



**Society for
Psychological
Anthropology
Newsletter**

Spring 2024

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SPA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Janis H. Jenkins

Dear SPA Community,

As new President, I send warm greetings to all SPA members, longstanding and prospective. We are an interdisciplinary community of researchers, teachers, and students with active engagements in a wide range of issues concerning subjectivity at the nexus of culture, psyche, body, power, and world.



As matters of lived experience, the social, psychological, and political atmospheres we currently inhabit are notably fraught, both globally and locally. While recognition of this state of affairs could be reduced to the truism that any or most eras are fraught with conflict, the immediacy of current circumstances is nonetheless genuine and palpable. Atmospheres – including those of university environments – are marked by strife and turbulence in uneasy coexistence with the struggle for transformation and healing. Within psychological anthropology, we are mindful of the complex ways in which psychological and political processes can be interwoven with the fabric of social settings as sites of harm, on the one hand, and sites of care, on the other. We are aware that human development requires a creative dynamism of social conditions that foster thriving and nourish possible selves, lives, and worlds.

While contemporary challenges for daily life, scholarship, and collegial exchange are substantial, the stakes are no less significant. In this regard, perhaps there is a modicum of difference between our globalized era and that of a century ago when psychological anthropology was established. Challenges to selfhood and identity have only grown more complex. Yet as an interdisciplinary field, our continued strength is that we have long embraced a diversity of theories and methods that emphasize the inseparability of culture, body/mind, and the sociopolitical structures of society, and the insistence that human experience is a powerful starting point of ethnographic investigation.

SPA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS (CONTINUED)

To speak from my own experience of the SPA, I have been a member of the Society since my graduate student days at UCLA. My early studies as an anthropology PhD student in the 1980s in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences were conducted according to what I only later recognized as a local cultural assumption: I imagined my research environment as representative of “simply the way things are” across universities and across the field of anthropology. With the dual mentorship of my anthropology adviser, Robert B. Edgerton, and the eminent psychiatrist Marvin Karno, I studied human conditions through the lens of cultural conceptions of psychosis, working with Mexican immigrant families. This led me to think that comparative cultural study of psychotic-related conditions was an obvious course of study, a self-evident way to examine the meaning of being human at the very edge of experience. While the study of serious mental illness remains one of my longstanding interests, I have long since been disabused of the notion that this kind of work was, for most anthropologists or even psychiatrists, obvious or standard. With the passage of time came the inevitable observation that my early academic environment was located in a particular historical and cultural moment for the interface of anthropology and psychiatry. That unique moment in the development of psychological anthropology and the training environment it generated shaped me as an interdisciplinary researcher among diverse social scientists, health scientists and clinicians.

This work taught, what for me, mattered most: careful, empathic research in an effort to understand lived experience and to empirically determine what makes a difference for recovery from afflictions that are culturally diagnosed as mental illness. The ethnographic surprise was to discover that something of academic interest in psychological anthropology – cultural conceptions of mental illness – is actually of critical importance for the course and outcome of such illness. So while I have always held an inherent intellectual fascination with what I take to be fundamental human processes of culturally constituted capacities of extraordinary experience – voices, visions, and tactile modulations – to discover that the cultural interpretation and emotional response of others to such states could make a difference for peoples’ lives and illness conditions, was then and now, mind-blowing. The “stuff” of interest within psychological anthropology, philosophy, psychopharmacology, and cultural psychiatry could pack a powerful punch.

SPA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS (CONTINUED)

While at UCLA, I was recruited by Byron Good to join the NIMH-funded postdoctoral program at Harvard Medical School in was then called “Clinically Relevant Medical Anthropology.” While not planned, this move turned out to be, in part, a traveling psych anth show. While I knew little of medical anthropology, I discovered that my new colleagues knew little of psychological anthropology. I was asked to lead seminars on the collaboration of anthropologist Edward Sapir and psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan. This was a highly productive environment and, for me, signaled the beginning of a thorough synthesis of interpretive cultural methods and psychological theory in the study of culture, emotion, and mental illness.

Encountering mostly Salvadoran women who came to a clinic in Cambridge where I worked with a Latinx team of clinicians, I found the need to expand my theoretical toolkit to prominently take into account the political violence that marked the lives of those I worked with ethnographically. Drawing on Bateson's notion of ethos to describe the tonal qualities of social atmospheres, I published a formulation of “political ethos” to identify social domains of power and interest that shape experience. I find this to be a generative way to think about situations and atmospheres that I continued to carry in my traveling psych anth bag. At Case Western Reserve it remained salient for my research on psychosis and depression with Puerto Rican and African American lived experience. Likewise, it inspires my longstanding cross-border (Mexico-US) research at my current academic home of UCSD, an enduring site of psychological anthropology that to my knowledge is the only department that was actually founded as a department of psychological anthropology and where we have contributed to the development of interdisciplinary Global Mental Health.

Convening our next SPA Biennial meeting in New Mexico (more info in this newsletter) holds special resonance for me since my family and I have lived in various parts of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation for various periods of time over the course of decades. I have conducted interdisciplinary research with newly arrived Kurdish and Vietnamese refugees and immigrants who had fled political violence. My more recent interdisciplinary team-based research focused on culturally “hyper-diverse” adolescents struggling with mental health. That work resulted in a book entitled *Troubled in the Land of Enchantment: Adolescent Experience of Psychiatric Treatment (2020)*, co-authored by me and Tom Csordas.

SPA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS (CONTINUED)

From my vantage as President, I can affirm and attest that there is much vital energy in psychological anthropology to expand our understanding of human being and possibility. I look forward to exploring these together at our April 2025 Biennial Meeting of the SPA Biennial in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico. Those who attended the 2019 Biennial here remember it fondly.

With anticipation and warmest wishes,

Janis H Jenkins,
SPA President

ANNOUNCING THE 2025 SPA BIENNIAL MEETING

On behalf of the SPA Board, the SPA Biennial Planning Committee and the SPA Program Committee, we welcome your attendance for the upcoming 2025 Biennial Meetings. We have the privilege of convening our meeting in this beautiful setting, with the profits from the Tamaya Resort contributing to social programs in the Santa Ana Pueblo. In addition, the Tamaya Horse Rehab is an on-site horse rescue -- a non-profit group of primarily volunteers who work with the horses through touch and care to help with rehabilitation and the fostering of horse-human relations.

The SPA Biennial Meeting is always a highly anticipated opportunity to experience the significant work of our colleagues in an up close and personal setting, and small enough to allow for conversation and exchange and large enough to embrace the diversity of the significant topics addressed by Psychological Anthropology. The quality of any meeting rests on its participants, and we welcome you to develop panel sessions, individual papers or posters, or roundtables, or other creative ways to showcase and share your work at the conference. Some will present work that is well formulated while others may be in early stages of writing and development of their work that is in preliminary stages. We welcome all scholarly and creative forms at all stages!

Feel free to be in touch with any questions by contacting Janis Jenkins (SPA President, jhjenkins@ucsd.edu) or Bridget Haas (SPA Secretary, bmh7@case.edu)



Society for Psychological Anthropology

BIENNIAL MEETING

April 3-6th 2025

Hyatt Tamaya Resort, Santa Ana Pueblo

New Mexico



Start planning for papers, panels, posters, roundtables!

Submission & Registration Portal:

Opening Oct 1st, Closing Nov 1st, 2024

**More information to follow, including registration for non-presenters*

2023 SPA AWARD WINNERS

THE STIRLING PRIZE



The Stirling Prize is awarded to a previously published work (to an article or book in alternating years; the 2023 prize was awarded to an article), that makes an outstanding contribution to any area of psychological anthropology.

The 2023 SPA Stirling Prize was awarded to Yahalom, J., Frankfurt, S., & Hamilton, A. B. (2023). *Between Moral Injury and Moral Agency: Exploring Treatment for Men with Histories of Military Sexual Trauma*. *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 10(1), 1-21.

The 2023 Stirling Prize Committee Members were Sarah Willen (chair), Anita von Poser, and Edda Willamowski.

In the words of Stirling Prize committee chair, Sarah Willen: “In their outstanding article, Yahalom, Frankfurt, and Hamilton explore how sexual violation of men serving in military contexts, which they term ‘military sexual trauma,’ can wreak havoc on men’s (deeply gendered) sense of subjectivity, creating ‘moral ruptures’ that unhinge their social worlds and derail their ability to forge intimate connections. Yet the authors offer far more than just ethnographically sensitive accounts of veterans’ unraveling lives. Drawing on their rich professional collaboration, which melds theories and methods from anthropology and psychology, they argue that we need to reconceptualize the therapeutic process of healing from sexual trauma. They show how trauma’s impact, and thus traumatic recovery, extends beyond the intrapsychic domain. Since the damage of military sexual trauma is also interpersonal, and of course deeply gendered, social exchange in group therapy can play a pivotal role in supporting moral restoration. As one veteran explained, ‘confronting this demon, telling someone else I had this tragic experience,’ and ‘listening to the other guys in the group ... really gave me hope that maybe, with time, things might get better.’ Beyond its ethnographic elegance, theoretical innovation, and clinical relevance, this powerful article also stands as a stark reminder that militarism and military violence don’t just harm those who end up on the wrong side of a weapon -- they can also harm those who wield weapons themselves.”

2023 SPA AWARD WINNERS

THE CONDON PRIZE

The Richard G. Condon Prize is awarded annually to the best student essay in psychological anthropology

The 2023 SPA Condon Prize was awarded to Maija-Eliina Sequeira for her essay, “Learning about time: Reflections on the Socialisation of Time-thinking among Children in Colombia and Finland”



Maija-Eliina Sequeira is a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research takes an interdisciplinary approach to examine and compare how children in Helsinki and Santa Marta, Colombia, learn to interact with others in locally appropriate ways. Through a combination of ethnographic and experimental methods, she explores different aspects of social interaction, including conflict resolution, management of peer behaviour, childrearing practices, and the socialising role of emotion and social status in shaping children’s thoughts, expectations, and behaviours.

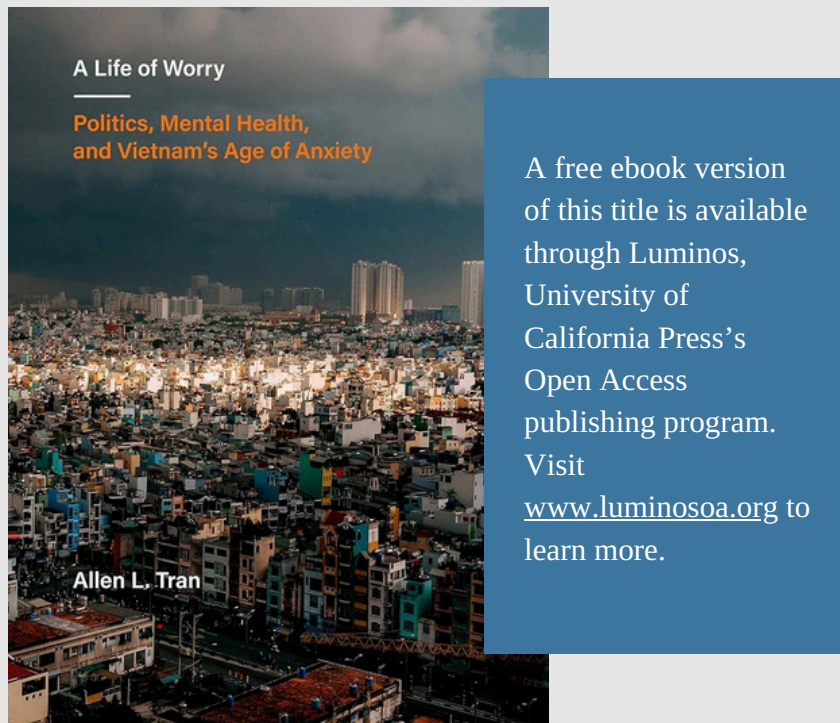
In the paper, Maija draws on the concepts of event time and clock time to frame and examine the different time-related practices observed in Helsinki and Santa Marta during her doctoral fieldwork. Developmental research on time-thinking broadly considers being future-oriented to be inherently beneficial for children; in the paper, Maija engages with this assumption critically in the light of her observations from these two very different contexts.

Maija’s paper was selected by 2023 Condon Prize Committee members Sonya Pritzker, Larry Monocello, and chair Whitney Duncan “due to its clear and concise articulation of theory and methods, the ways in which it directly engages the intersections between psychology and culture, its ethnographic critique of theories of time and child development, and its thoughtful multidisciplinary engagement.”

2023 Condon Prize Honorable Mention was awarded to Julio Villa-Palomino for “Extension: Configurations of Care in Community Mental Health.”

NEW BOOKS

A Life of Worry: Politics, Mental Health, and Vietnam's Age of Anxiety by Allen L. Tran



Who, what, and how we fear reflects who we are. In less than half a century, people in Vietnam have gone from fearing bombing raids, political persecution, and starvation to worrying about decisions over the best career path or cell phone plan. This shift in the landscape of people's anxieties is the result of economic policies that made Vietnam the second-fastest-growing economy in the world and a triumph of late capitalist development. Yet as much as people marvel at the speed of progress, all this change can be difficult to handle.

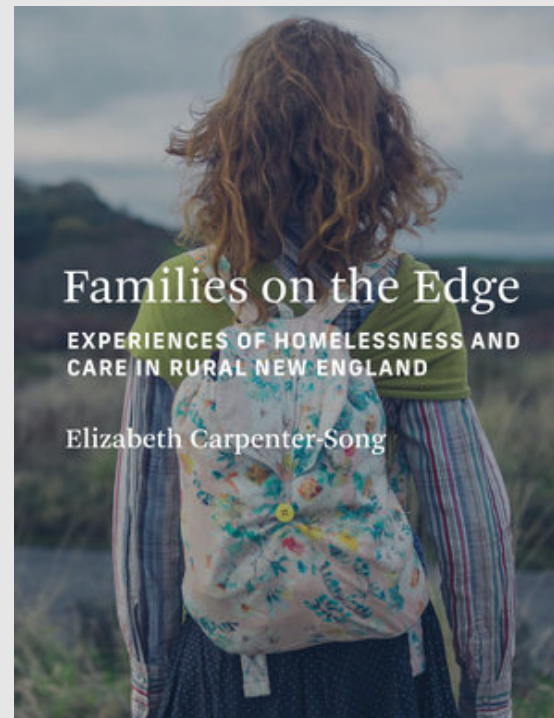
A Life of Worry unpacks an ethnographic puzzle. What accounts for the simultaneous rise of economic prosperity and anxiety among Ho Chi Minh City's middle class? The social context of anxiety in Vietnam is layered within the development of advanced capitalism, the history of the medical and psychological sciences, and new ways of drawing the line between self and society. At a time when people around the world are turning to the pharmaceutical and wellness industries to soothe their troubled minds, it is worth considering the social and political dynamics that make the promises of these industries so appealing.

NEW BOOKS

Families on the Edge: Experiences of Homelessness and Care in Rural New England

by Elizabeth Carpenter-Song

Elizabeth Carpenter-Song is currently Research Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Dartmouth College. Her work has been published in journals ranging from *Ethos* to *Psychiatric Services* to *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*. Find more about this book by MIT Press [HERE](#)



An intimate account of rural New England families living on the edge of homelessness, as well as the practices and policies of care that fail them.

Families on the Edge is an ethnographic portrait of families in rural and small-town New England who are often undercut by the very systems that are set up to help them. In this book, author and medical anthropologist Elizabeth Carpenter-Song draws on a decade of ethnographic research to chart the struggles of a cohort of families she met in a Vermont family shelter in 2009, as they contend with housing insecurity, mental illness, and substance use. Few other works have attempted to take such a long-term view of how vulnerability to homelessness unfolds over time or to engage so fully with existing scholarship in the fields of anthropology and health services.

Research on homelessness in the United States has been overwhelmingly conducted in urban settings, so much less is known about its trajectory in rural areas and small towns. Carpenter-Song's book identifies how specific aspects of rural New England—including scarce affordable housing stock, extremely limited transportation, and cultural expectations of self-reliance—come together to thwart opportunities for families despite their continual striving to “make it” in this environment. Carpenter-Song shines a light on the many high-stakes consequences that occur when systems of care fail and offers a way forward for clinicians, health researchers, and policymakers seeking practical solutions.

NEW BOOKS

How is it Between Us? Relational Ethics and Care for the World

by Jarrett Zigon

Download a copy
of this book
[HERE](#)

Jarrett Zigon's groundbreaking *How Is It Between Us?* puts anthropology and phenomenological hermeneutics in conversation to develop a new theory of relational ethics. This ethics takes place in the between, the interaction not just between people, but all existents.

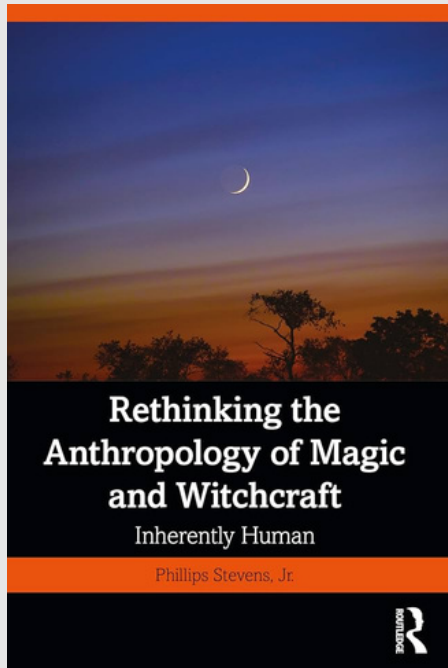
Importantly, this theory is utilized as a framework for considering some of today's most pressing ethical concerns – for example, living in a condition of post-truth and in worlds increasingly driven by algorithms and data extraction, various and competing calls for justice, and the ethical demands of the climate crisis. Written by one of the preeminent contributors to the anthropology of ethics, this book proposes a robust and systematic ethical theory to better address contemporary ethical problems.



NEW BOOKS

Rethinking the Anthropology of Magic and Witchcraft: Inherently Human

by Phillips Stevens, Jr.



This book introduces students to the anthropology of magic and witchcraft, terms widely used but with no widely accepted definitions. It takes a new approach to this area within the anthropology of religion, demonstrating that the bases for these beliefs and alleged practices are inherent in human cognition and psychology, even instinctual, and likely rooted in our evolutionary biology. It shows how magic and magical thinking are regular elements in people's daily lives, and that understanding the components of the witchcraft complex offers surprisingly important insights into patterns of thinking and social behavior.

The book reviews the many meanings of "magic" and "witchcraft," and introduces the best anthropological meanings of the terms. The components of these beliefs are timeless and universal; this fact, and recent advances in the brain sciences, suggest that the principles of magic are derived from basic processes of human thinking, and the attributes of the witch derive from neurobiologically based fears and fantasies. The propensity for such beliefs probably had adaptive significance in the evolutionary development of the human species; they are inherently human.

This book is intended to focus anew on the core concepts of magic, witchcraft, and the supernatural, while also serving as an introduction to the anthropology of religion for undergraduate and graduate-level courses.

Phil Stevens received his BA from Yale in English in 1963, then worked for three years with the Peace Corps in Nigeria. He entered the graduate anthropology program at Northwestern University, returned to Nigeria for dissertation research, and received his PhD in 1973. During 48 years with the anthropology department at SUNY, Buffalo, he conducted further research in Nigeria and the Caribbean, received two awards for teaching and an honorary Nigerian chieftaincy title, and wrote many publications in anthropology and African studies. He is the editor of Routledge's 4-volume *Anthropology of Religion: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, 2011. Find more about this book from Routledge [HERE](#).

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

NEWLY LAUNCHED PROJECT: IRRITATION AND HUMAN SOCIALITY PROJECT

Report from Hua (Miranda) Wu



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Why is irritation such a common, even constitutive, feature of our lives? What role does it play in relation to cooperation and morality? To what extent does it vary across space and time?

Irritation is a pervasive feature of the human experience, something that plays a major role in relationships of many kinds. We may find ourselves irritated by strangers, but perhaps ever more so, by those with whom we are close, including our spouses, colleagues, siblings and friends.

By one definition, irritation is ‘mild anger’ and it might thus be seen as a minor or secondary emotion by comparison with love, fear, hate, disgust, etc. And yet, the everydayness of irritation can make it a powerful thing. It might be felt that irritation is a threat to our close relationships. But its pervasiveness also suggests something else: that in some sense we may need irritation.

Irritation and Human Sociality Project is a new interdisciplinary, multi-filed site research launched at 2022, based in the University of Helsinki, Finland.

At IRRITATION Research Group, we are interested in the culturally shaped emotional experience. We combine methods from anthropology and psychology, to study irritation across 5 cultural contexts (Finland, Brazil, China, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka), in relation to two fundamental features of human sociality: cooperation and morality.

The project runs for five years and is funded by the European Research Council and Research Council Finland.



Click [HERE](#) if you are interested in learning about the project in details!

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ETHOS

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American Anthropological Association



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SPA BOOK SERIES

The Society for Psychological Anthropology (SPA) invites you to submit manuscripts to our [*Culture, Mind, and Society \(CMS\) Book Series*](#), published by Palgrave Macmillan (part of the Springer Nature Group).

SPA and Palgrave-Macmillan aim to publish innovative research that explores the interface of human subjects (emotions, thoughts, and experiences) and their material, social, cultural, and political milieus. Psychological Anthropology is broadly defined in this book series. It includes all research in the diverse fields of psychology, biomedicine, psychiatry, and anthropology that examines human emotions, cognitions, ideas, actions, interactions, and their work in social micro-level sites and in connection with broad social fields, organizations, institutions, nation-states, and other power structures.

The series welcomes proposals for either **monographs or edited volumes** – in the form of short books (25,000-50,000 words) or full-length (70,000-120,000).

Please see the **series description and guidelines** on the Palgrave website:

<https://link.springer.com/series/14947>.

Palgrave distributes and promotes the book series online and through other channels. All titles are included in an [eBook subject collection](#), which attracts over 50 million users from 15,000 institutions worldwide and offers tangible benefits in making our books highly downloaded and cited, hence amplifying the reach of our work. In addition to this, on publication, all titles will feature on a product page on SpringerLink, including ‘Look Inside’ functionality, full book and individual chapter download functionality, social media sharing buttons, and Bookmetrix indicating citations, readers, and downloads. On this page, customers can view all product details, access sample content, and order your book in both print and electronic form.

Palgrave editors regularly attend international conferences and meetings, including the AAA and EASA, to promote recent publications in the series as well as the Anthropology program more broadly.

Potential authors can contact Elizabeth Graber, Commissioning Editor at Palgrave Macmillan elizabeth.graber@palgrave-usa.com or Yehuda Goodman, our book series editor and a SPA board member (ygoodman@huji.ac.il).

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Note: The above call for manuscript submission to the CMS book series is approved and supported by the SPA Board