



## Emerging Global Cities: Origin, Structure, and Significance

By Alejandro Portes and Ariel C. Armony *New York: Columbia University Press, 2023, 368 pp., \$140 (hardback), \$35.00 (paperback), \$34.99 (E-book), ISBN: 9780231205160 (hardback), ISBN: 9780231205177 (paperback), ISBN: 9780231555876 (E-book)*

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# Book Review

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Alejandro Portes and Ariel Armony's *Emerging Global Cities* is a compelling work of global political economic and historical materialist analysis. It delineates the novel roles the cities of Dubai, Miami, and Singapore play in a 21st global economy that is grounded not in industrial production, but in finance, real estate, and the labor and consumption practices of the creative class. Their argument builds on Saskia Sassen's (1991) influential analysis of how the 'global cities' of New York, London, and Tokyo play a critical 'command-and-control' function for the decentralized activities of global capitalism while exhibiting deep divides between the wealthy resident minority that coordinates these activities and the insecurely employed majority that services them. As the capitalist system has continued to evolve, Portes and Armony argue that it has prompted the rise of additional regional centers that mimic the functions and social structures of established global cities in places previously considered to be at the 'edges' of the world economy. Drawing on comparative historical case studies of seven cities – the three successful 'emerging global cities' of Dubai, Miami, and Singapore; the 'global hopefuls' of New Orleans, Sao Paulo, and Lagos; and the singular case of Hong Kong as a contemporary regional entrepot in decline – Portes and Armony seek to identify the features that have allowed some cities to fill the 'emerging global city' niche. Their primary goal is not to prescribe a recipe for success in this pursuit or to create a new global hierarchy of cities, but to provide a more "nuanced understanding of globality in the context of the capitalist world system" (p. 6) and highlight the "degrees of freedom" (p. 32) that exist for diverse cities to eke out places for themselves in the current world order.

The book begins with an introduction that lays out the origins of this intellectual project. After publishing their 2018 book, *The Global Edge: Miami in the Twenty-First Century*, Portes and Armony engaged in numerous transnational scholarly conversations that revealed Miami to be distinctive but not unique. The cities of Dubai and Singapore exhibited similar geographic, architectural, social, and economic characteristics within their respective regions, while urban professionals in other cities, like Sao Paulo, positioned themselves in competition with this trio, theorizing ways they might attain similar international investment and lifestyle appeal. Drawing extensively on collaborations with the transnational scholars who helped the authors arrive at these realizations, the rest of the book is organized as follows. Part I articulates the book's primary contention about the role emerging global cities play in the current global economy. Chapter 1 provides a brilliant primer on the relationship between capitalist development and urban form from the ninth through the 21st century, concluding with the ways symbolic capitalism and commodification of the 'city as event' are driving urban development today. Chapters 2–4 provide case studies of the three emerging global cities: Dubai, Miami, and Singapore. Though these chapters vary widely in terms of their focus and narrative style and might have benefitted from more connective tissue between them, they effectively demonstrate that these cities share key features despite their many differences: they are heavily influenced by transnational migration, provide safe spaces for capital and investment in regions characterized by political instability, and offer pleasant and secure environments for elites and their families. Part II emphasizes the special qualities of these emerging global cities by providing examples of 'global hopefuls' that have failed to attain this status. Chapter 5 depicts how urban professionals from different cities network with one another and aspire to transform their respective cities into similar kinds of 'super-regional champions'. Chapters 6–8 focus on the global hopefuls of New Orleans, Sao Paulo, and Lagos, describing their unique histories with attention to those features that limit their appeal to global investors: political

instability, climate risks, crime, and corruption. Part III focuses on the threats emerging global cities face. A chapter on Hong Kong provides an example of a regional entrepot in decline due to political instability brought on by its relationship with China. The conclusion emphasizes the threats that climate migration and sea level rise pose to emerging global cities whose successes have been based in no small part on their prime beachfront locations.

Overall, the book represents an impressive intellectual undertaking, effectively moving political economic explanations of global urban forms and functions into the 21st century. Though I am largely convinced by the book's central arguments, as a cultural anthropologist with a special interest in new geographies of urban theory, there were aspects of this book I felt could have been improved. The authors position their project with reference to critical urban studies literature and the need to counter western-centric urban epistemologies; however, the text frequently slips into normative, teleological frames. The most obvious example of this is in the choice of the term 'emerging global cities' to describe cities that fill a distinctive urban niche, but it also appears in the use of terms like 'leapfrogging', which invoke unilinear evolutionary narratives even as they describe defiance of those trends, and in recurrent language about urban 'winners' without extensive reflection on what 'winning' means for a city's working class or transient inhabitants. The text also misses opportunities to critically consider the relationship between spatial form and social life in these cities. The introduction hints at a fascination with urban form, yet more than 20 pages of photographs are largely left to speak for themselves, and verticality is frequently cited but never explored. These critiques notwithstanding, *Emerging Global Cities* makes a clear and valuable contribution to research in the political economic geography of world cities. Global cities scholars hoping to teach about these theoretical frameworks or deploy them in their own work will find excellent inspiration in these chapters.

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