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Cultures of Solidarity: Cuba's internationalism as an alternative globalisation

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Abstract

Since the aftermath of the Second World War, the global order has remained largely defined by a capitalist framework. This system has undergone significant transformations over time, giving rise to new iterations such as neoliberalism. As these models have been adopted and entrenched by the world's major powers, envisaging an alternative vision of globalisation proves an inherently challenging task.

Cuba stands out as one of the few nations that has consistently articulated opposition to this dominant form of globalisation and has actively sought to cultivate alternative approaches. The first chapter of this thesis examines the most pivotal moments in the formation of Cuba's internationalist ethos, alongside an analysis of some of the country's most significant and emblematic instances of internationalism. The subsequent chapter aims to clarify and contextualise key concepts central to this study—namely internationalism, globalisation, and solidarity—while also discussing their definitions, theoretical implications, and interconnections.

This research explores the alternative vision of globalisation to which Cuba aspires, doing so through an examination of the fundamental principles underpinning the Cuban Revolution, particularly those of solidarity and internationalism. In order to comprehend both the structural limitations of the contemporary global system and the intellectual foundations of Cuban internationalism, these themes form the focal point of the first two chapters. The study then turns to more recent manifestations of Cuban internationalism, focusing particularly on Cuba's international engagement during the Coronavirus pandemic, to assess the extent and depth of the networks it has fostered. This case study further evaluates not only the credibility of Cuban internationalism as a potential foundation for an alternative form of globalisation, but also its long-term viability.

Keywords: Cuba; Solidarity; Internationalism; Globalisation; Neoliberalism; Cuban medical internationalism

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Introduction

We must love one another or die.

-W.H. Auden

On the 20th of July 1998, Fidel Castro announced 'no estamos en contra de la globalización, no se puede estar, es una ley de historia; estamos contra la globalización neoliberal' (Báez, 2004, pg.5). Translated, this phrase states that 'we [Cubans] are not against globalisation, one cannot be, it is a law of history; we are again neoliberal globalisation'. This statement brings with it an interesting implication, that there are other global systems, not only worth exploring, but already being pursued. Given the date of Fidel Castro's discourse, this is not necessarily a novel idea; in fact, according to Martell the idea of 'anti-globalisation' has been around for some time (Martell, 2016, pg.238). There are a few interesting things to note about these 'anti-globalisation', firstly, 'anti-globalisation' may not be the most apt description, especially within the confines of this thesis. This work does not seek to tear down and criticise the new webs of global interconnectedness, on the contrary there are a myriad of benefit that can be reaped from the corners of the globe growing closer. What this thesis seeks to explore an alternative avenue of the already connected globe. Martell, later in his works, remarks two important fact about these 'anti-globalisation' movements that have been predicated in the past. The first is that the notions of different anti-global groups are too disparate to form one homogenous movement, and the second is that these movement are for the most part oppositional, more often offering criticism rather than any positive framework. This is an issue that this thesis seeks to rectify.

The main thesis of this work is thus, that a viable, alternative form of globalisation is already present, and that Cuba's is one of its principal predicators. Obviously, this is a bold statement and is a

notion that would require further, intensive, investigation. However, this work serves a preliminary exploration into this, essentially functioning as the foundation of possible future work. To fully excavate and analyse this question, the following work has been divided into four chapters.

The first chapter serves to contextualise Cuba's history and relationship to internationalism. This chapter will explore some of the key events in Cuban history from the inception of the Revolution to the present day, interspersing analytical perspectives on how certain events in Cuba shaped the importance placed on international relations in the island nation. Some of the events discussed, for example, are the failure of the 10-million-ton sugar harvest of 1970 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and how both of these events forced Cuba to reevaluate its relationship to the broader global climate.

Present in this work are many different terminologies, such as solidarity and globalisation that are unfortunately vague in their definitions and implication. What the second chapter of this thesis seeks to do is to clarify and conceptualise these key terms for the purposes of this work. In this chapter, all the key terms relevant to this piece have their various definitions explored, in tandem with this, real world examples of how these concepts are implemented, and through what apparatuses, is delineated in order to gain a thorough understanding as possible of these terms. Furthermore, once defined and discussed, this chapter also affirms how these concepts will be viewed and used for the remainder of the thesis.

The third and fourth chapters focus on the case study, premise of which is to establish to what extent the connections Cuba creates as a result of its internationalism constitutes as an alternative form of globalisation. More than this, this case study seeks to analyse if Cuba's internationalist initiatives can be formed into an action framework of an alternative form of globalisation. As this is an issue the research of which could span the entire history of revolutionary Cuba, the case study has condensed the temporal fields, focussing solely on Cuba's internationalism during the Covid-19 pandemic. In

essence, this case study aims to analyse not only Cuba's outgoing actions, but what they have received as a result of it, including the new relations. The case study utilises articles from *Granma*, Cuba's official communist party organ, and western periodicals such as *Reuters* and *The Daily Mail*. The reason for this is so that, as much as possible, an objective view of Cuba's action, and their implications, can be viewed and assessed. Moreover, it affords this work an interesting opportunity to examine Cuba strongly differing perspectives on the same events, offering invaluable insight in how these two juxtaposed world views see global relations through the prism of their own ideologies.

Chapter 1 – Contextualising Cuba

‘It is not easy to understand Cuba’ (Kirk, 2015, p. 1). With this remark, John Kirk opens his study *Healthcare Without Borders: Understanding Cuban Medical Internationalism*, framing his exploration of one of Cuba’s most distinctive global endeavours. This concise yet perceptive statement aptly encapsulates the island’s historical and ideological complexity.

While the overarching aim of this study is to examine how Cuba articulates an alternative model of global engagement through its internationalist initiatives, it is first necessary to consider why the nation seeks to present an alternative to prevailing forms of globalisation. To that end, an appreciation of the historical, political, and socio-economic context underpinning Cuba’s development is essential to achieving a more nuanced understanding of its relationship with this particular mode of global cooperation.

Given that comprehending Cuba’s trajectory is no straightforward task, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a concise overview of Cuban domestic and foreign policy since 1959. Particular attention is paid to how successive historical epochs introduced new challenges and ideological shifts, to which revolutionary Cuba responded through adaptation and transformation. This resilience enabled the revolution not only to endure the manifold adversities it encountered, but also to persist in promoting and exporting its distinctive vision of an alternative global order.

To ensure clarity and to most effectively explain Cuba’s historical and ideological context, the following chapters will approach the subject in a twofold manner. They will, first, examine the significance of the various schools of ideological thought that have shaped Cuba’s trajectory since 1959, and second, explore how these ideologies both influenced and were influenced by the nation’s domestic and foreign policies during the periods in which they predominated.

The first chapter will analyse the period from 1959 to 1970, corresponding with the height of socialist consolidation in Cuba. The subsequent chapter will investigate the reorientation towards orthodox Marxism–Leninism between 1971 and 1986. Finally, the discussion will turn to the revival of revolutionary ideals grounded in *Cubanía* from 1986 to the present day.

Setting the Scene: Socialism in Cuba, 1959-1970

In *Cuba: Island of Dreams*, Antoni Kapcia characterises the Cuban Revolution as a 'revolution without a blueprint' (Kapcia, 2000, p. 6). This interpretation is supported by Fidel Castro's declaration, following the revolution's triumph, that it was not 'red'—a reference to Soviet Marxist ideology—but rather 'olive green… the colour of the rebel army from the Sierra Maestra' (Smith, 2016, p. 18). This assertion underscores the revolution's distinctive identity and ideological autonomy. Such a view was echoed by Herbert Matthews, a correspondent for *The New York Times* during the revolutionary campaign, who observed that the 26th of July Movement (MJ26)—the name under which Castro and his forces operated during their insurrection against the Batista regime—appeared to exhibit 'no communism to speak of'. This assessment temporarily allayed the Eisenhower administration's concerns regarding the potential spread of rival ideologies across the Americas (Schoultz, 2009, p. 65).

Consequently, the notion of the Cuban Revolution as a 'revolution without a blueprint' becomes essential for contextualising and comprehending its inherently fluid and adaptive nature.

Freeing the land: Agrarian Reform in Cuba, 1959:

During the initial phase of the Revolution, considerable emphasis was placed on the project of nation-building—on constructing a new Cuban society liberated from the constraints of imperialism, neo-imperialism, and the residual structures of the past. The imperative to develop and modernise Cuba was articulated even prior to the Revolution's victory. In July 1959, Fidel Castro underscored the need to prioritise infrastructural and productive

investment over consumerism, pointedly asking, “Why do we buy Cadillacs when we need tractors?” (Pérez, 1999, p. 480).

The pursuit of national reconstruction generated significant upheaval, both domestically and internationally. Among the earliest and most transformative measures introduced was the Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959. Implemented a mere five months after the revolutionary triumph, the law proclaimed that the new government would nationalise all privately owned land, redistributing it to those who worked it—namely tenants, sharecroppers, and even squatters (Kozameh, 2022, p. 32). This policy provoked strong opposition not only from wealthy Cuban landowners but also from foreign interests.

Prior to the Agrarian Reform, the United States had exercised near-total hegemony over Cuban land ownership, a dominance institutionalised through the Platt Amendment of 1902. Introduced following the joint Cuban-American victory over Spanish imperial forces, the Amendment consisted of a series of provisions incorporated into Cuba’s 1902 Constitution at the insistence of the United States as a precondition for the island’s nominal independence (Roosevelt, ed. by Chomsky *et al.*, 2019, p. 145). Effectively transforming Cuba into a U.S. ‘neo-colony’ (Schoultz, 2009, p. 25), the Platt Amendment granted the United States extensive authority to appropriate and utilise Cuban territory, dictate foreign policy, and intervene militarily in Cuba’s domestic affairs whenever it deemed necessary (Roosevelt, ed. by Chomsky *et al.*, 2020, pp. 145–146).

This dominance over Cuba intensified over subsequent decades, ultimately reaching its zenith under the pro-American dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Batista not only permitted the United States military to appropriate Cuban territory but also granted preferential economic concessions, including the export of sugar to the United States at prices below market value (Schoultz, 2009, pp. 35–36). The asymmetrical nature of this relationship was aptly captured by *The Nation* during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency, which observed: “politically Cuba may, in theory, be independent...

economically she is a vassal, and her economic bondage and political control are inextricably linked" (Schoultz, 2009, p. 32).

By 1960, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, INRA) had nationalised approximately 42.5 per cent of Cuban land. This process was accompanied by the state's assumption of control over all financial institutions and 83.6 per cent of the island's industrial production. Cuban economist Alfredo González Gutiérrez described this formative period as marking a "transition from a capitalist industrial sector to a socialist-run industrial sector", emphasising that this transformation occurred "smoothly and positively, without trauma or a fall in production" (Yaffe, 2012, p. 14).

Knowing how to read is knowing how to walk. Knowing how to write is knowing to fly: Literacy Campaign, 1961

The construction and development of a new Cuba, however, required far more than the mere nationalisation of land and industry. In the final days of the U.S.-backed Batista regime, the nascent revolutionary government confronted a formidable challenge—a structural impediment that manifested in two principal forms: widespread illiteracy and the debilitating effects of a 'brain drain'. At the time of the Revolution's triumph, approximately 23 per cent of the Cuban population was illiterate, a figure that represented a significant obstacle to national development, particularly given that illiteracy was disproportionately concentrated in rural areas (Artaraz, 2012, p. 26).

The term 'brain drain' in this context refers to the mass exodus of the Cuban middle class from 1960 onwards, a phenomenon that had devastating consequences for the Revolution's developmental ambitions. This outflow deprived the island of its university-educated and professionally qualified citizens, leaving the state without the necessary *funcionarios* (civil servants) to implement the constant stream of new revolutionary policies (Kapcia, 2014, p. 10). This predicament was explicitly recognised by Che Guevara, who observed that for those without education or literacy, it would

be “difficult to participate in the process of revolutionary changes” (Leiner, ed. Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2008, p. 192).

Crucially, this crisis of illiteracy and educational underdevelopment was not perceived by the revolutionary leadership as a merely technical or pedagogical issue; rather, it was understood as being “intimately tied to the revolutionary transformation of society and economy” (Leiner, ed. Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2008, p. 173). Drawing upon the renewed spirit of anti-imperialism and the siege mentality that emerged following the U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion, the revolutionary government sought to confront this dual challenge through mass mobilisation (Abendroth, 2009, p. 81). On 1 May 1961, Fidel Castro announced that secondary schools would be closed so that young, literate students could travel to rural areas to teach reading and writing to the illiterate population. In doing so, Cuba’s youth were transformed into a mass mobilised pedagogical force—known as the *brigadistas*—symbolising both the educational and ideological dimensions of the revolutionary project (Leiner, ed. Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2008, p. 190).

This process culminated in the 1961 Literacy Campaign, which functioned as a vital instrument for national development, social unification, and the consolidation of revolutionary ideals. Over the course of eight months, more than 700,000 Cubans attained literacy at a first-grade level, reducing the national illiteracy rate to below 4 per cent—the threshold established by UNESCO for a country to be considered free from illiteracy (Artaraz, 2012, p. 27).

This unprecedented cultural exchange between urban literates and rural agricultural workers not only fostered new social bonds and a shared sense of *patria*—that is, national belonging (MacDonald, 2009, p. 53)—but also deepened revolutionary consciousness across the population. For those who taught, the campaign represented active participation in the revolutionary project, while for those who learned, it constituted a profound act of personal and collective emancipation.

Deciding the soul of the Revolution: The Great Debate, 1962-1965

Although Fidel Castro formally proclaimed the socialist character of the Revolution in 1961 (Gordy, 2015, p. 61), the socialist orientation that came to define, at least the first decade of, the revolutionary project was not fully consolidated until the following year. Between 1962 and 1965, Cuba underwent a period of intense ideological clarification and debate—known as the *Great Debate*—which sought to define the Revolution's guiding principles, ideological foundations, and practical direction.

This period marked the beginning of what Kapcia (Kapcia, 2014, p. 61) refers to as the 'Guevarist phase' of the Revolution, characterised by a protracted discourse between Che Guevara and other 'New Left' radicals on one side, and the more orthodox factions represented by the Popular Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Popular*, PSP) on the other (Gordy, 2015, p. 64). The central issue under discussion concerned the most appropriate strategy for advancing Cuba's development. The orthodox communists maintained that progress should follow the traditional Soviet model, advocating gradual economic transformation and the continued use of certain capitalist mechanisms, such as profit motives and material incentives, as developmental tools (Gordy, 2015, p. 60; Kapcia, 2014, p. 61).

Guevara, by contrast, rejected the notion that Cuba's revolutionary process needed to adhere to such stages or rely upon these instruments. He instead posited that moral incentives and revolutionary voluntarism could serve as the principal drivers of socialist transformation, envisioning a distinctive Cuban path towards communism that diverged fundamentally from the Soviet orthodoxy.

The rhetoric articulated by Guevara during this period of ideological debate gave rise to a series of new attitudes, ideas, and policies that became central to the identity of the Cuban Revolution in the years that followed. Among the most significant of these were the concepts of the 'New Man' and of proletarian internationalism.

The notion of the 'New Man' originated in Guevara's 1965 essay *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, in which he explored what he described as the 'tension between the individual and the collective' (Serra, 2007, p. 1). In this work, Guevara delineated the profound transformation in consciousness required to construct a genuinely socialist society—a *new* Cuba—arguing that this could only be realised through the cultivation of 'new' men and women motivated not by material gain but by moral conviction and a sense of collective duty (Serra, 2007, p. 10). This reorientation towards action for the common good, rather than for individual benefit, was soon reflected in the conduct of Cuba's foreign policy.

During this early phase, revolutionary Cuba's external engagements were defined by the principle of proletarian internationalism—a commitment to the belief that the Cuban struggle was not unique, and that there could and should be "other Cubas" (Scott, 2008, p. 11). Fuelled by this conviction, the revolutionary government actively sought to foster and support liberation movements abroad. Between 1961 and 1964, Cuba provided military training to at least 2,000 guerrilla fighters and offered financial and communications assistance to emergent revolutionary movements across Latin America and Africa, including in Venezuela, Argentina, Guatemala, Algeria, and Bolivia (Gleijeses, 2002, pp. 22–23).

Not sweet enough: Failure of the 10-million-ton sugar harvest: 1970

The conclusion of the first era of revolutionary Cuba was precipitated by two principal factors. The decline of Cuba's policy of proletarian internationalism coincided with the loss of one of the Revolution's most emblematic figures. While assisting guerrilla forces in Bolivia, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was captured and executed in 1967—a moment which, as Kirk observes, represented the "symbolic end" of Cuba's military involvement in promoting revolution abroad (Kirk, 2015, p. 17).

A further catalyst for this shift in direction was the failure of a major domestic initiative that had profound repercussions for Cuba's position within global geopolitics: the unsuccessful attempt to

produce a ten-million-ton sugar harvest. This economic failure not only undermined the state's developmental ambitions but also curtailed Cuba's capacity for autonomous international action, marking the end of its early revolutionary phase.

The failure of the ten-million-ton sugar harvest is widely regarded as a pivotal turning point in post-revolutionary Cuba, fundamentally transforming the manner in which both domestic and foreign affairs were conducted. This event represented Cuba's attempt to assert greater control over its own political and economic agency, seeking to free itself from the influence of the global superpowers of the era by generating sufficient capital to reduce external dependency (Kapcia, 2014, p. 119).

Commencing on 28 October 1969, the ten-million-ton harvest campaign employed the same methods of mass mobilisation that had characterised earlier revolutionary initiatives, such as the Literacy Campaign. The government sought to capitalise on the relatively high global price of sugar—Cuba's principal export at the time (Blanco and Benjamin, 2019, p. 396). To achieve this ambitious, self-imposed target—approximately three million tonnes more than the nation had ever previously produced—the revolutionary leadership diverted labour and resources away from other sectors, including food production, a decision that proved economically disastrous (Blanco and Benjamin ed. by Chomsky, 2020, p. 396).

Although the campaign ultimately yielded around 8.5 million tonnes of sugar, the largest harvest in Cuba's history, this figure fell short of the stated goal and failed to deliver the anticipated economic autonomy, leaving the country still financially indebted to the Soviet Union (Kapcia, 2014, p. 119). When the government formally acknowledged the failure of the initiative on 26 July 1970, the resulting disillusionment—compounded by broader instances of domestic mismanagement—prompted serious reflection on the direction and viability of the revolutionary project. In turn, this moment of crisis precipitated a reorientation of the Revolution, marking the beginning of a second phase defined by a new

ideological framework and a restructured approach to domestic governance.

Cooling off in a Cold War: Orthodox Marxism-Leninism in Cuba, 1971-1986

Although internationalism—the ideal of global, Third World solidarity—had long been a central tenet of the Cuban Revolution, it was not until the late 1970s that it began to acquire tangible political and strategic momentum. Several explanations have been proposed for this development. One possible reason is that, during the Revolution's first decade, the primary focus was directed towards the project of national reconstruction. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, initiatives such as the Literacy Campaign and the Agrarian Reform placed emphasis on building the foundations of a new Cuban society, thereby diverting attention from extensive participation on the international stage.

Conversely, the emergence and consolidation of Cuba's distinctive form of internationalism in the late 1970s may also be interpreted as a pragmatic response to geopolitical isolation rather than a purely altruistic endeavour. Beset by the United States embargo and, at times, marginalised by the Soviet Union (Kapcia, 2014, p. 118), Cuba found itself precariously positioned on the periphery of the global order. In an effort to counter this isolation and assert its relevance within international politics, the revolutionary government increasingly prioritised internationalist engagement and the cultivation of partnerships with other nations of the Global South.

One of the partnerships that assumed paramount importance for Cuba during this period was its essential, albeit asymmetrical, relationship with the Soviet Union. As previously discussed, the conclusion of the Revolution's first decade was characterised by considerable challenges, both domestically and internationally. On the domestic front, the post-Guevara era was marked by growing inefficiencies and administrative disarray. In a retrospective interview, Cuban historian and philosopher Juan Antonio Blanco

underscored the pervasive dysfunction that afflicted the revolutionary administration following Guevara's departure. He attributed much of this instability to the dismantling of the *Budgetary Finance System* (BFS), a framework devised by Guevara that integrated administrative, financial, and technological methods derived from U.S. corporate practices, thereby "adapting the centralisation and efficiency inherent in monopoly capitalism to the socialist planned economy" (Yaffe, 2012, p. 14). Although its abolition was ostensibly intended to curb bureaucratic excess, it instead eroded the structural coherence of Cuba's centralised economic system.

This period also witnessed the controversial *Ofensiva Revolucionaria* of 1968, a sweeping campaign that sought to nationalise all remaining non-agricultural private enterprises—approximately 55,000 small businesses. Far from advancing socialist development, these measures further destabilised the national economy and compounded existing inefficiencies. As Blanco's interviewer perceptively observed, "in trying to eliminate the worst excesses of the marketplace, the government eliminated the market itself" (Blanco and Benjamin ed. by Chomsky, 2020, p. 396).

Years of Grey in Colourful Cuba: 1971-1976:

The early 1970s are widely recognised as a period during which the Cuban Revolution conformed to a "greater degree of political orthodoxy" in both its foreign and domestic policies (French, 2000, p. 34). The institutionalisation of Marxism–Leninism within Revolutionary Cuba precipitated rapid and far-reaching transformations across political, economic, and social spheres, as well as a marked realignment of the nation's international orientation. Domestically, beyond the formal entrenchment of Marxism–Leninism in the 1976 Constitution (French, 2004, p. 34), one of the most conspicuous expressions of this ideological consolidation was the period commonly referred to as the *Quinquenio Gris* ("Five Grey Years"), which extended from 1971 to 1976 (Weppler-Grogan, 2010, p. 145).

This period signified the deepened Sovietisation of Cuban cultural and institutional life. Drawing heavily upon the restrictive cultural paradigms of the USSR and the wider Eastern Bloc, the Cuban government initiated a process known as *parametración*, which entailed the systematic vetting of cultural workers according to their ideological reliability. This process extended to the scrutiny of individuals' religious convictions, sexual orientation, and other elements of personal identity. The state consequently imposed stringent controls on cultural production and discouraged interaction with foreign—particularly Western—cultural currents. A notable manifestation of this was the official censure of music by The Beatles, which Cuban youth were actively discouraged from listening to (Weppler-Grogan, 2010, p. 147). Such measures of cultural repression resulted in the marginalisation of numerous artists and intellectuals, many of whom were silenced or compelled to withdraw from public life altogether. Simultaneously, the number of Soviet instructors within Cuban art institutions increased, while aspiring Cuban artists were dispatched to Moscow for training—further entrenching Soviet cultural norms within the Cuban artistic milieu (Weppler-Grogan, 2010, pp. 147, 153).

Alongside cultural transformation, the *Quinquenio Gris* also signalled a significant reconfiguration of Cuba's economic structure. During this period, the Revolutionary Government abandoned Guevara's *Budgetary Finance System* (BFS), which had been predicated on voluntary labour and ideological commitment to a "moral economy" (Weppler-Grogan, 2010, p. 153). In its stead, the regime adopted the Soviet-style *Sistema de Dirección y Planificación de la Economía*(SDPE) (Eckstein, 1990, p. 76). This framework introduced a model of centralised, top-down economic planning and management, thereby diminishing the participatory role of the working class and consolidating a more bureaucratic mode of governance akin to Soviet state capitalism.

In parallel with these domestic transformations, Cuba's foreign policy during this era likewise came to reflect a pronounced adherence to Soviet orthodoxy. For much of the early 1970s, the island's commitment to *internacionalismo proletario* appeared to

be in abeyance. This recalibration is aptly illustrated in Fidel Castro's May Day address of 1973, in which he declared:

"En los años futuros pueden surgir formas de cooperación entre la Revolución cubana y otros gobiernos latinoamericanos, aunque no sean socialistas" (Scott, 2008, p. 13), translated as, "In future years, forms of cooperation may emerge between the Cuban Revolution and other Latin American governments, even if they are not socialist."

This pragmatic reorientation found tangible expression in the normalisation of diplomatic relations with several Latin American nations, including Chile, Peru, Argentina, and Venezuela, between 1970 and 1975 (Scott, 2008, p. 13). Such moderation in Cuba's foreign policy aligned closely with Soviet strategic interests, as it served to reduce regional tensions and facilitated the island's long-sought admission to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1972—a request that had been repeatedly denied throughout the 1960s (Kapcia, 2014, p. 119).

Furthermore, this period witnessed a marked expansion of Cuba's diplomatic and economic relations beyond the socialist bloc. Engagements with Western Europe and U.S.-aligned nations increased substantially, evidenced by the extension of significant lines of credit from France and the United Kingdom—amounting to approximately $350 million and $250 million respectively (Gleijeses, 2002, p. 224)—and by the emergence of Japan as Cuba's largest non-Communist trading partner. This phase of détente culminated in a perceptible softening of the United States' position towards Cuba, epitomised by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's proposal for the "full normalisation of relations" during this period (Gleijeses, 2002, p. 224).

The return of Revolution abroad: 1976-1986:

Although Revolutionary Cuba's domestic policy continued to operate broadly within Marxist–Leninist frameworks during this period, the island's adherence to Soviet *realpolitik* on the international stage throughout the early 1970s ultimately

represented a temporary capitulation in its pursuit of the Revolution's internationalist ambitions. The latter half of the 1970s and the early 1980s, however, signalled a decisive reaffirmation of Cuba's commitment to *proletarian internationalism*, as the nation significantly expanded its involvement across the Global South. This renewed engagement was characterised by the projection of Cuba's internationalist ethos through a diverse range of economic, military, and medical initiatives.

A particularly notable manifestation of this resurgence in internationalism as a cornerstone of Cuban foreign policy was the establishment of the *Sistema Económico Latinoamericano* (SELA) in 1975 (SELA, 2025, accessed 18 August 2025). The organisation sought to promote "a system of consultation and coordination for the Latin American and Caribbean region to adopt common positions and strategies on economic issues before countries, groups of countries, forums and international organisations, and to foster cooperation and integration among Latin American and Caribbean nations."

Virtually all Latin American nations participated in this organisation, underscoring Cuba's enduring and demonstrable commitment to internationalism. This commitment extended decisively into Africa during the latter half of the 1970s, a period in which Cuba's model of medical internationalism assumed heightened prominence. One of the most salient manifestations of this was the *Programa Integral de Salud* (PIS) (Kirk, 2012, p. 23), an initiative designed to provide medical training to thousands of young people while establishing healthcare infrastructure across a range of African nations, including Angola, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, and Uganda (Castro et al., 2014, p. 596).

Cuba's cooperation with Angola, in particular, has been characterised by Hatzky as "the world's most comprehensive example of civil and military cooperation between two formerly colonised countries" (Hatzky, ed. by Bonacci et al., 2020, p. 87). The scale of this collaboration is reflected in the deployment of over 300,000 Cubans to Angola between 1975 and 1991, during which

approximately 2,000 lost their lives. Such sacrifices earned Cuba considerable international esteem, most notably from Nelson Mandela, who affirmed that South Africans "vow never to forget this unparalleled example of selfless internationalism" (Kirk, 2012, pp. 23–24).

Cuba's internationalist endeavours reached their zenith in 1979 with the hosting of the Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an event widely regarded as the "high point of Cuban prestige among Third World nations" (French, 2000, p. 38). The NAM was, at its core, a profoundly anti-imperialist project—explicitly *anti-colonial, anti-neo-colonial, anti-racist, anti-Zionist,* and *anti-fascist* in orientation (French, 2000, p. 38). Its principal objective was to promote solidarity and cooperation among the nations of the Global South, enabling them to resist the political, economic, and ideological dominance of the contemporary superpowers. In doing so, the movement sought to cultivate an autonomous sphere of influence and mutual support, positioned outside the bipolar framework of Cold War hegemony that divided the East and the West.

Back to the Beginning? 1986-Present Day

After nearly a decade of relative prosperity and stability, Revolutionary Cuba once again found itself on the precipice of profound international isolation. This period can be characterised as a protracted existential struggle over the identity and direction of the Revolution. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, this era witnessed yet another ideological recalibration, with the revolutionary leadership employing ideology as a means of fostering social cohesion. Central to this endeavour was the revival—and continued mobilisation—of the elusive notion of *Cubanía*.

Denoting a sense of inherent "Cuban-ness," *Cubanía* has been described by Kapcia as an "ideological reservoir," one that is "malleable to all, by all, for all" (Kapcia, 2000, pp. 6, 123). This ideological shift warrants particular attention, as it was instrumental in the leadership's attempt to "reinvigorate" popular

faith in the Revolution during one of its most turbulent moments (Kapcia, 2014, p. 162). During this time, renewed emphasis was placed on acting—both domestically and internationally—in a manner that was distinctly and authentically Cuban. This return to the Revolution's original ethos, defined by the pursuit of an independent trajectory free from external influence, was not, however, a product of ideological voluntarism. Rather, as Kapcia observes, "Cuban leadership rarely enjoyed unfettered freedom to act" (Kapcia, 2014, p. 62); the reassertion of *Cubanía* thus emerged less from desire than from necessity.

Rectification of the Revolution: 1986-1989

Just as the failure of the Ten-Million-Ton Harvest had served as the principal catalyst for the preceding ideological reorientation, this subsequent phase of the Cuban Revolution was similarly precipitated by a series of multifaceted developments that compelled a fundamental reassessment of its character and direction. The first major challenge to the Revolution's legitimacy—and to the perceived value of its continuation—was the failure of the New Jewel Movement on the Caribbean island of Grenada. Occurring between 1979 and 1983, Cuba had been deeply involved in and actively supportive of this revolutionary project. Its collapse, according to Hernández, exerted "a deep impact on political processes, civic culture and Cuban revolutionary ideology" (Hernández, 2010, p. 52).

The downfall of the New Jewel Movement, brought about by a combination of internal divisions within the Grenadian leadership and direct United States military intervention, reverberated profoundly in Cuba. It dealt a severe blow to the institutional confidence of the Revolution and to Cuban society more broadly, prompting renewed introspection regarding the viability and trajectory of its internationalist commitments (Hernández, 2010, p. 53).

This growing disillusionment with the Revolution's trajectory, and with the apparatus through which it was sustained, continued to intensify until 1986, when a comprehensive campaign was

launched to reassess and redirect its course. This initiative, known as the *Rectification Process* (*Proceso de Rectificación*), sought to address what the revolutionary government identified as "errors and negative tendencies" (Eckstein, 1990, p. 67). According to Eckstein, the Rectification Process lacked "any formal blueprint," being instead driven by a pursuit of "ideological purity" (Eckstein, 1990, pp. 68–69).

In the absence of a structured programme, the Process was characterised by sweeping policy reforms that, as Kapcia observes, appeared to signal a partial return to several of the Guevarist principles and practices abandoned during the 1960s (Kapcia, 2014, p. 154). One such "course correction" undertaken by the revolutionary state was the reassertion of control over housing market prices, which had risen sharply as a result of intermediaries exploiting state-supplied materials to charge artificially inflated rates (Eckstein, 1990, p. 69). Moreover, this period witnessed the revival of mass mobilisation—a defining feature of the Revolution's early years—most notably through the deployment of *minibrigadistas*, voluntary workforces tasked with constructing housing, social facilities, and childcare centres (Eckstein, 1990, p. 69).

A Special Period in a Time of Peace: 1989-1994:

The conclusion of the Rectification Process, along with the relative stability that the Revolution had previously sustained, was precipitated by a singular and catastrophic event which not only posed an existential threat in its own right but also engendered a series of profound secondary crises. This pivotal rupture was, of course, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989—a development that left Cuba profoundly isolated on the international stage and precipitated severe domestic upheaval in the form of the *Período Especial* (Special Period).

The Special Period presents considerable challenges in terms of periodisation. While some scholars define it as spanning from 1990 to 1994 (Benzing, 2005, p. 69), others contend that, characterised as it is by enduring internal hardship and structural fragility, the

Special Period effectively persists as the Revolution's prevailing condition. For the sake of analytical clarity, however, this discussion delineates the Special Period as occurring between 1989 and 1994. The dissolution of the USSR, together with the collapse of its institutional frameworks—including the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the broader Eastern Bloc—plunged Cuba into a state of acute geopolitical and economic isolation, as the island lost both its principal international ally and its dominant trading partner.

By 1989, approximately 79% of Cuba's trade had been conducted with the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a figure that attests to the extent of Cuba's integration into the Soviet economic system. Beyond trade, the USSR had functioned as a crucial source of developmental and financial support, providing substantial economic aid in the form of loans and subsidies. Between 1986 and 1990 alone, the Soviet Union extended loans amounting to $11.6 billion (USD) and granted an additional $10 billion in non-repayable price subsidies. The depth of Cuba's dependency upon the Soviet Union is underscored by the ensuing economic collapse: between 1989 and 1993, Cuba's GDP contracted by 34.8%, exports declined by 78.9%, and imports fell by 75.6% (Benzing, 2005, p. 70).

On the domestic front, the repercussions of the Soviet Union's collapse were equally catastrophic. The dissolution of Cuba's principal economic partner precipitated acute food shortages, infrastructural deterioration, and a pronounced decline in living standards. The social and nutritional consequences were severe: the average daily caloric intake of the Cuban population fell precipitously from 2,908 kilocalories per person in 1989 to merely 1,863 in 1994—a reduction of approximately 38% (Benzing, 2005, p. 70). Employment levels similarly contracted, with job availability declining by an estimated 50% in 1991 alone (Mendes & Marques, 2009, p. 64).

Moreover, the economic disintegration of this period fostered the rapid proliferation of informal economic activities, most notably the expansion of the black market and the widespread circulation of

U.S. dollars. These developments not only eroded the ideological integrity of the Revolution but also severely undermined the state's capacity to regulate monetary policy and control inflation.

An Alternative Global Vision: 1994-Present Day

In an effort to amend Cuba's internal crises and extricate itself from international isolation, the Revolutionary Government once again invoked the 'ideological reservoir' of *Cubanía*. This notion was employed not only to galvanise an ideologically despondent populace but also to attract new international allies through the projection of Cuba's longstanding cultural, political, and social commitment to internationalism—a commitment that had garnered considerable global esteem over previous decades.

One of the more understated manifestations of *Cubanía* during this period was the rearticulation of the 1992 Constitution. This revision attenuated the overt Soviet ideological imprint of earlier decades, rendering the constitutional language more distinctly 'Cuban' in both tone and substance (Kapcia, 2014, p. 160). A more conspicuous and expansive mobilisation of *Cubanía*, however, emerged with the inauguration of the *Batalla de Ideas* (Battle of Ideas) in 2000. This campaign constituted a concerted effort to revitalise national culture and advance the construction of a more equitable society, evoking the rhetoric and methods of mass mobilisation characteristic of the Revolution's formative years.

The *Batalla de Ideas* encompassed a multifaceted programme centred on six principal domains: socially productive employment, social welfare and security, education, culture, health, and sport (Marques & Mendes, 2009, p. 73). Its overarching objective was to re-energise the Cuban population ideologically (Kapcia, 2014, p. 162), fostering renewed collective engagement with the Revolutionary project and restoring confidence in its enduring legitimacy and purpose.

The policies implemented under the *Batalla de Ideas* were, by numerous measures, deemed successful. For example, the emphasis on socially productive employment resulted in the

creation of approximately 380,000 jobs within a five-year period, thereby reducing the urban unemployment rate to a mere 1.9 per cent—a figure rarely achieved even in advanced capitalist economies (Marques & Mendes, 2009, p. 73). Among the most noteworthy initiatives was the *Programa de Trabajadores Sociales* (Social Workers Programme), which targeted Cuban youth as both agents and beneficiaries of revolutionary renewal. Encompassing 7,200 students aged between seventeen and twenty-two from four national training institutions, the programme sought to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility through direct community engagement. Participants were assigned socially oriented tasks—such as providing assistance to elderly citizens living alone—while simultaneously undertaking a ten-month intensive academic course delivered by university lecturers. This educational component frequently served as a pathway to higher education, reinforcing the programme's dual objective of social service and intellectual formation.

The *Batalla de Ideas* also placed significant emphasis on the dissemination and decentralisation of cultural initiatives. A salient example of this was the expansion of Havana's International Book Fair, which by 2006 had extended its reach to thirty cities across the island. Attendance figures rose dramatically from 200,000 in 2000 to four million in 2006, during which time approximately 2.9 million books were sold—a compelling testament to the campaign's extensive cultural impact and popular resonance (Marques & Mendes, 2009, p. 74).

Beyond domestic initiatives, the revolutionary government also sought to re-engage with the foundational principles of the Revolution on the international stage, reaffirming Cuba's enduring commitment to the ideals of solidarity that had characterised the socialist era. One of the most prominent manifestations of this renewed internationalism was the establishment of the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA) in 2004, a cooperative venture between Cuba and Venezuela. Conceived as an alternative model of regional integration, ALBA sought to counter the neoliberal orthodoxy promoted by institutions such as the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The alliance subsequently expanded to include Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda, facilitating collaboration in spheres such as energy infrastructure, financial coordination, and social policy (Artaraz, 2012, p. 31).

Moreover, this period was marked by a substantial expansion of Cuba's long-standing commitment to medical internationalism. By 2006, this policy had been extended to sixty-six countries and involved the participation of more than 24,000 Cuban healthcare professionals, thereby reaffirming the Revolution's internationalist ethos while simultaneously positioning *Cubanía* as a global vehicle for humanitarian engagement (Mendes & Marques, 2009, p. 75).

In examining Cuba's approach to medical internationalism, María Castro observes that the so-called 'Cuban approach' has consistently prioritised the cultivation of a long-term vision and the establishment of frameworks through which 'the project will be sustained by local communities once the collaboration ends' (Castro et al., 2014, p. 561). In essence, rather than offering merely short-term assistance, Cuba's model emphasises capacity-building and the transfer of skills, thereby enabling recipient communities to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain developmental progress autonomously. This ethos equally extends to Cuba's educational initiatives, most notably exemplified by the Bolivian literacy campaign.

The Bolivian Literacy Campaign commenced in January 2006 with the arrival of a contingent of Cuban educational advisors and formally concluded in December 2008. The Bolivian government characterised this initiative as the "refoundation" of the nation, a term that underscores its profound socio-political and cultural significance. At the beginning of the decade, Bolivia's illiteracy rate stood at 13.3%, a figure that the newly elected government of Evo Morales regarded as a principal instrument of oppression and social domination. Within three years of the campaign's inception, approximately 820,000 Bolivian adults—of whom an estimated 70%

were women—had attained basic literacy. Importantly, the campaign transcended Spanish-language instruction, extending to indigenous languages such as Quechua and Aymara. Through these efforts, 14,000 participants achieved literacy in Quechua and a further 25,000 in Aymara (Artaraz, 2012, p. 33), thereby strengthening the linguistic and cultural vitality of Bolivia's indigenous communities and reaffirming the campaign's commitment to inclusive national renewal.

The outcome of the Bolivian literacy campaign, as characterised by Artaraz, represented an 'evolution of policy thinking' (Artaraz, 2012, p. 35). This phrase denotes a broader shift in the Bolivian government's post-campaign approach: attention was no longer confined solely to the attainment of basic literacy but extended to the enhancement of educational standards and the establishment of a comprehensive, universal education system. The campaign highlighted the principle that the eradication of illiteracy could only be effectively realised by confronting the structural inequalities and entrenched forms of oppression within Bolivian society. As Artaraz observes, it is 'obvious' (Artaraz, 2012, p. 35) that the campaign's success would have been unattainable without the expertise provided by Cuban educators.

Central to this endeavour was the deployment of the *Yo Sí Puedo* (YSP) literacy programme, which was structured around face-to-face instruction in small groups. YSP was designed as an efficient and accessible method of adult literacy education, enabling participants to complete the course within approximately three months. Drawing upon pedagogical insights derived from the Cuban Literacy Campaign, YSP integrated innovative audio-visual technologies, incorporating pre-recorded video lessons alongside a corresponding textbook for each participant (Artaraz, 2012, p. 33). Its flexible design allowed for adaptation across diverse regional, social, and linguistic contexts. The programme's implementation was instrumental to the campaign's success, facilitating literacy acquisition not only in Spanish but also in indigenous languages such as Quechua and Aymara, thereby promoting cultural and

linguistic inclusivity and reinforcing the campaign's broader emancipatory objectives.

Conclusion:

As noted at the outset of this chapter, an understanding of Cuba's pursuit of an alternative form of globalisation necessitates a thorough appreciation of the island nation's historical and socio-political context. The purpose of this chapter has been twofold: to elucidate and critically examine this context, and to demonstrate that, despite the constraints historically imposed upon Cuba in the conduct of its domestic and international affairs, the ideal of internationalism has persisted consistently across every decade, epoch, and iteration of the Revolution's evolving identity. Whether framed as selfless action on behalf of others or as the pursuit of mutual benefit, this global outlook has permeated every facet of Cuban identity, consistently emphasising the significance of international events and concerns.

Cuban internationalism is distinctive in that it does not merely seek to impose a worldview upon other nations or provide aid exclusively to those aligned with its strategic interests. Instead, it constitutes an enduring commitment to global solidarity. Whether through the exportation of literacy programmes or the provision of medical assistance, Cuba has consistently sought to offer sustainable support founded upon mutual respect, equipping recipient nations with the tools necessary for self-sufficiency rather than merely supplying temporary solutions. While the altruistic nature of these endeavours may be open to debate, it remains indisputable that Cuba's internationalist projects have imparted enduring capacities to its partners. As evidenced throughout this chapter, these initiatives have generated transnational linkages and networks that endure over time, effectively constituting an alternative model of global engagement.

Throughout this chapter, numerous concepts and terms have been introduced that warrant further examination. Just as this chapter has sought to situate Cuban internationalism within its broader historical and socio-political context, the subsequent chapter will

endeavour to conceptualise these key terms and explore their interrelations. Specifically, the next chapter will seek to define and analyse terms such as *internationalism*, *globalisation*, and *solidarity*, considering their various forms, expressions, and implications within the Cuban and wider global context.

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Chapter 2 - ‘What’s in a name?’: Conceptualising Globalisation, Internationalism, and Solidarity

As with contextualising Cuba’s history and socio-political struggles, it is equally necessary to conceptualise the key terms that underpin this study. Globalisation, internationalism, and solidarity are terms frequently invoked in contemporary discourse, yet their meanings are often fluid and context dependent. They may refer variously to hegemonic, homogenising global cultural forces; the provision of aid to marginalised or displaced populations; or the unconditional support of specific groups. Conceptualising these terms is essential, not only because they constitute the foundational lexicon of this research, but also because any inquiry into alternative forms of globalisation—or comparable phenomena—requires an understanding of the conventional interpretations, as well as the connotations these carry.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to elucidate and critically examine the multiple dimensions of *Globalisation*, *Internationalism*, and *Solidarity*, thereby establishing a conceptual framework for exploring their alternative manifestations. This analysis will be structured across three sections. The first section will consider *Globalisation* and *Internationalism*, given that both terms inherently invoke differing models of global organisation and interaction; their meanings, historical development, and diverse forms will be examined in detail. The second section will focus primarily on *Solidarity*, tracing its origins, evolution, and the various ideological and socio-political influences that have shaped its contemporary usage. The third and final section will synthesise these discussions, highlighting the interrelations among these terms and assessing their mutual impact within the contemporary global landscape.

A tale of two terms: Globalisation & Internationalism

This section is entitled *"A Tale of Two Terms"* in recognition of the close conceptual relationship between *globalisation*and *internationalism*. Prior to engaging in a more detailed analysis, it is necessary first to clarify the fundamental meaning of each term.

Among the myriad definitions that attempt to capture the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of globalisation, Artaraz offers a concise and cogent formulation. In *Global Social Policy*, he defines globalisation as "a series of processes of integration that emerge from the exchange of ideas, goods, and culture" and further elaborates that it "represents a transformation in the organisation of social relations and transactions" (Artaraz, 2016, p. 17). From this definition, it is evident that globalisation encompasses the increasing interconnectedness of societies and cultures. It implies that, through technological advancement and the accelerated transmission of information, the traditional concept of nationhood is progressively attenuated, giving rise to a new form of global citizenry in which cultures, histories, and potentially even languages risk becoming homogenised (Melluish, 2014, p. 538).

By contrast, internationalism is concerned less with structural integration and more with ethical and political commitments across national boundaries. Halliday, in *Three Concepts of Internationalism*, succinctly defines it as the "idea that we both are and should be part of a broader community than that of the nation or state." While this provides a useful starting point, Jones offers a more expansive conception, defining internationalism as "the promotion of global peace and well-being through the development and application of international structures, primarily but not solely of an intergovernmental kind" (Jones, 1998, p. 143). Together, these definitions underscore that, while globalisation describes processes of increasing interconnectedness, internationalism emphasises normative and organisational frameworks designed to govern and guide interactions within this interconnected world.

Earlier in this section, it was noted that these two concepts are closely interrelated. Scholars who have examined the relationship between globalisation and internationalism, however, have reached markedly divergent conclusions. Phillip Jones and Fred Halliday exemplify two such extremes: Jones asserts that "the logic of globalisation contrasts markedly with internationalism" (Jones, 1998, p. 143), whereas Halliday contends that the "internationalising" of the world is essentially "the same thing" as globalisation (Halliday, 1988, p. 187). These contrasting perspectives are noteworthy, as they illustrate the inherently complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between the two phenomena, encapsulating the nuanced interplay that defines their connection.

At their most fundamental level, both globalisation and internationalism can be understood as systems—conceptual frameworks for how an increasingly interconnected world either functions or ought to function. Internationalism posits the deliberate coordination and cooperation of nations, states, or intergovernmental organisations to foster a more ordered and cooperative global system, whereas globalisation can be viewed not as a guiding principle but as the outcome of these processes: the observable integration of economies, societies, and cultures on a global scale. Both concepts, therefore, imply the emergence of a more homogenised global outlook, culture, and social organisation. The remainder of this chapter will examine these concepts in greater depth, analysing their meanings, historical origins, and practical applications, and detailing the various forms and modes through which they manifest.

What is globalisation?

In order to comprehend what globalisation is, how it operates, and what potential alternatives might exist, it is first necessary to engage with the concept itself and, critically, with its historical and intellectual foundations. Conceptualising globalisation in a manner coherent with the arguments advanced in this study presents a significant challenge, given the term's complexity and multifaceted

nature. What is often overlooked is that the world has long functioned as an interconnected system. Although the transmission of information was historically slower and the dissemination of technologies more gradual, global interconnections have existed for centuries. Martell, in *The Sociology of Globalisation*, highlights this continuity, citing examples such as the movement of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples and the establishment of expansive trade networks, including the Silk Road (Martell, 2016, p. 48). Contemporary usage of the term, however, emerged only in the 1980s, initially within North American academic institutions and subsequently in the financial and economic press, which contributed to the universalised understanding of globalisation that prevails today (Vega, 2014, p. 589).

As previously noted, Artaraz's definition of globalisation refers to a "series of processes of integration" (Artaraz, 2016, p. 17). At first glance, this might suggest that globalisation is an essentially neutral phenomenon: a technologically driven intensification of interconnectedness, representing little more than the continuation of historical trends. However, closer examination reveals that the term has been strategically appropriated by particular actors to denote a specific form of international economic integration—one in which investor rights are prioritised, while the interests of broader populations are largely incidental. This represents the dominant form of globalisation that has prevailed since the 1980s: neoliberal globalisation.

Two peas in a pod: Neoliberalism and Globalisation

Neoliberalism can be defined succinctly as a "political and economic ideology that represents the interests of market leaders—primarily large corporations and financial institutions—in their tendency to expand globally" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 7). This all-encompassing ideology gradually achieved widespread acceptance among state actors and international organisations, establishing itself as the hegemonic form of contemporary globalisation. Not only did neoliberalism come to constitute the

dominant mode of globalisation, but it has increasingly become synonymous with the concept itself. Consequently, wherever the effects of globalisation are observed—whether in the erosion of state authority or the intensification of global wealth inequalities—it is widely recognised that neoliberal policies constitute the primary drivers of these transformations.

The term globalisation, in its contemporary usage, only began to gain widespread traction in North America during the 1980s, coinciding with the consolidation of neoliberal policies. It is therefore understandable that these two phenomena are so frequently intertwined, as they emerged and expanded contemporaneously. In this regard, the relationship between neoliberalism and globalisation presents something of a causal paradox. Did neoliberal policies emerge and gain momentum as a consequence of increasing global interconnectedness, or did globalisation only truly take root because neoliberalism provided dominant powers with a mechanism for enduring, profitable, and hegemonic control over the rest of the world?

These questions, while perhaps ultimately unanswerable, do not constitute the primary focus of this chapter, nor of this study as a whole. As noted at the outset, the purpose of this chapter is to excavate and contextualise. With this in mind, the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant ideological framework underpinning contemporary globalisation is widely attributed to the Washington Consensus (Biegon, 2017, p. 84). The term 'Washington Consensus' was first coined in 1989 by the economist John Williamson, referring to a set of ten developmental economic policies that he deemed prudent for application in Latin America and other developing regions. These 'common-sense' policies were so named because Williamson assumed they would enjoy broad agreement among policymakers in Washington as essential measures for fostering development (Williamson, ed. by Serra and Stiglitz, 2008, p. 14). Key elements of the Consensus included trade liberalisation, the liberalisation of foreign direct investment (FDI), privatisation, deregulation, and the facilitation of property rights. Although Williamson originally intended these policies to assist debtor

nations in reducing their debt burdens, in practice they facilitated the expansion of laissez-faire financial practices, which were subsequently exploited by a range of international actors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

These policies position neoliberal globalisation as 'capitalism with the gloves off and on a world scale' (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 19). Although Williamson has disputed this characterisation (Williamson, ed. by Serra and Stiglitz, 2008, pp. 20–21), it is evident that the term has evolved significantly from his original conception. The Washington Consensus is now widely cited as the principal mechanism driving the global dissemination of neoliberal policies, which, according to Powell, have produced 'heightened inequalities, deepened marginalisation, the depoliticisation of labour… insecurity and vulnerability in the workforce, the shrinking or disappearance of the social wage and the privatisation of public goods' (Powell, 2008, p. 2).

Having established the nature, origins, and dominant form of globalisation, it is now necessary to consider the apparatus through which it asserts its hegemony over the world's nations. While its economic instruments have already been discussed, it is equally important to examine the mechanisms through which globalisation is propagated via cultural and socio-political channels.

Instruments of change: the apparatus of neoliberalist globalisation

Given that contemporary globalisation finds its origins in the policies articulated under the so-called 'Washington Consensus', it is reasonable to assert that globalisation, in its current neoliberal form, is intimately tied to the hegemonic predominance of the United States (Biegon, 2017, p. 83). Of the three principal modes through which US-led neoliberal globalisation manifests, its economic apparatus is arguably the most influential and far-reaching. Central to this apparatus are three key transnational organisations (TNOs): the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank. These organisations may be understood as extensions of the Washington

Consensus, or more precisely, as instruments through which its policies are operationalised. It is therefore pertinent to ask: what precisely are the roles and functions of these organisations?

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was established in the aftermath of the Second World War by economists and policymakers from the United Kingdom and the United States, with the objective of restoring and sustaining economic prosperity that had been severely disrupted. The IMF primarily achieves this by offering a variety of loan packages, enabling member states to access the capital necessary for projects such as public infrastructure, with repayment terms varying according to the specific type of loan (Head, 2008, pp. 109–110). The IMF derives its capital from its 191 member states (IMF, 2025, accessed 20th August 2025), with the United States acting as the largest contributor, thereby securing a disproportionately influential share of voting power. This is particularly significant given that the IMF's voting system determines the allocation and mobilisation of financial resources (Head, 2008, p. 156). In addition to financial assistance, the IMF provides member states with regular consultations—typically conducted on an annual basis—and technical assistance, which encompasses guidance on the design and implementation of economic policies, as well as the drafting and evaluation of legislation (Head, 2008, p. 112).

The World Bank performs a function broadly analogous to that of the International Monetary Fund. According to Head, the World Bank is a Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) that provides loans to states seeking to finance public infrastructure projects, ranging from road construction to teacher training initiatives (Head, 2008, p. 118). The World Bank differs from the IMF in the nature and structure of the loans it provides. Broadly, it offers two types of loans: 'hard' loans and 'soft' loans. Hard loans may originate from private investors, including individuals, banks, or insurance companies, and are channelled through the MDB to the borrowing country, which is obliged to repay the loan at prevailing market interest rates. Soft loans, by contrast, are exclusively funded by the governments of wealthier states, again administered through the

World Bank, and lent to the borrowing country on highly concessional terms. These loans typically have maturities of 40 to 50 years and carry interest rates of only 1–2% (Head, 2008, pp. 123–125). In practical terms, this means that a lower-income country borrowing 10 million dollars could be required to repay up to 20 million dollars over the life of the loan. The United States remains the largest shareholder of the World Bank, holding approximately 17% of voting power as of 2007, thereby exerting significant influence over the allocation and utilisation of funds.

The third principal instrument of neoliberal economic globalisation is the World Trade Organization (WTO). Its origins can be traced to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) of 1947, with the WTO itself formally established in 1995 following the approval of the Uruguay Round agreements (Head, 2008, p. 144). Unlike the IMF or the World Bank, the WTO does not provide loans to member states (Head, 2008, p. 146). Instead, its principal functions are to facilitate compliance with the economic policies promoted by the IMF and World Bank and to adjudicate trade disputes between member nations (Head, 2008, p. 145). The overarching philosophy of the WTO can be succinctly summarised by the maxim 'world peace through world trade' (Head, 2008, p. 135), reflecting its foundational aim to promote global economic integration and stability through the regulation of international commerce.

Having thoroughly examined the principal economic apparatuses of globalisation; it is important to acknowledge that globalisation is not solely economic in character but also encompasses political and cultural dimensions. While the institutional mechanisms of these dimensions are less concretely defined, Jones identifies several defining features. In his article *Globalisation and Internationalism: Democratic Prospects for World Education*, he describes cultural globalisation as including phenomena such as deterritorialised cosmopolitanism and diversity, the global circulation of images and information, and the expansion and transformation of tourism, among others. Political globalisation, by contrast, is characterised by the situating of local issues within a broader global context, the predominance of powerful international

organisations over national institutions, and a relative diminution of the primacy of the nation-state accompanied by the strengthening of shared and global political values (Jones, 1998, p. 146).

Globalisation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, the ramifications of which are often difficult to fully apprehend. This pervasive new world order permeates all aspects of human existence, shaping our daily lives, influencing discourses, and even informing individual and collective identities. A thorough understanding of the principal form of globalisation, as well as the mechanisms through which it manifests, is a necessary precursor to conceptualising alternative models of global interconnection. Having examined globalisation in detail, it is now essential to turn attention to the other two key terms underpinning this study: internationalism and solidarity.

Homeland of Humanity: the solidary nature of internationalism

Just as internationalism and globalisation are linked, so too are internationalism and solidarity, insofar as the principles of cooperation and collaboration central to internationalism inherently presuppose an element of solidarity. Indeed, it may be argued that, in many instances, internationalism constitutes an act of solidarity, predicated upon mutual benefit and equitable relations among participants. Nevertheless, as with globalisation and neoliberalism, the precise nature of the relationship between internationalism and solidarity warrants careful consideration. While these terms may initially appear straightforward, closer examination reveals them to be as layered and complex as the previously discussed concept of globalisation. Accordingly, this discussion will first seek to conceptualise internationalism.

What is internationalism?

Although two definitions of internationalism have already been provided at the outset of this chapter, it is beneficial to offer an additional, more concise definition to further clarify the term. Krull defines internationalism as the ‘promotion of increased economic

and political cooperation amongst nations' (Krull, 2013, p. 1). At its most fundamental, conceptual level, this definition encapsulates the essence of internationalism. However, unlike globalisation, internationalism manifests in a multitude of forms and through diverse practices, which has led scholars to adopt highly pluralistic interpretations. Some, as noted previously, equate it directly with globalisation (Halliday, 1988, p. 188), whereas others conceive of it as a more utopian and altruistic ideal (Castro et al., 2014, p. 595).

There has been considerable debate regarding the precise nature and scope of the different forms of internationalism. Harris, for instance, posits that there are two primary forms: liberal, or bourgeois, internationalism and socialist, or proletarian, internationalism (Harris, 2009, p. 28). Halliday, by contrast, expands this framework to include three distinct forms: liberal internationalism, largely consistent with Harris's conception; hegemonic internationalism, characterised by integration on asymmetrical and unequal terms; and revolutionary internationalism (Halliday, 1988, pp. 192–194). A synthesis of these perspectives provides the most effective conceptualisation of internationalism. Liberal internationalism is inherently hegemonic, shaped by factors such as European cosmopolitanism and the presumption of Western civilisational primacy (Harris, 2009, p. 28). Revolutionary internationalism, in contrast, is inherently socialist, drawing its philosophical foundations from Marxist theory (Halliday, 1988, p. 195).

Having established the two principal forms of internationalism that this study considers, it is now necessary to examine them in greater detail, outlining their defining characteristics and modes of expression.

My way or the highway: The unequal nature of liberal internationalism

Liberal internationalism may be most succinctly defined as the "strengthening, expanding, and deepening of international institutions in order to foster cooperation against common problems and to bring the globe closer to the long-held liberal ideal

of a world governed by a reasonably just, well-enforced set of rules" (Harris, 2009, p. 23). This perspective adopts an essentially optimistic view, positing that societies, as well as autonomous individuals, can progressively align with shared objectives of peace and prosperity. Liberal internationalism has underpinned much of Western political thought and praxis, serving as the dominant intellectual framework informing the creation and operation of numerous Western-led international organisations. Notable examples include the United Nations (UN) and the League of Nations (LoN), both of which reflect the principles and institutional strategies characteristic of this approach (Halliday, 1998, p. 195).

What, then, are the organisations that exemplify liberal internationalism, and in what ways, and to what ends, do they assert hegemonic influence? To address this succinctly, it is most effective to examine the functions and impacts of these transnational organisations in chronological order. As Yglesias notes, the League of Nations (LoN) was founded upon charters replete with high ideals and ambitious objectives (Maiolo & Robson, 2025, p. 1). Established in the aftermath of the First World War at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the LoN formed part of the Treaty of Versailles, with its initial membership comprising the most powerful nations of the period, notably Britain and Japan (Maiolo & Robson, 2025, pp. 5–7).

Maiolo and Robson assert that, despite the League's ostensible goals of "international cooperation among equally sovereign states," the promotion of economic development, and the establishment of new forms of global security and prosperity, its underlying purpose was inherently hegemonic. The LoN sought to impose a particular vision of internationalism upon less powerful member states, including China and regions across the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa (Maiolo & Robson, 2025, pp. 1–5). In effect, the League functioned as an instrument of what Maiolo and Robson term "liberal imperialism," consolidating control over global resources and monopolising economic and political power on an international scale (Maiolo & Robson, 2025, p. 5).

Inheriting the League of Nations' buildings, assets, and archives, the United Nations (UN) assumed the role of the League's successor following its formal dissolution on 18 April 1946. The UN's purpose and objectives can be understood as a continuation of the League's aspirations. As articulated in the Preamble to the UN Charter, the organisation is tasked with seeking "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war…reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights…ensure the equal rights of…nations large and small…and to promote social progress" (Fasulo, 2021, p. 1). While these aims are undeniably laudable, it is evident that the UN represents a further manifestation of liberal, hegemonic internationalism.

Despite encompassing 193 member states (Fasulo, 2021, p. 3), the UN maintains an uneven distribution of power. The United States, as former President Barack Obama noted, possesses a substantial stake in a "strong United Nations" and derives strategic benefit from a "global institution" such as the UN. This dominance enables the USA to shape global rules and norms, utilising UN infrastructure to enhance its own security and influence, while distributing the associated financial responsibilities among other member states (Fasulo, 2021, p. 10, 12). Moreover, the UN serves as the parent body to previously discussed institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose hegemonic and neoliberal policies have been critically examined above (Fasulo, 2021, p. 9).

In the discussion of liberal internationalism above, it becomes evident how organisations of this kind contribute to the creation of an imperfect global system. Embedded within the charters and stated objectives of these institutions is a clear drive to foster a better world. Given that many of these organisations and their mechanisms emerged as responses to catastrophic global events, it is reasonable to assume that a significant number of their founders were genuinely motivated by a desire to prevent a recurrence of such devastation. Nevertheless, two concurrent realities can coexist. While some actors were driven by altruistic intent, it is equally apparent that certain powers perceived the post-

conflict reconstruction of the world as an opportunity to expand their influence and consolidate control, thereby creating a complex international system designed to entrench their dominance.

It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to assert that this form of internationalism—although pursued in part with noble objectives—was enacted on uneven, unequal, and hegemonic terms, thereby revealing its fundamentally exploitative character (Harris, 2009, p. 28). This analysis underscores a continuity in the global distribution of power, providing a clear historical prelude to the emergence of contemporary neoliberal globalisation.

What is Solidarity?

At the outset of this section, it was proposed that internationalism may be most effectively conceptualised through two principal forms. Having now examined liberal, hegemonic internationalism, it is pertinent to turn attention to the alternative form: revolutionary, socialist internationalism. In the preceding discussion of the distinctions between different forms of internationalism, it was noted that internationalism may, in certain contexts, be regarded as an act of solidarity. To elaborate, it is precisely this revolutionary, socialist variant of internationalism that exemplifies solidarity in practice. However, in order to fully articulate the connection between these two concepts and to demonstrate how internationalism can constitute an act of solidarity, it is first necessary to establish a clear understanding of what is meant by solidarity itself. This requires a careful consideration of the term's diverse meanings and interpretations.

The precise meaning of solidarity, as well as the manner in which it ought to be enacted, remains a subject of ongoing debate. As a concept, solidarity proves notoriously difficult to define. Within the extensive body of literature addressing the topic, interpretations of its nature are highly diverse, and attempts to provide a definitive characterisation often verge on the mythological. This challenge has been noted by numerous scholars; for instance, Avery Kolers, in his work *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*, acknowledges the conceptual ambiguity of solidarity, describing it as 'very fuzzy'. He proceeds to

delineate several distinct forms of solidarity, including human solidarity, which posits that a 'love of all humanity' should underpin support for 'peace and the elimination of poverty beyond borders'; national or civic solidarity, which encourages allegiance to one's compatriots; and class solidarity, which seeks to unite social classes, typically the working class (Kolers, 2016, p.4).

One factor that distinguishes different forms of solidarity lies in the various schools of thought through which it has been conceptualised. There appears to be a degree of consensus regarding the principal traditions and their historical origins. Garbe, for instance, succinctly categorises these intellectual lineages as the Greek and Roman traditions, the Biblical tradition, and the French revolutionary tradition (Garbe, 2022, p.30). Of these, the Greek and Roman traditions are the most ancient, rooted in the Roman concept of *obligatio in solidum*, which denotes the 'unlimited liability of each individual member within a family or other community to pay common debts', and the Greek notion of *polis*, which gives rise to the 'idea of a comprehensive community including all human beings' (Bayertz, 2013, p.3–5). The Biblical tradition extended these classical ideas, yet its rationale for solidarity was moral and spiritual: all humanity is regarded as children of God, and therefore as brothers, rendering the care of others a moral, ethical, and spiritual imperative (Bayertz, 2013, p.3–5). This concept of fraternity was subsequently echoed during the French Revolution, in which the principle of *fraternité* became closely associated with solidarity. However, rather than clarifying the term, this association arguably heightened its conceptual ambiguity, leaving its precise definition as elusive as in previous traditions (Bayertz, 2013, p.29).

These diverse origins and schools of thought serve as foundational exemplars of human solidarity, which can be regarded as the bedrock of the concept itself, providing the rationale for why humanity ought to engage in acts of solidarity. Within the scope of this work, the specific form of solidarity under consideration—central to revolutionary internationalism—is political solidarity. While clearly rooted in human solidarity, insofar as its participants

seek to improve the lives of those with whom they are in solidarity, political solidarity is enacted in a distinct manner. Deveaux emphasises this distinction, noting that 'political solidarity is more than just a feeling or attitude, but requires action' (Deveaux, 2021, p.202).

Contextualised as a 'response to a situation of injustice or oppression' and grounded in shared interests, Deveaux characterises political solidarity as acting *with* those in solidarity rather than *on behalf* of them, asserting that 'genuine solidarity thus requires treating with respect those with whom one is in solidarity', thereby distinguishing it from mere acts of charity (Deveaux, 2021, pp.201, 203). Kolers similarly contends that political solidarity comprises 'reason-driven political actions on others' terms', emphasising that 'solidarity is achieved by the act of honouring—not crossing—the picket line' (Kolers, 2016, p.50).

To illustrate political solidarity in a historical context, Kolers invokes the example of Rosa Parks. In this scenario, a white bus passenger seeking to support Parks would demonstrate genuine political solidarity not by imposing their own judgment, but by adhering to Parks' explicit instructions, thereby respecting her agency. Kolers encapsulates this principle succinctly: 'solidarity entails…deference' (Kolers, 2016, p.53).

In essence, political solidarity is fundamentally defined by action; absent such action, this form of solidarity is rendered meaningless. The nature of this action may be diverse, encompassing both affirmative acts, such as participating in a picket line, and acts of omission, such as engaging in a boycott (Kolers, 2016, p.54). It is this enactment of solidarity that underpins revolutionary internationalism, distinguishing it from other forms of internationalism. Having now conceptualised the form of solidarity central to this study and examined its defining characteristics, attention may turn to the ways in which revolutionary internationalism is predicated upon political solidarity.

Respecting the picket line: Revolutionary internationalism as solidarity in action

Revolutionary internationalism differs from liberal internationalism in three distinct respects, as delineated by Halliday. Firstly, revolutions are international in both their causes and effects. Halliday cites the French Revolution and the Cuban Revolution as exemplars, both of which were inspired by external ideals and events, subsequently catalysing new periods of global revolutionary activity (Halliday, 1988, p.195). This confers upon revolutionary internationalism a more organic origin than that of liberal internationalism; rather than arising from the imposition of a hegemonic vision, revolutionary internationalism emerges through the dissemination of ideals, notably that of political solidarity.

Secondly, Halliday characterises revolutionary internationalism as inherently "contagious." The stability of states, regimes, or other governing bodies is interdependent; thus, the revolutionary transformation of one nation, or the extension of rights to previously disenfranchised groups in another, increases the likelihood of analogous developments elsewhere (Halliday, 1988, p.196).

Thirdly, revolutionary states are dependent upon and operate in collaboration with one another. Halliday emphasises that neither post-revolutionary Cuba nor the Vietnamese Communist regime could have survived without external assistance, highlighting the cooperative dimension intrinsic to revolutionary internationalism (Halliday, 1988, p.196).

With the key features of revolutionary internationalism now delineated, the most prominent and enduring exemplar, which consistently foregrounds political solidarity, is Cuban internationalism. Indeed, some scholars have deemed it necessary to distinguish Cuban internationalism from other forms, effectively situating it in a category of its own (Lin Lewis & Osei-Ospare, 2024, p.137). While the previous chapter examined the nature of Cuban internationalism in detail, it is worth emphasising here its exceptional commitment to political solidarity. Cuba has

consistently demonstrated a dedication to this principle by providing aid without fostering dependence or imposing its own values. A notable instance is its response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, where Cuba delivered long-term, sustainable support (Castro et al., 2014, p.600). This aversion to coercion is further exemplified by Fidel Castro's praise of then-Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev for 'not tell[ing] other countries what to do' (Gleijeses, 2013, p.17), a statement which aptly reflects the Cuban ethos of respecting the sovereignty and self-determination of other nations, irrespective of ideological alignment.

Unlike liberal internationalism, revolutionary internationalism provides fewer institutional exemplars, reflecting its foundation in events and actions—intrinsic to the practice of political solidarity—rather than a persistent, institutionalised presence. This is not to suggest that Cuban internationalism, or revolutionary internationalism more broadly, is inherently philanthropic. On the contrary, Bayertz observes that solidarity is not invariably altruistic and can encompass elements of mutual benefit (Bayertz, 2013, p.18), with the partnership between Venezuela and Cuba serving as a salient example of such reciprocity (Artaraz, 2012, p.31). Nevertheless, this does not diminish the centrality of political solidarity within Cuban internationalism.

In what manner, then, might revolutionary internationalism—exemplified by Cuban internationalism—constitute an alternative model of globalisation? The answer may be illuminated through an examination of another form of internationalism: transnationalism.

Power to the People: Transnationalism and Internationalism

In accordance with the definition of internationalism previously provided by Krull, the concept denotes cooperation between nation-states for their mutual benefit. Transnationalism, however, diverges from this in a fundamental respect. Whereas internationalism operates through a 'top-down' framework—wherein connections are primarily established at the governmental level—transnationalism functions through a 'bottom-up' process.

In this model, connections are forged in a more grassroots manner, emerging from the actions of ordinary citizens who express political solidarity across national boundaries (Maasri et al., 2022, p.10). In *Transnational Solidarity: Anticolonialism in the Global Sixties*, Maasri and colleagues identify the 1960s as the halcyon period of transnational solidarity, characterised by the formation of direct connections between activist groups rather than through formal intergovernmental collaboration. One pertinent example offered by Maasri is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts a 1981 poster symbolising solidarity between Palestinian and Salvadoran revolutionaries (Maasri et al., 2022, p.10).

Solidarity campaigns represent one of the most salient expressions of transnationalism and, more specifically, transnational solidarity. The Cuban Solidarity Campaign provides a particularly illustrative example. As detailed in an article examining Cuba's actions during the COVID-19 pandemic—a topic that will be discussed at greater length in the subsequent chapter—this campaign garnered thousands of donations and messages of support from individuals across the globe. According to the Cuban Solidarity Campaign, the international response to its online appeal to 'help Cuba fight COVID-19 and the US blockade' was described as 'overwhelming', receiving affirmations of solidarity from individuals in countries such as Italy and the United Kingdom, both of which had previously benefitted from Cuba's medical assistance during the pandemic, as well as from nations including Lesotho, Lebanon, Mexico, and the Philippines. Such solidarity campaigns encapsulate the essence of transnationalism: ordinary individuals expressing empathy and alliance with a movement or community with whom they share no direct contact, motivated solely by shared values and humanitarian sentiment. This form of solidarity is neither state-mandated nor institutionally orchestrated but emerges organically as a consequence of people learning about, or directly experiencing, Cuba's longstanding commitment to internationalism.



Figure 1 - 'The struggle continues in Palestine and in El Salvador, and the revolution will be glorious'

It is this synthesis of transnationalism and internationalism that distinctly characterises Cuban engagement on the global stage. Cuba not only seeks to establish enduring relationships with the governments with which it collaborates, but such cooperation—whether intentionally or inadvertently—also generates lasting

connections among the populations of those nations. In stark contrast to the previously discussed liberal internationalism characteristic of Western states, this dual-pronged approach cultivates a complex, interconnected web of solidarity networks spanning the globe. Through this intricate web, Cuba effectively constructs an alternative model of global engagement, one that simultaneously serves the interests of both the state and the people within the nations it supports.

Conclusion:

As noted at the outset of this chapter, any endeavour to propose an alternative vision—whether of globalisation, internationalism, or another domain—requires a comprehensive conceptualisation and understanding of the prevailing iteration. In conclusion, while terms such as globalisation, internationalism, and solidarity are widely invoked within contemporary discourse, it is evident that they remain insufficiently defined, with considerable ambiguity surrounding their precise meanings and implications. This chapter has sought to examine and elucidate the dominant forms and mechanisms of these concepts, thereby offering a degree of conceptual clarity. What has also emerged is that contemporary globalisation is characterised by profound inequities, unsustainability, and asymmetries of power. While internationalism presents the potential to offer an alternative model of global interconnectedness, this is contingent upon its grounding in the principles of political solidarity: engaging collaboratively with others rather than acting on their behalf and respecting the autonomy of others rather than imposing a framework that curtails it.

In the latter part of this chapter, it was suggested that Cuba's model of internationalism—characterised by the provision of aid without imposition, leaving recipients equipped with the tools to achieve self-reliance—could be understood as a viable alternative to neoliberal globalisation. Through this distinctive approach, recipients are endowed with the proverbial knowledge of how to fish, rather than merely being provided with short-term assistance,

as exemplified in the first chapter of this study. The purpose of the following analysis is to demonstrate contemporary instances in which this system functions as a viable, albeit contested, alternative to the dominant global order.

The subsequent chapter presents a case study examining a hitherto underexplored instance of an alternative form of globalisation and the role of Cuba in facilitating it. This case study will focus on Cuba's internationalist engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic, critically assessing its commitment to internationalism and its provision of aid on a global scale during this period of unprecedented crisis.

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Chapter 3 – Research methods

Case studies, as defined by Dawson, constitute "intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time" (Hancock et al., 2021, p. 9). Put more simply, a case study represents an exhaustive investigation into a specific phenomenon, strictly demarcated both geographically and temporally. The case study presented here constitutes an instrumental, qualitative examination of Cuba's internationalist activities during the Covid-19 pandemic and the extent to which these actions exemplify an alternative form of globalisation. This study is instrumental in nature, in that its primary objective is not solely to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Cuban internationalism—although this may constitute a consequential outcome—but rather to employ these events as a methodological tool for analysing the viability and characteristics of alternative globalisation models, a function that Dawson identifies as central to instrumental case studies (Hancock et al., 2021, p. 43).

This approach also enables the exploration of the question of how Cuba has maintained resilience and international relevance, if not through an alternative international order that allows it to generate both prestige and resources as part of its survival strategy. Moreover, the case study draws on a diverse dataset comprising both Cuban and non-Cuban sources—articles originating within Cuba and those produced internationally. This methodological decision was taken to mitigate potential bias, as these distinct perspectives provide complementary insights into Cuba's actions, presenting different dimensions of the same events and facilitating a more nuanced understanding.

As this case study utilises qualitative data, the principal forms of data collected comprise primary and secondary documents, in the form of newspapers and academic articles, respectively (Altheide & Schneider, 2012, p. 8). Document analysis refers to an "integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure, and technique for locating, identifying… and analysing documents for their relevance, significance and meaning" (Altheide & Schneider, 2012, p. 7).

Altheide and Schneider distinguish between two types of documents: primary, including newspapers and magazines, and secondary, encompassing scholarly publications.

The collection of data for this study was principally confined to a specific temporal window and particular forms of primary documents. All articles analysed were published between 2020 and 2022. This temporal limitation was adopted to refine the search for sources directly pertinent to the case study. Moreover, this period corresponds to the height of the Covid-19 pandemic on a global scale, during which the majority of Cuba's pandemic-related medical internationalism occurred. Specific events associated with Cuba's internationalist activities were also employed as key markers for data collection, including, for instance, the docking of the MS Braemar and Cuba's medical deployments in Lombardy, selected for their scale and global visibility.

A major source for this case study was Granma, the official media organ of the Cuban Communist Party. The University of Nottingham's Hennessey Centre for Cuban Studies provided streamlined access to Granma archives, catalogued chronologically, facilitating efficient retrieval of relevant materials. To ensure a more balanced and comprehensive analysis, primary sources from Western media outlets were also incorporated. Newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Mail* offered alternative perspectives and served to counterbalance the inherent partiality of Granma, which naturally reflects the Cuban Communist Party's viewpoint. These sources were identified through targeted keyword searches using Google and NU Search, the University of Nottingham library database. Articles meeting the same temporal criteria as the Granma publications were subsequently included in the dataset for analysis.

Upon collecting, cataloguing, and annotating the information contained within these documents, the data were analysed using a thematic analysis framework. A central feature of thematic analysis is the concept of "examining commonality" (Gibson & Brown, 2009,

p. 128). The analysis was conducted by systematically identifying key themes, concepts, and issues emerging across the dataset, irrespective of the documents' origin.

The thematic analysis revealed three principal concepts recurrent throughout the data: solidarity, internationalism, and medical diplomacy. These concepts were subsequently codified and colour-coded for clarity and analytical rigour, with individual sources or segments thereof assigned a colour corresponding to the most salient concept present: red for solidarity, blue for internationalism, and green for medical diplomacy. This coding facilitated the systematic interpretation of the findings across both types of documents, enabling a more structured and comparative examination of the data.

Media analysis is by no means an exact science. Periodicals, in particular, are highly susceptible to various forms of bias and rarely reflect an objective truth; rather, they often present a version of reality shaped either to appeal to their readership or to advance the editorial agenda of the publication (Hauser et al., 2012, p. 77). Throughout the data collection process for this case study, it was therefore necessary to maintain a conscious awareness of these limitations. This awareness informed the decision to incorporate sources of differing origins, as previously discussed, with the rationale that, within the multiplicity of perspectives on the same events, elements of verifiable information could be discerned.

It is also pertinent to acknowledge the gaps in knowledge revealed during the course of this research. One notable observation was the near-complete omission of any discussion framing Cuba's actions and its solidarity with other Global South nations as a potential alternative form of globalisation. While the concept of globalisation was frequently addressed within both Granma and academic sources, these discussions largely focused on critiquing its contemporary manifestations, with scant attention paid to the possibility of alternative models or the extent to which such models may already be operational.

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Chapter 4 – Connecting Cuba to the World: Cuban pandemic internationalism

The following case study offers a qualitative analytical investigation into the medical internationalism undertaken by Cuba during the Covid-19 pandemic. Cuban medical internationalism, or medical diplomacy, has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention since its inception in 1960 (Vanderslott et al., 2021, p. 2). Over the decades, numerous instances of Cuban medical internationalism have been the focus of a wide array of academic literature, encompassing interventions such as Cuba's support during Hurricane Katrina, assistance in combating cholera in Haiti, and its presence in West African nations contending with Ebola (Kirk, 2015, pp. 7, 37, 189).

Nonetheless, one area remains comparatively underexplored in the scholarly canon: Cuba's engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to the contemporaneity of these events, this remains a nascent field of study, though it is one likely to expand in coming years. Importantly, the purpose of this case study is not merely to catalogue Cuba's medical achievements on the global stage, but rather to analyse how these interventions generate enduring transnational ties, ultimately interrogating whether the networks and legacies established by Cuban internationalism can constitute an alternative form of globalisation.

This case study is intended to provide a foundation for future research. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the contemporary hegemonic form of globalisation is deeply flawed, characterised by inequity and unsustainability. By contrast, this case study seeks to illuminate the contours of a genuinely alternative system, highlighting the principles and mechanisms upon which it could be based.

While some scholarship has addressed the notion of an alternative form of globalisation, frequently framed under the rubric of 'anti-globalisation' (Martell, 2016, p. 248), literature that systematically

explores what such an alternative could entail at the macro-policy level remains markedly scarce. Furthermore, the terminology employed to describe this phenomenon, in the view of this research, is somewhat misleading. In an era characterised by ever-increasing global connectivity, the metaphorical 'genie' of global interdependence cannot, and arguably should not, be confined or reversed.

With respect to literature that explicitly identifies Cuba's internationalist actions as exemplifying an alternative form of globalisation, rather than its antithesis, the extant sources are limited. Notable contributions include the works of Steve Melluish and Maria Castro (Castro et al., 2015, p. 595), as well as Thomas Ponniah and William Fisher (Fisher & Ponniah, 2015, p. 91). This indicates that empirical research examining contemporary, operational instances of alternative globalisation—rather than theoretical discussions or conceptualisations of what such a system might entail—is exceptionally limited, to the extent that, within the scope of this study, little literature on the subject could be identified.

This research, and the accompanying case study, is therefore intended to serve as a foundation for further scholarly inquiry. The premise underpinning this case study is that alternative global systems do not exist solely as abstract conceptualisations; rather, they are presently operational. The primary aim of this study is to elucidate and demonstrate how such an alternative system functions in practice.

By situating the temporal boundaries of the case study within the Covid-19 pandemic, the research capitalises on a unique opportunity to examine not only the viability but also the operational functionality of this alternative model as enacted by Cuba. During this period, global networks were severely strained and exposed in ways unprecedented in the early twenty-first century. Furthermore, the enduring survival of Cuba under a stringent embargo raises compelling questions regarding the presence and efficacy of such an alternative international system.

The qualitative design of this case study is necessitated by the inherently unquantifiable nature of the research question: does Cuba enact an alternative form of globalisation, and, if so, in what ways is this manifested? Consequently, this case study is instrumental in its orientation, as its primary objective is not to provide an exhaustive account of Cuba's internationalist activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, but rather to employ this event as a lens through which to interrogate the broader research question.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to underscore the need for further scholarly investigation into this topic, which is particularly salient given the contemporary geopolitical context. While prior research has examined globalisation and Cuban internationalism independently, this case study seeks to build upon existing scholarship by synthesising these two domains, thereby offering a more integrated perspective on Cuba's role in shaping alternative global systems.

Literature Review

The existing academic literature exhibits varying degrees of relevance to the subject under investigation. Numerous studies address individually the three central themes of this case study—solidarity, globalisation, and Cuban internationalism—yet the intersection of all three remains largely underexplored. In the preceding chapters, key sources pertaining to these themes were examined in detail, including Kurt Bayertz's seminal work on solidarity (Bayertz, 1999), the analyses of Cuban internationalism by John Kirk and Piero Gleijeses (Kirk, 2012; Gleijeses, 2002 & 2013), and Luke Martell's sociological account of globalisation (Martell, 2016). The reliability of these sources is supported by their publication through peer-reviewed academic channels.

However, research that specifically investigates and analyses alternative global systems of collaboration—distinct from the prevailing hegemonic model of globalisation, explicitly framing these as alternative forms of globalisation and exploring their potential implementation—remains notably absent. This aperture underscores a significant gap in the scholarly literature regarding

the conceptualisation and practical analysis of alternative global systems.

Recent scholarship has begun to address Cuba's medical internationalism during the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, Fiona Samuels published an article analysing the apparent effectiveness of Cuba's response to the global crisis. In her study, Samuels evaluates Cuba's handling of the pandemic at both national and international levels, noting that Cuba's Covid-related medical internationalism received 'extremely positive accounts' and characterising it as 'the embodiment of internal solidarity' and an 'extension of Cuba's national health policy within [a] socialist framework' (Samuels, 2020, p.62). Nonetheless, Samuels concludes her analysis by contextualising Cuba's successes within the ongoing hardships faced by its population, citing phenomena such as 'empty shops' and 'long queues for food' resulting from the United States-imposed embargo.

Civantos, in her article, also highlights the significance of Cuba's actions during the pandemic, noting that Cuba is currently the only Latin American country to have developed its own primary Covid-19 vaccine (Civantos, 2025, p.11). She situates this achievement within the broader context of extensive South–South collaborations during the pandemic, emphasising that Cuba exported domestically manufactured vaccines at low cost to countries such as Mexico, Iran, and Vietnam. Furthermore, Civantos documents additional scientific collaborations between Cuba and nations including Iran and China in the development of supplementary vaccines (Civantos, 2025, p.13). However, she qualifies these accomplishments by interrogating the underlying motivations of Cuba's medical diplomacy, suggesting that such initiatives serve to enhance Cuba's global prestige, thereby increasing its capacity for 'soft power' and generating further opportunities for financial gain (Civantos, 2025, p.13).

Although these sources are limited, they are nevertheless extant. Given the contemporaneity of the event, a comprehensive body of

literature on the subject has yet to emerge; however, several articles examine the immediate aftermath of Covid-19, both within Cuba and globally. The significance of these developments is particularly noteworthy within the context of this dissertation, as the pandemic placed unprecedented strain on international connections, thereby rendering the tangible outcomes of Cuba's international collaboration more readily observable.

The significance of the themes explored in this case study, and this research more broadly, is evident in their pertinence to the contemporary geopolitical landscape and the pressing need to examine alternative models of global interconnectedness. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the prevailing form of globalisation is unsustainable, with its neoliberal policies driving numerous nations to the brink of economic collapse. This unsustainability is further underscored by the inaction of those with controlling interests in these policies, who have failed to implement measures to redress the vast disparities in global wealth. Importantly, however, an alternative form of globalisation is already unfolding quietly amidst this increasingly hostile global climate. For instance, Damian Cave, in an article for *The New York Times*, documents that approximately 1.7 million Vietnamese citizens donated an average of 38 US cents—roughly 10,000 Vietnamese Dong—through the Vietnamese Red Cross, ultimately raising around 13 million US dollars in support of Cuba (Cave, 2025).

Cave notes that this surge of charitable activity did not emerge spontaneously but was instead the product of longstanding relations founded upon solidarity and mutual respect. For instance, the article recounts the case of a Vietnamese woman, Dinh Hien Mo, who elected to donate a substantial sum—500,000 Vietnamese Dong, approximately US $19—after learning of Cuba's previous collaborative efforts in Vietnam, including the construction of hospitals and the deployment of medical personnel. This example serves as empirical support for the robustness of the present case study and the broader research undertaken in this work. While further analysis and investigation remain necessary, relationships such as that between Cuba and Vietnam provide compelling

evidence that alternative models of global cooperation are not merely theoretical; they exist in practice, awaiting broader recognition and scholarly attention.

It is virtually impossible to discuss Cuba, particularly in relation to a phenomenon as significant as globalisation, without encountering controversy. The literature reviewed in the course of this case study highlights the inherently polarising nature of such discussions. A striking example of this divergence emerges from two articles by Helen Yaffe and Christina Civantos, which offer contrasting perspectives on the same events. Civantos, for instance, contends that Cuba's engagement in monetary exchanges while pursuing its internationalist initiatives serves to 'destabilise Cuba's platform as anti-capitalist' (Civantos, 2025, p.14). She further challenges Yaffe's commendation of Cuba's internationalism, arguing that it ultimately reinforces 'oppressive messaging' (Civantos, 2025, p.18). Conversely, Yaffe, writing two years earlier, appears to pre-emptively counter this critique, characterising research emphasising the geopolitical and financial advantages Cuba may derive from these endeavours as 'critical and cynical' (Yaffe, 2023, p.228). The stark divergence between these accounts illustrates the contentious nature of scholarly debate surrounding Cuba. Accordingly, it is essential to adopt a critical and objective stance when evaluating the merits and limitations of Cuba's alternative vision of globalisation.

When reviewing the body of literature compiled for the purposes of this case study, it would be naïve to suggest that Cuba's internationalist endeavours confer no benefits beyond the maintenance of national duty and moral commitment—a facet of its medical internationalism that will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. Equally, however, it would be disingenuous to assert that Cuba's contributions are entirely devoid of material or strategic gain, and that all collaborative efforts are solely profit-driven. The reciprocal nature of Cuban internationalism, particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, gave rise to initiatives such as the 'solidarity-based' pricing system, which will also be examined in greater depth in a subsequent section. The

literature reviewed for this case study proves foundational to the argument that Cuba not only advocates for an alternative global order but actively enacts this vision, pursuing a world underpinned by values markedly distinct from those promoted by the prevailing international system.

Findings and Results

The synthesis of information gathered, collated, and catalogued during the research process for this case study lends support to the hypothesis posited earlier in this chapter: that, to a significant extent, Cuba's actions—particularly those undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic—constitute an alternative form of globalisation. This finding is substantiated across both types of sources examined, namely *Granma* articles and Western periodicals. Both categories of sources document Cuba's outward-facing initiatives and acknowledge the reciprocal benefits accrued. The analysis of the data thus indicates that Cuba's internationalist endeavours during the Covid-19 pandemic provide compelling evidence that these actions exemplify a viable alternative vision of globalisation.

This conclusion has been drawn from the analysis of both source types, each of which, unsurprisingly, exhibits discernible biases. In the *Granma* articles, Cuba's official state periodical, the moral virtue and purported superiority of its internationalist actions are frequently emphasised, albeit implicitly. For instance, expressions such as *"el pueblo Cubano…generosamente internacionalist y solidaria"* (the Cuban people, generously internationalist and solidaristic) recur throughout the text (Prieto, 2020). Cuba is often personified in this manner, foregrounding the centrality of solidarity to the Cuban cultural identity; in subsequent articles, the nation is described as *"serena y solidaria"* (Reyes Montero and Barbosa León, 2020). The specific ways in which these themes are articulated and manifested across the two source types will be examined in greater detail later in this section. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to contend that both categories of sources, whether

consciously or unconsciously, affirm the existence of Cuba's alternative global paradigm.

In the *Granma* articles, Cuba's internationalist endeavours during the Covid-19 pandemic are, as might be expected, documented in considerable detail. Particular attention is afforded to initiatives that attracted significant international notice, such as the docking of the MS *Braemar* (Reyes Montero and Barbosa León, 2020). Figure 1 below provides a concise overview of the countries in which Cuba was actively engaged in pandemic response efforts.

Figure 2 (Suárez Rivas, 2020) illustrates the full scale of Cuba's global presence at the height of the pandemic. Divided into four regions—Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Europe & the Middle East—the figure details the deployment of 1,455 Cuban personnel to support other nations. This data underscores the truly global reach and impact of Cuba's medical internationalism. Such extensive collaboration fosters enduring, transnational connections that transcend, and in some respects, challenge the parameters of the current hegemonic model of globalisation.



Figure 2 - "The 22 Cuban Henry Reeve medical brigades save lives in more than 20 nations"

The relationship between Cuba and the wider world is perhaps most clearly exemplified in its enduring ties with two of its closest and longest-standing allies: South Africa and Vietnam. The significance of these relationships to Cuba is evident across both Cuban and international media sources, though the broader implications are seldom fully explored. According to reports from both the *BBC* and *Granma*, the bilateral relationship between South Africa and Cuba was of critical importance to both nations. During the pandemic, Cuba deployed over 200 medical personnel to support South Africa in curbing the spread of Covid-19 (BBC, 2020), while South Africa reciprocated with in-kind supplies, including personal protective equipment. This exchange, illustrated in Figure 3, underscores the high value both countries place on the principle of solidarity.

Cuba's long-standing relationship with Vietnam is similarly significant. *Granma* highlights this "special relationship," stating, *"el mundo sería mucho mejor si tuviera relaciones como las de Cuba y Vietnam"* (the world would be much better if relations were like that of Cuba and Vietnam) (Laura Palomino and Chávez, 2020). During the pandemic, Cuba dispatched medicines from its biotechnology sector to support Vietnam's Covid-19 response, while Vietnam, in turn, supplied Cuba with essential commodities, including 5,000 tonnes of rice, amid the ongoing embargo and challenging trade conditions (Figure 4).

The enduring outcomes of Cuba's internationalist endeavours during the peak of the pandemic are further exemplified by the substantial international support and donations it received in 2022, two years after the Covid-19 pandemic was officially declared. This highlights the long-term efficacy and reciprocity of Cuba's approach to medical internationalism and solidarity.



South Africa has sent protective gear and other supplies for Cuban health facilities

Figure 3 - Cuba receives supplies from South Africa

Just as Cuba extended assistance globally during this period, so too did the international community offer support to Cuba. Facilitated through *el Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos* (ICAP), the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples—an institution established by Fidel Castro in 1960 to foster "mobilisation and unity in the international movement of solidarity" (Barbosa León, 2020)—Cuba received a total of 1,649 donations in various forms from 150 countries, alongside confirmed engagements with 60 solidarity groups across 57 countries (Barbosa León, 2022).

While both Cuban and international sources document Cuba's outward-facing activities during this period, it is the *Granma* periodicals that offer the most detailed insight into the multilateral and extensive nature of these international ties. The evidence presented in this case study demonstrates that Cuban internationalism has never been unidirectional; Cuba has consistently, and particularly during the pandemic, received tangible support in return for its contributions. The implications of this reciprocal dynamic will be examined further in the discussion section of the case study; at this juncture, however, it is instructive to consider these exchanges in greater detail.



Entre las donaciones realizadas a Cuba este año, figuran las 5 000 toneladas de arroz enviadas desde Vietnam. FOTO: RICARDO LÓPEZ HEVIA

Figure 4 - Between the donation sent to Cuba this year, 5,000 tonnes of rice were sent from Vietnam

Earlier in this work, it was established that a thorough thematic analysis of the collected data yielded three predominant themes: solidarity, internationalism, and medical diplomacy. These three concepts will form the primary focus for the remainder of the discussion of the case study findings. During the Covid-19 pandemic, two events in particular garnered coverage in both Cuban and Western media, serving as focal points for comparative analysis: Cuba's involvement in managing the virus in Italy, and the assistance provided to the British cruise ship, the MS Braemar. Collectively, these events exemplify all three thematic strands and offer distinctive points of comparison. An examination of these cases highlights the marked contrasts in how they were portrayed across different media outlets, thereby providing a basis for analysing not only the global reception of Cuba's actions, but also the manner in which these interventions contribute to the construction of a transnational culture of mutual solidarity.

Solidarity, according to Cuba

Every article from the Granma periodical collected for the purposes of this case study made explicit reference to the concept of solidarity. This emphasis on solidarity is manifested in multiple forms throughout the articles, including first-hand accounts and quantitative or qualitative data corroborating Cuba's actions. In the articles published during the height of the pandemic, Cuba's interventions are documented in meticulous detail. To illustrate the significance of this emphasis, in the *Granma* articles analysed for this case study, solidarity is explicitly mentioned repeatedly, with several articles containing multiple references across the periodical (Reyes Montero and Barbosa León, 2020). As previously noted, the concept of solidarity is inextricably linked to both the Cuban national psyche and cultural identity. Among the numerous instances of solidarity chronicled in Granma, two received particularly extensive coverage: Cuba's medical mission to Italy and the provision of safe passage to passengers of the MS Braemar.

In the edition covering the events of the MS Braemar, the story was allocated a three-page spread, an exceptionally extensive treatment in comparison with other instances of Cuba's medical internationalism, such as its operations in Mexico, which were confined to a single page section. Within this coverage, several elements warrant particular attention. Notably, the first article positions Cuba at the centre of the narrative, portraying the nation as the principal actor in the event. The opening line of the edition, published on 19th March 2020, declares: "ayer nuestra Isla fue protagonista de uno de los acontecimientos más notables de este joven siglo XXI" (yesterday our island was the protagonist of one of the most notable events of this young 21st century) (Reyes Montero, 2020,).

The article swiftly underscores the centrality of solidarity to Cuba, asserting that it constitutes "la fuerza…del pueblo y Gobierno Cubano[s]" (the strength of the Cuban people and government). In this framing, solidarity is presented not merely as a guiding principle but as integral to the conception of Cuban exceptionalism

consistently portrayed throughout *Granma*. The article reinforces this point by highlighting the contrast between Cuba and other nations, emphasising that while other ports had denied entry to the maritime traveller, Cuba had extended assistance. Moreover, the article situates this action within the broader context of Cuba's historical internationalist endeavours, citing examples such as its interventions in Africa during the Ebola outbreak and in Latin America in the treatment of cataracts. Montero further poses the rhetorical question: "¿Por qué este nuevo tipo de coronavirus haría una excepción?" (Why would this new kind of coronavirus be an exception?).

A separate article in the same edition further elaborates on the account of the MS Braemar, providing an even greater level of specificity. In the piece entitled *Decir Cuba es decir humanidad* (To say Cuba is to say humanity), precise details regarding the timing, location, and passenger manifest—including nationalities—are meticulously documented. In addition to this factual precision, the article incorporates reactions from social media platforms, such as Twitter (now X), highlighting the global attention garnered by Cuba's intervention. The responses of various stakeholders are presented, ranging from passengers, such as Steve Dale, who observed that "all of us should [acknowledge] what Cuba has done for us, intervening when none of the other countries and members of the British Commonwealth in the region offered assistance" (translated from Spanish in the article), to Anthony Stokes, the British Ambassador to Cuba at the time, who expressed gratitude towards the Cuban government for aiding British citizens and coordinating with the UK authorities for their safe repatriation.

Another prominent example of Cuba's engagement in European and Western contexts is evidenced by their aforementioned display of solidarity in Italy. This intervention held considerable significance both for Cuba and the international community, marking the first occasion on which a European nation formally sought Cuban medical assistance. Mirroring the coverage of the MS Braemar incident, this collaboration was extensively documented in *Granma* periodicals. The articles provide detailed accounts of

the mission, specifying the number of Cuban personnel—referred to as "collaborators" in the *Granma* text—and their respective areas of expertise (Reyes Montero, 21st July 2020).

Cuba's 'army of white coats' was deployed to Piedmont, Turin, identified by Montero as the third most severely affected region in Italy. Both the article and Doctor Julio Guerra Izquierdo, the head of the medical mission, emphasised the centrality of humanism within the Henry Reeve Medical Brigade. Regarding the mission, Doctor Izquierdo stated: "desde un punto de vista humano, el hecho de haber salvado 170 vidas y mantener de letalidad bajos, significó mucho para nosotros" (from a human point of view, the fact that we saved 170 lives and maintained a low lethality rate meant a great deal to us). The galvanising response of the people of Turin towards the Cuban medical personnel was also highlighted, with Izquierdo noting that local citizens expressed their appreciation publicly, applauding the team in the streets. Such recognition is perhaps unsurprising, given the scale of the mission: from their arrival in Turin to their return to Cuba, the Cuban medical team treated nearly 3,000 patients, conducted over 5,000 hospital appointments, and performed 81,000 nursing procedures (Reyes Montero, 21st July 2020)

Cuban solidarity vs. the World - Outside perspectives on Cuban solidarity

Given that these two cases involved the citizenry of European nations, there was a correspondingly ample availability of coverage in Western and European periodicals. As the docking of the MS Braemar primarily concerned the United Kingdom, the event was prominently reported in British newspapers, including *The Independent* and *The Daily Mail*. In contrast to the pronounced emphasis on solidarity in *Granma* articles, references to solidarity in these Western sources are relatively limited and typically occur only in relation to Cuba or ascribed by Cuban representatives. For instance, *The Independent* reports that the British Ambassador to Cuba, Anthony Stokes, expressed gratitude to Cuban rescue

personnel for their actions, describing it as a “great gesture of solidarity” (Stone, 2020).

In the articles documenting the MS Braemar’s interactions with Cuba, a clear dichotomy emerges between Cuba’s internationalist actions and the transnational consequences of those actions. The coverage demonstrates an apparent difficulty in reconciling pre-existing perceptions of Cuba’s state morality with the practical measures it undertook during the global response to Covid-19. This tension is particularly evident in the contrasting coverage between *The Independent* and *The Daily Mail*. In the latter, greater emphasis is placed on the lived experiences of the passengers aboard the MS Braemar and their interactions with Cuban personnel. The passengers themselves are largely portrayed positively, with the article highlighting their appreciation of Cuba’s efforts (Wright, 2020).

By contrast, *The Independent* frames the event primarily in terms of intergovernmental relations, describing it as “one of the rare bright spots in relations between the UK and Cuba” while simultaneously emphasising Cuba’s status as a “one-party state with a poor human rights record,” thereby contextualising the interaction within a history of strained diplomatic relations.

This contrast serves as a microcosm for the broader ambiguity present in Western media coverage of Cuba’s internationalist endeavours. Collectively, these sources appear uncertain as to how to evaluate Cuba’s actions, frequently foregrounding the nation’s political structure and historical tensions with Western states. For example, a *Reuters* report immediately identifies Cuba as “communist-run” while emphasising prior negative relations with Western nations (Marsh and Acosta,2020). This persistent focus on Cuba’s political framework highlights the underlying challenge Western media face in situating Cuba’s humanitarian actions independently of ideological preconceptions.

It is noteworthy that the political orientation of periodicals appears to influence the framing and coverage of Cuba’s internationalist activities. For instance, *The Telegraph*, alongside *The Daily Mail*, is

traditionally considered right-leaning within the British political spectrum. In their reporting, both outlets tend to focus predominantly on the experiences of the passengers and their interactions with Cuban personnel (Bellew, 2020), resulting in a portrayal of Cuba in a largely favourable light. This contrasts with the tone adopted by traditionally centre-left outlets such as *The Independent* and *Reuters*, where reporting frequently carries an undertone of scepticism or recrimination.

A point of particular contention among Western periodicals is Cuba's involvement in Italy, which attracted extensive scrutiny and debate. Many Western publications highlight the economic benefits Cuba is perceived to derive from its internationalist endeavours. For example, *The Guardian* asserts that "Fidel [Castro] was very strategic" and describes Cuba's internationalist 'scheme' as generating approximately £4.8 billion annually for the state (Phillips and Giuffrida, 2020). Similar emphasis on financial gain is evident in *The Economist*, which notes that Cuba had defaulted on debt payments to creditor nations such as Italy, implying that its assistance to the Italian population could be construed as a form of "in-kind debt repayment" (*The Economist*, 2020).

These examples illustrate how political orientation and editorial framing shape the narrative surrounding Cuba's internationalist initiatives, foregrounding either humanitarian contributions or strategic economic considerations.

Nevertheless, despite the critiques regarding Cuba's internationalist activities, its interventions in the Western world during the Covid-19 pandemic appear to have produced enduring, positive impacts. Even within the previously cited Western periodicals, accounts from individuals who directly experienced Cuban medical internationalism highlight its tangible benefits. For instance, in *The Guardian*, reflecting on his experience with the Cuban medical mission in Piedmont, Turin, Dr Julio Guerra Izquierdo conveyed a profound sense of humanistic commitment. Similarly, Marco Grimaldi, a politician from north-west Italy who

assisted in coordinating the arrival of the 39 Cuban doctors, observed that:

“In Lombardy…everyone is grateful for their [the Cuban doctors’] professionalism, their humility, and their willingness to assist a country they scarcely know. They are a lesson to Europe…how wonderful it would be to see brigades from northern or eastern Europe in Spain or Italy” (Phillips and Giuffrida, 2020)

The depth of public gratitude is further illustrated in Turin, where, upon the departure of the Cuban medical personnel, the city’s iconic Mole Antonelliana was illuminated with the words “Grazie Cuba” (Angela A. Escobedo et al., 2021, accessed 13th April 2025). Such gestures underscore the profound social and cultural resonance of Cuba’s medical internationalism, demonstrating that its impact extended beyond immediate healthcare outcomes to foster enduring recognition and goodwill.



Figure 5 - The Mona Antonelliana illuminated with the words 'Grazie Cuba' upon the doctors' departure

Case Study Conclusion

From an analytical standpoint, the findings of this case study are revealing in multiple respects. Cuba not only aspires to establish an alternative global system but actively participates in its construction. Earlier in this chapter, the question was posed as to how Cuba has managed to survive if it were not already embedded

within an alternative form of globalisation. The findings of this study provide some clarity in this regard. It is evident that Cuba's internationalist activities over the decades have produced enduring and far-reaching effects. Through its outreach initiatives, Cuba has cultivated a network of connections that enables not only its survival but also its capacity to contribute meaningfully to the global community. While the assistance provided by Cuba warrants close examination, equal attention must be paid to the aid received by the nation. Contributions from individuals, states, and organisations alike testify to the durability and reciprocity of the solidarity-based connections that Cuba has forged throughout its history of international engagement. The Covid-19 pandemic functions as an exemplary microcosm, revealing both the tangible fruits of Cuba's labour and the ongoing relevance of its internationalist endeavours.

While the findings are illuminating, they also provoke critical questions. To what extent are Cuba's actions genuinely altruistic? Are they ethically motivated, or are they primarily driven by self-interest? It would be remiss to ignore the evident symbiotic dimension of Cuba's internationalism. A critical assessment suggests that, to some extent, Cuba's internationalism operates as a form of global exchange. Rather than relying on conventional monetary transactions, Cuba's relations with the wider world are predicated upon the reciprocal exchange of skills, services, and commodities. In contexts where Cuba lacks the capacity to provide financial recompense for international obligations, its internationalism may function either as a mechanism to settle prior obligations or as a means of securing future goodwill, contingent upon the timing and nature of its collaborative engagements.

Such a reading might provide a sufficient, albeit somewhat cynical, critical approach to Cuba's actions were it not for the fact that they only began charging for these forms of collaboration relatively recently, and even then, exclusively to wealthier nations capable of bearing the cost. Rather than constituting a system of bartering, the goodwill generated by actors of diverse forms across the globe may be interpreted as the logical outcome of Cuba's sustained positive

engagement on the international stage. Regardless of the underlying motives, it is evident that Cuba's actions have produced enduring and far-reaching effects.

Notably, the prominence afforded to Cuba's involvement in Western and European affairs, as reflected in the Cuban periodical Granma, indicates the significant weight attributed to these interactions. Given that the majority of Cuban internationalism has historically been concentrated in Africa and Latin America, its direct involvement in European contexts is relatively rare. The extended coverage and greater detail accorded to these European-focused events can thus be understood as a reflection of Cuba's pursuit of global recognition—not merely for its humanitarian actions, but also for the legitimacy of its constitutional framework and system of governance. Since the earliest days of the Revolution, Cuba's socialist and/or communist society has been the subject of intense debate and sustained critique, predominantly from Western, capital-oriented nations. While some of this criticism is certainly warranted, it would be disingenuous to disregard the extent to which it stems from a presupposition that the capitalist systems prevalent across the West are inherently superior.

In this context, the particular emphasis on Cuba's interactions with Western nations during the Covid-19 pandemic gains further significance. The pandemic laid bare, in a stark manner, the systemic failures of Western states, particularly in the realms of healthcare provision and preventive public health measures. These shortcomings not only reveal the inadequacy of Western systems in caring for their populations but also underscore their inefficiency in mobilising societal resources effectively. Against this backdrop, Cuba's proactive engagement provides a counterpoint, demonstrating the potential of an alternative internationalist model that foregrounds solidarity and practical action.

Throughout this chapter, and indeed this work, it has been repeatedly emphasised that the alternative global system in which Cuba participates is already extant and has extended its reach to numerous regions across the globe. The central question that

remains—one which is quintessential to the overarching argument of this study—is whether this system is viable: can it be expanded and applied more broadly on a global scale?

Its viability is evidenced, in part, by Cuba's endurance over decades of embargo, with its earliest instances of medical internationalism dating back to the 1960s, in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. The central challenge, however, lies in the issue of priorities. As previously discussed, Cuba's engagement on the international stage is guided by the imperative of survival—not only its own, but also that of other nations within the Global South. By contrast, the prevailing orientation of Western international relations is primarily informed by the pursuit of profit. Accordingly, the critical question is not merely whether the Cuban system is operationally viable, but whether Western nations—entrenched in frameworks dominated by capitalist logic—would be willing to shift their focus, prioritising political solidarity over material gain.

Conclusion

All I have is a voice...and no one exists alone

-W.H Auden

This thesis has sought to explore the concept of an alternative, solidarity-based form of globalisation, analysing its theoretical underpinnings and practical manifestations through the lens of Cuban internationalism. From the outset, it was established that to propose an alternative global order, it is first necessary to understand the prevailing forms of globalisation, internationalism, and transnationalism. While liberal internationalism has historically emphasised hegemonic power structures and state-led interventions, revolutionary internationalism, as exemplified by Cuba, foregrounds political solidarity, mutual aid, and the organic dissemination of ideals across borders. Furthermore, transnationalism highlights the grassroots, bottom-up connections

formed between individuals and communities rather than governments alone.

Cuban internationalism, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrates how these principles coalesce in practice. Through its medical diplomacy, Cuba provided support to a diverse array of nations, ranging from South Africa and Vietnam to Italy and the passengers of the MS Braemar, creating enduring relationships based on reciprocity, trust, and shared humanistic values. These actions illustrate that Cuban internationalism transcends conventional definitions of both internationalism and transnationalism: it is simultaneously state-led, transnationally impactful, and rooted in solidarity that directly empowers both recipients and contributors. The resulting network of global connections represents a model of solidarity-based globalisation in which cooperation and mutual benefit take precedence over profit or geopolitical dominance.

While the findings of this case study suggest that Cuba's internationalism provides a viable alternative to the current hegemonic, neoliberal global order, several caveats remain. The analysis demonstrates that Cuban internationalism achieves tangible and long-lasting effects, yet questions regarding the ethical motivations, sustainability, and scalability of such a system require further exploration. Moreover, although Cuba's approach has endured for decades under significant constraints, its potential replication on a global scale—particularly in contexts dominated by profit-driven logic—remains uncertain.

In conclusion, this study proposes that solidarity-based globalisation, as exemplified by Cuba, represents a feasible, ethically grounded, and practically realised alternative to existing global structures. Its success illustrates that global cooperation can be conceived and operationalised in ways that prioritise human welfare, political solidarity, and mutual empowerment over hegemonic or financial imperatives. Nevertheless, further research is essential to evaluate its long-term viability, the mechanisms through which it could be scaled, and its potential to reshape

contemporary globalisation into a more equitable and sustainable system.

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