City Identity

City Identity:

Drawn from Intrinsic, Inherited and Imported Characteristics

By

William Solesbury

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CONTENTS

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Readers of my two previous books[1] will know of my addiction to cities. I've travelled enthusiastically to cities all over the world: in some I have spent time living and working; to others I have gone briefly on business; most I have visited for a week or more out of interest and for pleasure. My many past city stays and visits run alphabetically from Addis Ababa to Zurich—the footnote lists them all.[*] The photos in the book come from my travels. I am drawn to the popular sights, but mostly I just enjoy observing city life: walking the streets, noting building uses and styles, riding the tram or bus or metro, shopping, eating and drinking in cafes, bars and restaurants, and, above all, noting how the locals go about their daily lives. I suppose that this makes me—to use that rather hackneyed term—a *flaneur*.

But I have another inspiration. This is Italo Calvino's wonderful book *Invisible Cities* in which Marco Polo recounts to Kublai Khan brief descriptions of 55 cities that he claims to have visited in his travels. The book starts:

> "Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his."[2]

The cities are fictional, indeed mostly fantastical—all later revealed to be derivatives of Venice, Polo's home town. His 55 cities are categorised as

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[*] Addis Ababa, Amsterdam, Athens, Bangkok, Beijing, Belgrade, Berlin, Brisbane, Brussels, Bucharest, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Cape Town, Chicago, Cuzco, Delhi, Guangdong, Hamburg, Hanoi, Havana, Helsinki, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Kolkata, Lima, Lisbon, Los Angeles, Lyon, Macau, Madrid, Marrakesh, Melbourne, Memphis, Mexico City, Moscow, Mumbai, Naples, Nashville, New York, Oakland, Ottawa, Palermo, Paris, Phnom Penh, Prague, Ramallah, Riga, Rome, Saigon / Ho Chi Minh City, Samarkand, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Seattle, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Singapore, Stockholm, St Petersburg, Sydney, Tashkent, Tel Aviv, Thessaloniki, Tokyo, Trieste, Vancouver, Warsaw, Washington, Zurich.

Cities and Memory, Cities and Desire, Cities and Signs, and so on. But in each case, Calvino expresses the essence of the city. It was this book that aroused my interest in the unique identity of cities. And on my own visits to real cities I try to capture their identity in my mind.

This book explores the nature of modern city identities and how they are shaped—that of Addis Ababa, for starters.

CHAPTER ONE

A DAY IN ADDIS ABABA

In late 2018 I decided to visit Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, for the first time. My prior knowledge of Addis (the locals' abbreviated name) and of Ethiopia was scrappy. I had a recollection of reading about Prester John, a mythical King of Ethiopia, as a schoolboy. Also Evelyn Waugh's comic novel *Scoop* about a hapless newspaper reporter sent to cover political events there in the 1930s. Then, the Ark of the Covenant story from the 1981 Spielberg movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I had read and enjoyed Ryszard Kapuscinski's book *The* Emperor,[1] an account of the feudal and foolish court of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie before his deposition in the 1970s. And, of course, the Ethiopian famine of 1983–1985 and the Live Aid concert. But I had little sense of the identity of Addis itself.

I joined a two-week group tour in northern Ethiopia where the main early-Christian and royal sights are located—extraordinary palaces, churches atop mountains, churches carved below ground, funereal monuments. The tour concluded with a tough three-day cross-country hike, accompanied by bearers and donkeys, passing through villages and with two overnight stays in cold, remote huts—I didn't take my clothes off once! We returned to Addis at the end and I stayed on by myself for a few days.

On my travels I regularly keep a diary. Here is my edited entry for a day spent in Addis.

28 November 2018

While waiting for the morning tram near my hotel, a young man accosts me in perfect English. He asks 'Where are you from?'
'England'
'Ah, The home of football! What team do you support?'
In truth I don't have a favourite team. But I live in London near the Chelsea ground so I say 'Chelsea.'
'Up the Blues!' he declares, the Chelsea fans' slogan, as the tram arrives.

The Addis Light Rail tram is something new in the city, inaugurated in 2015. It has two lines running east–west and north–south, crossing near

Meskel Square. They are frequent, speedy and cheap, very basic in design, and always crowded. A Chinese company built and financed the network—nobody seems to know quite on what terms.

Now in Meskel Square I go to visit the Addis Ababa Museum, which, rather scruffily, records the history of the city through old photos, documents and artefacts. Next door is the more modern Red Terror Martyrs' Memorial Museum, which presents Ethiopia's dark decade of communist rule in the 1970s and 1980s. Emperor Haile Selassie was dethroned in 1974, and later executed, by a group of army and police officers known as the Derg (meaning literally 'Committee'). Ethiopia became a 'People's Democratic Republic', pursuing communist economic and social policies—in reality a vicious dictatorship, akin to the rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia also in the 1970s. This regime was overthrown in 1991—when communist regimes elsewhere in the world were also collapsing—by a liberation movement that has ruled Ethiopia since. The museum's displays are chilling.

After an hour in the museum, back in Meskel Square there are now hundreds of people, mostly young and wearing jeans and white T-shirts, streaming towards the nearby stadium. On their T-shirts is an image of clutched hands, the words 'Ethiopia & Eritrea', and the slogan 'One Love'. What they seem to be celebrating is a peace deal, recently concluded by the young, new Prime Minister, Ably Ahmed, between Ethiopia and neighbouring Eritrea, which had been in an intermittent border war for two decades. [Ahmed subsequently received the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.] *I later learn that "One Love", shown on the T-shirts, is the title of a Bob Marley song. Its opening lines are:*

'One love, one heart,
Let's get together and feel alright.'

Bob Marley, the Jamaican-born singer who lived from 1945–1981, was a pan-Africanist and Rastafarian, much celebrated in Ethiopia. Rastafarians believe that Emperor Haile Selassie, crowned in 1930 and known as the Lion of Judah, was a living God and that Ethiopia is their homeland. The Emperor encouraged them to emigrate, but there were not many takers.

I set off walking up Churchill Avenue, one of the city's main boulevards. A man steps alongside me, trying to persuade me to visit an Ethiopian Jazz concert that he claims to be arranging that evening. I shake him off. Along the avenue, in what is now central Addis, there is a mix of old and new, low- and high-rise buildings for government, commerce and some upmarket hotels. There seems to be a building boom here. One oddity is the prevalence

of eucalyptus wood, rather than steel, scaffolding rising up to quite great heights. Along the road, the pavements are unkempt, and the traffic is thick with many cars and lorries, commonly Toyotas. Also taxis and minibuses. No tuk-tuks, though they are popular elsewhere in Ethiopia—maybe banned in the city? A security guard for a ministry building chases me away from taking a photo.

At the top I turn left in search of the Tomoca Coffee House, strongly recommended in my guide book. It's small, just a room really with high counters but no seats, clearly geared for a quick turnover. It's busy with smart-looking young people—students and office workers, at a guess. Coffee is being roasted on the premises and the aroma is wonderful. Addis is full of coffee and pastry shops, all independent; no Starbucks or Costas here. The local style of coffee to drink is black, thick and strong, well-sugared, to my mind quite like Turkish coffee. But all modern coffee styles are available and I get my favourite flat white.

Piazza, at the top of Churchill Avenue, was once the city's smartest shopping district but now seems rather rundown. Its name and its townscape are Italianate. It's now essentially Addis's 'old town'. A few buildings have recently been restored as hotels and restaurants. The Italian colonialist regime, which ruled Ethiopia briefly from 1935–1941, removed an old street market from here to create a 'European' shopping district. A new market district, now called Mercato, was established a little way to the west. Often claimed to be the largest market in Africa, it extends over more than a square kilometre. Today little of it is open air, rather a jumble of shacks housing several thousand small businesses, offering every conceivable product, local and imported, or service. I look for a suitable souvenir of my visit to Addis, without success. Anyway, it's time for lunch, my opportunity to try the local dish called injera. It's a large, sour-tasting flat pancake made from the fermented tef grain that is unique to Ethiopia, topped with spicy meat or vegetable stew portions; you eat it with your hands. Today is a church-deemed fasting day so I only get vegetables. To be honest, I don't much care for the dish. though it was cheap: 100 Ethiopian birr, about 3.5 US dollars.

I devote the afternoon to the more conventional cultural sights north of Piazza. There is St George's cathedral of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: St George is the patron saint of Ethiopia—as of Portugal, Georgia, England and other countries—and the story of his slaying the dragon and rescuing the maiden is as well known to Ethiopian children as it is to English children. I also see the National Museum of Ethiopia with the famous 3.5 million-year-old ancient skeleton whose discovery in 1974 by archaeologists proved that homo sapiens walked the earth 2.5 million years earlier than

formerly believed. It is popularly known as 'Lucy' because, it is claimed, its discoverers were listening to The Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" at the time. Here also are: the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in a former palace of Emperor Haile Selassie; the Trinity Cathedral where Selassie and his wife Menen were ceremonially reinterred in 2000; and Africa Hall which accommodates the United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa.

Time now to think of supper. To get back to the hotel the choice is between a minibus or a taxi. The minibuses run on a network of fixed routes every few minutes and stop anywhere on request but, especially at peak times, getting on and off involves much pushing and shoving. A taxi seems simpler and, by international standards, cheap. The blue taxis are unmetered, usually owned by the driver, and the fare must be negotiated. Yellow taxis, usually owned by companies, are metered and, with regulated charges, usually cheaper. I bag a yellow taxi, but the driver claims that the meter is broken, so I must agree the fare.

Round about my hotel, in the south-west Bole Road area which lies on the way out to the airport, new restaurants, bars and clubs have sprung up. Italian cuisine seems the best option. The hotel receptionist recommends a local bar where I have an excellent tuna pizza and a local beer. The bar is crowded, mostly with young men, many of them engrossed by the TV. I look closely at what is showing: it's Love Island*, a British reality TV series in which good-looking, scantily dressed young men and women are taken to a sunny Mediterranean resort, accommodated together in a large villa, and expected to make out as couples. Though voting to select a winning couple was not an option for the audience here, they were vociferous in their preferences.*

I leave for London tonight. The newish Bole International Airport is very close in to the city. The flight is at 1.50am. A hotel car gets me to the airport for check-in at midnight. I've never before been at an airport at that time. But here it seems quite normal—its shops, bars and cafes all busy for night-time arrivals and departures. The usual routines of ticket desk, bag drop, security check and passport inspection follow. The terminal mainly accommodates Ethiopian Airlines, which has connections through Africa and beyond to 75 other cities as well as internally in Ethiopia. But the airport is quite under-capacity for its traffic of 10 million passenger annually. An expansion is under construction.

An overnight, relatively sleepless flight to London. I catch up on movies I've missed while away. Goodbye to Addis.

So, what can we make of Addis Ababa as a city of the modern world? The 2019 Bradt guidebook to Ethiopia observes:

> "Addis Ababa possesses a genuine sense of place lacking in those many other African capitals that were designed to be misplaced pockets of Western urbanity in otherwise underdeveloped nations. Indeed, perhaps the highest praise one can direct at chaotic, contradictory and compelling Addis Ababa is this: it *does* feel exactly as the Ethiopian capital *should* feel–emphatically and unmistakably a modern 21st century city, but also singularly and unequivocally Ethiopian."[2]

This seems to me to be a pointer. The identity of Addis is to be understood in terms of its economy, its politics past and present, its demography, its cityscape, its culture, how life is lived there here and now, and its connections to the rest of Ethiopia, Africa and the wider world. Is it the mix of such characteristics that shapes a city's identity?

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDENTITY OF CITIES

In recent decades city tourism has boomed. It now attracts a major share of the 1.4 billion people in the world who the World Travel Organisation estimated were tourists in 2018. These tourists come mainly from the wealthier countries of the global North, but increasingly tourists from Japan, Russia, China, South Korea, India and the Middle East have joined the annual flows. Greater disposable wealth is the main driver of the growth of tourism, but more leisure time is a factor too. That foreign places feature so much in the media—in films and on TV, on the internet, in newspapers and magazines—has also raised awareness of them as somewhere to visit. And businesses for the transport, accommodation and entertainment of tourists have emerged, both in the home countries of tourists themselves and in their destinations. Tourism has ceased to be an elite activity.

It is in this context that cities have become attractive tourist destinations. Air travel has brought the farthest-flung city within 36 hours of home, which is attractive for a two-week vacation. And those cities nearer home can offer a weekend visit. Tourists are not just visiting cities like Venice or St Petersburg or New Orleans, renowned for their historic, essentially Western, authenticity, for, perhaps surprisingly, the city in the world most visited today by international travellers is Bangkok; it is followed in the top ten by Paris, London, Dubai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Istanbul, Tokyo and Antalya. All had more than 10 million overnight visitor stays in 2019. And the next 10 most visited cities hold even more surprises: Seoul, Osaka, Mecca, Phuket, Pattaya, Milan, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Bali and Hong Kong.[1] Some of these are actually major resorts in tourist regions, like Antalya on the Turkish Mediterranean coast, Phuket and Pattaya among Thailand's beaches and islands, Bali in Indonesia, and Palma de Mallorca in Spain's Balearic Isles. Mecca is the world's major destination for Muslim pilgrims. But most of the top 20 are large, multipurpose, modern cities.

What makes these and other cities so attractive to the modern tourist? In *The Book of Cities*, Philip Dodd and Ben Donald provide pen portraits with photographs of "250 important and intriguing cities, a celebration of their diversity, energies and culture."[2] Here are extracts from what they have to

say about some of the cities in the above tourist Top 20: Paris, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, New York and Tokyo.

> "The great beauty of Paris is that it remains so fantastically and uncompromisingly Parisian. Shrugging its shoulders with a disdainful moue and an alert 'bof!', the city has accepted but essentially ignored the arrival of other cultures. When the first McDonald's opened, the names of the burgers had to be changed (remember John Travolta's "Royale with cheese" rap in *Pulp Fiction*); even the most global of brands has to toe the Parisian line. Paris is enduringly homogenous. Baron Haussmann's 19th-century street plan—the imprint for so many subsequent city designs—held together by the arrow-straight Champs-Elysées, is essentially intact, despite the best efforts of revolutionaries, occupiers, liberators and the évènements of 1968…The city's centre (the agglomération beyond the périphérique is as infinite a sprawl as in most cities) is compact and wonderfully walkable…Best of all, that walk should be à deux. It didn't really need Cole Porter to tell us that Paris is for lovers, or Robert Doisneau to capture that kiss on camera. Paris has been romancing for centuries…."[3]

> "Few cities have devoted themselves to promoting the restorative powers of retail and leisure therapy with such gusto as Dubai. Just in case anyone had missed the point, the city even hosts a Shoppers' Festival every winter. The 'shop till you drop' mentality which the city purveys is deliberate, a hard-headed business decision to build up an alternative stream of revenue for the emirate once the oil reserves run out—in 10, 15, maybe 20 years. Dubai has always been a merchant port: a century ago it was trading in precious metals, pearls and spices to supplement the income from fishing. The ruling Al Maktoum family have simply taken all that to an extravagant new dimension. To draw in the visitors, Dubai is hardly lacking in other natural resources. At the eastern end of the Gulf, on its southern shore, the city sits next to warm turquoise waters; its beaches are safe, clean and sandy. Add to that mix the lure of high-class golf and tennis tournaments, a horse race that is synonymous with wealth (the Dubai World Cup), fishing charters, sandboarding, water skiing and 4x4 desert excursions, and the tourist-friendly appeal of the city becomes self-evident. And of all its futuristic hotels, the 1000 feet (305 metre) sci-fi sail of the Burj Al-Arab, soaring up on its own islet, is a startling vision of opulence and post-modernism—it brands itself the world's first seven-star hotel."[4]

> "The city's name is, frankly, uninspiring. Kuala Lumpur is a Malay phrase for 'muddy confluence', hardly a glowing description. At the meeting of two sludgy rivers…there was little to get excited about in the early days when a handful of shacks made up the mining community created in the 1850s by Chinese tin prospectors. Yet, despite these unpromising origins, Kuala Lumpur has grown up full of confidence, and ready to take on all comers. Witness the Petronas Towers, Kuala Lumpur's instant icon, two slender,

tapering steeples, linked by a skyway halfway up…which, at their topping off in 1968, snatched, with a certain amount of impudence, the 'tallest building in the world' title from Chicago's Sears Tower…Likewise, the city underwrote the Malaysian Grand Prix…it hosted the 1998 Commonwealth Games. And its abbreviation, KL, grants it membership of that select club of cities who need only a few initials for recognition—LA, BA, NYC, DC—high company indeed… Together with an ethnic mix of Malay, Chinese and Indian, Kuala Lumpur's blend of old and new is the glue that holds the city together, like the coconut milk which coagulates the sticky rice, *nasi lemak*—along with satay sauce, the staple of every KL street stall."[5]

"And New York does not disappoint: New York delivers. It also polarises opinion quite swiftly. Although the first sight of New York City may figure high on the recognition scale, the first 24 hours of exposure can leave you totally exhilarated or bruised, bothered and bewildered. The brusqueness and energy of native New Yorkers is no front; their honesty can be brutal, but is more often than not refreshing. Following the World Trade Center attacks of 11 September 2001, the raw strength of New York and its determination to rise above the tragedy swamped the city in a wave of sympathy that it had never experienced before, and may never again enjoy. With its skyline forever altered—a skyline that was the most famous in the world—its psyche may also have changed for good. But New York is not just Manhattan. The other boroughs—Brooklyn with its brownstones, Queen's (once the centre of the film industry until Hollywood won out), Staten Island and the much maligned Bronx—are part of the incredible variety of New York."[6]

"And so, just as first-timers in New York City find themselves in what seem like remarkably familiar surroundings, much of Tokyo (the heavily photographed Ginza Yon-Chome pedestrian crossing, for example) taps into a similarly deep-rooted pre-memory. But although the neon, the sardine-like metro trains and the shoebox houses crammed cheek by jowl are all expected, the cleanliness of Tokyo's streets is a shock, and a realisation that, at one level, there is an obedience to rules and regulations and civic duty that underpinned Japan's economic miracle. For the city's dodgy underbelly, you have to peek into the loner's bars and hostess clubs, past the *yakusa* 'security consultants.' Tokyo has no obvious centre. Each area has a strong personality, and rather than being some quaint quarter is usually city-sized in its own right. So Ginza is shopping heaven, West Shinjuku the corporate headquarters, East Shinjuku where the workers of West Shinjuku look for fun at night. In Shibuya the teenagers follow the latest fads and fashions of the latest idol, or *idoru*. Their older brothers and sisters head to the all-night music clubs of Roppongi."[7]

As a visitor to these cities you will recognise these accounts. Very successfully—as evident in these extracts and indeed in all their book's 250 pen portraits—Dodd and Donald capture each city's *genius loci*. This

concept of *genius loci* has a long history. In its Latin origin it referred to the religious, protective spirit of a place. Later, it expressed the context that new landscape designs should respect: "consult the genius of the place in all" advised 18th-century Alexander Pope. And that applied to architecture too. Today, according to my OED, shorn of its spirituality it expresses the "prevailing character or atmosphere of a place." That is, in modern terms, its identity.

It is this identity that attracts the tourists to a city, not just to visit galleries and museums, to drink in cool bars or dine in exotic restaurants, but to experience something of what it is like to live in that city, even its inconveniences as much as its charms. It is the city's identity that the city's tourism agency—and most cities now have one—and the local travel businesses energetically feature in their promotions to lure the visitors. They use it—in a modern term— to brand their city, using words, images, metaphors and stories. This identity is the product of a unique mixture of a city's characteristics: drawn from one or more of history and geography, its economy, social structures and processes, public behaviour, cuisine, dress, politics and governance, artistic images and accounts, demography, buildings and transport, culture and consumption. And among these characteristics there will be both fact and fiction, what is familiar or strange, either comforting or challenging.

Above all it is the interweaving of these characteristics that creates identity. Back in 2004 the geographer Doreen Massey observed that:

> "There is a widespread argument these days that [personal] identities are 'relational'. That, for instance, we do not have our beings and then go out and interact, but that to a disputed but nonetheless significant extent our beings, our identities are constituted in and through those engagements, those practices of interaction. Identities are forged in and through relations (which includes non-relations, absences and hiatuses). In consequence they are not rooted or static, but mutable ongoing productions."[8]

She continued:

> "This is an argument which has had its precise parallel in the reconceptualisation of spatial identities. An understanding of the locational nature of space has been accompanied by arguments about the relational construction of the identity of place. If space is a product of practices, trajectories, interrelations, if we make space through interactions at all levels, from the (so-called) local to the (so-called) global then those spatial identities such as places, regions, nations, and the local and global, must be forged in this relational way too, as internally complex, essentially unboundable in any absolute sense, and inevitably historically changing."[8]

You get her point about relational identity by just imagining the characteristics of a familiar city street somewhere in the world. It will have a carriageway for vehicles, on which cars, vans, lorries, motor bikes, buses, taxis, maybe tuk-tuks and rickshaws will run; bicycles too, unless there is a separate cycle route. At the side, on a raised sidewalk or maybe just on a dusty strip, people will be on foot, some with wheelchairs or pushchairs or trollies. All will be going about their daily lives: getting to work or school, delivering goods, hailing transport, having chance encounters, attending appointments, going into shops, cafes or restaurants, speaking on their mobile phones. Some may be resting, even sleeping, in the street. At work in the street there may be policemen, refuse collectors, goods deliverers or taxi drivers; as well there may be people offering services as hairdressers, clothes and shoe repairers, and fast-food sellers. People in the street will be young and old, male and female. Some will have different styles of dress, speak various languages, look different from each other in terms of skin colour or hair style or with tattoos. Some of the street's buildings and spaces may be young in age, but some will have been constructed years, decades or even centuries ago, with materials and in styles no longer in use. And there may be history too behind some of the activities that present-day people are engaged in, as with using shops and businesses long established in that locality, sometimes proudly advertising their antiquity: 'established since 1895.' The goods they sell may also have been around for some years: like Marmite since 1902, Persil since 1907, 7UP since 1927. The street is not isolated, because buses, maybe metros or trams, and taxis will be running to and from other parts of the city; shops and stalls will be selling imported foods and other goods; TV screens and radios in shops and bars may well be carrying news of events from around the world. There might even be planes overhead, carrying passengers and goods from beyond the city, coming in to land at a nearby airport.

Some of these relational characteristics are clearly rooted in the present-day reality of the street: its layout, its traffic, its residents and businesses, their activities and behaviour. But there are also likely to be historic connections evident here: in the buildings from past eras, in the longevity of some of the businesses, even of some of the goods and services on offer, in the personal histories of locals, especially recent immigrants. And there are connections with places beyond the street: in transport, in clothing fashions, in imported goods for sale, in the fast food on offer, in visitors, in awareness through the media of national and international events. In these ways the street exhibits evidence of the present, of the past and of other places. The characteristics that shape the street's identity are then diverse, relational and embedded in both time and space.

This is true too of a city's identity. From this perspective reconsider Addis Ababa. Today three million people live in Addis, in a city spread across 200 square kilometres. As a capital city it has a diverse economy including trade and commerce; manufacturing; public administration for the national parliament and ministries, and also the city council; health, education and social care; media; and transport and communication, both within the city and connecting it to the wider world. Tourism is expanding in Ethiopia, the airport brings visitors in, the city has hotels and restaurants in a full range of qualities and prices. Here too is the hub of the Ethiopian coffee trade, exporting $1 billion worth of the crop annually, over half the country's national exports. It is claimed that coffee originated here: the popular myth is that a goatherd noticed his flock consuming the red berries of the Arabica plant and becoming hyperactive, so he decided to try them for himself. Addis is also often called the diplomatic capital of Africa, hosting HQs for both the African Union and the United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa. All these sectors offer both manual and mental labour, some work is regular, much irregular. Unemployment is officially stated to be just below 20% but is probably higher in reality. It is a lively city. Young people populate the city-centre streets. Mobile phones are in use everywhere. There is evidently a growing middle class of professionals and managers. People are mostly skinny—remember that lots of the world's marathon runners come from this part of Africa. The city has a rich selection of cafes, restaurants and bars. Literacy is high: over 90% for men, about 80% for women. But much of the population lives in poor quality shack housing, which is subject to official clearance policies that relocate them to new high rises on the city periphery, while sometimes redeveloping their sites for upmarket apartments.

But inheritances from its past are apparent in today's Addis too. It is a relatively modern city, founded in 1887 when Emperor Menelik II relocated his palace and Ethiopia's capital here. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, established since the 4th century, is a potent influence on city life: 75% of the population are adherents, the rest are mostly Catholics, Protestants or Muslims. Apart from weekly church going, the Church decrees around 200 fasting days a year when eating meat is forbidden. Ethiopia was never colonised in the European countries' 19th-century 'Scramble for Africa'. But the Italians, who ruled neighbouring Eritrea as a colony, had long coveted Ethiopia and seized it in 1935 to form part of their African Empire. Then in 1941, when Mussolini had thrown in his lot with Hitler in World War 2 and thereby become an enemy, the Italians were chased out by a British force and Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to his throne. But Italian influence persists; indeed, some Italian civilians stayed on after 1941.

Today, pizza and pasta are on offer in many restaurants, at all price ranges, and are also commonly eaten at home by Addis families. The city's central district is still called Piazza and the main market Mercato. The later communist period has largely been airbrushed from city history, except for the creation of the Martyrs' Museum and the retention of the Tiglachen Memorial on Churchill Avenue, a column topped by a red star erected in 1984 to commemorate Ethiopian and Cuban soldiers who died in a 1978 war with Somalia—the column paid for by their fellow communist North Koreans. Many Addis streets reference historical names. Apart from Churchill Avenue, there is General Wingate Street (Wingate led the British troops who captured Ethiopia from the Italian colonialists in 1941), Roosevelt Street, Tito Street, Sylvia Pankhurst Street (the former suffragette, she came to Addis at the Emperor's request in 1956 and died here in 1960), Queen Elizabeth II Street, De Gaulle Square and Mickey Leland Street (he was a US anti-hunger activist, who died in a plane crash in Ethiopia in 1989).

Imports from the rest of the world are on show everywhere. Addis males are obsessed with football. You see it played in the street, there is table football in bars and cafes, the local team is in the national league and the national team (not very successful, it seems) is in the All Africa Cup competition. But it's English Premier League football shown live on TV that attracts them most. Signage in English is everywhere. The young speak English confidently: many learn it in primary school and in most secondary schools all subjects are taught in English except Amharic, the national language. The city supports three weekly English language newspapers, titled *Fortune*, *Capital* and *Reporter*. Ethiopian Jazz, known as Ethio-jazz, is a unique fusion of traditional Ethiopian music with jazz, Afro-funk, soul and Latin rhythms; it was developed by Ethiopians in the USA and exported to their native country. Reggae remains popular. And many young men here wear Rastafarian dreadlocks, a style imported from the Caribbean, but smoking marijuana is illegal in Ethiopia. Among Addis people, clothing is more Western than traditional. Many foreign cuisines, as well as Italian, can be found in the city's upmarket restaurants. Coca-Cola, Fanta and Sprite are the most common soft drinks, but the beer, wine and mineral water on offer are local. The major international hotel chains—Radisson, Sheraton and Hilton among them—are here. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's three TV channels are supplemented by multichannel satellite services from abroad. Cars, vans and lorries are mostly imported from Japan. And evidence of Chinese investment is everywhere: in the building that holds the HQ of the African Union, in the new city tram, in the restored rail link to Djibouti on the coast, in new high-rise offices and flats under construction, in new financial businesses, and in the popular brands of mobile phones.

Reportedly, the Chinese are currently the largest immigrant community in Addis, though they remain largely invisible away from their workplaces. Eucalyptus trees, which supply firewood and building materials including scaffolding, were first imported from Australia in the 1890s.

So there is here a conjunction of the present and the past, and of the local and the global. But this is not unique to Addis. It is apparent in the identity of many of today's cities across the world. You can observe this conjunction in cities as seemingly different in identity as Rome and Manila, Los Angeles and Buenos Aires, and Moscow and Kinshasa. Few of these and other cities are to be understood in the present without regard also to inheritances from their past; few are immune from imported influences alongside local practices.

PART TWO

SOME CITY CHARACTERISTICS

The characteristics that create a city's identity can be found in one or more of the activities within it, the look and feel of the place, and the customs of its people. The activities in the city will be evident not only in its economy, the goods and services that it typically produces, and the forms of employment they provide; but also how the city is governed, policed and its public services provided; and what culture—art, performance, writing—is apparent. The look and feel of the city can be found in its buildings, its transport routes and the traffic they carry, its waterways and bridges, its people of differing skin colour and appearance; and also in the smells, whether nice or noxious, and the sounds and tastes of the place. Finally, the customs of its people express how they live their lives: how they feed, dress, travel, entertain themselves and behave in public.

In the following chapters I explore characteristics, in seven elements of today's cities across the world, that can help to define their identity:

Home—concerning address, shelter, homelessness, homeworking, tenure, housing mobility, renewal and removal.

Work—concerning city economies, makers, traders and thinkers, technology, formal and informal sectors, women's work, child labour, rich and poor.

Daily life—concerning food, faith, sport and games, clothing, public behaviour, smartphones, health, and crime.

Politics—concerning city halls, mayors, elections, city powers and finances, city planning, multi-agency and multilevel governance, corruption, civil society, and disorder.

Culture—concerning movies, fiction, music, concert houses and stadia, pop music, soap operas, festivals, flash mobs, and graffiti.

Travel—concerning traffic, street patterns, boulevards and freeways, bridges, pedestrianisation, travel modes, vehicles, cycling, walking, congestion, pollution, and the '15-minute city'.

and Buildings—concerning the vernacular, houses, skyscrapers, markets, stores and malls, factories, transport termini, hotels, infrastructure, cityscapes, and property markets.

Some characteristics may occasionally be unique to individual cities. Commonly, there are characteristics that can be found today in many cities: perhaps building types—like airports or skyscrapers—or graffiti or festivals. Even then, there may be subtle differences from city to city in how the same characteristics appear or function. In all these ways, all cities will have a mix of characteristics that help to define their identity.

CHAPTER THREE

HOME

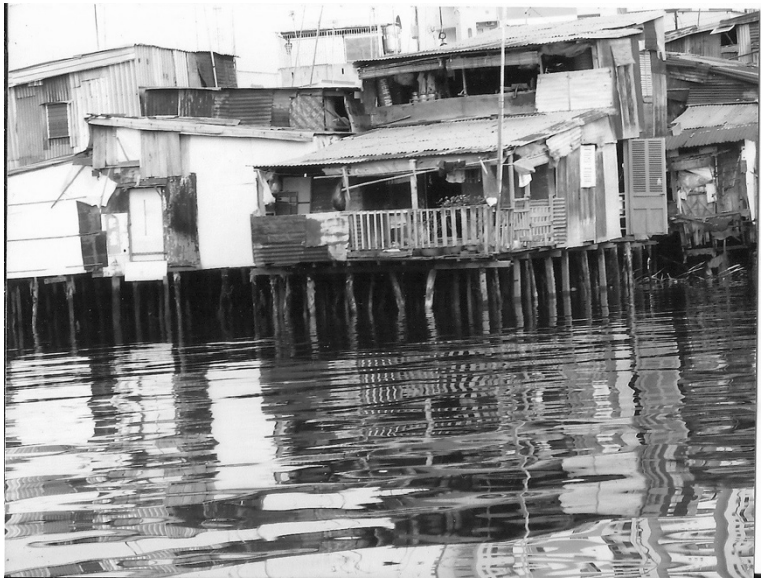
Address—shelter—homelessness—homeworking—tenure—housing mobility—renewal and removal

For people in cities their home provides them with shelter, a roof over their head. For some it may also be their workplace and an asset that can be traded. But, first and foremost, it can provide an address: a number or name in a street in a defined district of the city. Without an address city life can be restricted, with, most obviously, nowhere for mail to be delivered or for visitors to readily find their way to you; but it is also problematic in seeking employment, registering your children for schooling, or claiming financial benefits or other kinds of assistance. More abstractly, an address is, like your name, also an aspect of your personal identity. With this belief, in Kolkata there is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) whose purpose is to help the residents of shanty districts to acquire addresses, as a necessary step towards getting by in the city.

A home requires walls, a roof, doors and windows. But around the cities of the world, indeed often in one city, they can come in different shapes and sizes. For fortunate households, home means a house or an apartment, in good condition, relatively spacious with many rooms including separate toilet and bathroom, connected to phone and sewerage networks and supplies of power and water, and maybe with its own outdoor space: a balcony, yard or garden. It will be secured by locks or keypads, in some cases protected by door staff in apartment blocks, even by gatehouses controlling entry to rich people's fenced-off communities, and fixed to the front of houses may be boxes denoting burglar alarms or the threat of 'rapid response'.

For the less fortunate, there is slum housing. It takes many forms. In some cities of Latin America and Asia, spacious and elegant homes in inner districts have been abandoned by the rich, then subdivided and squatted by poor households. Two astonishing, though unusual, examples of squatting are the adaptation of old Mameluke tombs in Cairo's City of the Dead necropolis and the occupation for many years of the incomplete 45-storey

Torre de David office building in Caracas. Also, sometimes public housing has been badly maintained and declined into slums. But the most widespread kind of slum is the shanty town of largely self-built huts with minimal services, sharing water taps and toilets, surrounded by uncollected refuse, found today in most cities of the global South. Some of these are vast, covering many square kilometres with populations up to a million or more, either on the periphery of a city or within it on otherwise unused land like hillsides, floodplains or garbage dumps; in some riverine cities, like Lagos, Ho Chi Minh City and Kolkata, some shanty settlements are built on stilts above the water.



Shanty housing on stilts, Mekong Delta

The name they are given varies from place to place: *favelas* in Rio and San Paulo, *pueblos jovenes* [young towns] in Lima, *gecekondu* [built overnight] in Ankara and Istanbul, and *bidonvilles* in Francophone African cities. The geographer Mike Davis in his 2006 book *Planet of Slums* comments sardonically:

> "Thus, the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude bricks, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and

> scrap wood. Instead of cities of light soaring towards heaven, much of the twenty-first century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement and decay."[1]

Such settlements are now largely unknown in the cities of the global North but they were present in the past: in the USA during the Depression of the 1930s, they were named 'Hoovervilles' after the President who was held responsible for the collapse of the economy, and in Europe to accommodate migrants in the immediate aftermath of World War 2. They were mostly cleared by public authorities to make way for public housing. Today, trailer homes in trailer parks are equivalent housing for poor people, especially in the USA where they are estimated to represent about 5% of its housing.

Homelessness today, however, is a universal characteristic. In cities of both the global North and South, single people and sometimes whole families can be found sleeping in the streets, 'sofa-surfing' with family or friends, temporarily accommodated in night shelters, hostels or cheap hotels, or even sleeping in their car. One source claims the five cities with the highest numbers of homeless people are Manila, New York, Mumbai, Los Angeles and Moscow,[2] but enumeration is difficult. It seems that larger cities exhibit homelessness most; drug addiction and poor mental health are frequent factors. In *World Cities, City Worlds* I reported:

> "Mumbai has over one million street-dwellers, many of them families, some of them single men or women or even single children. Most are in work and compelled by their jobs—in transport, construction, catering, trading—to live in the otherwise unaffordable heart of the city. Arriving at the main railway station in the late evening you find the concourse taken over by families bedding down for the night, containing themselves within areas marked by white lines, leaving spaces between them for travellers to get to and from the platforms. Elsewhere the homeless are asleep on pavements, beneath market stalls, in alleyways and doorways, anywhere."[3]

Street dwelling is precarious. Protecting belongings can be difficult; you may be abused by passers-by, even attacked by vigilantes; and in some cases forced to pay corrupt police to escape harassment.

Every home in every city is also a workplace. At least there will be domestic tasks to fulfil: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and mending, commonly undertaken by women in the household; and household administration like keeping account of income and expenditure, paying bills, negotiating with officialdom, commonly a man's preserve. School children may have homework. And children and adults often have hobbies or interests that can be pursued in the home. For some people the home may

also be where they pursue paid employment. Typically, this will be true where a service can be offered to neighbours as a baker, bookkeeper, watch and phone repairer, translator, and many other skills. This homeworking may only be evidenced by a discreet plaque attached to the entrance or an advert on a local noticeboard, in a newspaper or on the internet. In recent years 'working from home' (initialised as WFH), either part-time or full-time, has become common for some white-collar workers, permitted—even encouraged—by employers. For the employer there is an economy in office space, no longer allocating permanent individual space to workers, but rather offering occasional access to shared space, known as 'hot desking'. For the worker, WFH can offer an easier work–life balance and the avoidance of hurried commuting. The worldwide coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2019 gave impetus to this shift, when in many cities government advice was to 'stay at home', to minimise interpersonal contact in workplaces and on public transport.

The pattern of housing tenure varies between cities and between districts in cities. Basically, either households own the homes in which they live, or they rent them from a public or private landlord; or they squat. In most cities across the world home ownership is dominant; the exceptions—where ownership is less than 50%--are the Czech Republic, Egypt, Nigeria, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland, a mixture of cities of the global North and South, which presumably specific local circumstances can explain. Even other presently communist or former communist cities in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and China have high ownership rates of 80% or more.[4] For owner-occupiers, their dwelling gives them security against dispossession and an investment which may increase in value; conversely, renters have no such benefits. But renting is to be found in most cities at all price levels and all qualities. There will be luxury apartments for the business and government elite, basic accommodation for middle-income families, social housing provided by state agencies, churches or charitable organisations, dormitories or hostels provided by employers, or even shacks in shanty towns, sometimes owned by rich people as profitable investments.

City people often move home. This may be through a change of circumstance—a new, more distant job, a growing family needing more space, or reduced income, for example—or a change of aspiration about where in the city they want to live. When such mobility is shared by many households it can change the social structure of a neighbourhood and its character. Two examples are what are known as 'white flight' and 'gentrification'. 'White flight' has historically been a phenomenon when the immigration into city neighbourhoods of Black, Asian or Latino people has led to an out-migration to suburban districts of existing White residents—

who ironically were themselves often earlier immigrants. This has particularly been a past social change in some US cities, when Black families from the South moved, in search of work and independence, to northern cities in what is known as the Great Migration of the mid-20th century; but such 'white flight' is not unknown in other cities of the global North. The result is a more racially segregated city. So-called 'gentrification' is also a phenomenon of immigration in cities. In this case the migration is of better-off people into neighbourhoods in inner-city locations hitherto occupied by poorer people who are displaced. This migration is often accompanied by a shift from rented to owned properties, property renovation and the creation of new businesses, especially upmarket food stores, restaurants and cafes. Gentrification was first noted and named by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1960s London:

> "One by one, many of the working-class neighbourhoods of London have been invaded by the middle-classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over…when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period—which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation—have been upgraded once again…Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly, until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed."[5]

Over the decades since then, gentrification has become evident in many of the larger cities of the global North and even in some in the global South. The driving force seems to have been the expansion of white-collar, professional work in city centres, the growth of dual-career households wanting to minimise commuting and ease of childcare, and the numerical decline of blue-collar, industrial workers by whom these inner-city districts were originally occupied. There has also been a cultural shift among incomers towards an appreciation of older, characterful housing. But not all older inner-city districts have become gentrified: in some industrial cities, as with the so-called 'Rust Belt' cities of the USA, they have just been abandoned.

Not all mobility is cities is voluntary. Most city authorities have, over the last century or more, accepted a responsibility for housing availability and condition. Housing renewal—demolishing substandard housing and building higher quality replacements—has become a common practice, offering new accommodation to displaced residents. In many cities this required the creation of whole new districts. New immigrants to the city might also be housed here. This new housing was often in high-rise towers

High-rise apartments, Guangzou

and slabs, which in the latter half of the 20th century came to be common in many cities of both the global North and South: witness the tower blocks of Glasgow and other British cities, the housing in the *banlieus* of Paris, the 'projects' of New York, the high-rise towers that characterise Hong Kong and Chinese cities—some of these have already been demolished. Elsewhere, the replacement housing was typically low rise in suburban or