Anne Winter’s book is based on her PhD thesis, completed in 2007, and sets out to explore the relationship between urban change and migration. This rather old question is approached from a new perspective: Winter’s focus is on the movement of migration, instead of the relations between migrants and non-migrants. Migration patterns are seen as social systems, rather than accidental historical events. This approach has the advantage of illuminating the vulnerability of migration patterns to structural social change. The book focuses on the components and speed of migratory change, and how this is influenced by changing economic, social and political conditions at origin and destination, especially on the latter.

The target area is the city of Antwerp, Belgium’s biggest and fastest growing town during most of latter part of the nineteenth century. Winter however is interested in the century prior to Antwerp’s demographic explosion. By doing so, she transcends the traditional temporal boundaries, often marked by the French Revolution. During the research period, Antwerp evolved from a pre-modern regional textile centre into a modernizing port city, and was prone to four different national governments (the Austrians, the French, the Dutch and finally the newly founded Belgian Kingdom). These profound economic and political changes as well as the richness of its source material make Antwerp a suitable city to observe.

The book opens with two extensive theoretical chapters, in which Winter explains the mechanisms of migration on a causally hierarchical micro, mezzo and macro level. This integrative approach, as is argued by the author, allows us to “disentangle the role of structural historical change from the existing variation in migration patterns” (pg. 33). The two succeeding chapters illustrate her theories with regard to immigration and the specific Antwerp case. In a detailed description of the Antwerp migrant, special attention is given to labour market characteristics, the life course of the migrants, gender-specific migratory patterns, and the impact of the large proportion of migrants on the city’s urbanization process. The last chapter is almost a separate book, in which Winter tries to distinguish between migrant patterns via the concept of migrant ‘circuits’. A ‘circuit’ refers to a group of patterns with correspondence between migrant origins and profiles. Four major migration circuits are discerned: intra-provincial rural, internal inter-urban, long-distance foreign and other rural migrants. Winter clearly explains how each of these circuits has a different way of shaping the adaptability of a migration pattern to social change, each with different speeds of change.

Winter proves her theories with an astonishing amount of data, both on an individual and on an aggregate level, from a very diverse range of historical source material. Moreover, many additional graphs and analyses are added in the appendices. This makes the book a great aid for every historian concerned with urban social history. Also in a conceptual way this work is very valuable. By looking at migration as an adaptive strategy, Winter succeeds to look beyond the direct opposition of continuity and change. Her book delivers an inspiring and refreshing approach to the old question on the relationship between migration and urban change.