

C O N C L U S I O N

The Brazilian rubber tappers, the Bolivian Guaraní, and the Nicaraguan women cooperativists all are displaying agency and consciousness in their struggle for cultural and economic survival. We have seen that the seringueiros of Acre faced violent evictions from their traditional lands by immigrants from the south of Brazil who came to raise cattle and engage in logging for export. The seringueiros responded by organizing themselves—creating a union, a national council, and a cooperative and joining the Workers Party. They were prepared for and assisted in these activities first and foremost by the Catholic church, then by national and international environmental groups and other NGOs. Although they are still locked in a struggle for economic survival, the seringueiros have embraced economic diversification to an impressive extent, and they have benefitted significantly from the acclaimed forest-based educational program, Projeto Seringueiro.

The Guaraní of O'Connor Province in the Chaco of Bolivia faced the challenge of defying the unjust system represented by the patrón. They, too, responded by organizing, joining with other groups, such as the campesinos' union, starting a school for their children and holding up education as the way to preserve their language and their past and to secure their children's future. They have revived the cultural tradition of assembly, participated in the national Guaraní organization, and welcomed the women's basket-weaving initiative. The Sisters of the Presentation have been instrumental in helping the Guaraní in their struggle and in strengthening the bonds of community. The Guaraní have also been assisted by national and international NGOs, which provide technical assistance and training; however, despite such assistance, they, like the rubber tappers, remain extremely poor.

The Nicaraguan campesinas have faced and continue to face eviction, the threat of eviction, forced land sales, and credit restrictions so severe as to have starved both agricultural and savings and credit cooperatives. The women have responded by organizing, forming more cooperatives, and seeking educational, technical, and financial assistance from NGOs everywhere; however, they are being squeezed relentlessly. In Nicaragua, ecumenical Christian groups have worked in solidarity with the poor from the 1960s and collaborated with the Sandinistas when their social goals coincided. With the advent of neoliberal