

Arid Pastures and Violent Paths:
El Niño 1982–1983 and the Environmental Making of *Sendero Luminoso*
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This project reveals the intersection of environmental transformations and sociopolitical revolution in the Peruvian Andes during the late twentieth century. Preliminary research has indicated a geographic and chronological correlation between areas affected by drought during the 1982–1983 El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) event and the region where sociopolitical conflict escalated into militarized revolution and counterrevolution (1983–1986). I intend to advance two pivotal components of the larger argument. First, the making of geographies of violence in the early years of the conflict as environmental disturbance and sociopolitical unrest converged. Second, the intimate correlations between agrarian pauperization, the disintegration of livelihood, and the escalation of sociopolitical conflagration.

In 2003, the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) concluded that the Internal Armed Conflict in Peru (1980–2000) caused 69,280 casualties. Approximately two-thirds of casualties occurred in the most impoverished rural areas of the countryside, within a region largely dominated by agrarian livelihoods and indigenous people. The unequal human impact of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence has led scholars to elaborate geographic and territorial understandings of conflict dynamics, placing the southern-central Andean region as the political and military epicenter of the insurrection caused by Sendero Luminoso and counterrevolutionary efforts.

Drawing on these contributions, this project scrutinizes the impact of the environmental dislocations resulting from ENSO that greatly undermined agrarian subsistence regimes, social relations of production, and *campesino* ecologies in the southern *sierra*. Further dissection of the geographic and chronological correlations between the Mega Niño of 1982–1983, the aftermath of droughts triggered by ENSO, and the militarization of the Internal Armed Conflict (1983–1986), allow us to understand the relationship between abrupt environmental change and societal turmoil.

This project argues that environmental dislocations and ecological collapses framed the rise and consolidation of Sendero Luminoso. It builds on literature that rethinks the material foundations and nature of armed conflicts from an ecological viewpoint and highlights the degrees of political and social vulnerability produced by abrupt environmental change. Standing epistemologies of armed conflicts, including those in Peru, have tended to overemphasize the sociopolitical conditions for catalyzing upheaval. Virtually no attention has been paid to the ecology of these conflicts. If revolutions are indeed fought on everything regarded of value, then agrarian foundations and family subsistence—integral components of *campesino* ecologies and sensitive to environmental changes—undoubtedly played a role in mobilizing rural villagers and fueling conflict.