

What is striking about all these grassroots women's organizations, and what unites them despite their diversity, is the transformative power they have had in women's lives. The powerful (and optimistic) message of this book is that profound cultural changes are taking place, even if they cannot be measured in terms of numbers of women elected to public office or legal gains effected under new, democratic governments. While most of the women activists quoted here shun the label "feminist" and dissociate themselves from "radical," middle-class feminism, their words reveal a deeply felt awareness of gender discrimination, a growing self-esteem, and a determination gradually to democratize their relationships with their partners. They have moved slowly—to avoid alienating devoutly religious women and to minimize family conflicts—but in all the organizations discussed, women are breaking old taboos. Not only have they put gender issues such as wage discrimination and child-care on the national agenda, but they are openly discussing domestic violence, sexuality, even abortion, in most cases for the first time.

In their struggles against poverty, persecution, and machismo, Latin America's grassroots women's organizations are pioneering a new form of feminism—one that, Fisher suggests, is helping to collapse the differences between feminine and feminist agendas, or between women's "practical" interests (for improved living conditions) and their "strategic" interests (for gender equality).

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*In Search of a Home: Rental and Shared Housing in Latin America.* By ALAN GILBERT. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 177 pp. Cloth. \$45.00.

The title of this work is misleading. Based on field research, the text deals only with low-rent and "self-help" housing in three capitals: Mexico, Santiago de Chile, and Caracas. This comparative, in-depth perspective, however, achieves the title's implied goal, in that the three cities studied have made distinctive responses to the problem of the shortage of low-cost housing.

The study's general objective is to show how misguided government policies have ruined the rental market by controlling rents and protecting tenants at the expense of owners. Nevertheless, the author sees renting (or sharing, as he encountered it in Chile) as the most feasible solution, given that even "self-help" housing is getting to be too expensive and that the most convenient locations have been underutilized by one- and two-story houses. Even in the consolidated settlements, the present housing could be expanded for rental purposes if a more propitious environment existed for renting as opposed to buying.

The study analyzes the differing circumstances—political, economic, or geographic—that affect the development of "self-help" housing in each of the three cities, and presents the results of surveys conducted in different types of lower-class housing areas. Although it is clear why the particular survey areas were chosen,

it is not clear how the persons interviewed in those settlements were selected, or what kind of distortion was introduced by interviewing approximately equal numbers of owners and tenants when the reader is given to understand that ownership is the norm, not tenancy. Nor is it specified whether the landlords were a group apart or simply some of the owners who also rented.

But these are minor details in what was undoubtedly an extensive undertaking, with its concomitant difficulties of organizing and coordinating three separate local survey teams. Two of those teams have published separate individual studies, which permit a fuller presentation of the data collected and the incorporation of other data that did not fit into the parameters of this study.

In all, this is a fascinating book, and I suspect that it will be considered a real find by history students of the twenty-first century who try to recreate the past. It will stand as testimony to one of the most disheartening problems of our times: the lack of a place to call home.

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*Contemporary Societies in a Comparative Perspective: Eastern Europe and Latin America in the Twentieth Century.* Compiled by the POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. Latin American Studies, vol. 14, parts 1 and 2. Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, 1992. Tables. Graphs. Notes. 418 pp. Paper.

For many years, Polish students of Latin America have been proving themselves to be innovative and dynamic. What's more, before Poland's freedom from Soviet control, its scholars showed themselves to be remarkably independent and incisive students of their own Eastern European reality, both past and present. To take just one example, Witold Kula's theory of feudalism, based on Polish historical experience, was also remarkably enlightening when applied to the analysis of traditional Latin American rural society.

Against this background, a group of Polish scholars organized a most ambitious international and interdisciplinary conference in May and June 1990 with the purpose of comparing twentieth-century Latin America and East-Central Europe. Two years later, the proceedings appeared in print. The main organizer was a Latin Americanist historian, Ryszard Stemplowski. By limiting the time period to the last century and recommending the "world system" and a variety of "modernization theory" as key theoretical tools, Stemplowski hoped to impose some degree of unity on the project. The impression conveyed by the published proceedings, however, is one of extreme diversity.

In theoretical terms, the best-known participant, Jerzy Topolsky, sharply criticizes Immanuel Wallerstein as well as the modernization concept. He recommends the comparison of macroregions (such as Eastern Europe and Latin America) "as integrated wholes in their dynamic structure" (1:30-32), however such a compari-