

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a coca field. The plants are lush green with many white flowers. In the lower-left foreground, a woman in a red dress and a man in a hat are sitting on the ground, both smoking. In the lower-right foreground, a young boy in a yellow shirt is sitting on the ground, holding a small object. The text is overlaid on this image.

COCA COMMUNICATIONS: TALES FROM THE BOLIVIAN COCA FIELD

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FIGURE 3: Map of Bolivia, showing the Yungas of La Paz.

(Reproduced from <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary//resources/stamps/map%20bolivia.jpg>)

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FIGURE 4: Map of Chulumani and Irupana municipalities, with Chulumani *sub centrales*

(Reproduced from Qhana and Pastoral [n.d.] *Nuestra Provincia*. Qhana, Pastoral, La Paz: p.65).

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FIGURE 21: Map showing Radio Yungas' coverage (from some years ago) (Reproduced from Qhana and Pastoral [n.d.] *Nuestra Provincia*. Qhana, Pastoral, La Paz: p. 39)

ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Bolivia's coca-growing Yungas region, this thesis is concerned with how, on the most practical level, development projects might hold more relevance to the lives of their target groups than they have hitherto tended to do, as well as how the power imbalances that characterise the relationships between development organisations and local people may be understood and addressed. Beginning with the concept of 'communicative ecology' (Tacchi et al 2003) as a framework for exploring the multifariousness of communicative avenues and the interconnectedness of these within a system, I focus my analysis on the *ecosystem* of coca communications. I argue, however, that the concept of communicative ecology on its own has little meaning without adopting a political economy approach, which incorporates the work of attempting to understand the social and power relations that surround the production, distribution and consumption of resources, both material and cultural.

As a way of analysing the strategies and potentials of people within the ecosystem of coca communications, I utilise Bourdieu's (1990) notions of *field*, *habitus* and forms of *capital*, where the coca *field* characterises itself by virtue of the fact that all those who are a part of it are linked in some way through the production, exchange and consumption of both the coca leaf, and the values, meanings and discourses that surround it. It is concluded that the ecosystem of coca communications is linked intrinsically to the coca production system, in that individuals and groups have differential access to, inclination to use, and success in influencing the discourse via different communicative media, depending on their situation within the coca *field*. This refers to land ownership, labour, organisational participation, exchange and consumptive practices, which is translated into a system of capital accumulation and exchange. The thesis argues that development organisations will do well to consider a given locality in these terms in order to facilitate the implementation of ICT projects that are relevant and compatible with local social and communicational systems, and further, that these organisations must reflect upon their own role as 'introduced organisms' within local communicative ecologies.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

SIGNED:.....

Nadia Kate Butler

November 2007,
University of Adelaide.

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DEDICATION

To the people of the Yungas and their *hoja sagrada*.
And to my loving, inspirational and handsome grandfather, Ross Hector Macpherson, who stayed
around just long enough to hold the final draft in his hands.

I would like it to go into your thesis, that we here in Bolivia want to industrialise the coca and export it to Europe, and other countries.

(Coca grower, Chulumani sector community)

This has to go into your PhD. People need to know, we're not like that, bad – lots of people think we're bad, lazy, we don't do anything... but it's not like that. If you want to give us something, we say thank you, but don't lie to us.

(School Director, Chulumani sector community)