

Shared Diversity

Peoples and Cultures in The Global Village

2nd Edition



Edited by **Norbert Dannhaeuser** and **David L. Carlson**

SHARED DIVERSITY:

**Peoples and Cultures in
The Global Village**

2nd Edition

by

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and

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Foreword

For many years we have taught a course titled "Peoples and Cultures of the World" that is taken primarily by students who are not majoring in anthropology. The course can be taught in a variety of ways, but our approach has been to emphasize the contributions that anthropology can make to understanding cultural diversity in the world around us. We have found that most of the currently available collections of readings are designed for use with a cultural anthropology textbook which takes topics such as "Subsistence," "Marriage and Kinship," and so on in sequential order and discusses their variability around the world. At the end, those texts (and the parallel readers) spend a chapter or so on development, colonialism, and cultural survival. While we find this an appropriate way to organize an introduction to cultural anthropology for students who will go on to take additional courses that focus on areas of the world in more depth, we do not find it as effective in presenting the relevance of anthropology to students of engineering, business, and agriculture.

In selecting articles for this reader, we had several goals in mind. First, we wanted to identify how anthropology differs from other social sciences by introducing the concepts of culture, ethnocentrism, and participant observation. Secondly, we describe the traditional (non-state) societies that anthropologists are so famous for studying. These topics span approximately one-third of the selections. Third, we cover the development of pre-industrial states and the role of peasants who provide the economic base to support stratified societies. Fourth, we explore the role of colonialism and the unequal relationships between industrial and pre-industrial states. Fifth, we look at the emergence of the extensive division of labor in contemporary industrial states and their relationships with the Third World or Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Finally, we explore the dynamic issues of cultural diffusion and globalization in the contemporary world as the volume and flow of international trade, migration, and information has dramatically increased.

Our goal is to demonstrate that anthropology is concerned with more than a few isolated, remote villages inhabited by a handful of people who choose to avoid the influences of globalization. An understanding of traditional societies provides students with a better awareness of how human societies solved similar problems of human existence in other parts of the world and in the past.

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Part I

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ITS STUDY

Chapter 1

What is Anthropology?

Anthropology distinguishes itself from other social sciences in a number of ways. Perhaps the most important is the way anthropologists define the term, "culture." The term has been widely defined and there are several books that explore the history and development of the concept in anthropology. Despite a wealth of definitions, most anthropologists recognize that culture is learned and that it is shared. Language is crucial to our ability to invent and share culture. Anthropologists also emphasize "holism," taking all aspects of culture into account and considering how the different parts of culture are inter-related. Anthropologists learn about other cultures through field research. They live with members of a culture for extended periods of time so that they can develop rapport, a sense of mutual trust and empathy, that makes it possible for the anthropologist to learn about aspects of culture that are rarely shared with strangers. By actively participating in a different culture, the anthropologist is better able to confront "ethnocentrism," a belief in the superiority of your own culture, as it is experienced by both the anthropologist and the society he or she is studying.

Article 1

Substance¹

James L. Peacock



If there is a central concept in anthropology, it is culture. On one level, there are almost as many definitions of culture as there are anthropologists. On another level, most anthropologists would agree that it includes certain central features. In particular, those things (thoughts, behavior, etc.) that are learned and shared. Peacock discusses the meaning and implication of culture by pointing out that it often involves those aspects in our society we take for granted. This becomes clear when relating this concept to people culturally different from us, such as those living in Surabaya, a port-city of Java (Indonesia).

Behold! I tell you a mystery!
1 Corinthians 15:51-2

What is life? What is the essence of human existence? Of what does experience consist?

Anthropology offers a variety of answers to these questions. This variety can be reduced to several major themes. Most prominent, perhaps, is this: Human life should be viewed as a whole—a configuration interwoven of many forces and aspects, all organized by culture.

It's Real!: Culture Beheld

Surabaya – hot, crowded, impoverished – is a port city of Java, which is the most populous island of the world's fifth largest nation, Indonesia. In 1962, when I was doing fieldwork in Surabaya, an estimated 75,000 of its million inhabitants were beggars. Most people were undernourished, living on a third the food Westerners eat. Inflation had run away; prices were tripling monthly, and monthly wages were enough for only a few days of each month. The family with whom my wife and I were living, in a shantytown near the railroad tracks, were surviving but barely. Medicine was difficult to obtain; communications were uncertain; transportation, an adventure. The city was dominated by the Communist party, which at the time was the second largest in Asia and was poised for revolution. Instability, hardship, and anxiety characterized this period titled by [the]... film "The Year of Living Dangerously."

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Amazingly, despite the hard and uncertain conditions of life, the exquisitely refined values of Javanese culture were sustained. If one visited a house, one would be seated at a small table and served a drink of tea or sweetened water. One could not straightaway drink but had to wait until host or hostess gave the command, a crooned word, "Manggoooooo," after which both of you would drink. Thus began the formalized ceremony of a Javanese visit, properly terminated by intoning in the same refined language, "Now I ask permission to leave." Such ceremonialism was so solidly entrenched and well understood in Javanese life that it was even the subject of working-class theater: A clown, playing the host, would substitute for the high Javanese invitation "Drink" the crude Javanese command "Slurp it up," alluding to the animal impulse beneath the polite facade. But the civilized veneer, if satirized, was deeply valued.

The conventions of refined language and manners were elaborated also in a vast complex of ceremonial life. A Javanese wedding of an ordinary couple would not suffer in pomp and pageantry by comparison to the Royal Wedding. Exquisitely graceful dances, inspired by the Javanese courts, were performed not only in the courts on auspicious occasions but on ordinary days by slum children on rickety bamboo stages. Cults in mysticism and meditation abounded, and ordinary people worrying about their next meal would expound esoteric philosophies and theorize about the profundities of Javanese civilization.

All of this was Javanese culture. The manners, ceremonies, language, arts, and philosophies were so deeply ingrained that they did not disappear under awful conditions. The culture is as much a way of life as the deformed beggars, haggling merchants, and corrupt politicians; it still flourishes, even after a time of violence when, following "the year of living dangerously," an estimated half-million Indonesians were massacred and turbulent changes occurred.

As in this example, most anthropological fieldwork has been done in settings harsh, remote, or both – rarely in the comfortable suburbs or salons that we associate with culture and civilization. Yet out of these exposures to "harsh light" has come an appreciation of what we have termed culture – an enduring way of thinking and of ordering our lives that survives the struggle to survive. Whatever culture is, "it's real." At least something is, which we can conveniently label "culture."

Culture Defined

In surveying the anthropological definitions of culture, one is reminded of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's lines: "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...." Anthropologists have promiscuously showered affection on the notion of culture, a notion so obvious in their experience and so central to their discipline. Yet they have never agreed on a single definition. Certain commonalities are, however, apparent.

The classic definition was provided by Sir Edward Tylor, the founder of social anthropology, in 1871: "Culture...taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

In Tylor's definition, culture is "acquired by man as a member of society." This implies that culture is learned, rather than inherited biologically. It implies further that culture is social; it is shared, rather than a property of the individual. On these two features of culture, most anthropologists would agree. Some would distinguish the society of ants or bees from that of

humans in that ant or bee society, although boasting division of labor (as between queens and workers) and other traits akin to human social organization, is seemingly an expression of inherited or instinctual rather than learned patterns. Others might distinguish the mental productions of the psychotic from that of a culture; the psychotic's delusion is peculiar to himself, whereas the ideas in a culture, though sometimes equally bizarre, are shared rather than borne alone.

These features – that culture is learned and shared – state conditions of culture. But what is culture itself? Tylor lists several elements of culture: “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” This list is long. It seems to include just about anything one can learn and share. Anthropologists have narrowed the list in different ways. Some have emphasized the mental or attitudinal rather than the behavioral aspect of culture. In this view, culture is not behavior itself but the shared understandings that guide behavior and are expressed in behavior. How do we learn about these understandings? Through observing behaviors and other visible or audible forms that manifest them. Difficulties in this formulation need not detain us now. Our present task is to grasp that something – some kind of pattern or organized disposition – is expressed in behaviors characteristic of each group of people. We need to sense the importance of these patterns and the power they have in organizing our lives.

The example from Surabaya is extreme; here people are maintaining culture under conditions imposing great strain. One thinks of other examples in history. Jan Bokelson's utopian religious community at Munster was besieged in 1535 by the royal armies of the Rhine. Cut off from food, the faithful were forced to celebrate the glories of God by performing athletic feats while starving to death. Most anthropological studies have not been carried out under conditions so severe as this, but, as noted, most have been carried out under conditions that were in some way harsh. Yet these are the experiences that have fueled the anthropological conviction that human culture has force and power: If culture survives here, it will prevail anywhere.

What are some of the qualities of culture that render it powerful?

Culture is taken for granted. In the metaphor of Edward Hall, culture is a “silent language.” Traditions and conventions are silent in the sense that they are often unconscious. People who claim to act rationally, to be motivated only by considerations such as efficiency, unconsciously are guided by rigid and pervasive traditions. To lay bare these traditions is a central task of the anthropologist, not to mention the satirist. Hall's work exemplifies this approach.

Hall points out that for centuries the West has conceived of time as linear. Time is a line stretching between the past and the future, divided into centuries, years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds. Every event we unhesitatingly classify along that line: The Age of Dinosaurs is many intervals back, World War II is near our present position; gestation may stretch nine months along the line, the act of birth is only a point. The future is similarly envisioned as a movement along a line: Nations follow five-year plans and try to progress; individuals have careers. Everyone should make a determined movement down the line and overcome obstacles and interruptions in order to “get ahead.” This way of thinking is embedded in our culture from many sources. It is in our language, which, unlike many non-European languages, has tense; it categorizes experience in past, present, and future. It is in our JudeoChristian religious tradition, which imagines that we have a history – a past progressing from the creation of the world through

Abraham, Moses, and the prophets – and a future. It has been intensified by the machine age, which forces us to mechanize, plan, sequentialize with precision. We have been taught this way of thinking in schools, which carry us through a sequence of grades toward graduation; by our proverbs, which tell us that time is money, that time waits for no man, that time should be saved and not wasted. We have grown up thinking about time in this linear way. We think this way without thinking about the way we are thinking. We take this way of thinking for granted.

Anthropologists like Hall teach us that not everybody thinks this way. The Trobriand Islanders of the Western Pacific reportedly held different assumptions. It is said that, unlike the hard-driving achiever, the Trobrianders did not particularly mind interruptions or even see an obstacle to their completing a task as an interruption. To them, time was not so much a line along which one moved as it was a puddle in which one sat, splashed, or wallowed. Trobrianders imagined time as a directionless configuration rather than a directional line.

One should, of course, hasten to caution against the danger of stereotyping a culture. In Java, I once was introduced as a speaker on a program by the phrase, "Now Mr. James will *mengisi waktu*," which means "fill up time." I was inclined to interpret this as part of the elaborate ceremonialism noted earlier: that people cared less about what I said or accomplished than that I filled a slot in the ceremony. This sort of nonlinear pattern can be seen in Javanese life, where time is traditionally based on cycles rather than progressions and is associated with Hindu-Buddhist traditions; but Western linear calendars and drives toward striving and achieving are apparent too.

That sense of time varies is obvious to anyone who looks and listens, for differences are apparent even within our own society. Black time occasionally differs from white time, and other ethnic and regional variations are noticeable too: "I'd love you in a New York minute but take my Texas time," goes a country and western song. Despite noticing the variations, most of us take for granted whatever notion of time is governing us. Achievers who claim simply to act efficiently and rationally are really performing a giant ritual expressing traditions of their particular culture and subculture. One may choose consciously a particular career or life-style and may justify a particular creed or set of values and goals, but no one ever uncovers all of the taken-for-granted premises that are part of one's culture—the "tacit knowledge" by which one lives in the world.

Culture is shared. Linguistic anthropology offers one of the most striking examples of this: the phoneme. The phoneme is a feature of sound that is crucial for communication. If you compare the way different people talk, even those who speak the same language and have the same "accent," you can hear all kinds of variations. Speakers use different pitch, volume, tone quality, stress, and patterns of breathing. They have different kinds of vocal organs, and some may even lack teeth or have other peculiarities. Incredibly, despite these differences, they communicate. How does language accomplish this? Every language identifies a small number of distinctions in sound (some languages have as few as a dozen, none have more than ninety, English has about forty) that are absolutely critical; these distinctions are phonemes. So long as these are produced and understood, communication can occur. For example, in English it is necessary that the speaker distinguish between "b" and "p" (otherwise he would confuse "pin" and "bin," "bull" and "pull," "pan" and "ban"). It is not necessary that he make all possible distinctions. Some that are critical in other languages make no difference in ours. For example, such Asian languages as Chinese and Thai distinguish tones that change the meanings of words. Without practice, an English-speaker

cannot even hear the difference between such tones, much less reproduce them, for tonal difference is not phonemic in English.

Shared patterning in language illustrates a feature of culture that has impressed anthropologists and anyone else who has thought about it. With no individual intending or planning it, a group establishes rules, codes, values, and conventions that its members share. Not confined to any single person, shared culture is beyond the control of any single person; it takes on a power of its own.

Encounter with the Other

Once in a small-town mosque in Java, a congregation of several hundred prayed that I convert to Islam. What was the source of my resistance? For one thing, I had taken the stance of the "researcher," the fieldworker "studying" this tradition, rather than the stance of a believer in one thing open to something else. In fact, when the Muslim group once asked me, "What is your religion?" I replied, "My religion is anthropology"; I meant that I was a student of belief, rather than a believer. At a deeper level, to convert would have meant giving up a cultural identity as well as accepting a religious commitment.

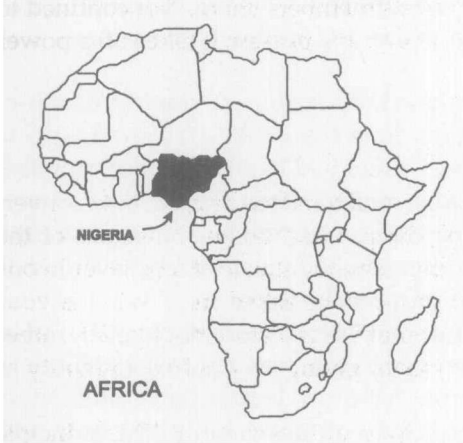
Encounter with the other intensifies awareness of one's own cultural identity. This principle explains the anthropologist's insistence on fieldwork in some alien setting, and it explains his use of comparison between the foreign and the familiar. The fish is the last to understand the water; perhaps he can do so in contrast to the land. Some kind of encounter with the other is necessary to grasp the power and reality of culture.

Culture, then, is a name anthropologists give to the taken-for-granted but powerfully influential understandings and codes that are learned and shared by members of a group. Different schools and branches of anthropology differ in the emphasis they give to culture (for example, British social anthropology emphasizes more the social context of culture, whereas American cultural anthropology emphasizes culture itself), but the concept of culture is important throughout anthropology. A major mission and contribution of anthropology has long been, and continues to be, to enhance our awareness of the power and reality of culture in our existence.

Article 2

Shakespeare in the Bush¹

Laura Bohannon



Ethnocentrism is not only a western practice. All peoples have a tendency to evaluate and judge other people and cultures on the basis of their own values and knowledge. Laura Bohannon discovers this as she tries to explain a classic of English literature, Hamlet, to the Tiv elders in Nigeria. After repeated interruptions, they congratulate her for getting most of the story right!

Just before I left Oxford for the Tiv in West Africa, conversation turned to the season at Stratford. "You Americans," said a friend, "often have difficulty with Shakespeare. He was, after all, a very English poet, and one can easily misinterpret the universal by misunderstanding the particular."

I protested that human nature is pretty much the same the whole world over; at least the general plot and motivation of the greater tragedies would always be clear, everywhere, although some details of custom might have to be explained and difficulties of translation might produce other slight changes. To end an argument we could not conclude, my friend gave me a copy of *Hamlet* to study in the African bush; it would, he hoped, lift my mind above its primitive surroundings, and possibly I might, by prolonged meditation, achieve the grace of correct interpretation.

It was my second field trip to that African tribe, and I thought myself ready to live in one of its remote sections – an area difficult to cross even on foot. I eventually settled on the hillock of a very knowledgeable old man, the head of a homestead of some hundred and forty people, all of whom were either his close relatives or their wives and children. Like the other elders of the vicinity, the old man spent most of his time performing ceremonies seldom seen these days in the more accessible parts of the tribe. I was delighted. Soon there would be three months of enforced isolation and leisure, between the harvest that takes place just before the rising of the swamps and

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the clearing of new farms when the water goes down. Then, I thought, they would have even more time to perform ceremonies and explain them to me.

I was quite mistaken. Most of the ceremonies demanded the presence of elders from several homesteads. As the swamps rose, the old men found it too difficult to walk from one homestead to the next, and the ceremonies gradually ceased. As the swamps rose even higher, all activities but one came to an end. The women brewed beer from maize and millet. Men, women, and children sat on their hillocks and drank it.

People began to drink at dawn. By midmorning the whole homestead was singing, dancing, and drumming. When it rained, people had to sit inside their huts: there they drank and sang or they drank and told stories. In any case, by noon or before, I either had to join the party or retire to my own hut and my books. "One does not discuss serious matters when there is beer. Come, drink with us." Since I lacked their capacity for the thick native beer, I spent more and more time with *Hamlet*. Before the end of the second month, grace descended on me. I was quite sure that *Hamlet* had only one possible interpretation, and that one universally obvious.

Early every morning, in the hope of having some serious talk before the beer party, I used to call on the old man at his reception hut – a circle of posts supporting a thatched roof above a low mud wall to keep out wind and rain. One day I crawled through the low doorway and found most of the men of the homestead sitting huddled in their ragged cloths on stools, low plank beds, and reclining chairs, warming themselves against the chill of the rain around a smoky fire. In the center were three pots of beer. The party had started.

The old man greeted me cordially. "Sit down and drink." I accepted a large calabash full of beer, poured some into a small drinking gourd, and tossed it down. Then I poured some more into the same gourd for the man second in seniority to my host before I handed my calabash over to a young man for further distribution. Important people shouldn't ladle beer themselves.

"It is better like this," the old man said, looking at me approvingly and plucking at the thatch that had caught in my hair. "You should sit and drink with us more often. Your servants tell me that when you are not with us, you sit inside your hut looking at a paper."

The old man was acquainted with four kinds of "papers": tax receipts, bride price receipts, court fee receipts, and letters. The messenger who brought him letters from the chief used them mainly as a badge of office, for he always knew what was in them and told the old man. Personal letters for the few who had relatives in the government or mission stations were kept until someone went to a large market where there was a letter writer and reader. Since my arrival, letters were brought to me to be read. A few men also brought me bride price receipts, privately, with requests to change the figures to a higher sum. I found moral arguments were of no avail, since in-laws are fair game, and the technical hazards of forgery difficult to explain to an illiterate people. I did not wish them to think me silly enough to look at any such papers for days on end, and I hastily explained that my "paper" was one of the "things of long ago" of my country.

"Ah," said the old men. "Tell us."

I protested that I was not a storyteller. Storytelling is a skilled art among them; their standards are high, and the audiences critical—and vocal in their criticism. I protested in vain. This morning they wanted to hear a story while they drank. They threatened to tell me no more stories until I told them one of mine. Finally, the old man promised that no one would criticize my style "for we know you are struggling with our language." "But," put in one of the elders, "you must explain

what we do not understand, as we do when we tell you our stories." Realizing that here was my chance to prove Hamlet universally intelligible, I agreed.

The old man handed me some more beer to help me on with my storytelling. Men filled their long wooden pipes and knocked coals from the fire to place in the pipe bowls; then, puffing contentedly, they sat back to listen. I began in the proper style, "Not yesterday, not yesterday, but long ago, a thing occurred. One night three men were keeping watch outside the homestead of the great chief, when suddenly they saw the former chief approach them."

"Why was he no longer their chief?"

"He was dead," I explained. "That is why they were troubled and afraid when they saw him."

"Impossible," began one of the elders, handing his pipe on to his neighbor, who interrupted, "Of course it wasn't the dead chief. It was an omen sent by a witch. Go on."

Slightly shaken, I continued. "One of these three was a man who knew things" – the closest translation for scholar, but unfortunately it also meant witch. The second elder looked triumphantly at the first. "So he spoke to the dead chief, saying, 'Tell us what we must do so you may rest in your grave,' but the dead chief did not answer. He vanished, and they could see him no more. Then the man who knew things – his name was Horatio – said this event was the affair of the dead chief's son, Hamlet."

There was a general shaking of heads around the circle. "Had the dead chief no living brothers? Or was this son the chief?"

"No," I replied. "That is, he had one living brother who became the chief when the elder brother died."

The old men muttered: such omens were matters for chiefs and elders, not for youngsters; no good could come of being behind a chief's back; clearly Horatio was not a man who knew things.

"Yes, he was," I insisted, shooing a chicken away from my beer. "In our country the son is next to the father. The dead chief's younger brother had become the great chief. He had also married his elder brother's widow only about a month after the funeral."

"He did well," the old man beamed and announced to the others, "I told you that if we knew more about Europeans, we would find they really were very like us. In our country also," he added to me, "the younger brother marries the elder brother's widow and becomes the father of his children. Now, if your uncle, who married your widowed mother, is your father's full brother, then he will be a real father to you. Did Hamlet's father and uncle have one mother?"

His question barely penetrated my mind; I was too upset and thrown too far off balance by having one of the most important elements of Hamlet knocked straight out of the picture. Rather uncertainly I said that I thought they had the same mother, but I wasn't sure—the story didn't say. The old man told me severely that these genealogical details made all the difference and that when I got home I must ask the elders about it. He shouted out the door to one of his younger wives to bring his goatskin bag.

Determined to save what I could of the mother motif, I took a deep breath and began again. "The son Hamlet was very sad because his mother had married again so quickly. There was no need for her to do so, and it is our custom for a widow not to go to her next husband until she has mourned for two years."

"Two years is too long," objected the wife, who had appeared with the old man's battered goatskin bag. "Who will hoe your farms for you while you have no husband?"

"Hamlet," I retorted without thinking, "was old enough to hoe his mother's farms himself. There was no need for her to remarry." No one looked convinced. I gave up. "His mother and the great chief told Hamlet not to be sad, for the great chief himself would be a father to Hamlet. Furthermore, Hamlet would be the next chief; therefore he must stay to learn the things of a chief. Hamlet agreed to remain, and all the rest went off to drink beer."

While I paused, perplexed at how to render Hamlet's disgusted soliloquy to an audience convinced that Claudius and Gertrude had behaved in the best possible manner, one of the younger men asked me who had married the other wives of the dead chief.

"He had no other wives," I told him.

"But a chief must have many wives! How else can he brew beer and prepare food for all his guests?"

I said firmly that in our country even chiefs had only one wife, that they had servants to do their work, and that they paid them from tax money.

It was better, they returned, for a chief to have many wives and sons who would help him hoe his farms and feed his people; then everyone loved the chief who gave much and took nothing – taxes were a bad thing.

I agreed with the last comment, but for the rest fell back on their favorite way of fobbing off my questions: "That is the way it is done, so that is how we do it."

I decided to skip the soliloquy. Even if Claudius was here thought quite right to marry his brother's widow, there remained the poison motif, and I knew they would disapprove of fratricide. More hopefully I resumed, "That night Hamlet kept watch with the three who had seen his dead father. The dead chief again appeared, and although the others were afraid, Hamlet followed his dead father off to one side. When they were alone, Hamlet's dead father spoke."

"Omens can't talk!" The old man was emphatic.

"Hamlet's dead father wasn't an omen. Seeing him might have been an omen, but he was not." My audience looked as confused as I sounded. "It was Hamlet's dead father. It was a thing we call a 'ghost.'" I had to use the English word, for unlike many of the neighboring tribes, these people didn't believe in the survival after death of any individuating part of the personality.

"What is a 'ghost'? An omen?"

"No, a 'ghost' is someone who is dead but who walks around and can talk, and people can hear him and see him but not touch him."

They objected. "One can touch zombis."

"No, no! It was not a dead body the witches had animated to sacrifice and eat. No one else made Hamlet's dead father walk. He did it himself."

"Dead men can't walk," protested my audience as one man.

I was quite willing to compromise. "A 'ghost' is a dead man's shadow."

But again they objected. "Dead men cast no shadows."

"They do in my country," I snapped.

The old man quelled the babble of disbelief that rose immediately and told me with that insincere, but courteous, agreement one extends to the fancies of the young, ignorant, and superstitious, "No doubt in your country the dead can also walk without being zombis." From the depths of his bag he produced a withered fragment of kola nut, bit off one end to show it wasn't poisoned, and handed me the rest as a peace offering.

"Anyhow," I resumed, "Hamlet's dead father said that his own brother, the one who became chief, had poisoned him. He wanted Hamlet to avenge him. Hamlet believed this in his heart, for he did not like his father's brother." I took another swallow of beer. "In the country of the great chief, living in the same homestead, for it was a very large one, was an important elder who was often with the chief to advise and help him. His name was Polonius. Hamlet was courting his daughter, but her father and her brother... [I cast hastily about for some tribal analogy] warned her not to let Hamlet visit her when she was alone on her farm, for he would be a great chief and so could not marry her."

"Why not?" asked the wife, who had settled down on the edge of the old man's chair. He frowned at her for asking stupid questions and growled, "They lived in the same homestead."

"That was not the reason," I informed them. "Polonius was a stranger who lived in the homestead because he helped the chief, not because he was a relative."

"Then why couldn't Hamlet marry her?"

"He could have," I explained, "but Polonius didn't think he would. After all, Hamlet was a man of great importance who ought to marry a chief's daughter, for in his country a man could have only one wife. Polonius was afraid that if Hamlet made love to his daughter, then no one else would give a high price for her."

"That might be true," remarked one of the shrewder elders, "but a chief's son would give his mistress's father enough presents and patronage to more than make up the difference. Polonius sounds like a fool to me."

"Many people think he was," I agreed. "Meanwhile Polonius sent his son Laertes off to Paris to learn the things of that country, for it was the homestead of a very great chief indeed. Because he was afraid that Laertes might waste a lot of money on beer and women and gambling, or get into trouble by fighting, he sent one of his servants to Paris secretly, to spy out what Laertes was doing. One day Hamlet came upon Polonius's daughter Ophelia. He behaved so oddly he frightened her. Indeed" - I was fumbling for words to express the dubious quality of Hamlet's madness - "the chief and many others had also noticed that when Hamlet talked one could understand the words but not what they meant. Many people thought that he had become mad." My audience suddenly became much more attentive. "The great chief wanted to know what was wrong with Hamlet, so he sent for two of Hamlet's age mates [school friends would have taken long explanation] to talk to Hamlet and find out what troubled his heart. Hamlet, seeing that they had been bribed by the chief to betray him, told them nothing. Polonius, however, insisted that Hamlet was mad because he had been forbidden to see Ophelia, whom he loved."

"Why," inquired a bewildered voice, "should anyone bewitch Hamlet on that account?"

"Bewitch him?"

"Yes, only witchcraft can make anyone mad, unless, of course, one sees the beings that lurk in the forest."

I stopped being a storyteller, took out my notebook and demanded to be told more about these two causes of madness. Even while they spoke and I jotted notes, I tried to calculate the effect of this new factor on the plot. Hamlet had not been exposed to the beings that lurk in the forest. Only his relatives in the male line could bewitch him. Barring relatives not mentioned by Shakespeare, it had to be Claudius who was attempting to harm him. And, of course, it was.