



BOOK SYMPOSIUM

## Investigating anthropology's Cold War histories

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Comment on Price, David. 2016. *Cold War anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the growth of dual use anthropology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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In *Cold War anthropology* (2016), the third book in a trilogy, David Price chronicles “interactions between American anthropologists and military and intelligence agencies” (p. xx). *Cold War anthropology* forwards a perspective that by now is seemingly self-evident but perhaps in our contemporary time of forgetting bears repeating: anthropology has been involved in knowledge production that is, to varying degrees, shaped by, manipulated, and perverted by US military-intelligence organizations in play during the Cold War. Price solidifies this argument by making extraordinary use of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, and other agencies for “documents on anthropologists and organizations where anthropologists worked during the Cold War” (p. xiii). Having had some experience with FOIA requests (and parallel processes) for my own research on the history of genetics science and nuclear energy development in Brazil during the Cold War, I salute David Price, who is clearly a scholar with focused purpose and talent. Given the sheer volume of material he has waded through, I remain impressed and in awe of his persistence, stamina, and hearty backbone in carrying through on this project. The result is an invaluable resource for anthropologists and other scholars engaging with either Cold War themes or the complex history of the discipline. The book is a masterful application of investigative journalism and ought to be thoroughly lauded for what it does.



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*Cold War anthropology* is a critical and important starting point for analyzing complex interactions between American anthropologists and government agencies. But I must emphasize the phrase “starting point” for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that I am not convinced the main theoretical framing for the book is sufficiently specific or even new. The entire field of Latin American studies, for example, has argued for some time that scholarly work is both a product and constructor of policies and actions taken by the US military and other government agencies. The cases of Chile and Brazil provide just two examples of collaboration between scholarly experts and US CIA covert actions. But Price is specifically interested in anthropology: he gathers and organizes an enormous amount of material on individual anthropologists, their funding sources, and their engagement with a range of government military and development institutions. He thus builds an argument that sees anthropology as deeply complicit with and affirming of US policies of the Cold War and warns us to be vigilant against this pattern in a post-9/11 world. Price captures the diverse range of complicity with the term “dual use” anthropology, a moniker that generalizes material utility but also, as I argue here, collapses the intentions and effects of these diverse intellectual engagements, enabling them to appear as if they are all related variations of a singular theme. For this reader, the “dual use” anthropology narrative is a bit too broad as a theoretical proposition; the brush that taints individuals and institutions is so thick we are all swept up within it. Indeed, this aspect of Price’s argument is, for me, at times frustrating.

I heartily share Price’s skepticism of anthropological engagement with US military, security, and other government institutions and programs. This position is not unusual for a contemporary academic anthropologist working in Latin America and currently working at the edges of Science and Technology Studies. I have cautioned my graduate students from pursuing National Security Education Program grants, and I would prefer that they work in academia rather than in corporate, military, or government positions. But they struggle with themes of “relevance” and how to survive in a neoliberalizing academic and public sphere. Sometimes these anxieties translate into a desire to join the systems that oppress and pay the bills. Price’s book provides a healthy cautionary note to consider: work that may be considered relevant may also entail serious ethical and intellectual risks.

Price’s book is an important chapter in a respected lineage of reflexivity and critique that anthropology has already weathered, perhaps more so than other disciplines. His conclusion that “dual use” anthropology has undermined its commitments to research participants by participating in US foreign policy, military actions, and covert activities (Price 2016: 356) is akin to critiques made by an earlier generation about colonial anthropology (e.g., Asad 1973). But even while agreeing with these broader arguments, I feel a bit wary of the (perhaps necessarily) incomplete treatment of the career and interests of our predecessors and the narratives that Price propagates in order to build this picture. I am concerned by the lack of a fuller historical contextualization, the kind of work that cannot be activated in the attempt to reveal a pattern. The acknowledgment of historical situatedness and sensitivity is precisely what makes institutional ethnography, as opposed to many forms of investigative journalism, at once fraught and complex. The need for nuance and fine shading is something we now expect of these genres. But what of



simply reporting a connection or pattern of connections, as much of Price's very competent book does?

I agree with Price's cautions about knowledge production in anthropology and the ethics of use in government military and security projects. But this is not the nuanced work of institutional discourses or patterns of power that Foucauldian scholars provide, and it is not necessarily the nuanced work of Marxist cultural theorists who attempt to access the collective historicized subjectivity of a group. It is instead at times a rather blunt evidential approach that reveals facts: a person appearing in a report, an archive, a payroll, or with a connection to some other complicit source of military power, and then declares these facts as formative of a pattern. Further, the book encourages the reader to think about such relations as problematic: these anthropologists have been naive, repentant, or full collaborators in ill-fated government and military schemes of the Cold War. Yet the book provides very little analytical nuance or detail about these individuals, their motivations, their affiliations, or even their doubts. Only when Price has been able to contact individual scholars to discuss these events, and finds them repentant for their earlier acts, is there a change in analytical tone.

Let me provide three brief examples of these connections. Price takes aim at Clifford Geertz, who is linked with the Modjokuto Project (1952–59) and with CENIS, the Harvard Institution with deep affiliations with the CIA and Pentagon. Price recalls what anthropologists have conversed about for years: namely, that Geertz's fine detailed ethnographic descriptions seemed to miss (or omit) the massacre of almost three-quarters of a million Indonesians. But Price goes a step further, placing Geertz in the company of fully complicit scholars—Milliken, Rostow, and other CENIS participants. He writes, "Geertz's involvement with the Modjokuto Project, the Ford Foundation, and CENIS fits a dual use model of the half unwitting scholar who was not directly concerned with the forces and politics of the Cold War, even while contributing to the intellectual discourse in ways that supported American hegemony" (Price 2016: 98). Similarly, he captures Margaret Mead in a less than flattering role as the head of the AAA's "Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the Controversy Concerning Anthropological Activities in Thailand" in 1971 (336), a committee that issued a report that argued (against the younger generation's perspective) that "community development and counterinsurgency were simply the contemporary issues providing funding opportunities for anthropologists" (338). When the Mead report was eventually rejected, the group working in opposition to the report's perspective celebrated. Price here refers to Richard Lee's datebook that notes the following: on January 27, 1972, "he was 'standing at a bus stop somewhere on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with Marvin Harris and Eleanor Leacock discussing the new organization. It was Harris who said let's call it Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, ARPA, an ironic dig at the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Administration'" (Price 2016: 343). In this version of history, Geertz is a naive fool, Mead is a punishing elder, and Harris is an ironic (and clever) leftist. Price is lucky these people cannot speak from the grave! This rewrite of their contributions to the discipline as secondary to an accused complicity with US intelligence interests sometimes goes a bit too far.

Let me offer my own story as a challenge to Price's storytelling method. I had a friend and colleague back in graduate school who claimed inspiration from Marvin

Harris and would try to make a point about the censorship of intellectual ideas by carrying around a yardstick and comparing bookshelf space in US libraries with bookshelf space in other parts of the world. His colleagues laughed at his thumpy approach to proof, but he swore to us all that this was precisely what was needed to prove the point. Price moves around archives and FOIA documents with a similar yardstick and claims to tell unmitigated truths, connecting individuals to suspicious characters and heinous acts. At the beginning of the book, Price states that he has been warned that writing negatively about anthropological ancestors will raise the hackles of some. But reading some of Price's insinuations regarding lists of people, professional interactions, and collaborations gave me the feeling that the author judges these canonical anthropological actors by today's standards, with little patience or sympathy for historical timeframe. Is anthropology better or worse than other disciplines of the same timeframe? I am not saying Price or his readers ought to dismiss unethical acts simply because they happened in a different milieu or era, but there is something righteous and unsympathetic in Price's tone that is difficult to express. Aren't we all complicit? If complicity involves naïveté or disinterest alongside agentively heinous acts, how do we determine which anthropologists are more guilty than others?

After the difficult debates that took place within the profession shortly after the publication of Patrick Tierney's (2000) *Darkness in El Dorado*, I began to focus some of my own work on one small corner of the debates. One aspect of my current research involves contextualizing the writings and research in Brazil of the biological anthropologist and geneticist James Neel. After reading through the research papers, letters, and documents in his personal archive, I found that I had more sympathy for the man than I began with and that I had to write differently than I had originally expected. This is because Neel eventually appeared to me as a complex product of his historically situated training as a scientist, and some of the actions he took in the field acquired a certain historical coherence. When examining his work in the Amazon and with the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission in post-War Japan, I wrote about the continuities and discontinuities that struck me as central to these debates but that I felt had been ignored (Goldstein 2012; Goldstein and Stawkowski 2015). The first of these articles sat for more than two years on an editor's desk before going out for review. After receiving two positive reviews, the editor rejected the paper, explaining he was making the executive decision to prevent its publication. There is more to this story, but I quickly realized that my attempt to bring a discussion of Neel to a four-field anthropology journal (even if historically situated) had caused anxiety. In contrast, my second article (Goldstein and Stawkowski 2015) was featured on a Russian Academy of Sciences Vavilov Institute of General Genetics website (see, <http://vigg.ru/news/news-single/article/iz-istorii-biologii-s-uchastiem-iogen-james-v-neel-and-yuri-e-dubro/>). We are not sure why this happened, but perhaps it was because our paper tried to explain Neel's grip within a particular domain of radiation genetics during the same time period in which a Russian scientist offered an opposing scientific explanation. We illustrated how the position of this Russian scientist was disadvantaged in the context of knowledge production in Cold War science. The point is this: I had no control over a gatekeeping editor's decision to reject my first paper about



Neel, nor did my coauthor and I have control over a Russian organization's decision to feature a second one on their website.

All of this is to say that none of us can predict exactly how our research will be utilized. There are many excellent connections made in Price's work; I do not disagree with its conclusions. But there are passages in the book with conclusions so general that I feel as if he collected and made use of all of those FOIA documents only to tell us what we intuited some time ago. Even today, many anthropologists align closely with progressive NGOs they admire from afar, only to find once deep in the field that the NGO is involved in problematic activities. Some may feel censored from making a critique due to an earlier alliance. These issues pervade our work, yet Price's book points accusingly at such past alignments in a way that is not nuanced.

I am not advocating a return to some mythical apolitical or neutral past. But all anthropologists work in a field of alliances and allegiances. Whether we align with a heroic NGO's quest for social justice or the interests of the US government's most nefarious institutions, the adoption of an activist position against the subjects of our work is always problematic. Price's book reiterates this point with regard to the US military and related institutions, a point I stand with him on. But the narrating of this history with an eye for (re)naming collaborators and (re)signifying heroes does not help us align more effectively with the people we care about. On the other hand, Price's book is masterful in keeping to the stated argument and in making its point: anthropological knowledge has been taken up by bureaucrats, warmongers, hawks, racists, and other motley characters, and our forebearers were often complicit in these engagements. If we once fantasized that anthropology is a discipline that has always been a step ahead of its time, this book dislodges us from that comfortable temporal reading. Price's book reinspired me to think in cautionary terms about the knowledge I produce and how it could be rendered "dual purpose" by forces unseen. Read in the context of the current political cycle where investigative journalism seems all but dead, this book comes as a welcome reprieve. I hope this book will be an opening to further conversations about anthropology's past and future—an opening, not an endpoint.

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