

Preface

In the spring of 2007, a long decade marked by the lack of oil was just coming to an end in one of Latin America's most oil-dependent economies. My impression as I first arrived was that the reggaetón musician Daddy Yankee's megahit "Gasolina" was playing on repeat in every corner, a song about roaring engines and a hot-blooded desire for gasoline. But in Havana, public spaces were filled with messages of another kind. It was no different in western Pinar del Río or eastern Guantánamo. All over Cuba, billboards called for work efficiency and energy "saving" as a national, revolutionary undertaking: *"Ahorrando más, tendremos más. Una revolución con energía"* (Saving more, we will have more. A revolution with energy). I soon learned that I had arrived in the midst of the country's Energy Revolution. A project of radical environmental consequence, the Energy Revolution was decarbonizing the Cuban economy, but as I would later realize, it was also reconfiguring the socialist state in a more fundamental, political way.

This book builds on research I have carried out since my first encounter with Cuba, working over a year on the island and many more at a distance from it. My main research base in Cuba was the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" (UPR) where a group of mechanical engineers in the Center for Studies in Energy and Sustainable Technologies

(CEETES) provided me with a workspace and tirelessly helped me sort out all necessary *trámites*—Cuban code for visas and research permits. I am especially grateful to Francisco Márquez Montesino for accommodating me in CEETES on repeated occasions and to Rolando Zanzi at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, who early on put me in contact with UPR. An institutional affiliation is a requirement for doing research in Cuba, and with the backing of UPR, I was able not only to speak to people informally but also to carry out interviews and make observations in state companies and to access research-only areas in archives. The institutional arrangement also gave me access to the university as a field site where I was able to take part in research and education and engage with scholars and students, many of whom were recruited from the industrial workforce in Pinar del Río.

Beside CEETES, my key entry points were the organizations CubaSolar and Fundación “Antonio Núñez Jiménez” de la Naturaleza y el Hombre (FANJ). I am particularly grateful to Bruno Henriquez at CubaSolar and Reinaldo Funes Monzote at FANJ for their generosity. I am also indebted to José Altshuler, Luis Bériz, Mayra Casas Vilardell, Luis Guillermo Castillo González, and Francisco “Panchito” Lorenzo, who in different ways enabled my work and deepened my understanding of Cuban environmental politics.

I stayed over the long term in two households, one in Pinar del Río and one in Havana. Experiences and conversations with the members of these households have in large part informed my understanding of everyday energy use in the household setting. I learned from the most mundane tasks—making coffee while talking behind the veil of the *Radio Rebelde* broadcast—but also from more unusual events, such as discussing Engels’s dialectics of nature during a storm-induced blackout. I leave the identities of my *familia pinareña* (Pinar del Río family) and my *familia habanera* (Havana family) undisclosed, but I am incredibly thankful for their kindness and support.¹ Coming to Cuba from a European background with institutional funding, I was reminded time and again of how my ability to access and use energy differed from that of my hosts, reflecting our different positions in the power geometries that shape energy use. The affiliation with UPR granted me residential status and access to spaces that non-Cubans normally were excluded from, but while I could travel from

Pinar del Río to Havana on the back of a hot, diesel-smelling truck for a nominal sum—just as any Cuban—I always had the ability to travel in an air-conditioned tourist bus too if I wanted. My argument that energy use, as a mundane socio-ecological practice, always raises questions of political economy is directly rooted in experiences like this.

Drawing on fieldwork in households and industry, the book is an attempt to examine socialist Cuba from the “inside.” Much research on Cuba is still clouded by a Cold War logic in which bipolar conflict asserts narrative order, making Cuban history an extension of the US and Soviet empires. Based on conversations, observations, and documents from Cuba, my aim is instead to take Cuba’s revolutionary history seriously and see it as a starting point for reconsidering the research priorities and conceptual frameworks that guide work on energy transitions and infrastructure in critical environmental studies today. The geographies of knowledge about energy are very particular, shaped as they are by research on a rather small set of countries in Europe and North America. An “inside” perspective on Cuban history, which still attends to processes and events that take place beyond national borders, provides an alternative outlook in social science energy research in an effort to, as Gavin Bridge writes, “theorize about energy geographies from elsewhere.”²

To re- and deconstruct an official Cuban government narrative, I draw on archival material collected in the Biblioteca Nacional “José Martí,” the Biblioteca Provincial Pinar del Río “Ramón González Coro,” the library of FANJ, the library of CEETES, a government repository of political speeches, and the private collections of José Altshuler. I am grateful for the assistance of the staff in these libraries, and especially to Professor Altshuler for inviting me into his home. I have also benefited greatly from the newspaper collections in the Bodleian Library and the British Library and from the interlibrary lending service at the Maughan Library in the United Kingdom.

Cuban government and Communist Party archives remain closed for research. However, as Jennifer Lambe and Michael Bustamante argue, we should be careful not to overlook “the Revolution’s own published archive” of newspapers, magazines, and bulletins as a source to the past.³ During the Cold War, Western observers often drew a sharp line between the independent capitalist media and the tendentious socialist press—“Our press tries to contribute to the search for truth; the Soviet press tries to convey

pre-established Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist truth,” as Fred Siebert and colleagues wrote in their media-studies classic *Four Theories of the Press*.⁴ For most communist parties, mass media were and still are regarded as active instruments in the production of the symbolic life of the Party and the state, aiming not only to express opinion but to form it.⁵ The dependence of Cuban newspapers on state institutions leaves no doubt—and no pretense to the contrary—that mass media are instruments of ideological production, just as political speeches and other government publications are. The question, then, is not whether we can uncover a stable, impartial past through these documents, but whose past they allow us to uncover. While many Cubans in my experience find official representations to portray a revolutionary hyperreality resonating poorly with their own lived experiences, we should ask how these representations have been co-productive of lived experiences over time. As Lambe and Bustamante suggest, the Revolution’s official narratives should be taken as an “analytical starting rather than ending point,” and that is my attitude in these pages.⁶

The book began life as a doctoral project at King’s College London. I am deeply thankful for the conversations I had with Raymond Bryant and Alex Loftus during my time at King’s. They provided detailed comments and professional guidance in equal measures, and their transformative work in political ecology has inspired my argument more than I think they realize. Simon Batterbury, David Demeritt, Matthew Gandy, and Alf Hornborg also asked provocative questions on earlier drafts, and I can only hope I have done justice to their feedback. In researching and writing, I benefited from the insights and friendship of James Angel, Sophie Blackburn, Corinna Burkhardt, Archie Davies, Cornelia Helmcke, Oscar Krüger, Jon Phillips, and Alexandra Sexton. I received wisdom, too, from members of the Contested Development research group in King’s College Geography, particularly Helen Adams, Christine Barnes, Andrew Brooks, Ruth Craggs, and Richard Schofield. In the closing stages of writing, my colleagues in the Department of Liberal Arts at King’s and, latterly, the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg have been exceptionally supportive.

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It goes without saying that the largest source of support is my family: Gunnel and Leif Cederlöf, Erik and Elin Täufer Cederlöf, Laila and Niels-Peter Hansen. Hiking with my parents among the *vegas* and *mogotes* in Viñales was one of the highlights during my lengthy stay in Pinar del Río in 2015. I want to say extra thanks to my mother, Gunnel, for discussions big and small, for encouragement and always listening to unfinished thoughts. Beyond comparison, though, it is Vanessa Hansen who carries me through life. She has walked with me along the Thames and sat with me on the Malecón. We now carry Frank together, and he has helped too, insisting on the importance of raspberries, swings, and watering the garden.

Gustav Cederlöf
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Note: For readers less familiar with Cuba, it will be helpful to know that the Cuban currency is the peso (CUP). The peso is subdivided into centavos. In 1993, the US dollar was made legal tender, which established a dual economy. The Central Bank of Cuba then replaced the dollar with a new currency in 2004, the convertible peso (CUC). The CUC was pegged to the dollar and could be traded for 24 CUP. In a long-awaited monetary reform, the currency was reunified in 2021.

