

# Shades of Urbanism(s) and Urbanity in Pre-Colonial Africa

## *Towards Afro-Centred Interventions*

**ABSTRACT** A cross-regional assessment finds varied trajectories of how, at the expense of alternatives, humans in Holocene Africa gradually opted for urbanization as the lifeway of choice. However, based on locally centred benchmarks and descriptors, what is the nature of and evidence for urbanity and urbanism across Africa's regions? Inspired by the African philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* and decolonial analytical lenses, this contribution engages with case studies of variable shades of urbanity scattered across southern Africa's deep and recent pasts, to strike comparison with corresponding behaviours etched elsewhere on the continent and outside of it. It ends by sketching, as motivated by African ways of knowing, conditions, and peculiarities, profitable lines for future interdisciplinary forays into urbanism and nested compartments.

**KEYWORDS** Comparative urbanism; pre-colonial Africa; *hunhu/ubuntu*; diversity of cultural expression; human settlements; cities.

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### Introduction – Urban Matters

Large parts of Africa, to be sure, had no cities until recent times. Patterns of shifting agriculture or of establishing new capitals with each new ruler prevented the development of urban life in areas where other circumstances might have been favourable (Bascom 1959, 29).

The deep history of urbanism (being a city) continues to be a foremost research theme in archaeology and cognate fields (Wirth 1938; Childe 1950; Bascom 1959; Adams 1966; Wheatley 1970; Blanton 1976; Fox 1977; Andah 1982; McIntosh 1999; Cowgill 2004; Smith 2006; Manyanga, Pikirayi, and Chirikure 2010; Connah 2015; Smith 2016; Smith and Lobo 2019). This is hardly surprising because with sharp intensity, urbanism and the concomitant urbanity (life within cities) have, over the past few centuries, crystallized as dominant forms of human organizational compartments on earth. With 55 per cent of the world's population living in urban areas in 2018, projections indicate by 2050, 68 per cent of people in the world will live in cities (UN DESA 2019). The consequence is that alternate ways of life, such as scavenging, hunting, and gathering as well as transhumant pastoralism, are fast becoming extinct. Interestingly, over a century ago, on the eve of contact and eventual colonization of Africa by European countries from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, these alternative lifeways and their organizational logics co-existed, with variable scales of intensity, alongside urbanity and urbanism. For example, nomadic pastoralism was practised north to south from the Fulani of West Africa (Basset 1986), through Kenya and Tanzania (Robertshaw 1990) to the Khoekhoe of southern Africa (Smith 1992). The San of southern Africa were committed to mobile modes of existence set in hunting and gathering

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Figure 4.1. Map of Africa showing cities of different time periods, scattered across different regions. Compiled based on data from Connah 2015 and Chirikure 2017. Illustrated by Robert Nyamushosho.

just like the Hadza of Tanzania and the Pygmies of Central Africa (Mitchell 2002). Side by side with populations that selected these livelihood options and embedded organizational processes were communities that congregated in places, lived sedentary lives, invested in architecture, and practised mixed farming (Phillipson 2005).

This organizational diversity speaks to James C. Scott's (2010) view that urbanism and its characteristics, such as urbanity, are neither the best nor only options available to humanity. Fast forward from the late nineteenth century, colonialism instated urbanism and urbanity welded to capitalist extractive economies. Cities such as Johannesburg emerged on the back of industrial mining (Chirikure 2015) while others such as Lagos were ports and colonial administrative centres. The big question is what indigenous variants of urbanism and urbanity were prevalent in Africa's regions (Fig. 4.1) before colonial interruption and disruption? It is the ambition of this paper to initially provide an understanding of urbanism and urbanity in southern Africa using

locally centred conceptual frameworks. In the end, outcome knowledge is compared with that from other parts of Africa and regions outside the continent to map ways of engaging with African urbanism into the future.

### **Hunhu/Ubuntu, Urbanism, and Urbanity in Southern Africa: Towards Afro-Centred Thinking**

In the global West, most contemporary explications of urbanism in disciplines such as geography and sociology are derivatives of sociological and functional theoretical positions (Wirth 1938; Childe 1950; Bascom 1959; Adams 1966; Smith and Lobo 2019). These consider cities as central places characterized by functional specialization and populated by socially heterogeneous groups (Cowgill 2004). Consequently, cities are considered aggregates of political, social, cultural, religious, economic, environmental, and other services and amenities (Smith 2006). Tracking the evolution of literature on urbanism shows that archaeologists applied this framework to study cities of the past, beginning with those in Eurasia. Perhaps, one of the most famous attempts is that of V. Gordon Childe who, after admitting to the notoriety of defining cities, crafted ten correlates for identifying civilizations and by extension ancient urban centres (Childe 1950). Some of the variables on his trait list include monumental public architecture, economic specialization, predictive sciences, external trade, and among others class distinction. While useful as a starting point or heuristic tool, the insistence that civilizations and cities, in all places, all the time must incorporate all the variables on the Childean list created multiple problems and contradictions. One of these was the exclusion of urbanism in parts of the world that did not conform to Mesopotamia and other Eurasian examples (McIntosh 1999; McIntosh 2005; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005; Connah 2015). In Africa south of the Sahara, for example, Great Zimbabwe possesses stunning monumental public architecture, evidence of external long-distance trade, and class distinction, but was without written literacy (Pikirayi 2002). On another end of the continuum, Yoruba towns in West Africa and urban centres that functioned as capitals of the Luba and Lunda states in Central Africa were home to more than fifty thousand socially heterogeneous people but lacked monumental public architecture and other behaviours on Childe's list (Ogundiran 2003). A Eurocentric and culturally inflexible application of Childe's traits prompted some to conclude, rather naively, that

Africa south of the Sahara had no cities or civilizations. One of these was William Bascom (1959), whose contribution to debates about whether the Yoruba population congregations were urban or not opens this paper. Necessarily, Africanist historians (e.g. Anderson and Rathbone 2000) and archaeologists (e.g. McIntosh 1999; McIntosh 2005; Connah 2015) eloquently demonstrated that the Eurocentrism etched in Childe's definitions of cities and embedded indicators were not fit for all contexts, all the time. This is because the African continent was characterized by great cultural diversity, with the consequence that depending on where one was located, socio-cultural behaviours such as urbanism and urbanity found varied expressions (Blier 2012), some similar, but others different, with contradictions in between. This motivated Afrocentric and decolonial ways of thinking about ancient cities in Africa to properly represent indigenous cultural processes and characterize them on their own terms for broader comparison.

What, however, has been missing in theoretical debates and empirical engagement with pre-colonial African urbanism is the promotion of definitions and criteria for distinguishing archaeological cities set on indigenous or native philosophical pivots (Chimhundu 1992; Chirikure and others 2017a). This omission is material because the tendency to subsume African expressions within global universals is neither helpful nor desirable. This of course, is not a call for African uniqueness (Chirikure 2019). Rather, taking the cue from Bruce Trigger, the goal of fields of human endeavour, such as archaeology, is to explicate motivations behind similarities and differences in human behaviour across spatial, cultural, and chronological contexts in the world's different areas (Trigger 2003). Therefore, highlighting features of urbanism and urbanity peculiar to Africa especially using native philosophies and those that she shares with others is critical to the minting of a rich body of comparative urbanisms locally and globally. This has positive knock-on effects in that the world can better understand Africa's diverse expressions as well as universally shared behaviours. Be that as it may, without first understanding Africa in its own shades, the utility of cross-regional comparison becomes severely muted (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004). Consequently, this paper explores the viability of such an approach, firstly by applying local philosophies and concepts of *hunhu* or *ubuntu* (Samkange and Samkange 1980) from the last two centuries to urban centres associated with the Zimbabwe Culture (AD 1000–1900) in southern Africa, and secondly, by making regional and supraregional comparisons.

The Zimbabwe Culture refers to the practice of building royal residences (*madzimbahwe*) of dry-stone walling, without mortar (Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008). Often, the dry-stone built areas together with unwallled settlements formed urban centres reaching more than a hundred hectares in spatial extent (Garlake 1973). Some of the most famous examples of this culture are remains of capitals (*mizinda*, singular *muzinda*) of states based at places such as Great Zimbabwe (AD 1000–1700) and Khami AD 1450–1820 (see below), both of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. Zimbabwe Culture urban centres are widely distributed from the Indian Ocean coast in the east to the Kalahari in the west, from the Zambezi River in the north to the Limpopo region of South Africa in the south (Pikirayi 2002). Because the Zimbabwe Culture is a product of groups now known as Shona, archaeologists have, for over a century drawn analogies from their recent philosophies (past two hundred years) to interpret urbanism and other cultural behaviours in the deep past (Beach 1998). Such an endeavour however requires caution because it is fraught with pitfalls. For example, in analogical imagination, it is essential to avoid treating the past as a series of unchanging continuities from the present (Wylie 1985; Fabian 2014). Given that the use of analogy is unavoidable, a more cautioned application of cultural concepts from the recent past to generate illustrative and comparative ideas with the archaeology is highly recommended (Stahl 1993). This allows mapping dynamism of practice, continuities and changes, as well as innovation through time as communities navigated through daily challenges.

Explorations through Shona philosophies, such as proverbs, metaphors, oral literature, traditions, myths, legends, and other sources of knowledge (dating to the last two hundred years), elicit fundamental ideas about the concept of *hunhu* or *ubuntu* (widely expressed in Bantu Africa) (Samkange and Samkange 1980; Pongweni 1989). This philosophy encompasses metaphysical and existential issues and is firmly grounded in the ideology of communitarianism (Masolo 2010). Three major ideas form vital cogs that turned the wheels of the ideology and philosophy of *hunhu* (Samkange and Samkange 1980): (1) an individual was only a person because of others — *munhu, munhu nekuda kwevanhu*; (2) in conditions where individuals were confronted with the imperative to make choices between accumulating wealth or saving the life of others, then preserving life was more important than riches; (3) leaders owed their positions to the needs of people, such that kingship was never about selfishness. There existed figures of speech such as *panodya mambo varanda vanogutawo*, which means that a leader must eat with their follow-

ers (Pongweni 1989). Within *hunhu*, leadership was all about rotation, as supported by the proverb *ushe madzoro hunoravanwa* (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). *Hunhu/Ubuntu* conditioned registers of speech, cultural practices, and behaviours, such as collective action wherein the benefits and burdens of individuals were always managed in ways beneficial, and not prejudicial, to the community (Masolo 2010). Selfish leaders and individuals (*veundyire*) were eliminated (see Chakaipa 1976). Personhood or *unhu* embodied all the invaluable virtues that society strived for towards maintaining harmony and the spirit of sharing among its members (Samkange and Samkange 1980). This concept of sharing or redistribution, often effected through the concept of *kugova nhaka* (distributing inheritance wealth amongst relatives), after death lowered wealth accumulation between generations, and within settlements such as cities (Chirikure and others 2018a).

Within *hunhu* and its structuring cosmologies, cities are human settlements and cultural constructs constituted by and generative of thoughts, practices, symbols, and beliefs. They are spaces where people live, perform mundane activities, practice technical routines, conduct religious ceremonies as well as other activities as part of everyday life (Samkange and Samkange 1980; Masolo 2010). Shona cities were nodal points in multiple circuits of circulation of commodities, ideas, and people making them pivots for livelihood practices that were locally embedded and worldly oriented. Ranging in size from a constellation of a few homesteads to large aggregations of multi-building settlements, urbanism was therefore a continuum from the small to the medium to the extensive (Mudenge 1988; Beach 1998). Cities of power, i.e. those where kings resided, were further known as *mizinda* (singular: *muzinda*). Although political power was hereditary within the lineage, political succession was based on rotation between different lineages (houses) such that often successors did not move into residences of their predecessors (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). Rather, they ruled from their own homesteads (*misha*, singular: *musha*) or *dzimbabwe* (plural: *madzimbahwe*) that became the new capitols. A capitol (*muzinda*) refers to a settlement or homesteads associated with the king or chief, while a capital was much broader, referring to a city or *guta* (plural: *maguta*) that housed the king's *dzimbahwe/muzinda* as well as other settlements making up a city or *guta*. Meanwhile, the residences of their predecessors continued to be occupied; only that political power, but not royalty, had shifted. Within states (*nyika*), there existed multiple levels of hierarchy from provinces (*nyika*), to districts (*matunhu*, singular *dunhu*), to wards, vil-

lages, and homesteads. In some ways, there too was a hierarchy of cities mimicking these levels, but there was also heterarchy in the sense that provinces and districts were more or less equal (Chirikure and others 2018b).

Typically, the kingship or political power rotated provinces and districts, resulting in a change of status for places upon the death of kings. Sometimes, and for various reasons, kings also shifted their capitals, but ultimately the sizes of capitols depended on the individual success of leaders. The same ideology resulted in the expansion and contraction of settlements as generations succeeded each other. This occurred because upon marrying, sons were given their own areas to build homesteads thereby expanding settlements. Often, with the passing of parents, some homesteads were abandoned and became *matongo*. Therefore, settlements shrunk when children moved out and expanded when families were growing. Of course, there were limits to this. On average, because land was communally owned through the king, there were no property rights to force people to live in the same area for thousands of years as with urbanisms in other regions. Equally, upon the death of king or commoner, their wealth was redistributed to relatives, which considerably suppressed intergenerational wealth accumulation. Also, because political power did not remain with a single family but was rotated in the broader lineage (Beach 1998), Shona kings did not benefit from the wealth of their predecessors as was the case in medieval Europe or other places.

The layout of Shona settlements and cities was conditioned by the ideology of *hunhu*, which dictated that production activities, such as agriculture, animal raising, hunting, and so on, were performed within the confines of collectivism. This prism of *hunhu* strongly motivates a broadening of the theoretical grasp of non-Western cities to open a space for broader comparative undertakings of urbanism in different contexts (Pieterse 2009). Based on this theoretical and philosophical sketch, and mindful of pitfalls of unconstrained analogies (Wylie 1985; Stahl 1993), it is essential to elicit out of this cultural representation salient elements of cities that are spatially and materially recoverable. With these, an approach can be made — in a cautioned manner within archaeology — to generate points of comparison based on similarities and variances (Stahl 1993). Table 4.1 presents several variables associated with Shona cities as mediated by the ideology of *hunhu*. These variables form the basis for comparing, within resolved chronological and spatial contexts, the urbanisms in recent and deep pasts, especially that associated with the Zimbabwe Culture.

Table 4.1. Variables of cities coming out of Shona concepts of cities as human settlements mediated by the ideology of *hunhu/ubuntu*. Sources: Garlake 1973; Beach 1998; Samkange and Samkange 1980; Mudenge 1988; Pongweni 1989; Chakaipa 1976; Pikirayi 2002; Huffman 2007; Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012; Chirikure and others 2018a; 2018b.

Behavioural aspects	Predicted presence	Comments
Size	Small = <5ha; medium = >10 ha; large = >20 ha	Settlement size was determined by existing population.
Political centres	Capitals, capitols, or both	Within <i>maguta</i> , residences of kings were capitols.
Economic and trade centres	Variable, nodes	Different places were networked, cities were nodes in circulation circuits.
Religious centres	Yes	Royal residencies and royal burials were sites of royal ancestors whose duty was to look after the health and productivity of states and their citizens.
Centralized administrative functions	Variable	There were no absolute monarchs, decisions were based on consultation with councillors known as <i>machinda</i> or <i>makurukota</i> .
Decentralized administrative functions	Yes	Often power was devolved to provinces and districts in a confederacy or federation.
Population size	Variable	Cities were part of a culture, economy, and livelihood. The population was dependant on livelihood strategies, but on average, cities had more people than other settlements. Low-density urbanism often prevailed.
Military centre	Variable	There were no military garrisons stationed in the capitals.
Ceremonial and display centre	Yes	There were annual ceremonies, religious events, and cultural displays performed in the capital.
Places for refugees	Variable	Congregation built strength in numbers, in times of stress people gathered in cities and dispersed afterwards.
Wealth accumulation	Very low	Principle of sharing inheritance levelled wealth across families and generations.
Rotation of power within settlements	Yes	Power was based on a rotation between lineage leaders from different houses.
Expansion and contraction of settlements	Yes	Cities expanded and contracted with time.

With these variables and philosophical understanding, it is essential to approach the archaeological record to create discussion points to map and understand where possible, the nature of past Shona cities, using the example of the Zimbabwe Culture. This allows us to set up cross-cultural comparisons with other types of urbanisms in the region, such as amongst the Tswana and Nguni (also part of the Bantu people), across the African continent, and elsewhere in the world.

## Urbanism in the Southern African Past

### *The Zimbabwe Culture (AD 1000–1900)*

There exist hundreds of Zimbabwe Culture urban settlements strewn across southern Africa. Of these, Great Zimbabwe (AD 1000–1700) ranks as one of the most famous urban settlements in pre-colonial

Africa (Garlake 1973). It is situated twenty-eight kilometres to the south-east of the modern town of Masvingo (Sinclair and others 1993; Pikirayi 2002; Huffman 2007). Established around AD 1000 on Zimbabwe Hill, Great Zimbabwe expanded as centuries passed to cover the Valley and surroundings (Fig. 4.2). After cycles of expansion and contraction, this extant *guta* flourished until AD 1700. Estimates of population range from two thousand to twenty thousand inhabitants (Garlake 1973; Huffman 2007; Chirikure and others 2017b). This huge differential motivates more work into the population of Great Zimbabwe. Relative to the size of the population in the early to mid-second millennium AD, even two thousand people were a substantial congregation (Chirikure and others 2017b). The *guta* of Great Zimbabwe comprises multi-building settlements scattered across a colonially and arbitrarily defined 720 hectare of land. Consequently,

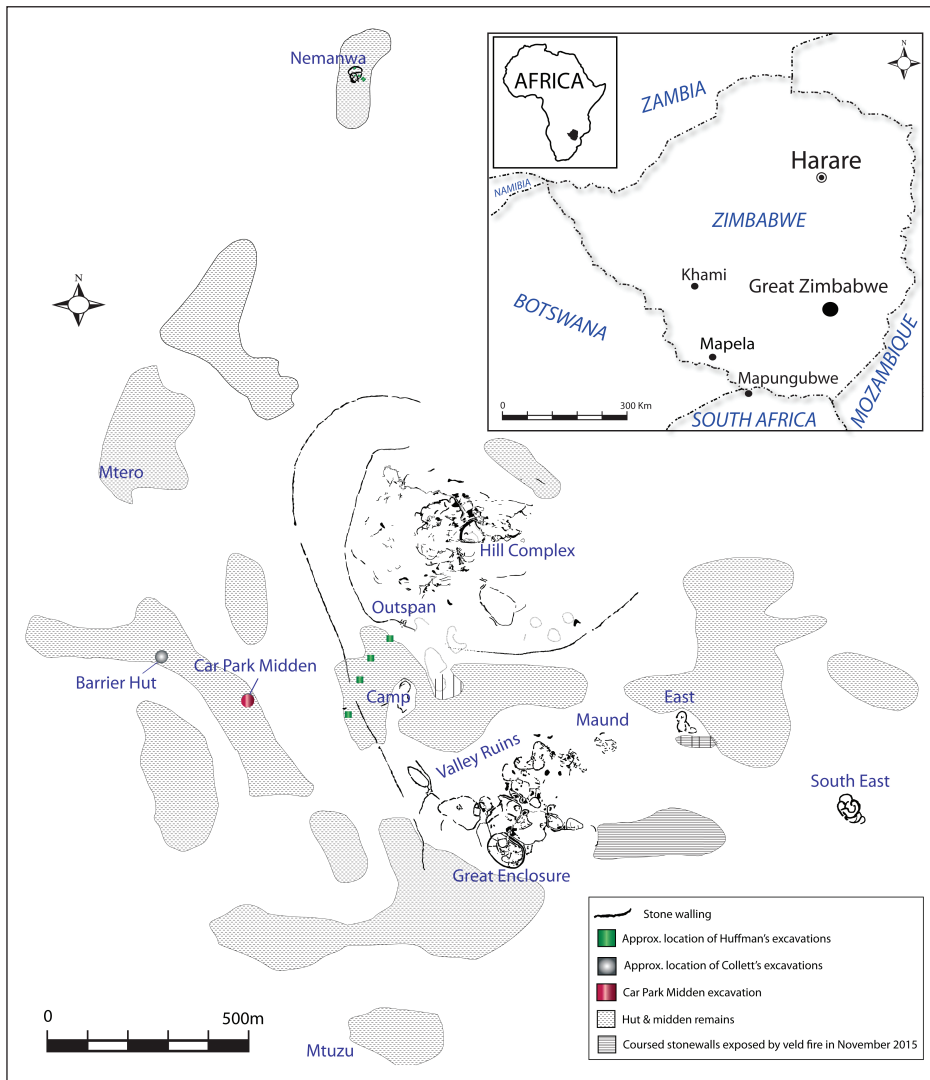


Figure 4.2. Map of Great Zimbabwe showing layout of the main settlement concentration. Illustration by Foreman Bandama.

the actual boundaries of Great Zimbabwe may be larger than those of the present. Within this wide landscape, the urban centre of Great Zimbabwe is made up of several groups of settlements (*misha*), namely the Hill Complex made up of the free-standing walled buildings on the summit and terraced settlements on the southern and western hillslopes (Chirikure 2020). These accommodated a sizeable population. Then, there is the Valley and Great Enclosures, settlements situated on the flats. The Valley Enclosures are made up of distinct *misha* such as the Upper, Central, and Lower homesteads. Based on the number of houses exposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Great Enclosure appears to be a settlement unit with between nine and twelve buildings (Garlake 1973). Outside these main clusters are smaller walled settlements such as South-East Ruins, Chenga, and among others Nemanwa (Pikirayi 2002; Huffman 2007). In-between and contiguous to these areas

were unwalled settlements with multiple building clusters of variable sizes. Remnants of buildings making up typical settlements are mostly visible on the eastern and western parts of the city.

Chronological evidence suggests that the city expanded from the hill to the valley, and from there, spread eastwards as well as westwards. Architectural and radiocarbon evidence suggests that most settlements on the hill were built earlier than those on the Lower Valley (Collett, Vines, and Hughes 1992). Furthermore, unwalled settlements to the west were still occupied into the seventeenth century AD when occupation had ceased on the hill (Chirikure and others 2018a). This clearly shows that settlement expanded and contracted prompting repetitive shifts in capitols from the hill to the Great Enclosure to the Valley and perhaps outside of these places (Beach 1998; Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008). The hallmarks of the *muzinda* of Great Zimbabwe include monumental architecture, reaching exquisite expression



Figure 4.3. The Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe. Photo by Shadreck Chirikure.

in the Great Enclosure (Fig. 4.3), carved-stone public and ritual sculptures combining human and animal features (e.g. birds and bowls), external trade, leadership and ancestral power, and class differentiation (Garlake 1973; Pikirayi 2002). The size and unprecedented scale of Great Zimbabwe is that of an administrative and religious centre with a large population, relative to local context. There is no division of labour between homesteads in individual settlements or across settlements. Remnants of crafts such as weaving and metallurgy, subsistence activities such as food preparation, ritual paraphernalia like musical instruments, as well as artefacts associated with entertainment and relaxation like mangala board games were found in and around the urbanscape (Chirikure 2020).

Great Zimbabwe participated in local and long-distance trade and exchange linking it with other regions thousands of kilometres away, such as Central Africa (Pikirayi 2002). In addition, it was a vital node in the Indian Ocean Rim-based circulation system where it supplied ivory, gold, food, bark cloth, ideas, and other resources. Recent work on the political economy of Great Zimbabwe has shown that the rulers may not have monopolized all forms of trade as previously thought. Rather, households located in different parts of the network circulated

commodities, thereby demonstrating the capillary nature of the political economy (Chirikure 2019). In fact, ancestry and a communitarian ideology enabled the rulers to access production without the need for centralized control. Great Zimbabwe had established oral literacy and forms of engineering principles that were finely executed on the monumental walls and buildings making up the dwellings. Overall, the urbanism at Great Zimbabwe was dispersed across the landscape, with nodes of congregation spread out to take advantage of agriculture, control of public health, as well as collective action to mobilize labour to support various activities from public buildings to subsistence and crafts.

Another iconic, less talked about but nevertheless standout example of Shona urbanism is that represented at the *guta* and *muzinda* of Khami located about twenty kilometres to the south-west of the modern town of Bulawayo (Fig. 4.2). Believed to be the seat of power for the Torwa-Changamire state, Khami flourished between AD 1450 and 1650, before power was violently transferred to Danamombe (AD 1650–1820) in the Zimbabwean midlands (Pikirayi 2002). Khami is distinguished by the predominant prevalence of dry-stone built terraces that created spectacular platforms on which buildings were erected (Fig. 4.4). There is some

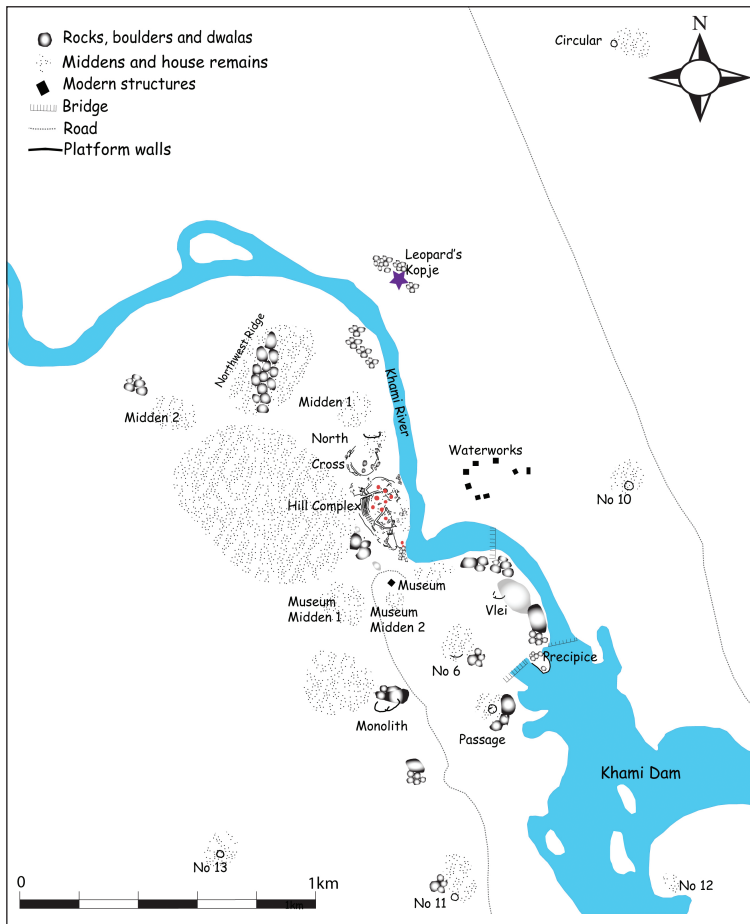


Figure 4.4. Map of Khami showing its spread-out nature and multiple platforms. Estimates suggest that the city covered at least 120 hectares in size. Illustration by Tawanda Mukwende.

thinking that the differences in masonry between free-standing wall dominating Great Zimbabwe and retaining wall dominating Khami speak to ethnic differences (Huffman 2007; Mukwende 2016). Khami is made up of at least fourteen platforms spread across more than 120 hectares of landscape. The largest of these is the Hill Complex believed to have been the last capitol in this *guta* (Fig. 4.5). Other platforms include in no order of size or importance: the Vlei, Precipice, Passage, Monolith, and many others. While a few houses were built on the platforms, more were built on the surrounding flats. This pattern easily stands out at the Circular Platform 10 situated near the quarry. The dry-stone walled area comprises a free-standing enclosure on the one side and retaining walls on the other. Inside, houses of solid *dhaka* (earthen material) were built. Outside, the platform is surrounded by mounds representing foundations of seven buildings likely to have functioned as houses. The advantage of the Circular Platform is that it was not as long lived as others, for which reason the pattern of settlement is very clear. All the

other platforms replicated this pattern whereby few buildings were built on top, with a lot more on the contiguous flats. However, there also exist settlements in areas without dry-stone built on the flats to the northern, western, and south-western parts of the urban landscape. These are associated with deep middens.

The *muzinda* of Khami was a religious, political, and administrative centre. Status symbols such as dry-stone walls, ceremonial objects, and unique crafts were recovered across the platforms. Khami worked ivory (Fig. 4.5), gold, metals, and wove cloth. All these were exchanged, using local, regional, and international circuits. In reality, all circulation systems morph into one, such that regional and international trade networks are pivoted on local nodes. The local economy was based on crop agriculture and cattle raising. Vitriified cattle dung found within various urban precincts such as the Hill Complex indicates the presence of infrastructure for penning cattle on the hill and around other platforms. What makes Khami stand out is the sixteenth-century Portuguese reports that complained that although Khami was situated in gold-rich country, its citizens were uninterested in gold trade (Mudenge 1988). Rather, their major preoccupation was cattle keeping. This shows that gold-fuelled international trade was not always important in all contexts, and that local priorities mattered more. Population estimates suggest that the population of Khami was between seven thousand and ten thousand (Huffman 2007). Furthermore, some of the characteristics in Table 4.1 are also suggested, for example dispersed and non-concentrated urbanism. As mentioned earlier, besides Great Zimbabwe and Khami, there are hundreds of Zimbabwe Culture urban centres in southern Africa. These appear in various sizes from a few dry-stone walled enclosures less than a quarter of a hectare in size to more than fifty hectares. Some of these also yielded monumental architecture and symbols of power and authority, such as stone sculptures, iron gongs, and much more (Chirikure 2019). However, it is essential to perform chronologically well-resolved inter-site analyses on a regional level to establish spatial relationships between different *madzimbahwe* (former capitals or centres of power) (Pikirayi 2002; Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012).

### Tswana Towns (AD 1700–1850)

Within southern Africa, but this time, further south of the Limpopo River, there are numerous urbanisms that are not always given prominence (Connah 2015). One of these is attested by the Tswana megatowns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.





Figure 4.5. Photograph showing a) trade goods imported ceramics; b) ceremonial axe; c) divining dice; and d) the western wall of the Hill Complex at Khami. Image source: S. Chirikure. Compiled by Robert Nyamushosho.

These were planned according to the ideology of *botho* (*botho* is Sotho for *ubuntu*), which emphasized togetherness and communitarianism. In general, the chief's settlement was often at the centre, with those of the followers falling outside the centre to form wards, villages, and individual homesteads in a continuum (Hall and others 2006). Some Tswana towns such as Molokwane stretched lengthwise for between four and five kilometres and hosted around ten thousand people (Pistorius 1992). Congregation and its benefits appear to have been a motivating factor for these Tswana towns. Often, residents lived away from the capitals in production areas such as cattle posts and fields to

the extent that there are times of the year when the towns were 'half-empty'.

The signature characteristic of Tswana towns are the low dry-stone walled enclosures that formed scallops where houses were built (Hall and others 2006). Dozens of these are well known in northern South Africa, going south towards Kuruman and the Free State. Examples of these include Molokwane (Pistorius 1992), Kaditshwene (Boeyens 2003), Marothodi (Hall and others 2006), Dithakong, and many others (Maggs 1976). Estimates suggested that in 1820, Kaditshwene had a population of twenty thousand, which was more than that of contemporary Cape Town (Boeyens 2003). These towns

Table 4.2. Shades of urbanism in southern Africa based on leads from philosophies of *ubuntu* and empirical research by various authors (see above).

	<b>Zimbabwe Culture (AD 1000–1900)</b>	<b>Tswana towns (AD 1500–1900)</b>	<b>Nguni (Zulu/Ndebele) (AD 1810–1870)</b>
Nature of settlements	Dry-stone walled cities comprising enclosures and terraces where houses were built and unwalled settlements either with solid <i>dhaka</i> or pole and <i>dhaka</i> houses.	Low dry-stone walls creating scallops where pole and <i>dhaka</i> houses were built.	Grass and thatch houses, wooden palisades to create settlement, and cattle enclosures.
Size of settlements	Largest Great Zimbabwe c. 200 ha; smallest less than half an acre.	Largest Molokwane, c. 150 ha.	Largest uMgungundlovu.
Urban characteristics	Monumental architecture, public spaces, public art, status symbols, class distinction, infrastructure for water, and drainage inside buildings.	Dry-stone walls forming scallops, dense population aggregation, public spaces, large size, and social stratification.	Dense concentration of warrior houses, large congregation in barracks, class distinction, status symbols, and display areas.
Subsistence base	Crop agriculture, animal husbandry, and hunting, metal crafts.	Crop agriculture, animal husbandry, and hunting, metal crafts.	Crop agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and centrally controlled raiding and brigandage.
External trade	Long-distance trade with central Africa and Indian Ocean Rim, supplied ivory and gold in return for cloth and glass beads.	Trade with the Cape and limited contact with Indian Ocean.	Trade with Indian Ocean via Natal and Delagoa Bay, Maputo. Long-distance raiding.
Ideology	<i>Hunhu (ubuntu)</i> .	<i>Botho (ubuntu)</i> .	<i>Ubuntu</i> .
Political and administrative centralization	Divine Right Kings, central administration, devolved to lower levels.	Hereditary leadership.	Hereditary leadership, centralized administration.
Religious centres	Mwari centre, religious symbols, and spaces.	?	?
Decentralized administrative functions	Provinces, districts, wards, and villages.	Chief's area ( <i>Kgosing</i> ), ward ( <i>kgoro</i> ), and villages ( <i>metse</i> ).	Provinces, districts, wards, and villages.
Population size <sup>1</sup>	c. 2000–20,000.	c. 5000–20,000.	c. 5500.
Military centre	?	?	Zulu urbanism militaristic in nature.
Ceremonial and display centre	Present.	Present.	Present.
Wealth accumulation	Very low, redistribution.	Very low.	Very low.
Shifting urban centres	Long-lived cities, shifting of power without abandoning settlements.	Mobile cities, especially in the nineteenth century.	Mobile cities.
Duration of occupation	On average 300 years.	On average 15 years.	On average 15 years.
Oral literacy and numeracy	Well-established system of counting and oral literature.	Oral literacy.	Oral literacy.

<sup>1</sup> There is need for more fine-grained work to build demographic estimates that are systematic and empirically reproducible.

were administrative centres with a court (*kgotla*) marked by symbols, such as monoliths, and households organized in wards (*kgoro*) with that of the chief at the centre. There are two very interesting characteristics of Tswana urbanism. The first is that production took place away from the urban space, in faraway fields and in cattle posts or pastoral areas (*moraka*) (Ndobochani 2020). This meant that half the time, the cities had low populations, the bulk of which was dispersed on the landscape and hooked into production-related activities. The second is that for various reasons, Tswana towns shifted locations in very short spaces of time. For example, the capital of Litakun shifted three to four times in twenty years (Maggs 1976), while Marothodi was only occupied for twenty years before settlement shifted to other areas. This mobility allowed the land to recover and was aimed at offsetting the public health challenges associated with having thousands of people in one place. This gave an interesting mobile character to Tswana urbanism, which was interrupted by British colonies. It is a feature of African urbanism that, in some cases, not all areas of cities were occupied and that not all residents were present throughout the year (Fletcher 1995; 1998).

#### ***Nguni Military Cities (AD 1812–1880)***

The Tswana urban system in some ways mimics that of Nguni urbanism, especially that of the Zulu and Ndebele peoples. Although created within the confines of *ubuntu*, Zulu urban centres are fairly recent, being established as part of ecologically hinged congregation processes leading to the rise of Shaka (Shillington 1995). A military genius, Shaka managed to forge a state, and until his assassination had shifted his capital at least three times in twelve years. This urbanism, however, stands out for being based on militarism as a magnet for congregation and for supporting an economy based on raiding and redistributing the spoils for patronage purposes. Because not much work has been performed on Shaka's capitals, scholars often turn to uMgungundlovu, the fairly well-researched capital established by his successor, Dingane. uMgungundlovu was oval in shape, with a perimeter of nearly two kilometres (Parkington and Cronin 1979). Geophysical prospection suggested that the town covered an area at least twenty-two hectares in extent. This massive size accommodated sections of the royal family, cattle, and military regiments. There were more soldiers than civilians in Zulu capitals (Shillington 1995). Nevertheless, there also existed administrative and political centres with provinces, districts also sharing some responsibilities under trusted royals or *indunas*. What is inter-

esting about Zulu capitals is that they were mostly built of perishable material, such as grass for houses (so-called beehive huts) and were surrounded by a wooden stockade. This made it easy to constantly shift them: Shaka himself had four successive capitals of variable sizes, while Dingane also moved his more than twice.

Furthermore, when new kings ascended the Zulu throne, their pre-existing settlements became capitals — Dingane did not move into Shaka's palace, while Mpande did not move into his predecessor's residency (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). Cetshwayo, who succeeded Mpande, also ruled from his home at Ondini, which earlier on was a provincial centre.

#### ***Comparative Urbanism in Southern Africa***

The Shona, Tswana, and Zulu are all part of the broader Bantu collective and share the ideology of *ubuntu*. However, because of different cultures, their urbanism exhibits various shades from different degrees of congregation to monumental public architecture to building cities of impermanent materials (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 shows that urbanization through the ages in these Bantu societies, which share the ideology of *hunhu/botho/ubuntu*, expresses various shades — some similar but others sharply different in characteristics such as the layout, size, functions, activities, and expansion patterns of cities. Whilst Zimbabwe Culture settlements expanded with time and were long lived (more permanent), Tswana and Zulu cities were semi-permanent, and built to accommodate various functions before moving whole populations to new locations. As such, Zulu and Tswana urbanisms were highly mobile, short lived with new towns being built after every few years (Maggs 1976; Parkington and Cronin 1979). At a superficial level, Tswana cities had low stone walls defining domestic space, and the Zimbabwe Culture too had monumental walls that enclosed spaces where homesteads were built. The meaning of the walls was however group specific. Zulu urbanism, however, stands out for being pivoted on military garrisons, which were geared for a raiding economy. Nevertheless, a reverence to cattle, public displays, and hosting of ceremonies, which were key elements of other urbanisms in the region, were also retained. Therefore, in a single region, there are multiple shades of urbanism: sedentary and monumental (Zimbabwe Culture), nomadic/mobile urbanism (Tswana and Zulu), and military/mobile (Zulu and related peoples, e.g. Ndebele). If we were to plot a map of variables, some will plot in the same

Table 4.3. Categories of urbanisms across Africa including their characteristics based on an initial categorization by Blier (2012). Sources: Fletcher 1993; 1998; Hassan 1993; Kusimba 1999; Connah 2015; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005; Manyanga, Pikirayi, and Chirikure 2010; Blier 2012; McIntosh 1999; Wynne-Jones 2007; Wilson 2002; Clist and others 2015.

	<b>Monumental Urbanism</b>	<b>Nomadic/transhumant</b>	<b>Satellite</b>
<b>Region</b>	Permanent constructions, centralized or decentralized administration, religion, crafting. Concentrated or dispersed.	Mobile cities built of grass, raffia, and bamboo. Ritual sites, administration, crafting, military administration. Concentrated or dispersed.	Entwined community groups congregating to form an urban network. Presence of shrines, ditches, and mud walls. Concentrated or dispersed.
<i>Southern Africa</i>	Present, e.g. Zimbabwe Culture (AD 1000–1900).	Present. Tswana towns (AD 1700–1850), Zulu (AD 1812–1870).	? Some Tswana settlements existed as satellites, e.g. places on Royal Bafokeng Nation Land.
<i>Central Africa</i>	Absent (more research needed).	Present, e.g. M'banza of Kingdom of Kongo, capitals of Luba, Lunda.	Absent (more research needed).
<i>East Africa, including coast</i>	Present (coastal areas). Swahili towns, Kilwa, Songo, Pemba, etc. (AD 1000–1400), Ethiopia – Axum (AD 300–900).	Present (interior) (in the Great Lakes area). Capitals of Buganda were mobile (AD 1700–1900).	Present. Medieval Ethiopian mobile cities and kingships (AD 1200–1600).
<i>West Africa</i>	Present (DDG sites along Cameroon/Nigeria border).	Absent (?).	Present. Jenne Jenou in inland Niger Delta (300 BC–AD 900), Oyo and Ife in Nigeria (AD 1500–1900).
<i>North Africa including the Nile Valley</i>	Present. Nile Valley – Naqada, Memphis, Meroe, Carthage, etc.	Absent.	Present (?) (More research needed for recent historical times).

place but others in different spots, creating multiple shades and continuum. With this continuum and nested similarities and differences in the settlements of people sharing *hunhu/botho/ubuntu/* as a philosophy, how does urbanism and urbanity in other areas of Africa and elsewhere compare? Is it also variable and a continuum of responses by humans living in varying geographical and cultural mixes? Some of the answers to these questions are provided in the following discussion section.

### Discussion: African Urbanisms through Local Lenses?

Both by population and land mass size, Africa ranks as the world's second largest continent, after Asia. And yet, sometimes, there is a notorious tendency, especially in the West, to treat Africa as it were a country or a homogeneous region devoid of any cultural or biogeographical diversity. Curiously, the same treatment is never accorded to other continents. Clearly, treating Africa as homogenous spectacularly fails to accord justice to a vast and variable continent characterized by deserts, tropical rainforests, savanna plains, and coastal forests. A survey across deep and recent histories of southern Africa identified varied shades of urbanism among

different groups that are all part of the Bantu collective. What options of urbanism and urbanity were selected across the vast African continent, as people congregated in settlements to establish urban centres? The observations emerging from southern Africa were combined with those in the literature to delineate major arrays of urbanisms across the continent (Table 4.3). However, available data varies in quality and details, making comparison a little bit unwieldy. For example, in some cases, sizes of settlements are provided, while in others there are no population estimates and information on crafting and division of labour. Nevertheless, a few general points can be elicited as a step towards signposting trajectories of studies of urbanism shades and continuums into the future.

Although Table 4.3 shows three major typologies of urbanism found across Africa's multiple regions (see also Blier 2012), in reality this cultural behaviour appeared in shades, as a continuum, to the extent that — in some contexts — categories morphed into each other as mediated by local ideologies and cultural logics. As such, these three major types of urbanism had in-between varieties, thereby demonstrating the typology defying and bewildering creative diversity in settlement organization in pre-colonial Africa over the past five thousand years (Connah 1972; Holl 1985; Hassan 1993; McIntosh

1999; Wilson 2002; Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). For example, the practice of rebuilding cities on new sites upon deaths of leaders or occurrence of calamitous events was a feature of Central African cities (de Maret 1999; 2012; Blier 2012), Great Lakes East African cities as well as southern Zambebian cities (Sinclair and others 1993; Kodesh 2010) and those south of the Limpopo, such as the Zulu in South Africa (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). Therefore, it was common to find a mix of all types within and across the continent's regions and time periods, giving rise to concentrated, high-density urbanism or dispersed, low population urbanism (Fletcher 1993; Sinclair and others 1993; Fattovich 2010; Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). Furthermore, hierarchy and heterarchy were often practised in the same cities conforming to various heuristic categories. For example, there was horizontal heterarchy between cities with monumental urbanism in southern Zambezia (Chirikure and others 2018b). However, within them, there was vertical hierarchy. This shows that both forms of behaviour can be found in the same system, and they are therefore not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the categories of urbanism in Table 4.3 are only indicative, and by no means were they mutually exclusive (Blier 2012; Connah 2015). However, the processes of urbanization (establishment of cities) took different trails and were fanned by assorted impetuses from the functional, through the sociological to the accidental. This produced not one urbanism, but many, and calls for the use of local concepts to develop new meanings that temper dominant Western-dominated narratives of urbanism in different areas.

What motivated these different urbanisms and developmental trajectories that they took? Urban areas, regardless of their form and layout were settlements where people lived and performed life-sustaining activities. Whether the place is Armana in ancient Egypt, Aksum in Ethiopia, Ife in Nigeria, M'banza Kongo in Angola, or Great Zimbabwe, the urban settlement was designed to offer homes to people and, in the process, provide administrative, political, ritual, and other services. Inevitably, there were localized differences across early and later contexts, in different regions. For example, ancient Egyptian and Nubian capitals practised centralized control of resources (Edwards 1994; Snape 2014) which was not the case in places such as Great Zimbabwe where households were given free play to participate in production and circulation (Chirikure 2019). Indeed, peripatetic capitals, such as those of the Zulus of South Africa or those of the Kuba, Luba, and other states of Central Africa, performed similar functions — administratively, politically,

and ritually. They were also hubs for networking whose spokes radiated to other sectors of society. On a smaller scale, urban centres regardless of typologies were homesteads and working spaces, but at a bigger, cumulative, and collective scale they became urban settlements. Therefore, recursivity — working back and forth — in terms of units of analysis is required to fully capture the nature of urbanity in different parts of Africa.

However, similarity of outward expression of urbanity in Africa and outside of it does not mean similarity of meanings. This is important because cities were created to offer individual and collective services habituated by prevailing cultural logics and ideologies (Chirikure and others 2018a). The latter was motivated by local attitudes to things such as wealth accumulation, resilience, class differentiation, as well as sustainability needs. For instance, wealth accumulation was a key feature of Nile Valley urban centres, whereas within Great Zimbabwe, accumulated wealth was redistributed upon the death of leaders (Chirikure and others 2018a). In the latter case, this levelled intergenerational build-up of wealth. The militarism ideologies of the Zulu gestated urban forms pivoted on military garrisons and an economy reliant of raiding. However, despite these differences, and in whatever form they appear, urban areas served basic human needs. Of course, scholarly creativity dictates that such needs can be classified into the functional or sociological or something else, but cities are still dwelling spaces and places to work and live. So, in a way, although African urbanism had outward differences, the motivation was the same — to provide services consistent with culture-specific rationalities. Given this variation, and similarities, should there be one urban theory, many urban theories, or one urban shade or shades? Just as an argument has been made for a continuum or shades of urbanisms, cultural and contextual details are best reflected through 'heterogenizing' theories and not through homogenizing them. *Hunhu* or *ubuntu* shows the potential of homegrown philosophies that gave effect to behaviour expressed materially, temporally, and spatially at cities associated with the deep and recent history of Shona people (Samkange and Samkange 1980). This provides a basis for critically engaging with established frameworks within the wider discipline.

For example, central-place theory and rank-size rule, derivatives from geography and sociology, are well established in Western urban theory (Wirth 1938; Mabogunje 1968; Wheatley 1970; Cowgill 2004; Smith 2006; Smith 2016). Rank-size rule argues that a consistent relationship exists between ranks and sizes of settlements in an urban system (Mabogunje 1968).

Indeed, these fundamental principles were applied to identify central capitals, provincial capitals, district centres, and villages across Africa and other parts of the world. The largest places are always considered as central capitals, while the next in size, after factoring some distance, are labelled provincial capitals and so on. Based on this logic, and owing to its size, Great Zimbabwe is considered a central capital, supported by provincial centres, district centres, and villages. To researchers immersed in central-place theory and rank-size rule, this reconstruction makes sense. However, if one applies local philosophies such as *hunhu/ubuntu*, on a finer analytical scale, the situation easily becomes more complicated and perhaps senseless. The Zulu state is a case in point: its 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> territory was ranked from the central capital, to provincial centres, district centres, and with military barracks as distinct structures strategically planted around the territory. In his twelve-year rule, as already mentioned, Shaka established four capitals, two in different areas. Shaka's successor, Dingane, initially established his capital in one place, before moving to uMgungundlovu, neither of which are close to any of Shaka's abandoned capitals that were burned down. Similarly, Dingane's successors, Mpande and Cetshwayo, also ruled from their own capitals. During Mpande's rule, Cetshwayo's capital was a provincial centre that later became a capital. With each new leader, there was a realignment of ranks — some provincial capitals became capital cities while some provincial centres became district centres (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). A challenge raised by this historical situation is that, of all the Zulu capitals, uMgungundlovu is the biggest, eclipsing by far any of Shaka's capitals or those that came after him. An application of central-place theory would make uMgungundlovu the capital, while Shaka's capitals might be provincial or district centres on the basis of rank-size rule (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012). However, the status of places changed, and so too their ranks. This fluidity in behavioural changes was captured in philosophies such as *hunhu/ubuntu*. But because the duration of occupation at these sites was within a few years of each other, even the precise chronologies cannot separate Shaka's from Dingane's and from Mpande's capitals (Chirikure, Manyanga, and Pollard 2012).

So far, most of the effort was on emphasizing the variable and sometimes similar character of African urbanity and highlighting salient features at cross-regional levels. What similarities and differences do urbanisms in pre-colonial Africa share with other parts of the world? In the first instance, cities are settlements of variable size that develop as humans

seek to solve a host of challenges. They are places where the smallest social units (households) and largest units (city) seek services through various means such as production, consumption, and circulation. Under these situations, cities are living areas, they are production spaces, consumption spaces, religious spaces, and administration spaces. Cities are therefore characterized by congregation of large numbers of people (high-density urbanism) or dispersal of few people (low-density urbanism) in one area attracted by different services and needs. However, the congregation sometimes created challenges of its own. For example, there was need to produce food and extract resources, which explains why urban cities needed rural areas or hinterlands to exist. This reinforces a point made earlier that urban centres are places where people lived, worked, worshipped, relaxed, and so on. Therefore, the needs were the same human requirements. What differed, however, are outward differences in the pursuit of these needs. Within and outside Africa, some cultures built lasting monuments, others were more environmentally friendly and opted for renewables, such as raffia and bamboo, in building their cities. So, in a way, there are massive differences in the manner in which ancient cities looked like, which is matched by massive similarities in what those cities did! In any case, some behaviours, such as dispersal, mobile settlements, and so on, were practised by the Maya and the Zulu, while mobile cities were common in Ethiopia, Bali, and other places.

What, however, are the archaeological correlates of urbanity and urbanization? The existence of multiple ways of defining cities prescribes the corollary that there are multiple ways of identifying cities and urban spaces in the deep past, at cross-cultural levels. Several criteria, both quantitative and qualitative, are often deployed to identify cities in the African past and elsewhere (Childe 1950; Smith 2006; Smith 2016). Shifting to the quantitative criteria, measurable physical components of settlements, such as spatial extent, population size, population density, and a predominantly non-agricultural population, are some of the often-utilized measures. According to Michael E. Smith (2002), quantitative criterion such as demographic variables permit comparative studies on the landscape, allowing for identification of parameters related to hierarchy and ranking in society. However, that archaeological surveys and excavations are often small parts of bigger wholes makes it difficult to rank places using any of the quantitative criteria. Because of poor surveys and lack of data, population estimates for pre-colonial African cities are often horribly off the mark. In view of these challenges, qualitative measurements transcend some of

the challenges caused by absolute numbers inherent in quantitative approaches (Smith 2006). Such qualitative measures pay accord to local contexts, including philosophies, and how cities are classified and defined to come up with identification criteria.

While methods of identifying the urban in deep history might be similar in archaeology, the local specifics dictated that identification of urban and rural areas must be locally conditioned to build cases for comparison. For example, Yoruba urbanism involved aggregation of heterogeneous permanent groups residing in settlements making up cities (Blier 2012). The bulk of the population was agricultural (Andah 1995). However, the households were economically independent, socially stratified, politically independent, and practised craft specialization and the material sciences (Ogundiran 2003). This has resonance with the observation by Monica L. Smith (2006) that households are the basic unit of production, consumption, and circulation, showing that elite-centred histories distort the past in damaging ways. In Africa and elsewhere, there has been a tendency to view cities as being primarily inhabited and directed by elites. However, commoners were also present and made significant contributions to the manner in which cities functioned (LaViolette and Fleisher 2005). It is only that most techniques of archaeological identification are not in the favour of commoners. This means that we cannot universalize techniques for identifying and defining urban centres, although on a comparative scale some criteria will find broader application.

What are some of the profitable lines for research into African urbanisms? In many ways, archaeology is an observation-driven field. Given the very slow pace of archaeological research, especially by those on the African continent, there is a need to return to the basics, to survey landscapes in order to identify, excavate, and date more settlements. Advances in technology, especially geophysical prospection and LiDAR can go a long way towards assisting with surveys of individual places as well as of entire landscapes (Connah 2015). Seductive as these new additions are, they do not come cheap, especially in poverty-stricken parts of Africa. Nevertheless, a mix of field surveys and opportunities to deploy LiDAR and other technologies when available, through genuine and well-meaning collaboration with those with resources (Schmidt and Pikirayi 2016), will hopefully provide information on larger sites, smaller sites, and immediate hinterlands and afford a delineation of roles and functions that such places may have performed in a multi-scalar network. Follow-up excavations at prominent places are essential for obtaining samples for dating to build precise chronologies. In

some regions, there are very few radiocarbon dates with very huge error ranges of plus or minus 150 years, which is not terribly useful! Indeed, there is need for a huge commitment to improve the chronology of settlements in Africa at individual and landscape levels. This will allow archaeologists to think about how places were related on the landscape, subject to insights from local philosophies. Demographic estimates will improve with better field-based observations and will challenge the wild estimates that are sometimes encountered in the literature. Also, while admitting that there are huge constraints facing archaeologists based on the continent, scholarly creativity and innovation is required to transcend some of these limitations. One way is to make the archaeology of urban systems speak to daily bread and butter issues.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, impelled by ever-increasing urbanization, urbanity has over the course of the twentieth century, resolutely established itself as the most dominant, easily recognizable contemporary human way of life. But urbanization too was an important behaviour in Africa's pre-colonial past. Within southern Africa and other regions of the continent, cities were human settlements and arenas where life was lived, services were reciprocated, and authority engineered and maintained. Urbanism in Africa had several shades, which were given variable spatial expressions. It represented a continuum from seemingly scattered homesteads forming a network to military cities and urban centres dominated by monumental public architecture. The presence of different philosophies such as *hunhu/ botho/ubuntu* speaks to cultural pluralism whose materialization on the ground conferred many colours to African urbanism. The vast African continent had various shades of urbanism and urbanity, ranging from the monumental, through the satellite, and dispersed to the nomadic and peripatetic. Regardless of category, urban settlements were first and foremost dwelling spaces, they were working precincts, religious areas, and relaxation spaces. The manner in which such activities were organized in different set-ups builds a case for exciting cross-regional comparisons in Africa and beyond. Furthermore, it is essential to explore the motives, cultural, environmental, political, and so on, that prompted the rise and character of different urban systems and their shades. This is important because the need to allow land and other resources to recover often precipitated mobile systems of urbanism, while the nature of political sys-

tems might promote the same pattern. Given this variation, it appears therefore that there is no single urbanism, but rather many urbanisms across Africa. There are differences, but there are also similarities which makes the study of urban archaeology promising, worth the while, and interesting.

Despite having great promise, studies of urbanism in different parts of Africa are confronted with various limitations. The first and perhaps most important is that often resources for regional and detailed intra-settlement surveys are very scarce. This means that often interpretations are made on the basis of inadequate observations not supported by the situation on the ground. A second limitation is that not many settlements have been excavated and let alone robustly dated, and this often perpetuates knowledge which, while meeting precepts of certain theoretical postures, is at variance with daily, lived experience. A more forceful use of local philosophies to explore how urban settlements functioned is required beyond citing one or two ethnographies and oral traditions. African researchers must also theorize various elements of urban systems using local philosophies and cosmologies to create points of comparison with the other parts of the world. Although there is a rela-

tionship between theory and data, often theoretical formulation does not require resources as much as field-based research does. In so doing, this will bring balance as far as perspectives are concerned and, in the process, decolonize studies of pre-colonial urbanism in Africa. The challenges associated with shortages of resources will not go away anytime soon. Consequently, there is a need to perform socially relevant research on cutting-edge issues such as sustainability, poverty, and inequality as well as class relations. These will likely attract funding from governments already grappling with similar issues. Also, collaboration with genuine international partners can avail resources for transformational research. Thus, while the future of studies of urbanism in the vast African terrain is very bright, there is need to perform more research to add to the handful of examples that we perpetually recycle, giving the impression, albeit a wrong one, that the continent had a few urban places. Such action, when added to robust theorization using local concepts and cosmologies as attempted here, will increase the goodness of fit between the local context and theories and ideas from elsewhere. Consequently, to those who are daring, the future of urban studies is limitless.

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