

COUNTRY ON THE MOVE: MIGRATION TO AND WITHIN ISRAEL, 1948–1995 by Gabriel Lipshits. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.

This book presents a comprehensive investigation of immigration to and within Israel since independence in 1948. Although focused on the extraordinary case of Israeli immigration, the scope of the book is much broader. The book succeeds in presenting a migration system, which incorporates inter-national, inter-regional and local migration waves in one conceptual framework, founded on structural economic arguments and national policies. In particular the book stresses the socio-spatial implications of these migrations on core-periphery relations in Israel. The result is a book that presents the Israeli case within the context of world structural economic and migratory trends, and in the context of general geographical knowledge. The attempt to put the Israeli case in context is beneficial in two ways. First, it presents a unique case study in which the impact of international migrations on internal migration and socio-spatial disparities is extremely high. Second, it demonstrates how even the unique example of Israeli migrations is subject to some more general patterns mainly the structuration of core-periphery relations.

The book starts with a historical overview of migration movements to and within the country during the last fifty years. Already in the first page the reader is exposed to a new perspective on the pattern of migration waves to Israel. First, Israel presents a unique case in which the number of immigrants in fifty years (since 1948) exceeds five times the number of veterans who settled the land prior to independence. As a matter of fact at present more than eighty percent of the Jewish population in Israel are members of families that migrated to Israel during the last fifty years. Second, the new wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union presents a new appreciation of immigration patterns to Israel. Instead of analyzing seven succeeding migration waves, we should think about two major waves—one during the early fifties and one during the early nineties. Between them one should think of five secondary waves in which only less than one third of the total number of immigrants arrived in Israel.

The comparison between the two main waves of immigrants, the one in the 1950s and the other in the 1990s, is the focus of this book. Its four main chapters, following the historical context and the theoretical framework, analyze the characteristics of each immigrants wave and its impact on internal migration and economic disparities. The two waves differ from each other in the absorption milieu that they were forced to face. Economic conditions during the fifties were difficult and the government intervened directly and vigorously in all aspects of immigration absorption. Furthermore, the government channeled the immigrants to confront national pioneering goals in the national periphery. During the 1990s economic conditions highly improved and immigrants were directly absorbed into the economy and society with the government supplying them with a financial absorption package. This makes the comparison between the two main waves interesting and relevant for the evaluation of migration policies in general.

The book shows that Israel's socio-spatial periphery formed during the 1950s mainly by channeling the new immigrants to the new peripheries conquered during independence war. The government was able to control the newcomers who arrived as refugees with no private means. In addition, the government did not have either the means to provide more than minimal housing conditions and work opportunities in the periphery. Under these circumstances the geographical periphery had been transformed also into a socio-spatial periphery. Internal migrations between the two main immigration waves restructured the marginalization of the national periphery since the stronger segments of the population in the periphery moved to the core. By thus a two-layer system has been emerging: a planned one, which was oriented toward the dispersion of the population and jobs, and a spontaneous one, which drew stronger segments of society into the metropolitan cores. Since the late 1960s a new series of centripetal movements started to take place from the cores to the outer rings of the metropolitan regions.

The wave of immigrants of the 1990s did not change drastically the core-periphery structure of Israel's demographic and social space. The direct absorption policy channeled most immigrants to the metropolitan core. The government intention to channel the immigrants later to peripheral towns, by creating jobs and houses there, was only partly implemented and too few actually moved, mainly to the interstice zones between the core and the periphery. The relative population in most sub-districts did not change drastically. Despite this highly significant changes took place on more local levels. First, some new towns increased in more than thirty percents each as the result of absorbing new immigrants, creating tensions between the newcomers and the veterans. Second, immigrants contributed to an improvement in the level of education in the periphery. Third, immigrants contributed to the revival of declining neighborhoods in the inner cities of the metropolitan core. Fourth, immigrants contributed to a new wave of metropolitan expansion into formerly peripheral zones and into the Occupied Territories. In this sense the author fails to emphasize the impact of new road construction and rural policies in promoting the new metropolization wave.

Three migrant groups are not mentioned in the book because of their minimal impact on national trends, as in the case of the Ethiopian immigrants and Israeli Palestinian intra-migrations, and migrant workers, which were little investigated so far. About 250,000 migrant workers entered the country in the last decade, occupying abandoned neighborhoods in southern Tel-Aviv, construction sites like in Rishon Lezion and in Modi'in, and in rural settlements. Their impact on the social space in certain regions in Israel is significant to the extent that requires a separate research.

The book may be useful for a variety of readers, starting with students who are interested in understanding the formation of social space in Israel and the role of immigration in shaping core-periphery relations in Israel. In addition, the book may present a unique and interesting example for the understanding of migration waves in general, and systems of intra, and inter-national migrations in particular.

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