

Conor Kerr: Welcome to the Circle of Knowledge Podcast, sponsored by the Edmonton Community Foundation. Today's episode is a little different, in that we have a panel discussion around land acknowledgements. We have with us today, Hunter Cardinal from Neheyawin Communications. Tibetha Kemble, Director in the Faculty of Health and Medicine at the University of Alberta. Chelsea Vowel, a writer, artist, activist, and lawyer, currently a graduate student studying the Cree language and Native studies. And Murray Utas, the Artistic Director of the Fringe Theater.

Conor Kerr: They will discuss land acknowledgements and treaty acknowledgements, what they are, what they mean to us, and how we can use them in our work towards reconciliation. Please enjoy this discussion.

Hunter Cardinal: [Cree 00:00:43] I greet you all. How's everyone doing? Good? How's everyone doing over here, gentle golf claps? That's good. How is everyone doing over here? Yeah, all right. How's everyone at this corner, the northwest, fantastic. Nice, I got a thumbs up. I am so honored and excited to be here to have this conversation. As you noticed, we're in a circle. Some of the teachings that I've been given, as a Nehiyaw, around why we use the circle, it helps us create a multidimensional understanding of not only ideas or problems, but objects, anything, new technologies, new ideas.

Hunter Cardinal: What I've been told is, if we were to gather in a circle this we are now, perhaps around a tree, for some reason, it's Arbor Day, and we're trying to understand what this tree is, I would describe the tree from my perspective. And then we would go around the circle, and I could see from Chelsea's perspective how she sees this tree, and maybe we see the same thing. But once we get to the other side of the circle, where Murray is, I can't see what's on that side of the tree. So I have to rely on Murray's perspective to not understand what is the right version of the tree that we're talking about, but what is this tree in all of its multidimensional-ness. Then we go around the circle, and what we've done is we've created that multidimensional understanding of this object.

Hunter Cardinal: But it not only works fantastically with three-dimensional objects, it also works with ideas. So what we'll be doing is putting this idea of treaty and land acknowledgements in the center of our circle today, to understand from each perspective what they are and what they mean. So do we have any questions before we dive into things? Scan of the circle, hey. So before we dive into things, I just wanted to say that it's very exciting to be sitting in this circle, to be talking, creating that understanding. That's been a practice and a tradition that has been here since time in memorial. Also, gathering in that spirit of peace and friendship is what we are doing as treaty people as well. So to be renewing the relationships that we have, as treaty people living, working, and playing here on Treaty 6 territory, is very exciting. It's an amazing honor and privilege to be here.

Hunter Cardinal: Why don't we start this off by going to the left, you picked the sacred spot, so you're going to go.

Chelsea Vowel: The sacred spot, the hot spot.

Hunter Cardinal: We start to the left. What I'd love you to do is introduce who you are, where you call home, as well as share a bit about what you do, so the audience knows who's in the circle.

Chelsea Vowel: [Cree 00:04:08] So there you go, now you know everything about me. Just kidding. I'm from Lac Ste. Anne as well, living here in Edmonton. I am the mother of six daughters, so I am always exhausted and semi-lucid. Semi is good. I'm a teacher, I am currently a Cree instructor at the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta. Today's my last day, and I get a little bit of a vacation. I'm also a grad student, and just really tired. Thanks.

Hunter Cardinal: Amazing, thank you.

Murray Utas: Hi everybody, my name is Murray, and I'm an artist here in our city of Edmonton. I've called this place home for a long time. I'm also currently the Artistic Director at Fringe Theater, and have been a part of that organization going on five years now. I'm really honored to be sitting in this circle, as a settler and an ally, and to have this conversation in this time that's not politically charged at all or anything. Yeah, man.

Hunter Cardinal: We're allowed to do this, don't worry.

Murray Utas: Okay, great. I can talk a little louder now, is that going to be okay? I have worked with a company in the past, there's a beautiful little company in our city called Azimuth Theater. And Azimuth Theater started out as a social action theater, and it toured extensively to all sorts of rural areas throughout our province. The stuff that I learned by spending four, five years with this company as an artist, we'd always do a post-performance discussion afterwards, so you'd really get to know a community. Sometimes we got to stay in communities, and that knowledge that was passed onto me through that journey really shaped for me this province of ours, and the people that inhabit it, and what that means to us as we move forward together.

Murray Utas: Like the treaties intended, side by side, and really being a part of each other. I'm very humbled by that, and I carry that with me as I move forward. Thank you.

Hunter Cardinal: Hi.

Tibetha Kemble: Hi.

Hunter Cardinal: Hey.

Tibetha Kemble: Hey. Good afternoon, my name is Tibetha, I'm a Stonechild by birth. I am from the Piapot First Nation, which is located in the traditional territory of Treaty 4. I'm a child welfare survivor, part of the Sixties Scoop, so Edmonton is my home

and where I was raised. I like to joke that I'm a recovery public servant, I did 15 years hard time with the Federal and Provincial Governments. A few of my colleagues are here, still slugging it out. I'm currently the Director of Indigenous Health with the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, trying to shake things up over there. And I'm also a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, also tired.

Hunter Cardinal: And we're all tired. So my name is Hunter Cardinal, I am Director of Story at Neheyawin. We're an indigenous consultancy that works broadly in indigenous relations. I would say that Edmonton is where I call home, my family has been here for a long time. We're Sakawithiniwak, so where we are now is up near Lesser Slave Lake, at a reserve called Sucker Creek Cree Nation. To start things off, why don't we start with the first time that you heard a treaty or a land acknowledgement. Where were you, what did you feel when you first heard it? What was going through your mind? I can open this up to anyone.

Chelsea Vowel: I was, because you'd sent some of these questions, so I was pondering this, and I honestly can't remember exactly when I first heard it, except that it's pretty recent. Within the last 10 years, or maybe 10 years ago. That's recent, it is. I heard it mostly I think in institutional settings. It's not like you go home and people are like, "Come to dinner, and by the way, we're having this dinner on Treaty 6 territory in the Metis homeland." It's in these institutional situations, and so at first I was like, "Why is this white dude talking about this stuff? What's going on?" It was a bit odd.

Chelsea Vowel: Then it just became so commonplace, but again, very urban, very institutional. And often, we'll get into that, but often performative, if it's not indigenous peoples leading it. It's a recent thing.

Hunter Cardinal: Totally.

Tibetha Kemble: I was thinking about the first, pondering the question, going back through my memory. Did I ever hear in the public service? And I couldn't remember ever doing it in the public service, but by the time that the TRC came out, which is the genesis or what is driving a lot of the territorial acknowledgements, by the time I left, it was only 2017. So TRC had been out, and people were still wrestling with how do you approach TRC, and the cost of action. Then when I moved to university in 2017, there was proliferate use pretty much in every meeting room, or any engagement that we do, it's used every single time.

Tibetha Kemble: Then what did I feel? It was the same thing, like, "Wow. Why?" Then I spent some time thinking about the why, although I don't know if it's the same deep level and engagement on the other side. But for me, I was like, "Okay, so it's acknowledging the role of educational institutions, and colonization, and their space and place on this territory." Although, I don't think it's pondered that deeply elsewhere. Anyway. It's a little odd.

Hunter Cardinal: I remember the first time that I heard it, I was actually very proud and felt seen for the first time. For me, it was probably around 2007-ish when we started having more adoption ... I think UNDRIP came out around then, the TRC was coming out later. So I remember really seeing a sense of earnestness from allies, to acknowledge and engage with the land that they're on. But for me, I think growing up, I did feel a lot of shame about the indigeneity. I felt like when people were acknowledging that ... Though there are, and maybe we can talk about this, the politics of recognition get a bit tricky, of needing to be acknowledged by an external system, but we won't get into that now.

Hunter Cardinal: But I did feel excited that people were talking about it, and it wasn't something that was filled with shame, but something that was almost like a prayer or saying something before dinner.

Tibetha Kemble: That's interesting, because in the places and spaces that it was being done with me, it felt almost disingenuous. But there were specific people who would take it upon themselves to do a treaty acknowledgement that was deeper, so it would acknowledge the land and the people and the language, and the history. But then also, would talk about their commitment as a settler ally to what it is that they're going to do. Then somebody used treaty principles in it, "As long as the sun shines ..." And I burst into tears. That's when it was like, "Okay, you get it. You've done some deeper work there." But in the beginning, it just felt really quite awkward.

Murray Utas: The first time I heard it too was in that same way, obviously the person who was reading it was just given it, because they read it very poorly. So I didn't really at first know what was happening, but what was trying to be conveyed had a deeper meaning to it. I was like, "This is good." But the way that it was delivered, it was really like, "I am scanning this for the first time, and I am reading it to you, and there is zero connection to what I am saying."

Hunter Cardinal: Totally. I'll tack onto that, when we're talking about this, for each of you, what is your perspective on the difference between a treaty acknowledgement versus a land acknowledgement? Because from my perspective, what I see that's interesting, someone how is indigenous, I see there being no separation from the land, the people, and also the principles and governance principles that come from the land. So that's my perspective on it, but I'm curious about what you all think about treaty versus a land acknowledgement, and when is each one appropriate. Or what do you prefer using?

Chelsea Vowel: I lived for a while in Montreal, and so I've always lived in treaty territories, so it was weird to be in a place where there is no treaty, and where not-being under treaty is a big part of pride that's held by Haudenosaunee and [inaudible 00:13:54], and different peoples out there. And there's a bit of a misconception too, I find out east, they're like, "Oh yeah, you prairie treaty people, you gave up your land." I'm like, "Don't say that." The difference between ceded and unceded land, but we didn't give up land either. So over there, and a lot of places are not covered by treaty, so why would they make a treaty acknowledgement?

Chelsea Vowel: In fact, they're like, "We have no treaty, there's not even a pretense of Canada having sovereignty over us." There's no acknowledgement there, it's just about traditional governance and traditional lands. Out here, where people are part of treaty, I don't see a difference between treaty and land. Treaty is all about sharing the land, so you can't do one without the other. One thing that I have noticed over the years though is that often treaty acknowledgements will leave out the Metis, so there's this thing where it's like, "We're all treaty people." Actually, a lot of indigenous peoples are not treaty people, there's no treaty. And Metis, are Metis treaty people? Some people argue, yes. I feel like living in Treaty 6 territory, I always say, "I come from Treaty 6 territory."

Chelsea Vowel: But some people are like, "Metis never signed treaty either." So that's a bit fraught, some interesting discussions there. But when we do make treaty acknowledgements, in my mind, those are also land acknowledgements. And I think in the spaces where there are no treaty, then it's just a land acknowledgement.

Hunter Cardinal: Yeah. Any thoughts off of that? I think what we're touching on is the importance of understanding actually what treaty means. Because even that's a word that has diametrically opposed meanings, when we consider the written document of treaty that you can read. And it's really boring, if you want to get a nosebleed, you totally can. But if you look at some of the oral histories found in the TARR Program, the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research Program that was compiled in the late '60s and '70s, of the oral histories of what was actually negotiated and promised at the signing and negotiation and creation of treaties, it tells a different story that is less legally binding and static, and coming from that European Roman Law, that treaties from the west can, and typically do tend to trace the roots back to.

Hunter Cardinal: Whereas the indigenous perspective is more relational, it's more based out of peace and friendship and understanding. It's about an adoption and an agreement to live as if we are a family, gathered around certain values. Do you find that discussion is being had when we're talking about land and treaty acknowledgements in these areas? In either of your guys' work?

Murray Utas: First off, in how it started, no. That wasn't there. To introduce that, I think starts to add what that meaning is, and how you can be a part of that too. A part of the discussion. You don't have to feel like, "Maybe I'm not supposed to be in this conversation. I'm not supposed to be thinking about it in that way." I think the work that's being done now to ask for that, go a little deeper with that, figure out the understanding of that exact thing, that we are family. The idea of side by side, and what does that mean, and how does that color the words for you then, and what you're saying. And knowing what you're saying, that's an important delineation between just saying it. But gaining the understanding, going to the knowledge keepers to find out why you should be saying it.

Murray Utas: What are the stories that brought this to here? And go after that, be thirsty for that.

Hunter Cardinal: Totally. Did you have a thing, or did I just point at you and put you on the spot? I know, make something up now. I think Murray, what you're talking about is really interesting. Because in the work that we've done together, it seems like this acknowledgement or this statement is actually the symptom of a much larger process of understanding. I'm curious, Chelsea, what do you think is important to include in that process?

Chelsea Vowel: Learn how to say people's names right. If I have to hear Saulteaux butchered one more time, "Soul-to?" I'm going to lose it. Learn, minimally learn the people's names. The nations on whose territory you reside, and how to say it properly, that should be a minimum, and often that minimum is not met. I don't blame it on the people who are just handed a piece of paper, who haven't had time to think about it, so I think it needs to be a wider process.

Chelsea Vowel: First off, I want to make something clear, I think that territorial acknowledgements should unsettle people that are hearing them, it should be something that makes you think, and be like, "Whoa, what's going ... Wait, I'm on somebody else's territory, what does that mean?" You should feel uneasy and leave with thoughts, with questions in your head. I think in spaces where they've become rote, people are not unsettled. They don't even listen to it anymore, it's formulaic. They're like, "Nah. As soon as this is over, we'll start our real work." But I think there's a lot of places where territorial acknowledgements are not happening, and I think those are the spaces that we could be doing some unsettling.

Chelsea Vowel: I've been in spaces, like when I was on Ohlone territory in Oakland, nobody did a territorial acknowledgement. And for all my cynicism about it, I was like, "Wait a minute, rude." It was like it was an indigenous event, but nobody was like, "We're on Ohlone territory," do that explanation. Because as a guest, I rely, when I go to somebody else's territory, I rely on those to be like, especially if it's a place I'm unfamiliar with, "Who are the indigenous nations of this place? Who do I go to for protocol?" I need to know that, so that I understand my role as a guest. So that's what it should be telling you, it should tell you who are the guests and who are the hosts of this territory, and that is the very beginning of a relationship of your reciprocal obligations to one another.

Chelsea Vowel: If it doesn't have that, if you can't even name the people whose territory you're on, because sometimes it will literally be like, "We acknowledge we're on First Nations' territory." That's not good enough, who specifically? We are a multitude. Just be specific.

Tibetha Kemble: I was thinking a little bit more about, is there a difference between land and territory, or sorry, treaty and land acknowledgements? And I just was thinking a little bit more about what Chelsea was talking about. I do think that they are distinct things. When I think about a treaty acknowledgement, I have never heard anybody say, "I acknowledge the treaty that we're on," because I don't think anybody's actually spent time reading the treaty, which I do think is sexy. If you read it, and you understand the history and all that, it's interesting stuff to

look at what was agreed, and how we have come to understand the possessiveness of indigenous people, and where the idea of that all started.

Tibetha Kemble: So I do think that they are an important distinction, and territorial acknowledgements include Metis. And here in Alberta, there is an absolute need to do that, because we're the only province that has Metis settlements, and an obligation under Settlement Act to acknowledge Metis, and include all of that. So I think there's an important distinction to be made there, but I also agree that I don't think, we're not all treaty people. We are maybe beneficiaries of treaties, but we're not all treaty people. But then in terms of the unsettling, in the spaces that I'm engaged with, they are not unsettling. Oftentimes, it talks about how indigenous peoples benefit, our presence continues to enrich something. As opposed to, "I acknowledge that I'm on Treaty 6 territory, and I acknowledge all the indigenous groups that are here," but nothing unsettling about it.

Tibetha Kemble: "I acknowledge that you have been dispossessed of your traditional territory, and that this institution sits on that dispossessed land." There's nothing unsettling about that. I would love to see more, people to leave and go away, like, "What's my role in that?" Understand their role in the complicity of the ongoing dispossession.

Murray Utas: If I could share a story, probably one of the most frightened times I've been in my life, and it's been quite recent, goes back to January. This gentleman sitting across from me put on a show called Lake of the Strangers, and it was coming to opening night. And when asked who was going to do the treaty acknowledgement, free-land acknowledgement, Hunter and his sister Jackie said, "Murray." I just pooped at that moment. But I went and I thought about it, and I thought about it for a while. Then I went back to them, and I said, "Okay, but Hunter, I'm a bit afraid, but I want to use my words." He was like, "Yeah, Murray. I want that."

Murray Utas: So I went out, and you guys, I'm an actor, I stand in front of thousands of people, but I was so scared. I was shaking. I thought about the lessons and the gifts that have been given to me, and what does that mean to me in this moment, right now, standing here in the backstage theater at the Fringe, talking to these people that are here, and talking to the ancestors, and everybody where we're going forward. I got done, and the show went on, the show was beautiful. Afterwards, Hunter's father, who I love so very much, came up to me and hugged me. Just like, "Murray, your words were real." And I was like, "Wow, that's amazing." And then I was walking out, and this older woman, she came to me. She's like, "You."

Murray Utas: I was like, "Oh no." She goes, "I need to tell you something." And I'm like, "What?" She's like, "I've heard those things before, but you shook me." I was like, "What?" She goes, "Your words shook me, and thank you for that. I now need to know more." So I feel like with that one lady, that was something that shifted, because just even in that language that she used when talking to me, I

was like, "Wow. Okay, great." It was, you guys, but I had to find it in my heart, I had to speak it from my heart to do it. It was hard work, and I was scared.

Tibetha Kemble: Can we spend a moment talking about that? Fear and vulnerability. Because I think what I love about you sharing that experience is that you entered, there was a fear about being vulnerable, because you didn't know. You walked into that, you dealt with it, and you wrestled with it, and you did it anyway. Entering into that space of vulnerability I think is part of the process. So many people get up to the point of being like, "This space is vulnerable, it means I need to shift power, and I can't do it." And then they don't, then they say, "Why are we doing this, anyway?" Then they walk away from it. But I think we don't talk often enough about that space of vulnerability, and power, and I'll leave it at that.

Hunter Cardinal: No, I think what I'm starting to hear is there's a mindfulness of the role that you, I guess take up, being here, and understanding your relationships. I want to shift the conversation back to what Chelsea was talking about, in terms of ... Because what I loved is, there's this idea of unsettling, and there's this idea of unsettling to know who and what you are in relationship with. What I think is important is when we're using these words, we have that shared understanding of what we mean. What I feel like and what I've heard is that when we're talking about unsettling, that's different than what I've heard some people talk about, which is when you write a land acknowledgement, you should feel so guilty and bad. Not even guilty, but shameful. Like you, a non-indigenous person should feel ...

Hunter Cardinal: And I'm just like, "Where can you go with that?" That's a different understanding from what we're talking about with unsettled, and I'm wondering if we can spend some time jamming on what we mean by that, because I think there's some nuance there that's really exciting.

Chelsea Vowel: Guilt is so unproductive, and if people just, this is a thing with anything, if settlers stay at guilt, they don't do anything. They're just like, "You're making me feel bad, you're so mean and aggressive." Which is what a lot of us get all the time, "Stop talking about this, it's making me uncomfortable." And so I think some people don't like territory acknowledgements for that reason, they're like, "Here we go, it's guilt time again." So I think that, and we'll talk about this in a while, but there does need to be an evolution. Things have to, this can not remain a static thing. The things to understand too is territorial acknowledgements didn't come from some bureaucratic ...

Chelsea Vowel: This wasn't done in government, they're like, "You know what'd be cool?" No, this was activists, these were people who were fighting to pushback against indigenous erasure. You've got to understand that there's a fighting spirit there to be acknowledged, and to take up space, particularly in your own territory. So if people find that threatening, I think they need to sit with, why are they threatened with indigenous presence? What does it mean to be unsettled or scared of having indigenous peoples visibly around you? Or invisibly around you? So it's not about guilt, I think it's about understanding first some basic

history of the lands that you're on, and that starts with who are the people that were always here.

Chelsea Vowel: If that's your first contact with that history, great, but it can't be the only contact. Eventually, more information has to come out, and where I like to see it now is people talking about that relationship between "What does it mean that you are an uninvited guest? That you have not been actually welcomed here? That you are sitting on somebody else's land and benefiting from their dispossession? Can you still be in good relationship with somebody when that's the case?" If you're like, "No, obviously not, because I feel guilty all the time," then you're not going to do anything. But if you're like, "Okay, I'm going to learn more about this, and still be in relationship with people and make things better," then that's where I want to see it going.

Hunter Cardinal: Yeah. In Vine Deloria Jr., I think it's God is Red, one of his books, he talks about common philosophies held by indigenous nations across the world, one of which is always being in a dynamic process of being and becoming. What I'm hearing is a little bit about that idea of acknowledging where you are, and seeing where you could go, and pursuing that. It's a process, is that what you're talking about?

Chelsea Vowel: Absolutely. Even indigenous languages are almost completely verbal, versus being based on noun formation.

Hunter Cardinal: Yeah, talk about that. Sorry.

Chelsea Vowel: Sorry, I'm a little nerdy about this. Even colors are verbs.

Hunter Cardinal: What?

Chelsea Vowel: Yes, yes. You talk about [Cree 00:29:49], something black, something that's animate, or [Cree 00:29:53]. Your shoes are being black. There's the potential there of transformation that maybe they won't be black, or maybe they're not always black, depending on the light, or whatever. So everything, in Cree, you don't really need to use nouns that much, you can verbalize almost anything. The idea of transformation, Leroy Little Bear calls this indigenous metaphysics, where it's really about transformation is banal. It is the norm, and everything is constantly in transformation.

Chelsea Vowel: Our relationships obviously are always in flux, our being, we shed everything, we're like new people every 30 days or something. All of that is part-

Hunter Cardinal: The cells, right?

Chelsea Vowel: Yeah, just your cells. You're all cells, what are you talking about? It's everything. We just slough it off. That idea of everything always being transforming means that we have to have ways of adapting to the new, and recognizing that we

cannot remain in static relationship. The treaty can never just be the Four Corners signed agreement, it's an evolving relationship. That's true of every interaction we have with one another. You can't set it in stone, and walk away from it. That's not how relationships work.

Hunter Cardinal: Sometimes I feel like there is this idea of we have to write the acknowledgement and have it blessed hilariously by an elder, and then no one's allowed to touch it. Because it's right, we've done it so good, we do not have to think about it again. But I feel like there's a type of lightness that can be involved in the creation and the relationship to that acknowledgement, and I guess we touched on this, but when do you feel like it's important to use these statements? Is it before a meeting? Should it be integrated into our day to day speech, and our ideas, and our understanding of where we are all the time? Or is it something more of a mindful moment, when you've gathered people to think about that? I'm curious about that.

Hunter Cardinal: I'm actually curious too, Murray, there's an interesting example of people being forced to do land acknowledgements in Toronto at that festival. Maybe you could talk a little bit about your experience hearing about that, and how we chose to navigate that.

Murray Utas: It came a lot from the international artists, in that particular scenario that you brought up, and some of the local artists as well. It's interesting what people will find to bring up to keep from actually getting to the point. Going, "I'm sorry, my show doesn't lend itself for us to be able to do that." "You're being a little precious about what your show is. This is not about your show, this is about what's happening before your show, and you can probably get back into character and do your show, so maybe." But don't tell me what to do, don't force this on me. The administrators and producers of that festival, they may, because again, you get busy, you've got a lot of checklist things going on, and you may not have rolled that out in the best way.

Murray Utas: But I think that if they would have just flipped onto what they were thinking about with this, and including the artists in the conversation, they may have got a different approach to what that means. But it was, "Here's the words that I'm giving you, now say them." So you're not going to get much buy-in if you do it that way. But if you actually have a conversation with someone, and you talk about what it is you're doing, and how ... For me, as a theater creator, I'm going, "Okay, artist who thinks of this, your show is one thing, and this may not fit into it. Then let's work together and give ourselves enough time, let's put it in, let's integrate it into the show. Let's make it so it doesn't change whatever you think your aesthetic is, Robert Lepage, and bring that through."

Murray Utas: But listen, be a little brother sometimes, listen. Hear what people are saying, don't just instantly go, "No." Because not only with the guilt you're talking about, just being able to put that out, just being like, "As opposed to exercising any sort of openness or vulnerability, I'm going to push it out." What I did with our artists, and our touring artists, our traveling artists, I said, "I want you to get

to know the territories that you're coming to, and what some of the history is. Here's some resources, here's some people you could talk to." And from that, a lot of them are finding their own way in to having that as part of it. I even got asked this, and I would put this back to the group, they're like, "I'd like to do that acknowledgement after my show, is that appropriate? Is that okay?"

Hunter Cardinal: That's a great question. Anyone have any initial thoughts on that?

Chelsea Vowel: I don't know, just do it. It doesn't matter if it's before, it doesn't matter if it's during. I don't know. It's become customary, new custom, to be done at the beginning as folks are filing in, getting coffee or whatever. Would it matter if you do it at the end? I don't know. Because we really need to talk about, does it do what it's supposed to do? My cousin Jodi, Jodi Stonehouse gave an awesome territorial acknowledgement recently, where she was like, "I acknowledge I'm on my territory. I acknowledge that you killed the buffalo to move us off my territory. I acknowledge that you're sitting here on stolen lands, benefiting from stolen resources. I acknowledge all of that, do you acknowledge that?" And I was like, "I love you. That's my cousin."

Hunter Cardinal: Wow.

Chelsea Vowel: That was great. Would that matter if it was before or after? I don't know.

Hunter Cardinal: You'd probably want to choose after, right? Any thoughts? I think what's interesting is we're hovering around this idea of the potential performative or hollow nature of what these could be. I'll pose this to the group there, is that idea of we should know the territories, and have an idea of where we are, as if you are in someone's home, or someone's place where they hang out, but where's the line between then it becomes a listing exercise? And how well you can pronounce certain things? Where is that line between performing, but then also knowing the history and connecting in a way that is true for you?

Tibetha Kemble: I'll just maybe share my experience at the university. You'll be surprised to know that there are very few indigenous people in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. So when I came, it was like, "Ooh, an indigenous person. Let's talk about territory and acknowledgements." I was like, "Hold on, stop." Because it was, "Is this one okay? What about this one? Does this one work?" And I was like, "No, this does not feel right." So I offered them the opportunity to sit down and talk about working in relationship together to develop one. Specific for whatever it was that they were doing.

Tibetha Kemble: And there were two responses, there was, "That's way too much work." And then the other one was, "Great, let's have a conversation." You can tell which one I like better, but the conversations around "Yes, let's have a conversation," I take them in different places. It's not so much about understanding who the people are, knowing how to say the names, that's I think when you get ready to deliver it, that's important. But before we enter into that, especially for

medicine in particular ... And at the University of Alberta, we have a horribly dark legacy for sterilization of indigenous women, and supplying doctors for Indian hospitals, and limiting, basically dis-incentivizing medicine as a profession through the Enfranchisement Act. Going through that history, as a school situated on Treaty 6 territory, and having Emily Murphy Park just down the hill, who was an avowed eugenicist, that was all part of this larger thing.

Tibetha Kemble: Understanding that, and understanding the faculty's role in redressing that legacy, makes our acknowledgement different. Then you acknowledge your responsibility for redressing that legacy, and people then, I ask them to identify in their specific role. So if you're an administrator, if you're a faculty member, if you're making decisions about hiring and all of that, think about the landscape, the constellation of colonialism specific to your profession. Because each and every single one of us, can take it up in our own way. So land acknowledgements, they take on ... Of course, I make things complicated, they have to be. I make it difficult, I do, and I acknowledge that, and I'm okay with that.

Hunter Cardinal: Can you expand a little bit more about what that process is like for both you and the person or people that you're working with, when it does get complicated?

Tibetha Kemble: The ones who were really meaningful, engaged, settler allies, will work through that challenge with me. They're like, "Geez, I'm really uncomfortable and I'm starting to feel guilt." And not looking for me to make them feel better, they own it, deal with it and process it on their own. Because there's often that downloading of guilt, and "Help me feel better," and all of that, that is exhausting for indigenous people, and indigenous women I think. So they deal with it on their own, and then come back and reflect back, which I think is an important process. "Is this where we should be going?" Checking back and then moving forward.

Tibetha Kemble: And then for those who find it too uncomfortable, who aren't willing to enter into that vulnerable space, they usually end up walking away. I don't chase that, because that wasn't meant to be there then. Or whoever is doing that is not meant to do that.

Hunter Cardinal: That's fantastic. Chelsea, one of the things that you mentioned, and I keep on going back to this, because I feel like to me it speaks clearly to what this acknowledgement or this statement should be doing, when we're talking about what is our role. I guess, what I'm curious from the group right now is what do you feel is that role as an indigenous person? And what constitutes a good relationship with the other, or a non-indigenous ally, or someone who is a guest or an uninvited guest? What is their role, what is your role? Maybe you can have a conversation about that. And this is for keeps, this is the answer.

Chelsea Vowel: Am I allowed to change it later?

Hunter Cardinal: I hope we're live-tweeting this.

Chelsea Vowel: Back in the day, when I first started doing a lot of public education, I would have said, "My role is to educate and build bridges, and blah-blah-blah." Now I'm like, "My role is to support my people, and you all can figure out what the hell you want to do on your own time. And don't ask me to educate you. I wrote a book, read it, don't even talk to me about that stuff again." No, I mean obviously, this is the thing, indigenous peoples are incredibly open and welcoming, and put so much energy and lay our traumas bare, and give information again and again, in the hope that settlers are going to see that and understand, see us as human. We're constantly having to humanize ourselves to the other, and then things are going to get better, because that's how we do things.

Chelsea Vowel: Tapwewin is all about telling the truth, and if you don't have the truth, then you have no basis on which to form a good relationship. So we're constantly truth-telling, and it's exhausting, it re-traumatizes people. It sucks energy away from capacity building in our own communities. And we do that work, because it's the only way sometimes to reach people. But I think at this point, settlers need to understand that there is so much information already out there, and that if they want us to tutor them one on one, they better pay really, really well, and get our consent first. This is a thing that happens to me a lot, I end up in situations where I've been asked to come speak, and I feel like, without consent, settler-doming.

Chelsea Vowel: They're like, "Yeah, make me feel like crap. Tell me how bad we are. It's so cathartic." And they leave all just released or something, I'm like, "I didn't sign up for this. That's not, no." I need you to do something more. I think that we've explained over and over again, give back the land, that's off the table. "No, we're not going to give back the land, we all ..." No, give back the land, and do some actual real things. The information is out there for you to figure out what those real things could be. That's the role. I think we, as indigenous peoples, have laid it all out there. We'll continue to do so, but we also need to conserve our energies for ourselves, so that we can exist into the near and far future, without constantly being drained by vampiric settlers.

Hunter Cardinal: Thank you. I'm curious from the group, what is your perspective on your role, when you're connecting with this idea of this statement, of this acknowledgement? Because for me, I think where my mind goes is it goes back to one of the oldest agreements between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, which was the Two Row Wampum. From the knowledge keepers that I've spoken to, it's a really fascinating symbolic device of what a relationship could and should look like between indigenous peoples. In the context of its creation, it was in 1613 between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, they created this belt that visually represented what this relationship between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch could be.

Hunter Cardinal: It looked like two rows of parallel lines, signifying the Haudenosaunee in their canoe, and the Dutch in their ship. And at no point do they crossover, and it

becomes the One Row Wampum, but it remains separate. There's a certain space between them, and that was for the values of peace, friendship, and understanding. There's different translations of what that was. For me, what I hear and see is that there's an obligation to maintain the relationships that we have as indigenous people in our canoe, and there's so much we can do to mend that relationship and be in that state of renewal. But there's a lot that we can do in our own canoes as well, and make sure our lives and our relationships are in order, and make sure that we're being good partners going down the river of life together.

Hunter Cardinal: One thing that's exciting for me is learning more about this, the knowledge keepers that I've been speaking to have told me that the Two Row Wampum, though it was between the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee, it also had thousands of emissaries from across Turtle Island witnessing that agreement. So you can see common threads of those relationships permeate into that spirit and intent of treaty that we were talking about earlier. So for me, I take it as an opportunity to remind myself of "I'm in my canoe, and they're in that ship, and I have an obligation to maintain that distance, and nurture that relationship, not remain separate." Even sometimes I think I can go into the ship, and know how to walk around in there and be respectful in there. If they want to come into my canoe, they have to know how to walk in the canoe. Because if you don't know how to walk in a canoe, you flip it over, and it's traumatizing. Very dangerous.

Hunter Cardinal: But that's where I go, when I'm thinking about that acknowledgement and that statement. I'm curious where you all go.

Murray Utas: I think this roundabout may be getting into what you've asked, but the idea of room. Making room, and what people think that is. That there is space, and that there is room. A lot of those invitations are made, like, "I invite you, and I'm going to make room for you, but the emotional labor is still all yours. I want you to give me all that knowledge. Then when it comes time, I'm going to turn around and go, 'Did you see what I did there? I'm a good guy, I did that.'" So don't make a side door in, knock all the doors down. Knock it wide open, and get the eff out of the way. Make the room, and then say, "Give me your list of all the barriers that are in your way right now to tell this story, or whatever it is."

Murray Utas: Of course, I'm a storyteller, so it would be that, "And I'm going to go, and I'm going to take all the resources I have, and I'm going to get those barriers out of your way." That's the work.

Chelsea Vowel: I call it doing the dishes, literally. Just do the frigging dishes, so that we can do the other things.

Murray Utas: Yes. I think that's huge.

Hunter Cardinal: I love that. Thank you.

Tibetha Kemble: You're hired. I think all of this encapsulates ... My role is to do no more harm. To create, facilitate relationships and conversations, but to do no more harm. And to encourage us all to do no more harm. But I often find on the other side, it's like, "We will come, and we will support up to the point until it feels like it's too much." If it's too much space, or if it's too much money, or if it's too much whatever, then it's the gradual backing away. So that's the point where we're at right now, at least in my own sphere of influence, is just that we've done all these great things, "But we didn't want you to have all that space. Really do you need that much money?"

Tibetha Kemble: It's like encouraging the conversation to have 100 of you burning down, not buildings, but busting doors down and making space around tables, and that sort of thing. My role, do no more harm. Encourage others to do no more harm, and accept spaces at tables to affect change.

Hunter Cardinal: Totally. Yes, you're hired. I'm curious if we can talk a little bit about the future of what these acknowledgements could be. Chelsea, your work often revolves around futurism, and I'm curious if maybe you can give us a priming of futurism, what that means, and how that could be applicable to I guess where we're going as Canadians in this time and space right now.

Chelsea Vowel: Did you just say you identify as Canadian? Rude. I'm just kidding.

Hunter Cardinal: Maybe.

Chelsea Vowel: It's totally up to you.

Hunter Cardinal: No. Yes? You're hired.

Chelsea Vowel: First, don't do a territorial acknowledgement and then have people stand up for O Canada. That happens to my kid's school all the time, and I'm always like, "Ah, cognitive dissonance." Anyway. So futurism, indigenous futurism is built off of Afrofuturism, so it's this idea of indigenous people acknowledging the indigeneity of African peoples as well, existing into the near and far future, on our own terms. We're the slowest vanishing people in all of history, we're constantly being told that we're on the verge of dying out, our culture is dying out. They're like, "Tick-tock, tick-tock. We predicted this 50 years ago, 100 years ago, you're still here. It's really annoying." We're like, "No, we're just going to keep on keeping on."

Chelsea Vowel: So for me, I'm just going to personalize it with my work, is I have spent so much of my time focusing on white people, and so when I talk about settlers, that's who I'm talking about. I'm talking about white people. I was not even, even calling people white is something that people get all offended about, we can't even have a conversation. I'm like, "Deal with it." So my thing now is when we talk about that, that's who we have in our minds. European settlers, we're like, "Our relationships are with them." What about our relationships with black

people? Many of whom were here before or at the same time as white Europeans. What about the reasons that they were here? And what kind of relationships did indigenous peoples form with black communities?

Chelsea Vowel: Because those histories are there, and they've been deliberately erased. There were so many black communities here in Alberta, I didn't even know about it until recently. Black presence is completely erased in Canada, it's all down in the States. What are our relationships with black people? What are our relationships with people who have come here because Canada continues to engage in colonialism abroad? You have people who are displaced because colonial violence continues to go on, or there's that legacy of colonial violence. They get here, we're like, "You're newcomers," but they don't get to bring their legal orders with them. They're not taking over the country, whatever fricking UCP says.

Chelsea Vowel: They're here because of global colonial violence, so what are our relationships with those people? I want to build with black and indigenous and people of color, and focus on that, because we are always separated, and we just pour so much energy into, again, trying to humanize ourselves. Yet we're all dealing with these really intense levels of colonial violence, in different ways. And yet all of us are experiencing that ongoing onslaught of violence, so let's build with one another against colonial violence. If white people want to come in and be allies, they have to be complicit, they have to tear down white supremacy as well. Otherwise, they're not doing anybody any good.

Chelsea Vowel: For me, territorial acknowledgements, whatever we're doing, the work that we're doing has to build towards a future of justice for everybody, and that absolutely requires dismantling and destroying white supremacy and the settler colonial state. There's no other way around it, in my opinion.

Hunter Cardinal: Amazing. Anyone else's perspective on the future of where we're going with these statements?

Tibetha Kemble: It's interesting, so my daughter experiences the same thing in her elementary school. It starts so young, the pushback, because of this whole ... We're so dedicated to liberal multiculturalism that says, "We're all equal, and we're all the same." When history tells us such a different story, right? So I think my daughter provides, she keeps me real, but she provides a really great example. They did a territorial acknowledgement, then they sang O Canada, and of course my daughter doesn't sing O Canada, and doesn't recognize it, and was questioned by her classmates as to why. And she says, "Because I'm indigenous, and there's lots of things going on that I don't, until we're respected, I won't."

Tibetha Kemble: Her classmate said, "You're Canadian." She says, "I'm indigenous." "You're Canadian-indigenous." "No, I'm indigenous." That conversation I think we need to, if we think about the future, we have to start all the way back here, and change how much conversation, or how much energy we keep putting into this liberal multicultural idea. And really disrupting the root foundation of how we

think about Canada as a whole. White supremacy, I'm totally on board, where do I get in? But the future of land acknowledgements, it is deeper, much deeper than I think we're giving it credit for right now.

Hunter Cardinal: Murray, do you have any thoughts on this?

Murray Utas: I just would reiterate the idea of it going deeper. It has to be woven, it has to be not just a polite gesture anymore. We've got to go deeper. And even if it's going to make you uncomfortable, whatever it's going to do, push through that. Think of it from the heart. We have become such head-driven, let's just ignore all the signs of maybe we have effed this up with so many things, and yet we're just going to keep screwing over Mother Nature with the rock monsters digging shit out, as opposed to trying to give back and actually nurture it. I think we've got to flip a switch, and it's going to take so much work to do it, but it's got to be done. Do the work.

Hunter Cardinal: Exactly. I think on that note, what I feel like would be useful conversation is what does that work look like in a sustainable way? What can people who are listening to this conversation do, and take away, in that idea of being and becoming? Because we know where things are now, we know that it has a tendency to be performative, we know that we could see a future where there is justice for everyone. How do we bridge from here to there, and what could that look like on the small incremental steps that we can all take? For people maybe needing to write this for an event coming up, or wanting to use this as an exercise, what would you advise?

Murray Utas: Start small. If you have a family gathering for dinner, just put it in a place where you could really go, "I can be vulnerable in this situation," and then look out and take that further. But take a first step, find a first step on what that is, so you can just start to turn a corner.

Hunter Cardinal: Cool.

Tibetha Kemble: I think somebody here wrote a really great book that helps people make a good first step.

Hunter Cardinal: Read.

Tibetha Kemble: Just engaging with material, and spending time with books, just start somewhere. You start with Chelsea's book, and you go to a footnote, or you go to the references, and just keep digging deeper. Make a personal commitment to reading something, or subscribing to something. But make a lifelong commitment, start small, start with Twitter, start with the internet. I hear it's a big thing now.

Hunter Cardinal: It's a great big tube.

- Tibetha Kemble: I know, it's amazing.
- Chelsea Vowel: I think in terms of taking territorial acknowledgements into the future, one thing that's interesting right now is the UCP is not requiring it anymore in a lot of spaces. So I feel like there was this reconciliation wave after the TRC that is like, "All right, we've spent enough time on that. We have reconciled." Obviously not. But the fact that right now territorial acknowledgements, in my opinion, in the spaces where they happen, are the bare minimum. Now some folks are not even going to do the bare minimum? Now, when they're like, "No, we're not going to do this, we're only going to do it if people feel like it." Now there's an opportunity to make it disruptive again. Just flash-mob territorial acknowledgement, I don't know. Just putting it out there.
- Chelsea Vowel: Going forward, I think that one thing that I've seen non-indigenous peoples do that I think is interesting, is we as indigenous peoples always locate ourselves, we're like, "I'm Metis, I'm from Lac Ste. Anne, I live here." Because that's explaining whether or not we're from the territory, this is how we find cousins as well. But I've seen some non-indigenous people also be like, "I am of Scottish origin, I guess my great-grandfather came from Scotland, and I'm a settler here. I'm learning more about that." To locate themselves as well, to say where are they coming from, so how are they entering into this relationship. That's interesting, I think that should be part of ...
- Chelsea Vowel: I think people need to personalize their territorial acknowledgements when they're giving it, when it's a non-indigenous person doing it, be like, "Here's where I am." What I also have seen that I didn't like is some people were like, "I'm from Treaty 4 territory," and then you think that they're native, because they deliberately don't identify as non-indigenous, and leave that ambiguity there. Don't do that. That's real crappy. And then I always say, and people always laugh, and I'm not joking, that people, myself or other indigenous peoples, will accept cottages, keys to your home. If you have a farm that you want to pass on and nobody wants it, we will take that land back in a heartbeat. Do it, give the land back. I keep saying it, but do it. That's what I want to see.
- Hunter Cardinal: I think what's exciting is how this, these ideas being incorporated into the work that's being done now in your respective field. A wrap-up question is where are you taking these ideas with the projects, with the work that you're doing right now?
- Tibetha Kemble: I think we're still in the education phase, like I said before, when I first came in, "Hey, indigenous person." Then I would stop the conversation, or it would stop itself organically, because it ended up being too difficult. I'm in the education phase now, not me educating others, but engaging in a learning process. And then starting with the basics, like governance and readings, and just engaging with each other to understand, and then we can move into potentially a land acknowledgement or territorial acknowledgement. But for me, I'm not rushing into it, because I really despise this rushing up to it, and checking the box, and moving away.

Tibetha Kemble: You're not present to it, there's no relationality to it, we're not observing the process of this ongoing-ness of the relationship. I'm slow, I'm painfully slow, and it makes people mad. I'm okay with that.

Hunter Cardinal: What are some resources that you would recommend, like a top three summer reading list that you would recommend?

Tibetha Kemble: Can you give me some time?

Hunter Cardinal: Yeah, we'll go. Murray?

Murray Utas: In our organization, we are getting deep into how we need to move forward. That has been a massive shift, and we are now in the process. What I have told our board, and what I want to do is I want to bring in, have a position for a leader, and have that leader just lead, tell us, look back, and mentor and bring those around. So that we can start something that just allows things to be seeded. Because if I can help make that a reality, and we can just start kicking out more leaders into the arts industry to start to balance that plate, and make more voices at the table, we have to do it. So we're getting intentional about what that is, and the idea of not just making room, but the room is there, and we're going to go forward.

Murray Utas: If we've got to take whatever resources are being pushed in one direction, I'm grabbing that, and I'm turning it a different way. I'm partnering with a lot of others, my dear friend Renee is out at the [inaudible 01:03:24] Center, she runs a program out there, and I'm going to be working with [inaudible 01:03:28] to find this leader. And in my heart, I want her to matriarch and just go.

Hunter Cardinal: Amazing.

Chelsea Vowel: I'm in a unique space right now, I'm at the Faculty of Native Studies, so for once in my educational career, I'm not in a minority situation, or being tokenized. I just hang around with native people all day, it's really sweet, you should do it. I also have a law degree, and I used to think that I could make change by being a lawyer, and doing all these things. I no longer believe in working within the system, I don't believe in incremental change. If you know anything about the history of Indian and Metis organizing in this country, we've been given the same bullshit story over and over again. "Incremental change, change is slow."

Chelsea Vowel: No, no. Enough. Generations, my great-grandparents were fighting some of the same battles that we're fighting today, and I'm done. So the work that I do is focusing on building community in small spaces, recognizing that we have to rely on one another. Things are getting really bad, things are going to continue to get very, very bad. We have to organize around principles of dispossession, of mass migration, of catastrophic climate change, and we can't do that if we're relying on the urban south, mostly in the east political centers making decisions for us. We need to come together as indigenous peoples, as black peoples, as

people of color, settler accomplices, to support one another in the here and now. And that can mean providing childcare for one another, that can mean growing food for each other. That could mean kicking goddamn cops out of the schools, as they disproportionately target visibly native and black youth, and criminalize them.

Chelsea Vowel: It's providing homes for foster kids, it's stopping them from taking our kids. It's providing help for those kids who are taking their own lives. It's not talking about what you're going to do, it's doing the thing. Washing the dishes, feeding the people, loving the people where you live and exist. That is the only thing that is going to make a difference for the lives of my children, my grandchildren, and the children that I will never see. That's where I'm at, at this point.

Hunter Cardinal: Tapwe. I think that's a perfect note to leave it on. But thank you so much for your thoughts, your insights, your vulnerability, as well as the bravery to have this conversation, to ask these questions, and to share your thoughts. So hay-hay, thank you so much. Everyone who is listening, thank you so much for being with us. We'll end a bit early, and if you have any questions, please come on up, have a conversation. We'll turn the mics off, so it's not intimidating, but thank you so much.

Conor Kerr: Circle of Knowledge was recorded at the NorQuest College Innovation Studio, and is hosted by me, yours truly, Conor Kerr. Production and editing by Corey Stroeder. Theme song is Eagle Rock, by Wes Hutchinson. Special thanks to the Edmonton Community Foundation, whose generous sponsorship made the Indigenous Speaker Series and the Circle of Knowledge Podcast a reality. Lastly, and most importantly, big shout-out to all the speakers who have been involved. We are incredibly grateful for the knowledge and time you share to make this series a possibility. Thoughts, comments, questions, anything else regarding today's Circle of Knowledge episode, we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at Podcast@NorQuest.ca.