Anthropology: My Non-Woke Personal Library and Its Saving Virtues. Part 6

By Geoffrey Clarfield

By the time I was a second-year undergraduate something was missing in my understanding of the world. My music professor lent me a book that he said might provide the kind of insight I was looking for. He was right. I binge read Clyde Kluckhohn's introductory book on Anthropology, *Mirror for Man.* This is another book that changed my life.

Kluckhohn was the head of the anthropology department at Harvard. He had spent his life studying the people's of the "four corners" of the Southwest, notably Indians, Hispanics, and Anglos. He was fascinated by their systematic linguistic differences which he thought expressed unique world views and offered researchers the opportunity to do what we now call cross-cultural research. There was and is much value in his book.

Years later, when I was based in East Africa, I read it again, understanding that this book is an expression of the American anthropological tradition that focuses on Indians, on the language, religion, and world view of American Indians based on long term participatory observation.

At about the same time, as I first read Kluckhohn's book, I discovered that just before and after WWI, the British began to send out full time professional anthropologists to their vast colonial empire in Africa and Asia with a focus on finding out how Indigenous peoples organized themselves into distinct groups and how these groups were structured and ruled (as did the French, Dutch and Belgians). So I was inducted into the two overlapping worlds of English-speaking British

and American anthropology, the first focusing on social organization, and the second on culture as a system of values.

As an undergraduate, I began to take anthropology courses, and read some of the classic ethnographic studies of these two approaches to anthropology. I came to understand that both converge in defining "institutions" (like kinship, law, economics, and music) as structured group behavior across themes that can be holistically analyzed within a larger social context and can be compared "across societies and cultures."

I came to the conclusion that culture, and thus social organization, comprises a kind of generalized and group specific "software for living," that is handed down and modified from generation to generation. Later, as a graduate student, I studied French anthropology which tries to show the systematic nature of culture, thought of as sets of language-like symbols which drive social interaction. How Cartesian!

Since much of culture is unconscious in the Freudian sense of being taken for granted (both explicit and implicit), I concluded that the goal of a good anthropological researcher is to do participant observation among a foreign cultural group and come as close as possible to providing a normative description of daily life, which then generates a "rule book" that can predict much of the specific cultural behavior of a group with perhaps 80% accuracy, allowing one to say, "Among the Nuer, or among the Navaho or the Yanomamo, this is done in this way, or they believe this to be the case and therefore…."

Since WWII, many American, Canadian, British, and European professional anthropologists have gone out to do long term field research among non-Western peoples. So many, that no one can master all the literature. Since the 1960s, most anthropologists have focused on "ethnographic area studies." Being an anthropologist myself, I have shelves full of these studies. Some anthropologists, braver than the rest, tackle

the harder task of comparing societies and cultures in order to discover what is common across all societies, and therefore can be attributed to human nature *per se*: separating what we have in common from what varies and can therefore be attributed to nurture or "culture" in the anthropological sense. Anthropology was founded as a way of finding the answer to this big question. The jury is still out. The evidence is myriad, complex, and growing.

There has been much progress, but unfortunately, mainstream Anglo American academic anthropology has now moved so far to the radical left, that there are only a few who still share the past discoveries of this field with the wider public. Sadly, much contemporary research is merely radical advocacy, dressed up in activist language.

It is telling that the American Anthropological Association (AAA) has succumbed to the anti Semitism that its founders decried after WWI and during WWII by officially supporting BDS and boycotting Israeli researchers and institutions.

Nevertheless, cultures are not all the same, they do change over time (for better and for worse) and anthropologists have not exaggerated how different is the "savage" from the "civilized." It is a topic worth exploring.

When people ask me, "If they had to read one anthropological classic or just a few books, what would they be?" I recommend three authors, starting with Napoleon Chagnon. His autobiography, *Noble Savages: My Life Among Two Dangerous Tribes,* tells his life story of doing research among an untamed Amazonian tribe called the Yanomamo. He shows both qualitatively and quantitatively a life that is nasty, violent, brutish, and short, a life where every community is the enemy of every other community. A society of what he calls, "forever war."

Chagnon also shows the personal viciousness of competing

anthropologists who follow Rousseau in believing the myth of the “Noble Savage.” They scapegoated Chagnon for showing them that it is not true.

Beside Chagnon’s autobiography, I recommend three books by a British social anthropologist, Evans Pritchard: *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer; The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People;* and *Nuer Religion.* The Nuer, are a group of warrior-like cattle pastoralists who live in the marshes of the southern Sudan. One could easily spend a year pondering the rich ethnographic details of this group of clans in Pritchard’s excellent ethnography (I spent one full semester as a graduate student, doing just that).

Finally, there is British trained anthropologist, Christopher Hallpike, (a student of Evans Pritchard) who carried out first rate research among the Konso, in southern Ethiopia and among a group in the highlands of New Guinea.

Hallpike seems to have read every major piece of French, British and American ethnology. Using the theoretical paradigm of Jean Piaget, Hallpike demonstrates in *The Foundations of Primitive Thought,* that there is a qualitative difference in the thought patterns of non-literate, preindustrial (tribal) peoples and those of us in the industrial West.

Like Chagnon, Hallpike has been pilloried for his honesty, but has coped with this with humor, ironic distance, and a furious dedication to self-publishing his remarkable books on comparative ethnography. His latest book is, *How We Got Here,* an anthropological history of the world.

These three author’s works comprise just the beginning of a vast series of studies, most of which sit unread today on the shelves of university libraries and are either vilified or ignored by many of today’s younger anthropologists, who are oh so inexperienced and, sadly, oh so Woke.

Still, at the end of the day when people ask me, “Why is anthropology relevant?” I have three answers. The first, is that when anthropology began in earnest in the early 20th century it was trying to figure out how the primitive, non-literate, preindustrial, tribal, and Asian worlds were organized, socially and culturally. These congeries of tribes and oriental despotisms – that include the exploding Islamic world – were soon to be thought of as “modernizing” or “developing” societies who would one day throw off tradition and embrace some sort of Western oriented modernization. This is not what happened.

Instead, these societies became more powerful, more hybrid, more science fictional, and more threatening to the West. Anthropological studies of these peoples are a valuable resource –for those who will do the reading– that provides good descriptions and analyses of the non-Western social and cultural worlds, and much of their history, both oral and written.

Second, even as we in the West are now threatened by the “developing” third world, we have regressed as a culture and society, away from our Judeo-Christian values and Greco Roman modes of thought. We are increasingly returning to premodern, predemocratic, preindustrial forms of culture and thought. This is being driven by social elites who are creating networks that resemble traditional tribal, hierarchical social structures, with their private kindergartens, private schools, Ivy League degrees, placement in government or Wall Street, revolving doors, and class-oriented endogamy.

Indeed, our elites behave increasingly like the elites of developing countries. This is a terrifying convergence which has created much of the darkness of the first part of the 21st century, with the widespread domination of Woke culture and behavior. By studying modernizing and traditional societies, we can get a better picture of what our life will

become like if we continue to regress into a new form of tribalism and ideological fanaticism, dominated by self-serving transnational elites. Anthropological studies of tribalism –its structures, practices, and its deficits– hold up a mirror to the dangerous path our society is on today.

Third, is the relevance that the anthropological study of comparative religion, both written and unwritten, may have for developments in medicine stemming from discovering the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms in Amerindian religious practices. For, it was anthropologists who discovered that most Amerindian religions were based on some kind of Shamanism which usually included the use of hallucinogenic plants which formed the main sacrament of many of these religious systems.

Weston La Barre is an anthropologist who studied the Peyote Cults of American Indians. In his magnum opus, *The Ghost Dance*, La Barre argues that these cults had their roots in the culture of the late European Paleolithic and were brought – along with the plants and sacred mushrooms – across the Bering strait from Siberia by the ancestors of these American Indians up to 24,000 years ago.

Using an ethnographic, historical, and Freudian understanding of these "crisis" cults, La Barre argues that the *spirits* are various and changeable, but the mushroom-induced religious experience is not: and that this kind of hallucinogenic experience is somehow at the root of all religion.

When I first read *The Ghost Dance* in my twenties, I noticed that the scholarship on the world religions at that time– Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism – either avoided this idea or suggested that there was no evidence for it in the written history of these religions. The implication was that these shamanistic mushroom driven experiences were not "really" revelations, but simply "primitive religion."

I felt that this could not be true and so delved into rebel

Biblical scholar John Marc Allegro's book, *The Sacred Mushroom, and the Cross*, where he argues that ancient Near Eastern religions, as well as Judaism and Christianity, were mushroom based at their origins. Allegro was dismissed as a lunatic by the academic community, without bothering to do any research to prove or disprove his thesis. The fact that his book became a cult best seller among young people in the sixties who were experimenting with LSD and Psilocybin did not help Allegro with anything but book sales.

Luckily, since then, other researchers such as Gordon Wasson, Stella Kamrisch, Jonathon Ott, and Carl Ruck have slowly and painfully put together the evidence that suggests that indeed, the "world religions" (in particular the Greek and Roman polytheists) when they first emerged, had a similar chemical base. Christianity, too, began with hallucinogenic masses adopted from the followers of Dionysius according to independent researcher Muraresku.

We now live in a world in which one of the top public health threats facing our society and our youth are harmful prescriptions recommended by doctors and psychiatrists, driven by Big Pharma, as well as by "illegal" drugs such as heroin and cocaine and their derivatives, like fentanyl that are causing havoc in society.

As one South American drug lord commented in a TV interview, "The problem of drugs is not one of production but of consumption!" If gringos were not chasing cocaine there would be no need for a "war against drugs." And so it is with a sense of what I can only call "anthropological irony" that I read about the John Hopkins Psychedelic Medicine program that carefully, and in controlled circumstances, uses LSD and Psilocybin to treat drug addiction and similar life-threatening trauma.

The experiments and the results are positive and hopeful. It has taken five hundred years since the conquest of the

Americas by Europeans, but it is through a few pioneering American anthropologists explorations of Amerindian "psychedelics" that their application to our biggest pandemic and trauma, offers the potential of massive benefits from what an obscure aspect of modern anthropological research discovered decades ago. I do not doubt that other obscure anthropological discoveries of the ethnobiological variety may turn out to benefit all humanity.

Thank you, Dr. La Barre and your many colleagues. And many thanks to those stubborn and brave Native American Shamans.

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