



Dubai: Gilded Cage,
by Syed Ali (Yale,
£14.99)

Within 40 years Dubai has been transformed from an obscure regional port into a global city glittering with iconic architecture, such as the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. But, Syed Ali argues, it is a unique kind of global city: "a city of transients". Astonishingly, 90% of Dubai's population are expatriate workers. From builders to bankers, all are on short-term, renewable visas. They live in a state of "permanent impermanence". For Dubai's rulers, the lack of permanence is a form of social control. Anyone they don't like is simply deported, a fate suffered by Ali himself. "You are asking too many questions about locals and non-locals," the police officer said. Ali argues that Dubai is a social experiment. In Dubai's market society, money is all that matters and culture is generic and global. "Dubai Inc" has become the ultimate non-place, where no one feels at home. Laissez faire urban utopia or exploitative, artificial dystopia? As Ali shows in this fascinating study, in the future there may well be many more cities like Dubai.

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