



# AN INAUGURAL LECTURE

**PROFESSOR VUSILIZWE THEBE**

Head: Department of Anthropology and Archaeology

VIRTUAL LECTURE

10 June 2021, 18h00-19h00

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## FORMER MIGRANT LABOUR SOCIETIES AND QUESTIONS OF TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN AFRICA

### PROGRAMME

#### Introduction of Prof Vusilizwe Thebe

Prof Tawana Kupe

*Vice-Chancellor & Principal*

#### Inaugural Address

Prof Vusilizwe Thebe

*Head: Department of Anthropology and Archaeology*

#### Acknowledgement

Prof Vasu Reddy

*Dean: Faculty of Humanities*

#### Close of Ceremony

### ABSTRACT

Former migrant labour societies of southern Africa have their respective historical lineages, characterised by blurring lines between the rural and urban. The mediating role of this long history, together with debates about semi-proletarianisation, agriculture, transformation and the future of these societies, provides a range of policy questions. These social formations have been explained in some literature in relation to the creation of a worker-peasantry, or 'divided families', often deemed to be negative. In this lecture, I focus on the history of these rural areas and their development as a colonial project. I question their representation in literature, which has provided justification for transformation by both the colonial and postcolonial state. At the same time, I recognise that transforming these societies was central to the state-sponsored social engineering of the rural society, although it undermined the social realities that emerged through changes, negotiations and compromises as a society responded to accompanying constraints and opportunities. I thus, recognise the significance of the resultant structures and dynamics to rural households in a context of livelihood changes and crises, which makes them an inherent part of rural life. Finally, I conclude by arguing that future policy should recognise and accommodate the new social realities, and rather than transform, reform is essential to facilitate the efficiency of the systems.