

Indigenous Embassy

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As Indigenous Peoples, we are afflicted in modernity by the barriers and borders of transgressive cultures and imperial bullies. Our own orientation to boundaries is incompatible with these oppressive constructs because, for us, borders are dynamic, semipermeable sites of relational increase. We will share this orientation from our unique experience of emergent embassy rituals between Cañari and Kara::Kichwa of the Andes::Amazon and Bama/Murri of Australia's northeast (see Jacobs & Narváez; Yunkaporta).

Indigenous borders are semipermeable membranes around local bio-cultural systems. For millennia, our diplomatic customs have facilitated flows across these membranes in novel/emergent encounters of kin-making shaped by environment and eras of change. The flows are multi-lateral and trans-dimensional; as time and space interweave, entities migrate and change in seasonal and deeper stellar cycles. It is challenging to describe the liminal states of these relationships and the forces of Indigenous cosmology in English, but the Andean concept of *Illæ* best illustrates the concept of fluid self-other boundaries in our shared pluriverse of entangled existence.

In this Andean notion of zero as a space of self-organising emergence, *Tzimp'lu*, the tadpole, becomes *Anp'tu*, the toad. The action of its transformation and also its movement, not-here-then-here (jumping), is not captured by a verb, but by naming a state of being in emergence and flow: *Illæ*. Our shared toad stories between Ecuador and Australia align in collective understanding as one sibling sings the words *Tzimp'lu* and *Anp'tu*, and another sibling sings back the words *Mimbula* and *Mimbabulamba* from the other side of the world.

Indigenous embassy occurs without any agenda beyond increasing relatedness. Making kin and enriching relationships is work that must be done. It does not need to serve any particular purpose because the work is an end in itself. It enlivens creation, promotes increase, and sparks complexity, catalysing abundant ecologies and economies as self-regulating and integrated systems. Making kin and enriching relationships is not a quick

process – it requires dedicated time and space. The vulnerability introduced is meant to close the space between people and for the conversations to engage beyond that time and space. Therefore, this work cannot be rushed or reduced to superficial interactions. We see many unlawful practitioners using terms like ‘kin-making’ to describe workshop activities and regenerative projects that claim but do not reflect Indigenous principles in the sacred work of making kin, making Embassy, and conducting Ceremony.

In Indigenous embassy, each person brings their own consciousness, awareness, and commitment to the circle. Our shared dedication to understanding and honouring these connections compels us to come together to exchange knowledge, lore, and sacred mysteries. In that testing period, if there are disturbances or sickness in spirit with any of us, we must help and heal each other before we proceed. An afflicted person must step back if the disturbance can't be resolved.

The inclusion of non-Indigenous people in these spaces is problematic – Indigenous ceremonial spaces require participants to have deep spiritual, totemic and familial foundations in tradition. While non-Indigenous individuals may maintain spiritual beliefs, these are mostly grounded in traditions that have fundamentally incompatible relationships with time, place and ancestral memory. These differences in collective spiritual foundation can disrupt the flow of kin-making and Ceremony, centring settler understandings and repositioning Indigenous governance systems as illegitimate, exotic expressions of difference.

Our ceremonies depend on collective relations that are an essential part of one's spirit. Without these connections, a person becomes like a living ghost – spiritually incomplete. This affects both non-Indigenous participants and some of our own people who have become isolated through politics and performative identities. When participants don't recognise their spiritual incompleteness or know when to step back, the ceremony stalls and loses its path (Illæ, principle of autopoiesis::zero). This has caused pathologies and dysfunction in our communities but the old ways are still held by many, and we can share some of those processes here as Indigenous people in diplomatic relation together. These relations and protocols are implicit to us, and we are unaware of any attempts to describe them explicitly to others, although we feel it is important to translate these things for lost humans who are trying to come home to the land.

Firstly, we must be sharing Lore::Pacha (Earth Lore) when we are moving towards Ceremony together – this is where our differences become familiar and provide the ground for a complementary purpose to emerge. We connect macro-narratives about shared entities like constellations visible from both homelands, or knowledge of the migratory whales, trees, fish, and birds that already connect our places biologically (the natural laws of semipermeable borders). Great serpent entities, such as Amaru in the Andes and the

Rainbow Snake in Australia, can provide pathways for connection in a myriad of forms, embodying the unique spirit of places and seasons, offering the key to listening and sensing our way into cross-cultural immersion.

Gift exchange is essential at this stage. We carefully select meaningful gifts for each member and potential new kin at the initiation of Embassy relations. These are sentient objects that will migrate with us and reside with our families to maintain the presence of our new kin and keep us linked in spirit. In our Cañari Embassy, there were delicately wrapped clay bowls for sharing drink and *ikat* scarves – a woven textile that once carried secret messages among Indigenous people under colonial rule, portraying the powers of elements and animals. These gifts connect us to different time::places that are held dear in ancestral and living memory. Gifts also include hand-beaded earrings for spouses and small baskets for the children. Each gift is chosen to honour the whole family and acknowledge each person's position and importance in Embassy-making. Tools, bowls and weapons were also exchanged from Australia in this way.

The exchange of gifts can fail to achieve its purpose when the Embassy is incomplete. For instance, if important members of the kin groups refuse to participate or engage in the gathering, after receiving gifts, it creates an imbalance in the spiritual and relational dynamics. Similarly, if gifts are met with hostility or not reciprocated appropriately, it signals a breakdown in the foundational trust and respect necessary for Indigenous embassy to function.

However, this doesn't mean that all is lost when an embassy attempt stalls. Rather, it indicates that another group member, perhaps one with different spiritual connections, gender or relational ties, might have better success in facilitating the process. The fluidity of Indigenous embassy allows for such adaptations, where different members can step forward when others need to step back, ensuring the continuity of relationship-building even when initial attempts face challenges.

Ceremonial Indigenous embassy is not the same as our social borderwork customs of seeking passage, access, engagement, and permission of other members. In those situations, we are coming alongside with requests and agendas such as, 'We want to fish in your territory during the salmon run,' or 'We want to sit with your stone carvers to improve our skill,' or 'We want to learn your traditional ecological knowledge.' These are usually grounded in existing relationships already integrated with the symbiotic flows between bioregions. In comparison, ceremonies of embassy are usually the result of novel encounters (self-organising, self-determining, and collectively sovereign) – either by choice or by emergent necessity. These circumstances result from lawful voyaging outside regular migratory routes and can be initiated by humans or non-humans.

Crows are a good example of voyagers who facilitate embassy. They are problem-solvers and can adapt their habits quickly, and those changes create signals in biological networks that trigger shifts in plant and animal behaviour or relationships. They can be messengers that amplify the adaptive patterns of Ceremony to signal changes we are making in carefully designed 'natural' systems such as forests and social-ecological communities like food production systems. Humans and non-humans often voyage together, resulting in creative or destructive disruptions in the places they visit, depending on whether the correct protocol is observed.

The observation of protocol is the shared responsibility of both visitor and host. Encounters from lawful voyaging are voluntary and involve mutual consent. Other novel encounters can be involuntary but still lawful in situations of displacement or evacuation resulting from invasion, oppression, famine or natural disaster. In all these cases, non-human travellers::passengers need to partner with local humans as symbiotic stewards, as they gradually adapt to new habitats, and habitats adapt around them in response.

However, when the voyaging is unlawful and the visitor's actions are invasive, then non-human passengers are neither ambassadors nor refugees but victims of trafficking, biopiracy, and bioprospecting. When they enter a new ecosystem without human stewardship, they enact destructive behaviours as a trauma response and disrupt vulnerable local systems. When a new species is trafficked this way, retroactive embassy is needed to bring it into right relationship and balanced symbiosis. Extermination and demonisation are not appropriate or effective responses to the trauma of displacement, and we do not think of these species in terms of contagion, pollution, and toxicity.

Often, we will hear the call of new species who wish to come under our care and Law, or the more distant call of our own species that have been trafficked abroad. Aboriginal Australians heard the local call of the poisonous cane toad introduced to Murri territories from South American lands (including Ecuador) decades ago, making sure it had a song, story, totemic category, and dance, with Ceremony teaching the watchful crows how to avoid the poison and eat the belly, while keeping the remains out of waterways and within ant systems that neutralise putrid waste. The crow teaches other species how to do this, too. Aboriginal Australian delegates have only recently heard the international call of native eucalyptus trees trafficked to the other side of the world, where the cane toads came from.

The trees call our diverse Peoples together for Ceremony across the sea, and so we have begun performing sacred rituals, voyaging to each other's lands and exchanging meaningful gifts and songs, coming together under our shared Lore of the celestial beings we all know as the Seven Sisters (Pleiades/Ukumari Kuyllur) and the Hunter (Orion/Chaski). These star beings have guided our Peoples for millennia. The eucalyptus tree, though native to

Australia, has become a powerful messenger and diplomat through its medicine and presence in Ecuador. As we gather together, we recognise that we are not creating new connections but acknowledging and strengthening bonds that ancestors and non-human ambassadors have long established. The eucalyptus, with its healing properties and sacred presence, helps to close the perceived distances of space::time between the Andes and the Great Dividing Range of Australia.

In Kara::Kichwa Nations, eucalypts have been carefully managed to become part of the biocultural system. They are now essential to traditional medicine, ceremonies, and ritual object crafting. They are sentient beings and totemic entities that our cultures now share. Other sacred entities enrich the relational space between us and ancestral circles. These include living beings such as tobacco, cacao and waterlily. While cacao is consumed daily by many Kichwa people in the southern Andes, it holds profound familial significance – working as a powerful medium for body and spirit while providing warmth against the mountain cold. Through these shared relationships with living entities, we find ourselves drawn together in Ceremony, our songs and rituals affirming relations in the deep-time weaves of creation.

We also work between our continents with entities of colour – specifically red, white, and yellow – and sentient elements of earth, air, and water. Water remains our most sacred spirit conduit, connecting our Peoples across vast distances, rather than being experienced as oceans that separate us. These connective currents and Lore manifest in our exchanged gifts of shawl weavings, substances and ritual objects.

The greatest lesson we hope others may learn from our story of Indigenous embassy is the notion of boundaries as sites of relational increase, rather than illusory constructs of barriers between territories, categories, ecologies, and knowledge systems as sites of purity in isolation. Human embassies and borderwork should not involve manipulation, zero-sum negotiation and exclusion, but rather they should facilitate access, enriching flows of energy and matter, and lawful voyaging between worlds. Identity is not formed by discrete sets of items and behaviours, but by flows between systems and the unique patterns of diversity that emerge through good relations.

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