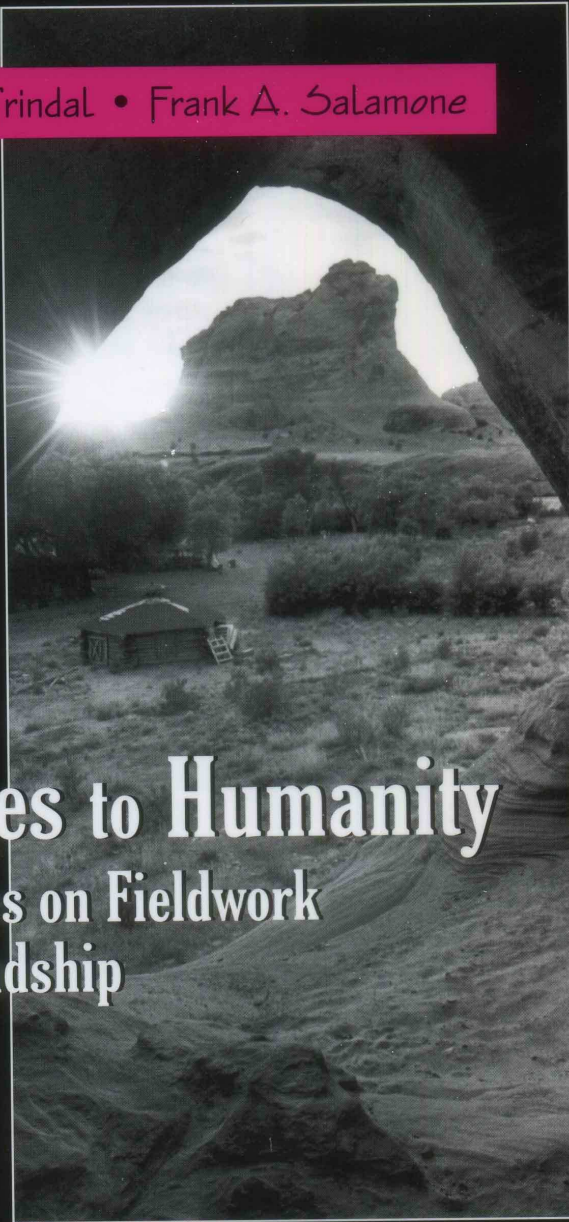


Bruce T. Grindal • Frank A. Salamone

Bridges to Humanity

Narratives on Fieldwork
and Friendship

Second
Edition



Alma Gottlieb &
Philip Graham

Our Village Needs Chairs

In a memoir of their first two alternately distressing and exhilarating field stays in Beng villages in Côte d'Ivoire called *Parallel Worlds*, Gottlieb and Graham chronicled the difficulties of transcending the often enormous cultural gulfs separating them from their neighbors and developing rewarding friendships with some of their village hosts and hostesses.

Returning to Bengland in summer 1993, the authors aimed to offer their book royalties to two villages for community development projects of their choosing. Would the residents of these villages agree on small-scale projects? Should Gottlieb and Graham try to steer a development project toward their own values concerning social justice? In this essay, the authors meditate on the obligations—as friends, as residents of the economically privileged West, and as fellow humans—that devolve on the ethnographer of a place, any place, over the long term.

Alma

During our previous stays among the Beng in the rain forest of Côte d'Ivoire, Philip and I had tried to repay the hospitality and generosity of our hosts and hostesses. People's medical needs and demands turned out to be the most compelling arena for our efforts. Indeed, these were so great that we always ended up spending a large proportion of my grant funds on such supplies as bandages, antibiotic creams and washes, malaria medicine, aspirins, and vitamins, and by offering basic nursing services daily. Villagers regularly sought and appreciated this assistance, but we were painfully aware that we could help only some individuals and not others, and certainly not the village as a whole. Moreover, our efforts, however well meant, were of the most transitory sort—indeed, quasi-ritualized encounters. Soon after we left the villages, whatever medical supplies we left behind would run out, and rural Beng would have as little access to Western biomedical care as when we had arrived.

Many scholars now say that the time for such temporary reciprocity is gone, and a far more active, even lifelong, commitment to our field community is morally required. Our willingness to engage with the ethical foundations of our fieldwork is undoubtedly part of a broader tendency to interrogate critically the ethical implications of virtually every aspect of the discipline, from fieldwork to writing to conceptualizing our analytical models to teaching. This move also acknowledges that many of us continue to return to the field during our own lifetimes. Ironically, anthropologists' increasing acknowledgment of continuing obligation to our host communities comes at the same time that many in our discipline are pushing the limits of the very notion of an appropriate field site or community, expanding its classic focus on non-Western villages to factories, urban elites, ethnographers' native communities, science and the scientific laboratory, Internet and cell phone communities, the theatre, transnational and multiple sites, and so on. The long-term ethical demands of these new ethnographic practices and places have yet to be systematically charted.

Acknowledgments

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While the classic field site is thus being reconstructed in daring and imaginative ways, some of us continue to pursue more traditional style fieldwork in rural communities in the non-Western world. In my own case, as an ethnographer who had built a career on the basis of such fieldwork, I had assumed a lifelong debt that I thought could never be fully repaid—but that I needed to try to repay it at least partially. Perhaps my sense of professional obligation is similar to the way that lineages view the business of marital debts in some non-Western communities. In certain African societies, for example, bridewealth payments are seen as constituting a long-term obligation that is sometimes completed only after a number of years or even when one of the spouses dies. Elsewhere, a marriage itself may be seen as a long-term obligation that can never be repaid—instead, marriage may incur a permanent system of debts and counterdebts among lineages. Similarly, our “marriage” to the Beng occasions a continuing commitment. And ours is a decidedly asymmetrical obligation, with the bulk of debt clearly on our side.

Recognizing this debt early on in our fieldwork, Philip and I had vowed that if we were ever in a position to offer an ongoing basis of support to the economically impoverished Beng community, we would. Indeed, by the end of our first stay, having become enmeshed in kinship ties that began as fictive but soon felt real enough, we were poignantly aware of the Beng value that in families, everything—from illness and misfortune to bounty and good fortune—should be shared.

A modest opportunity came in 1993, when we returned to Côte d'Ivoire immediately after publishing our fieldwork memoir, *Parallel Worlds*. After negotiating our book contract, we had decided to split the book's after-tax royalties equally with the two Beng villages in which we had previously lived, Kosangbe and Asagbe. Arrived in Abidjan in May 1993, we were delighted to learn that the U.S. Embassy offered a new matching grant program that was meant to support small-scale, locally appropriate village projects. If we could submit an application for a project that was acceptable according to the guidelines of the program, the embassy would match our funds, thereby increasing dramatically the possibilities that we could offer the Beng.

Would the residents of the two Beng villages be able to agree on a small-scale development project . . . or would various subgroups diverge, perhaps bitterly, in their opinions? Would one group monopolize the decision-making process to their own advantage? If it seemed this was in danger of occurring, should we claim titular rights to the profits realized by *Parallel Worlds* and try to guide the villagers toward a project that reflected our own values concerning democracy, gender equality, and ecologically appropriate development—or would this be too interventionist, our own form of neocolonialism? Influenced by a generation of critics of Western colonialism and postcolonial “development” efforts, I had often presented my students with lectures on “how Europe had underdevel-

oped Africa." In enacting a modest development project ourselves, could we so easily avoid mistakes of our own?

Soon we relocated to Bengland, taking up a place in the compound of our old friend, Amenan Akpoueh, who was still living in her natal village of Asagbe. We let the village elders know that we had brought means to support modest development projects for Asagbe and Kosangbe. We hoped to call a public meeting in Asagbe. But Germain Kouassi—the representative of the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), which was then the nation's official government party—decided instead to spread the news of our offer throughout the village and then report back to us periodically on the evolving public opinion. No doubt Germain enjoyed this opportunity to boost his prestige by serving as mediator between us and the village, in effect a political midwife to what he hoped would become a significant enterprise. Over the next few weeks, Germain proposed for our consideration a series of possible projects that he said grew out of his conversations with other villagers.

The first option Germain reported was the construction of a building to serve as the headquarters for the PDCI party in the village. But having already studied the stipulations of the U.S. Embassy, we knew that this strictly political undertaking wouldn't be eligible for a matching grant, so we politely asked for a second choice on the part of the villagers.

"You could help construct houses for our village's elementary school teachers," Germain replied. "The teachers have to rent out houses from the villagers, and this arrangement isn't good for them. The government is planning to build houses for the teachers in two years, but if you fund this project, it would be done sooner."

Philip and I suspected that this proposition would also fall outside the guidelines of the U.S. Embassy since the Ivoirian government itself was planning to undertake the project. Besides, the teachers—none of whom was Beng—seemed to be living well enough, at least compared to the villagers. We didn't see why our scarce funds should support relatively privileged outsiders rather than poor Beng farmers.

"What about a mill?" we suggested, adding, "when we were in Abidjan, officials at the U.S. Embassy said that they've introduced mills in several other villages around the country, and the machines seem to be working quite well. They hull coffee and rice, and they also grind peanuts and corn."

"Let me propose it and see what others say," Germain agreed. A few days later, he returned to report that there didn't seem to be much support for the mill.

"But people would get a better price when they sell their coffee and rice," I countered. "And it would really help the women, since they work so hard grinding corn and peanuts by hand." Fearing a male monopoly on the discussion, I decided to ask Germain bluntly, "Have you given the women a chance to voice their opinions?"

"They're the ones who are opposing the mill," Germain answered quietly. "It's complicated," he added, appearing embarrassed.

My friend Amenan, who'd been listening, joined in to explain that some village women were reluctant to accept a mill because they were afraid of sorcery-based sabotage, rooted in a recent incident in the village. A short while ago, it seemed, an old Beng woman had taken some manioc to an immigrant man living in the village who owned his own small, manioc-grinding mill. The old woman was outraged by what she considered an exorbitant milling fee and walked away in a huff. As soon as she left, Amenan added dramatically, the machine broke down! Everyone in the village had agreed that the old woman had used witchcraft to break the machine. With this sad story weighing heavily in current memory, some women were nervous about introducing another mill—and perhaps more reasons for sorcery—into the village.

Germain suggested a new plan for our funds: we could buy a powerful, outdoor amplifier system. This would be used for large, village-wide meetings, Germain explained—for example, when government officials from the cities came to conduct meetings in the village. This way, everyone in the village could hear the proceedings.

Once again, we doubted that the U.S. Embassy would support yet another of Germain's politically motivated schemes. Reluctantly, Germain agreed to canvas public opinion once again. Soon he reported back to us the unwelcome news that the mill was now becoming the focus of a dispute between the teachers and the villagers. Ironically, the teachers were supporting the mill project... while some villagers still preferred the project of constructing houses for the teachers. Perhaps these villagers reasoned that if Philip and I supported housing for the teachers and witchcraft were to follow, it would be the teachers' problem and no concern of the villagers.



Amenan and Alma. Photo by Philip Graham.

How could we broach this impasse and “do good” for the Beng community when it was seeming increasingly doubtful that there even was “a Beng community”? Perhaps, I wondered bitterly, there were just congeries of disputatious individuals who called themselves “Beng.” At the time, Philip was revising the manuscript of his novel, *How to Read an Unwritten Language*—a title that unfortunately seemed to resonate all too well with the mysterious changeability of our Asagbe neighbors.

Soon Germain returned once again: the skeptical villagers had unexpectedly changed their minds and decided on the mill after all. I was relieved, though still a little sad. Reminded of my friend Amenan’s last childbirth, I thought back to the delivery I had partly witnessed and partly missed back in 1980. Was I destined to be only half-present when important events occurred? But of course Philip and I were delighted that the villagers had finally agreed on a project that we ourselves approved of, as we thought it might actually alleviate in modest ways their poverty. We turned our attention to Kosangbe, eager to finalize a project for that village before anyone in Asagbe voiced further doubts about the mill.

Philip

If Alma and I had any foolish illusions that we’d managed to capture the fluid Beng world between the covers of a book, our return to Bengland in the summer of 1993 soon evaporated such notions. Clearly, the last page of our memoir was not our last page with the Beng—though after years of writing and revising, writing and revising, I think that in some ways our village friends and neighbors had quietly, slowly, become characters to me, actors in a parallel literary world.

As Alma and I sat in a gathering with the elders of Kosangbe under the village kapok tree to discuss the distribution of book royalties, it was clear we’d never be able to pin these people to the pages of a book. We’d worked so hard to make them come alive on the page, and here they were, our Beng friends, the “characters” of *Parallel Worlds*, effortlessly themselves before us, teasing and debating each other far more vibrantly than we’d ever been able to portray.

After all our writing, how little we knew them. I’d predicted that the book royalty negotiations would run smoothly in Asagbe (how wrong I’d been!), and feared that the always contentious Kosangbe villagers would be our greatest challenge. Yet here were our former crusty neighbors, once so easily divided from each other, now just as easily civil, and surprisingly united in their judgments. The normally cunning and often dictatorial chief, San Yao, now searched earnestly for consensus, and the usually sharp-tongued Ché Kofi guided the discussion gently yet eloquently. Clearly, these two men had changed, matured in the years since we’d first met them. Or had Alma and I merely underestimated these



Girl works her village's water pump. Photo by Philip Graham.

aspects of their personalities, not given them enough weight in our portrayals? Oh, the curse of a writer, endlessly revising. . . .

What all the elders finally agreed on was this: long overdue repairs to the village water pump. Currently the women of Kosangbe had to work overtime with their old and deeply inefficient pump, an exhausting, daily chore with seemingly no end in sight, for no one was expecting the government, after so many years of neglect, to help them any time soon. I sat back on my chair beneath the kapok tree, pleased that the male elders had placed the interests of the women of the village first on their list. It was a surprise as well, considering what I'd

long considered to be Beng men's indifference to the terribly burdensome workloads of the women, from the daily gathering of wood and water to the constant triple demands of farming, cooking, and child care.

Alma and I felt certain that water pump repairs could be funded by the U.S. Embassy, so we agreed with confidence to the elders' choice on the spot. Within a week, Yapi Kouadio, a Beng mechanic who could fix almost anything, traveled by bush taxi to the city of Bouaké and haggled with Jula traders there over prices for materials and spare parts. He also suggested a way to adapt the well so that a woman would get twice as much water for half the usual effort by converting from a hand pump to a foot-pedaled pump. Even with this addition to the project, when we tallied up all the necessary expenses for parts along with the cost of labor, we still had a substantial amount of money left for the villagers' use. So we initiated yet another round of discussions, engaging Yacouba Kouadio, our dearest friend in the village, as a trusted middleman.

After a few days, a delegation from Kosangbe, headed by Yacouba, came to visit us in Asagbe to report the villagers' decision. This was the moment when Alma and I shifted from what had been, perhaps, too convenient a fit with Beng villagers' needs and our own Western assump-

tions of value and, once again, realized that no matter how carefully we'd written our friends into a book, they were still capable of surprising us.

"Our village needs chairs," Yacouba announced.

But not the traditional wooden stools or chairs of the sort made by Ghanaian carpenters. Instead, the Kosangbe villagers wanted flashier chairs in the current and popular Ivoirian style, made in a very busy factory in Abidjan—comfortable chairs with brightly colored molded plastic seats attached to a sturdy metal frame.

Alma and I knew them well. In Asagbe they were brought out on ritual occasions for the visiting elders to sit on. To our eyes, they looked garish—such bright yellows, greens, blues, and reds! But they were indeed comfortable—those molded plastic seats really did the trick, and this was a considerable plus for elders who had to sit through hours of funeral orations or marriage thanking speeches. The fact that the chairs were expensive added to their prestige. Asagbe had bought theirs through contributions raised by every compound—in a sense, the entire village owned those chairs, which had become a demonstration of village pride and respect for visitors.

Kosangbe, however, while the ritual center of Bengland, was a small village, and a poor one as well, even by local standards. The villagers had tried more than once but had been unable to raise enough funds for such fancy chairs. Yet, more often than most Beng villages, Kosangbe hosted many events in the ritual calendar. Each event brought with it a moment of shame when no modern, welcoming chairs could be offered to honored guests. In Yacouba's words, Kosangbe's "name was broken" before all the other Beng.

So we agreed to buy fifty chairs for Kosangbe. Alma and I took a trip to the factory in Abidjan and negotiated a price. We also couldn't resist a little aesthetic meddling and picked out the most muted color available—dark blue. Then we arranged for delivery, understanding that we were ensuring the arrival of much more than furniture: these chairs represented to the people of Kosangbe the rescue of their village's good name.

Still, we had royalty money left over. So Kosangbe went through a third round of discussions. This time the request that Yacouba announced to us in Amenan's courtyard was even more surprising: "The elders would like a stereo system for the young people of the village."

"A stereo system?" I replied, beginning to feel less like a grateful guest of Bengland and a bit more like Santa Claus. Yet there must be a story behind this unexpected request. I leaned forward with great interest as Alma and I waited for our friend to provide it.

"The youths don't have anything to do in the village in the evening," Yacouba explained, "or anywhere to go to amuse themselves. Farming is so hard. Why *shouldn't* they move to M'Bahiakro or Bouaké?" Indeed, Kosangbe had lost more than ten percent of its population in recent years—nearly all of the loss being young men and women leaving for the



Fifty blue plastic chairs stacked up in the public plaza of Kosangbe upon presentation to the village. Photo by Alma Gottlieb.

larger towns and cities. It had become difficult to persuade a family from another village to offer a daughter in marriage to a Kosangbe man, for such a young woman would have to move to a tiny, backward place—even if it was the most powerful of all Beng villages, ritually speaking.

But Kosangbe's reputation would soon be on the rise, Yacouba declared, now that a refurbished well and beautiful blue chairs for the most respected guests were on the way. A weekly dance party, the elders reasoned, would not only give the Kosangbe youth another reason to remain in their natal village, it would make marriage negotiations with other villages far easier. Kosangbe already had a gasoline-powered generator that could be adapted to run a stereo system, and, Yacouba added, some of the young men had already worked up a list of the favored stereo components to buy; they were particularly hopeful that the tape deck might be a Sony.

By now, our continuing experiences in Bengland had begun to revise us, authors who at least unconsciously felt we'd earned a dollop of authority about the Beng. But what had we learned except that we'd always learn? So Alma and I found ourselves once again back in Abidjan, this time in the ironical pursuit of a good deal on expensive Japanese electronic technology, all in the service of helping shore up the shaky demographics of the most traditional of all Beng villages.

On the day we brought the stereo system back to Kosangbe, everyone danced, from the youngest child to old San Yao, the frail chief of the



Mother and daughter pound food in a mortar. Photo by Alma Gottlieb.

village. When the elders stopped the music briefly to bless us ritually, Alma and I felt a bit closer to that elusive acceptance we'd always craved, and we felt that we had somehow come full circle: by distributing the proceeds of our book about Beng culture, we had not only adopted Beng notions of obligation and generosity, we had further entered into the culture's logic, discovering value not only in typical development projects easily approved by U.S. Embassy officials, but also in projects that offered benefits that were more sociological and psychological than economic . . . but whose effects were no less tangible.

Parallel Worlds, written in the hopes of bridging the gulf between two cultures, had, through its royalties, brought us the gift of discovering how easy it was for our book about fieldwork to be revised in the face of the ongoing fieldwork experience. As a writer, revision has always been for me a professional obligation and a personal passion; yet, slow learner that I am, it had taken me so long to understand that fieldwork itself is a form of revision, version after version of one's faltering understanding being "written" and then altered in the face of new insights. *Parallel Worlds*, I realized, was only an early draft in a continuing journey of experience and imagination.

Postscript

In the years since *Parallel Worlds* was published, we have received many queries from students about specific events that we discussed in

the book, and our reflections now, many years after the fact, about them. We reproduce here some excerpts from some of these questions and our responses as they pertain to the theme of this collection.

1. *Is there one incident that signaled to you that you were truly accepted?*

"Feeling truly accepted" is a process that we don't think is ever fully definitive—it's not really a once-and-for-all, watershed moment. As we spent more and more time among the Beng, we indeed often felt more and more accepted, but there were still bumps and obstacles along the way, and some people probably never accepted us for their own reasons. Also, during our second time in Bengland, once we decided to live in Asagbe rather than Kosangbe, a new kind of acceptance/rejection calculus entered our experience, as Asagbe is a much larger village than Kosangbe, and so inevitably there would be groups of people we had little to do with. Then, too, in both villages, some individuals may have accepted us in some ways and in some contexts, but not in others.

In the field, we discovered that acceptance is often a multistranded concept rather than an all-or-nothing affair. For instance, even early on, many people in Kosangbe were comfortable sharing thoughts about subjects such as the weather, their crops, and social issues such as marriages, while declining to talk about religious issues.

2. *Did you make the choice to bring so much medicine with you to the villages as a way to offer a service to the people (and to gain an immediate "in" with them), or were you surprised by the role you took on as community doctor?*

This was totally unplanned for our first visit! We quickly realized, though, that the villagers had far greater need for medicine than we did. In 1980, we had to replenish our supplies regularly, as they ran out very early on as a result of the role of village "nurses" that we unexpectedly came to play. Philip in particular would sometimes spend three or four hours a day dispensing medicine and medical care. In subsequent visits, we've planned to bring medical supplies, since our hosts made it clear that they really value this service, and Alma has written this expense into her grant proposals.

Ironically, playing the role of village "nurse" increased both closeness and distance: closeness insofar as people trusted us with their most intimate bodily afflictions as well as their thoughts about what might be causing this or that disease; and distance insofar as our access to expensive resources, and our knowledge of how to obtain and use these resources, highlighted the economic and educational gulfs separating us from our village neighbors. Despite these separations, we thought we had no choice: opting to deny such medical resources—some of them life-saving—because they could be perceived as an attempt to "fit in" more would, we judged, be unethical.

3. Do you feel that your presence in Kosangbe changed or altered that community's culture in any way, good or bad?

In the grand scheme of things, we came and went and didn't change much, if anything, long term. We've now donated all our profits from the book and then some to the community, and that has had a positive impact, but even that is still relatively short term and modest. Conceivably the most significant impact on the Beng as a group may be indirect. After our last visit, we've sponsored and semi-adopted a former resident of Kosangbe as a student in the United States. He completed a BA in political science and an MA in African studies on our campus, and he's now completing his PhD in international relations at another university. Currently the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire is preventing him from returning home, even for a short visit. If he's able to return to his home country once he completes his doctorate, he hopes that he'll be in a position to help the Beng community in a significant way that could have a long-term effect.

4. How has this experience changed your life? What did you learn? Is there anything you learned from your stay with the Beng that you couldn't have learned from another culture?

It's impossible to answer the last question insofar as we haven't lived in any other society as intensively as we have among the Beng. But there are certainly things we learned from the Beng that we hadn't thought about from living in the United States. We both re-thought child-rearing strategies as a result of living in Beng villages, and Beng child-rearing styles have influenced much of our own child-rearing strategies since we became parents in 1987. Alma has written about how Beng pregnancy and childbirth practices influenced her pregnancy and childbirth with our first child (the article, "The Anthropologist as Mother: Reflections on Childbirth Observed and Childbirth Experienced," was first published in the journal *Anthropology Today*; a short version is included in the first chapter to her book, *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From*). Philip discusses his thoughts on literary issues toward the end of *Parallel Worlds*, in the section on "The Alien Snow." Specifically, he found that his experience in Bengland changed him greatly: after learning another culture's assumptions, the America he returned to seemed like a world, not *the* world. This affected his writing, seeing his culture with the eyes of both an insider and an outsider, most particularly in his novel, *How to Read an Unwritten Language*, and his story collection, *Interior Design*.

Bringing our son Nathaniel with us in 1993 when he was six-years-old further taught us new things about both Beng and American child-rearing practices that we hadn't previously thought about. For instance, Alma noticed a much higher level of independence among Beng children as young as two-years-old, and this taught her to question the high level of dependence most middle-class Euro-American parents create in their

children much of the time. Nathaniel has written a little about some of his own perceptions in an article all three of us coauthored, "Infants, Ancestors and the Afterlife: Fieldwork's Family Values" (published in the journal *Anthropology and Humanism*); more recently, he's written about the experience in some college application essays!

5. *How did fieldwork affect your marriage?*

It definitely brought us closer together! We were together 24-hours a day for days, even weeks, at a time. Sharing all that level of experience and minutiae on a daily basis—bodily, emotional, intellectual, social—adds much to a relationship, either positive or negative. People who crave levels of privacy in an intimate relationship might be driven crazy by it, but fortunately that wasn't the case for us.

6. *Was Alma truly friends with Amenan?*

Yes (and no)—but that's probably the same answer I'd give regarding lots of other friendships too. There aren't many friends with whom we share absolutely everything. In my mind, Amenan was indeed a close friend, and we did share many, but undoubtedly not all, intimate thoughts. The same is true for most of my relations with my American friends in the United States. Perhaps other people might draw the boundaries differently around "friendship" . . . I guess it depends on how you interpret "truly."

7. *How has your impression of U.S. culture changed as a result of your experience with Beng culture?*

Alma: In lots of ways! As an anthropologist, I question everything continually, I'm always asking myself why we do X or Y, and how it might be done differently elsewhere. This forms the basis of much of my teaching, especially at the undergraduate level. To introduce the arbitrary nature of our monetary system, I've set fire to a dollar bill the first day of an introductory class in anthropology; to teach students to understand and critique the cultural values behind familiar childhood games, I've had students redesign the Parker Brothers game of "Life" for another society other than the middle-class, Euro-American players for which it is meant. Having become close to people who have such different models for how to do so many familiar tasks and activities of daily living—eating, sleeping, having sex, walking, singing, buying items in a store, saying *hello*, bathing—I no longer take any aspect of my own society for granted as "normal" or "natural."

Philip: Africa and America seem less and less distinct from one another. I used to believe in the magic realist writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez's observation that life in the tropics "resembles the wildest imagination," but no longer. Human beings' wild imaginations are on display everywhere. Yes, the Beng believe in spirits and the invisible presence of ancestors, but glance at any church in America and you can bet it's filled

with people who believe in angels and devils. Stock analysts and weather reporters are our culture's diviners, who claim to predict (and not always accurately) the economic and meteorological future. There is, in fact, far more belief in "magic" in American culture than we're willing to admit. And now, with the advent of voice mail, instant messaging, the Internet, blogging, reality TV, and the 24-hour news cycle, our culture is constricting, or even losing, one domain of privacy after another. In this way, we increasingly resemble an African village, where there's rarely an escape from the scrutiny of others.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think all cultural anthropologists owe a permanent debt to the communities in which they have conducted research? If so, why? And what sort? If not, why not?
2. Do you think fifty plastic chairs and a stereo system were the best use of development funds for Kosangbe?
3. In offering funds from the royalties of *Parallel Worlds*, should Gottlieb and Graham have vetoed any choices for development projects, or should their responsibility have been to honor the community's preference, even if that preference violated their own egalitarian values?
4. Do you perceive any differences in the issues that concern Graham as a writer and Gottlieb as an anthropologist, either while in the field or in the writing of their experiences in this essay?
5. What are the dangers of writing about people from another society? Can they become "characters" whose portrayal might take on independent life? Can their human complexities be captured, or are they more likely to be simplified?
6. Is fieldwork indeed a continual process of revising one's assumptions, or are there permanent truths that can be identified in other societies?
7. In donating their book royalties to the Beng, Gottlieb and Graham seem to have internalized some of the values of obligation in Beng culture. Is such an adoption of a host culture's values an inevitable aspect of anthropological fieldwork? Is it desirable?