

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S BOOK AWARD

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour of presenting to you

Patricia Catherine Henderson,

Senior Lecturer

of the Department of Anthropology,

for the **Vice-Chancellor's Book Award.**

One of the core purposes of a University is to produce new knowledge that enhances humanity's understanding of the natural and social worlds.

The Vice-Chancellor's Book Award seeks to recognize a recent book published by a current staff member, that advances knowledge and understanding, and brings undoubted credit to the University by virtue of the contribution it makes to scholarly literature, or the discipline within which it is authored.

Dr Henderson's research is centered on the social concerns of women and children. Over a four year period from 2003 to 2006, she lived and gathered data in Okhahlamba in the Northern Drakensburg, researching the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDs, commencing at a time before anti-retroviral medication was available.

From this field work, the book *A kinship of Bones – AIDS, Intimacy, and Care in Rural KwaZulu-Natal*¹ was born, a 254 page monograph of original research, first published by the University of Amsterdam Press in 2011, and subsequently by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press in 2012.

A reviewer of the book notes that "There is remarkably little in the literature on the effects of the HIV/AIDs pandemic in Southern Africa about practices of care and relationship. It is as though the disease renders social life impossible to think."

Henderson gives us a window into how those directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic in rural KwaZulu-Natal sought to manage the illness and foster the kind of community necessary to extend the lives of those living with HIV/AIDs. The book describes how, in times of great suffering, human beings are capable of significant triumphs, and that illness can enhance sociality rather than diminish a sense of caring and intimacy in a community.

Henderson's work challenges previous public discourse on HIV/AIDs in which stigmatization is often a notable feature. It contests purely biomedical accounts of the disease, and documents the gendered and economic dimensions of HIV/AIDs.

¹ Henderson, Patricia C, *A kinship of Bones: AIDS, Intimacy and Care in Rural KwaZulu-Natal*. (2012, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press). First published in 2011 under the title: *AIDS, Intimacy and Care in Rural KwaZulu-Natal: A Kinship of Bones* (Amsterdam University Press.)

A colleague who nominated her for this award describes her research as “meticulous and empathetic”, “theoretically sophisticated”, and the stories of the people in her studies as “rich and unique”, as well as “touching and harrowing”. “Her intimate knowledge of Zulu makes the story all the more compelling, for she is able to articulate the eloquence with which people rendered the disease tangible/visible, as a *thing*, with which one is able to engage and potentially diminish.”

Henderson’s work is more than ethnographically significant. A reviewer describes the author as “theoretically erudite”. She interrogates theoretical reflections on violence, suffering, survival, and sociality, making this book an important contribution to contemporary analyses of South Africa.

One review states that “The book is written in a poetic manner that helps to produce a layered understanding, one that is precise when needed, but allows for a welcome degree of inchoateness at moments in the analysis.”

Another reviewer refers to it as a “beautiful, messy-with-life book”, and notes that “there is something astute, fierce, and intimate that we take away from reading *A kinship of bones* – like touching and being touched, we see and care about people in a different way”.

It is for her outstanding writing and contemporary contribution to knowledge, that Dr Henderson was chosen as the recipient of this award. To quote her nominating colleague again: “The incredible detail in this book makes it a worthy recipient of the award, for Dr Henderson presents anthropological fieldwork at its finest, indicating the intricacies of everyday life and stepping back to explain the broader social and human significance”.

So, Mr Chancellor, I request you to award the **2013 Vice-Chancellor’s Book Award** to **Dr Patricia Henderson**.