



## BOOK REVIEW

# Solovey and Cravens, Cold War Social Science

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Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens (eds.), *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*  
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This paperback edition of *Cold War Social Science*, originally published in 2012, includes 13 chapters divided into three sections: knowledge production, liberal democracy, and human nature. The collection surveys the state and the development of the American social sciences—mainly sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, future studies—during the Postwar period and the Cold War years. In a dense introductory essay, however, editor Mark Solovey warns scholars against a too-facile use of the “Cold War social science” label, which should be understood more as an hypothesis than as a conclusion. In fact, in both the introduction and Theodore M. Porter’s foreword, the complex web of government-driven research, purely scientific and theoretical interests, forms of funding, technological gizmos, mass media, and changing understanding of the public role of the social sciences is sketched as a paradoxical, often contradictory figuration of structures and processes which defy a single simplistic definition—let alone any one-way kind of causal explanation, as the very expression “Cold War social science” might suggest.

These warnings are justified by a multiplicity of facts which continuously pop up from individual chapters. First, the Cold War did not reshape the social sciences in an immediately evident and coherent way, for different and often diverging streams of research, analytical models, and empirical conclusions were elaborated from intellectuals working within different scholarly traditions—many of which were rooted in Prewar and Interwar developments (see, for example, the development of creativity studies recounted by Michael Bycroft in chapter 11). Second, many scholars did not participate in the military-academic-industrial complex, but rather took a critical stance towards it—among them neo-evolutionist anthropologists (chapter 9) and leftist critics (chapter 8). Third, local and international academic, political, and interactional factors all mediated the impact of “the Cold War” on social scientific practices and ideas, so that no generalization “in the last instance” can be advanced. At the same time, Solovey underlines that the Cold War climate exerted a clearly detectable influence on the social sciences by creating new objects of study and “entire fields of inquiry,” unseen institutional designs, and innovative forms of extra-academic patronage.



Individual chapters oscillate between a skeptical illustration of the relationships between the Cold War and the developments of social scientific disciplines and a general sense that, in Noam Chomsky's dictum, "everything was connected." I would like to call attention on Janet Martin-Nielsen's essay on the use of computer in linguistics (chapter 4) and Edward Jones-Imhotep's piece on the training of maintenance technicians (chapter 10). In spite of their modest length, both essays treat the connections between technical devices, theoretical schemes, and empirical results in a way reminiscent of some STS studies of the interplay between technology, scientific thinking, and human practices. Here machines are seen as both means of structuring theoretical hypotheses and human behavior, of educating, in a way, the habits of, respectively, practising scientist and maintenance technicians in order to gain scientific and/or technical goals in the face of uncertainty, limited rationality, and the possibility of human error. On its part, Joel Isaac's study on epistemic design (chapter 5) focuses on the understanding of the relationship between analytical schematas and the collection and interpretation of empirical data at the Department of Social Relations at Harvard. In this view, social scientists should develop models and schemes in order to treat and combine raw data with the goal of gaining "higher" (or "deeper") theoretical knowledge of social phenomena. Isaac uses some examples drawn from the so-called "Ramah project," designed and headed by Clyde Kluckhohn as a comparative study of values across five cultures, to show the generalizing tendencies of Harvard-trained anthropologists and sociologists, and to underline typical Social Relations obliteration of history in favour of reified, simplified theoretical constructs. The same tendency can be seen in Martin-Nielsen's section on Chomskian linguistics and in Hunter Heyck's essay on the creation of institutional methods for assuring the rationality of choices in the face of uncertain environments and failing human decision makers (chapter 6). At the end of the day, my general impression is that social scientists were, on the whole, driven more by scientific concerns than by political or social ones, even if Marga Vicedo's interesting essay on mother/child relations and Hamilton Cravens' sketchy analysis of the relationships between nationalism and social scientific concepts (chapters 13 and 7, respectively) point to individual cases in which Cold War ideology and scientific concepts were particularly close. The many stories about negotiations, misunderstandings, and divorces between the military, politicians, and social scientists—as described, for example, in Joy Rohde's chapter on the vicissitudes of SORO and David Engerman's essay on the Harvard Refugee Interview Project—demonstrate that the circulation, the disclosure, and the practical use of the results of scientific inquiry remained quite difficult.

Since *Cold War Social Science* was first published in 2012, some of its authors have published monographs which expand and deepen our understanding of the relationships between the development of the American social sciences and their social, economic, political, and cultural milieus between 1945 and 1970—see, for example, *Working Knowledge* by Joel Isaac (2012), *Shaky Foundations* by Mark Solovey (2013), *Armed with Expertise* by Joy Rohde (2013), *The Nature and Nurture of Love* by Marga Vicedo (2013), and *Age of System* by Hunter Heyck (2015), to which I would also add Jamie Cohen-Cole's *The Open Mind*, published in 2014. Solovey's introduction ends with an invitation to practising social scientists to participate in a wider debate on the history of their disciplines—"After all, they have a strong stake in how this history gets written" (p. 19). As a sociologist, I think that this call should be duly accepted by practising social scientists in order to begin a serious dialogue on the different ways in which the history of our disciplines is written. In particular, a theoretical, methodological, and substantive exchange between sociologists, anthropologists, economists, psychologists, and intellectual historians might shed some light on the nuances and the details of the parallel development of ideas and institutions. In general, social scientists might pay more attention to the institutional and political milieus within which social science is pursued, while historians could maybe try to read more deeply into the intricacies of the different



ideas and the theoretical tools used by other social scientists as they try to improve the strictly scientific, as opposed to the political or the social, condition of their disciplines.