Dubai: An Emerging Global City or a Regional Entrepôt?

Nowhere has the flow of capital, goods, and labor, the ownership of resources, and the uniqueness of place intersected with more turbulence and prominence than in Dubai. “World City” rankings, questionable though they are in terms of metrics used and transparency of methodology, place Dubai well within the world’s top 50 cities. Dubai serves well as a case study to explore, test, and critique current theories that “globalization” is formed, facilitated and sustained in strategic global locations whose political economies, societies, and cultures have been amalgamated into a global network through communication, transportation, and trade.

In the last three decades, Dubai has emerged as a self-proclaimed “global city” with an economy built originally on petrochemicals but now much more dependent on trade, tourism, real estate, and financial services. Is Dubai truly a “global city,” defined as a critical center of economic, cultural, social, and political activity connected to other such centers and exerting control over global systems of governance, power, finance, and business? Or is Dubai more simply a key logistical and support entrepôt node in a regional web of urban trading and transportation hubs that are critical links in global supply chains?

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