

**DISEASE, DEVELOPMENT, AND DEFINING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY:  
THE EMERGENCE OF MACHUPO VIRUS  
IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY BOLIVIA**

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## ABSTRACT

One of the four Latin American Hemorrhagic Fevers, Machupo virus, emerged in 1959 as a hemorrhagic disease in the lowlands of eastern Bolivia. The primary factor in the emergence of Machupo virus into the human population was the development of the eastern lowlands, brought about by Bolivia's National Revolution in 1952. The *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) government encouraged mass migration to eastern Bolivia in the form of resettlement programs in an attempt to stimulate the development of agriculture. By 1959 when Machupo virus first emerged, the MNR had distributed over 400,000 parcels of uncultivated land under the Agrarian Reform Act. The resultant clearing of uncultivated lands by the indigenous population was the primary factor in the emergence of Machupo virus.

The United States government, in response to the burgeoning communist threat in the middle of the twentieth century, provided direction, technological assistance, and economic aid in the colonization and development of Eastern Bolivia, the region endemic to Machupo virus. Focus shifted from indigenous resettlement to immigration in order to provide a population the West perceived as capable of successful agricultural development. This shift was in response to the image of Indians provided for the West in the accounts of nineteenth-century travel writers who explored the economic advantages of the eastern lowlands. Travel writers ascribed an identity to the indigenous population resulting in a status of less than second-class citizenship in the eyes of the West, limiting them to subsistence agriculture, which contributed to the emergence of Machupo virus.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my father, Robert Leon Welty, whose unconditional love, support, and encouragement endowed me with the confidence to pursue my goals and develop my potential throughout my life. I am forever indebted to him for teaching me how to find a healthier and more satisfying life. Special thanks go to my mother, Mary Hrib Welty, and my sons, Kevin and Jeremy Moore, who provided me with the opportunity to complete this project by providing loving caring for my father as he struggled with lung cancer in the last days of his life.

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