-guard actions on the wrong side of history. Internationally, the Cuban revolutionary project has won; domestically, Cubans are building on decades of uneven progress to realize the 60-year-old revolutionary promise of having fought for and earned the chance to make the/ir revolution.

At the same time, Randall goes awfully easy on the Cuban leadership, who are human, who made mistakes—more than a few unforced errors—and at times exercised bad judgment. A more honest, even-handed approach which acknowledged these failures would make the material here more, not less, convincing. One of the revolution's staunchest allies, Amílcar Cabral, sometimes referred to as the Che Guevara of Africa, famously said, “mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories...” No state could possibly live up to the picture Randall paints here, but as a counterpoint to 60 years of US propaganda and pressure it is compelling and convincing.

For academics, the dearth of sources and citations, the at times cavalier disregard for what most people might regard as failures or setbacks, and occasional tone-deaf throwaways (defending Stalin, rewriting Che's sexism) will be bothersome. Yet as a mythopoetic testament, one perhaps in debt to Steffen's (in)famous comment about a purported exchange between the UK's Lloyd George and Italy's Mussolini (“Authentic? I don't know ... Like so many rumors, it was truer than the records... somebody said it, somebody who understood what it was all about”), this recitation of the Cuban Revolution's importance and successes has much to recommend it. The relevant textual reference points here are not standard histories or social science texts (though *The Cuba Reader* is a reliable one-stop to make many of the matters here more legible). Think instead of Didion's contention that “we tell ourselves stories to live” (or Rukeyser's quip that “the universe is made of stories, not atoms”). No other small country has had the global influence and impact of Cuba since 1959; its story is legend. Castro's famous declaration that Grenada was a “big revolution in a small country” might better reflect the Cuban revolutionary

experience globally.

This is no one's last word on the topic, perhaps not even Randall's. With no impartiality and little pretense, and rich with oral histories, anecdotes, and effort to situate the Cuban revolution's place in the global firmament, this combination memoir, oral history, presentation of work not normally seen, and distinctive political analysis, is, like the Cuban Revolution, extraordinary, unique.

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