

Making Space For Justice with Gary Murray

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SPEAKERS

Uncle Gary Murray, Janet McGaw



Janet McGaw 00:24

Hello and welcome to threesixtyCITY, a podcast delving into the future of urban life. I'm today's guest host, Janet McGraw, associate professor in architectural design in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we're recording this podcast on the country of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. As an architect with Anglo Celtic heritage. I'm aware of my complicity with the settler colonial project that has dispossessed Aboriginal peoples in Australia and, in part, this motivates my interest in making amends through the work that I do. Today, I'm really thrilled to be introducing Uncle Gary Murray. Uncle Gary Murray was born in Balranald, NSW. He is a multi-clan descendant of the Wamba Wamba, Dhudhuroa, Wiradjeri, Yorta Yorta, Baraparapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Djupagalk and Werkgaia Nations which span across the northern parts of Victoria. He has over fifty-two years of activism for many First Nations issues in Australia particularly in community development, native title, cultural heritage, economic development and human rights. It's an absolute pleasure to welcome him here today. We've been working together since 2009. Can I begin, Uncle Gary by asking you if you could define the concept of spatial justice, and talk about how this differs from other kinds of justice?



Uncle Gary Murray 02:12

Thank you, Janet, for that kind introduction and also cheerio to all the audience out there, wherever you are around the globe. Spatial Justice goes to the heart of colonization, invasion of all First Nations across the globe, and particularly in Australia. And spatial justice means it addresses the issue of dispossession, dispersal, and decultivization, with all the genocidal connotations and everything else that goes with it. And we only have to look around today, in '22, we're sitting on land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, language group. There's eight clans in that group, eight clans in the extended family group, and probably six of those clans have gone forever. But there's nobody around today that can claim those six clans' country. So, that's a snapshot of genocide in Australia, and that happens all over Australia, not just the province of Melbourne here. And I think people need to recognize that racial justice is about tangible, and the intangible. Goes through intangible things like creation stories, astronomy, for

example, and all that stuff like that. The tangible part is land, water, and all the stuff that goes with land and water that leads to healthy communities. So that's a basically, rough definition of spatial justice. We need to get our land back, so that we can achieve sovereignty, joint sovereignty with the Australian government. We need to get our land back, to make sure our communities are healthy and safe.

J Janet McGaw 04:06

Aboriginal peoples or Indigenous peoples around the world has been disconnected and dispossessed from their lands, what's particular about the Australian context, do you think?

U Uncle Gary Murray 04:21

Well, it goes through dispossession and dispersal. We were scattered all over the place. You know, I've come from a group, for example, where my father - called the Wamba Wamba Group, and there's probably way more Wamba Wamba people living in metropolitan Melbourne, which is not our country, than there are on Wamba Wamba country on the Murray River, Swan Hill, and Moulamein and Deniliquin terrain and so on, so we're scattered. And we're trying to reconstruct our traditional communities with the modern upgrades, as we say. And that's really important that we do that reconstruction... you can't do it, unless it you've got a land base, an economic base, a political base, a cultural base, and a moral base. And, you know, we've got to bring back some of the old values that we've lost over the last four or five generations, and I think that's really important. And having a place that is ours, that we own, and we're not leasing it or renting it or part of somebody else's facility or land ownership, and that's really important that we get our land back... and we're lucky in Victoria, where we are, the state of Victoria has drawn a treaty path, and opened the Treaty to address the sort of issues that need to be fixed up after our lands were stolen, and water, and everything else...

J Janet McGaw 05:45

So, Australia, unlike pretty well, everywhere else in the world, had no treaty when settler colonization began.... Apart from the kind of pretend treaty that Batman drafted. It's been a long process, hasn't it? Getting to treaty?

U Uncle Gary Murray 06:12

Yes, it's been over 233 years since the first white man stepped on our shores, you're gonna remember this - we've got 270 First Nations language groups around Australia. In Victoria, we've got 38 plus First Nations; 300 clans in that 38 Nations. So clans are everywhere, they have the first rights of country and any treaty that should be done has to take that into account. And in one sense, it's really good that we've never done a treaty when the white man first came here. Other groups around the world, like Canada and America and New Zealand they went first. And whilst their treaties were done, some four hundred years ago or whatever, we learn from it, we learn by their failures and their mistakes, as well the good things. So we're

in a unique position in Victoria ; 38 Nations to construct a treaty that we design, that we determine, and that we negotiate directly with the state government of Victoria. I think that's good in that sense.

J Janet McGaw 07:20

Yeah, that's a really good point. I hadn't thought about it like that. So do you think Treaty is going to be a path to get spatial equity?

U Uncle Gary Murray 07:29

Well, one would hope so and I think, you know, we've got that combination of cultural heritage strategies, land justice strategies on the state regime. We've also got a native title regimes as well. And in those strategies over the last 25 years, and even the past 10 years, there is this responsibility to look after your cultural heritage; responsibility to do your Native title rights and to get your fishing and hunting rights back. And then, with that bag of rights, there's also what they call Crown land being transferred to Aboriginal title. And then a traditional land and manage board, to set up to manage a national park with the state and traditional land group, that's got the park. Next step, is what can we do with those parks? And at the moment, in terms of land rights in the state, we're lucky to own 25,000 acres in 7 million acres of Victoria or whatever it is, we're a little black dot on a map of Victoria in Australia. But in those Aboriginal title national parks, can treaty take it to the next level? And the next level is clearly what can we do inside those parks? Can we design and construct to create spatial justice inside those national parks? The treaty is gonna give us land back. We've got to look at those national parks and say, alright, we don't want the the whole national park, we're not going to restrict the national park to visitors and tourists. We need to be there. So you can see us. It's a bit like that project and Melbourne CBD. Where do you see us in the CBD? Well, you don't see us because we haven't got a flash building; we don't have a culturally appropriate buliding that stands out, like the Eiffel Tower or the Empire State Building. We haven't got that building in Melbourne CBD, but we need to build it. That's still on agenda. But we also need to satelite that concept across every one of the 38 plus Nations. And that concept is simply a multi-purpose cultural heritage, economic, tourism, and astronomy site. First Nations bring back the astronomy part, which is astronomy at the center, where you can share those stories about how we link the stars, to the people, and country.

J Janet McGaw 10:02

Uncle Gary, there's been a lot of work done in the architects Accreditation Council in Australia to transform the competencies that our graduates need to have before they begin working. And about a quarter of them relate to understanding how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. And some of those around how you might integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into the built environment and ideas of caring for country. How might those ideas change the way architects work on the kinds of projects that you're describing?

U Uncle Gary Murray 10:54

Well there's several little things that architects can look at like how do you build our space

Well, there's several nice things that architects can look at, like how do you build our space around water, fire, the stars, the land and the people. And you've got to come in there with an open mind on that. And every First Nation, every clan is different. So you've got to come up with unique designs. And that's a really important part. And akin to that, you need to talk to the people on the ground, doing the cultural work and doing the everyday thing that we all do. And then you'll get to where you want to go. Every design will be different, with the different country, different water, different astronomy stories and the rest of it. And you've gotta bring those intangible things into the space with your designs and the material engineers, and all the other stuff that goes with it. And of course, the most important thing in '22 is to make sure that it's environmentally friendly, that we use really good materials that withstand bushfires, cause we get bushfires, and we get floods; we're in a flood climate at the moment, and the next one will be a bushfire and then after that - probably the locusts. We've been hit with everything. So you've got to build around that and you've gotta take that into account.

J Janet McGaw 12:14

So you're describing a kind of equity that mixes up the social and the spatial, is that right? That that these things are entangled intrinsically for Aboriginal peoples?

U Uncle Gary Murray 12:28

Well they are, but they're also an emotional thing as well, because I bet kids see a beautifully designed and built and managed building, then that raises their self esteem. That's ours - they can claim it. It's a bit like owning a football ground or something. But we've got to build people's self esteem from our kids, to our elders and everybody in between. And that's what we're all about. It's not about now 233 years of dispossession and dispersal and decultivation. We're trying to address that. And so we can move on. We want to move on, and we want to share this country I suppose, and all that stuff that goes with it. You know, we have a shared history up to a point, some good, some bad, some beautiful, some ugly, but at end the day, we're here and nobody's going home. And we're not going away. So at the end of the day, and we need to sit down and get that spatial justice sorted out. And I think between all the strategies or now we call them cultural heritage, now it's treaty, we have the perfect opportunity in this generation, to build the satellites we've talked about in the Melbourne project. And some have already been done. Like kind of projects done for the Dja Dja Wurrung just got allocated \$12 million for building in Bendigo. It goes on and on. So everybody's starting to move, get that building that space, that gives us justice, in all aspects of it.

J Janet McGaw 14:03

At the moment, there's still very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander architects and designers in Australia. There's a lot more than there were when we first began on this path of thinking about these things. How can we encourage more Indigenous youth to become architects and designers and work in this space with you?

U Uncle Gary Murray 14:29

I've thought long and hard about that. And the same thing with lawyers and economists. We

don't have a Black economist that I'm aware of. We don't have too many lawyers, either. We got a lot of teachers. Not many teaching in the classroom, but we do have a lot of teachers that have graduated. My view is that if you build a facility, you will build into it the strategies about education. And one example, where I live in these northern suburbs of Melbourne, and six acres of land that we're working on getting a design and construct done. And one of our aspirations is to get 20 good people that want to do an online law degree out of Charles Darwin Uni, or any Uni that wants to do it. So we gathered in students on the site, they could work from home and eventually they'll get a law degree. Why can't we do the same with architects? We have those kids that want to do that stuff, even if it's medicine - do it online do a bit in a facility? Or even go on campus to a mainstream University. We just gotta get creative about that. And that's what it's always about; get culturally creative, and address the issues where we got gaps. And we have got gaps in gaps in architecture, and we got gaps in the economy sector...

J Janet McGaw 15:54

So what role do you think non Indigenous allies can best play to support projects like the ones you're talking about and Indigenous placemaking more generally?

U Uncle Gary Murray 16:09

Well, we'll get behind the strategies and the concept we're talking about, we just sort of talked about them generally, but you need the experts and - mostly non-Aboriginal experts. You got to bring them in and work out your joint strategies and how they fit in. Everybody has a role in addressing the reconstruction of our communities, and getting the design and construction concepts up. You know, plumbers and electricians and so on. We need them, too, as well as architects and all the other people that go with that. It's a team effort, and you've got to put your best team on the field, and it's not a color problem.

J Janet McGaw 16:49

What do you think a spatially just world would look like, Uncle Gary, and how do we get there? What's the process?

U Uncle Gary Murray 17:00

Well, the process is doing the design and construct concepts in every First Nation, and getting our kids involved in it so not they're not in the streets getting shot, or bashed to death. We've got to get them in safe environments and we've got to build their self esteem up, and educate them, and give them skills development training, and all that sort of stuff, and make them proud of their culture. If you look, behind me, I've got my daughter's artwork up there. We've got historical photos with a house of their ancestors. That's what we got to do, we've got to start raising that culture. People need to see this stuff, people have to go to a space, go to a website, and see their ancestors up there. And not just for photos, but the story about those people. And that also, that story has to be built into the bricks and mortar stuff. That's really

important. So when you walk past that building, you know it's us. When you walk inside that building you know it's us. And that's what the kids have to see and the elders have to see that before they die.

J Janet McGaw 18:13

You've been working on this stuff with such hype and energy and enthusiasm for so long, Uncle Gary. Just help us understand - what motivates your activism?

U Uncle Gary Murray 18:27

Well, I come from a long line of activists. My grandfather, well, prominent person, very important in the state and around Australia. He was knighted by the Queen and made cabinet of South Australia. So, he went to a new level. He's the only one who's done it, nobody else has done it since. My dad, of course, Stewart Murray, he was mentored by my grandfather back in the day, obviously my father married his daughter. We've come from that, we come from hunters and headmen - headwomen. So we've always been out there doing stuff. That won't change ever. All my kids, I've got twelve kids and, every one of them are out there doing stuff politically, having a go and doing the right thing. And the grandkids are gonna be even better, they seem to be getting taller, better looking and smarter. And I've got 28 of them. So I've got a little army going there. And I'm looking forward to them really taking a big role in the community. And maybe I'll go fishing then, but not now. I'm still here. I'm still here. And I intend to go for a bit longer. And I want to see stuff done. It's unfinished business.

J Janet McGaw 20:55

So there's - you've talked a lot about the changes underway at a state level. There are also changes happening at a national level. Do you want to talk about that?

U Uncle Gary Murray 21:08

On February 3, 2016, there was a meeting at Federation Square in Melbourne on Flinders Street. About four or five hundred of us turned up. The agenda was about the commonwealth changes, the voice and vetting us into the Commonwealth Constitution, well that was soundly unanimously rejected. And we went on a state treaty process, and I'd be drafting a motion for that. And that's where it started, it hasn't gone the way we thought it would, but essentially, we are now in a treaty climate. After elections in a couple of weeks, we still believe that both parties will deliver the process. Cause we will, and we will get our treaty by '23 and '24, will be our first treaty. And they will address questions of sovereignty, reparations, landmarks, stolen generations. Treaty is an agreement. And it's a book with chapters. We need to write the chapters and put our aspirations out there. And we're going to bring people in that we haven't needed before, like an economist, somebody has to cost it. And we need lawyers, we need a commercial accountant, people and all that sort of stuff. So there was a self determination fund that's been created - and the first installment was about \$60 million. And that's to pay for the experts, and to run the meetings and to create a delegation, and they'll deal directly with the state. And I'm looking forward to that. So I'm thinking, we need an architect in there as well, to

design whatever land we're going to get back, what are we going to put on it? And that's a really big one for architects to look at, with the lawyers, and the accountants, and the economists.

J Janet McGaw 23:20

You've talked about some projects that have gone ahead, Indigenous cultural and knowledge and education centers in regional Australia. Tell us about those and how they've benefited communities there.

U Uncle Gary Murray 23:37

Right, well we've got the Gunditjmara one, four of my kids come from out of there. But that was probably the one that really got more attention about how design can work. And the Gunditjmara people are the eel people, they farmed the eels and they controlled waterways so the eels came into a certain channel, and they just picked them up, and smoked them and traded and ate them and all that sort of stuff. So, there building that they created, probably a multimillion dollar building, over \$10 million was built around that, and the eel nets and the stone huts that were there before the white men came to the zone. Very similar to what we did up in the mountains as well, and probably elsewhere around Australia. We did stay in one spot, we weren't nomads, we only went elsewhere to get food, and we went hunting and fishing and all that sort of stuff. So the new building reflects that; reflects the stone hut, reflects the eels. So everybody's got their own ideas about what sort of building can be done, right into environmentally friendly stuff as well. Really good, unique designs that reflect their culture.

J Janet McGaw 25:42

Settler Australia has tended to focus its interests in really concentrated areas, you know, the capital cities, located around the fringe of Australia, mostly in the southeast, and a little bit over in the West. Aboriginal people occupied the whole of Australia, prior to colonization. There is a kind of different spatiality at play, and I'm wondering, is that part of why these satellite centers that you're talking about are so important?

U Uncle Gary Murray 26:19

Well, they're important because each nation has country and each nation's got social issues, economic issues, political issues, and they need a base, a modern day base, and obviously the multi-purpose concept is what we all look at. The days of just putting a building up with boomerangs on the wall are gone. We want a living spatial area, that's safe, culturally relevant, and reflects us. Each nation, each clan, will want that... that's where we're coming from. And it's really important that we get the resources to do it, whether it's with the Native title outcomes or with treaty outcomes, whether it's state treaty or national treaty, I would hope the commonwealth government would be looking at treaties now.

J Janet McGaw 27:21

Janet McGaw 27:11

Up until now, it's been complex, sometimes for architects to know who to speak to around issues, particularly with the complexity around registered Aboriginal parties and regions that don't have obvious groups. What's your advice around this? Is this something we just have to watch and wait for as Treaty unfolds? Or are there ways that architects can work now that makes sense to you?

U Uncle Gary Murray 27:54

Yeah, well, there's 200 corporate associations, or cooperating communities in Victoria and that's one example. And there's a website called the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporation. Most of them are up there, and all their contact details and membership and their board and all that. So, you could easily do the research and find them. If they're State Incorporated, there's the Office of Fair Trade and Consumer Affairs. They have a list, you can just Google it and do a search, and we'll come up on there. There's also thirty five discrete communities that have Aboriginal community organizations for health, and housing and so on, and they generally parallel with the traditional groups were they are. So in any community, if you take say Melbourne, you've got Wathaurong, Wurundjeri, and Boonerwung covering greater Melbourne, right down to the peninsula with Boonerwung. But you also got a whole heap of community organizations, so we're easy to find, we're in the phonebook as they used to say. But also, you can Google it. Nobody should have any problem about contacting the right group and the right person straight away.

J Janet McGaw 29:14

So do you think that architects should seek out these groups for any project they're working on, regardless of whether it's a project specifically for Aboriginal cultural interests?

U Uncle Gary Murray 29:29

Well, that's the good news. Because it's called planning, and planning can be good or bad. But good planning is you get architects and lawyers and economists through a process to provide assistance to win contracts, to transfer money to do what we need to do. Now we're currently looking for an economist to help us do the treaty stuff. And we've approached a couple of them, a couple of firms that might do the job. Cause we've never used them before. Same thing with architects; there was a lot of scope out there to create an opportunity, not just for us, but also for the architects. Look, there was not too many buildings done yet, we've done a handful, that have been done, in terms of what we've been talking in this podcast. But there's probably another 30 out there that need to be done. And they would be multimillion dollar concepts that need architects to come and good designs and give us a master architectural plan concept, then get into the actual design and construction of the building and the rest of it. So it can create its own industry, if it's done properly and respectfully. That's what we ask.

J Janet McGaw 30:47

So you're suggesting people reach out to communities, find out what they need, and gather together groups of other professionals who might have skills to advance those projects. Is that

what you're saying?

U

Uncle Gary Murray 31:02

Exactly, whether it's an individual company, or whether it's a group of companies that have got that architectural stuff going... Let's work a strategy out. You know, you contact me and we can talk about an architectural strategy for the Murray River from the top right to the bottom. Cause there's no real buildings that are being done. And we're all in the process of Native title, cultural heritage, and treaty. So the option's now, right now: get in there, and provide the important participation and respect and everything else that comes with it, and it will be a two way thing.

J

Janet McGaw 31:40

So some traditional owner groups, they're from areas that have been more intensively claimed, and built on by free settlers in the early days, that strange notion that you could just arrive and take what you wanted for the first 20 years or so, of settlement and colonization in Victoria. And those lands are the most difficult to get back. So can you talk about the challenge of groups that are in areas where there is not much crown land at all? And how how they might actually get land justice?

U

Uncle Gary Murray 32:26

Well, the only crown land left now is surplus assets that the police don't want for example. And, the usual thing is, the state transfers that over to a Native title group. But, the national parks that have Aboriginal title attached to them now, what can we do with that? As I said before, we don't want to take the whole national park, but we need to have access in there, so we can design and construct our buildings and our residential components where staff and where our people just want to go home and live on country and do a bit of hunting and fishing. And those national parks, there's probably hundreds or thousands of acres in those parks where we could add value to the national park by having a physical presence in 'em and doing the tours to non-Aboriginal people, we're not going to close off access. I reckon that's one of the things we've gotta look at in treaty. And the only other way we're going to get land back is to buy it back on the commercial market. So if we've got traditional owners living in Melbourne, who aren't Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung or aren't Boonerwung, and they don't want to go home, their treaty rights and benefits shall be allocated to them in Melbourne. That means that funding for housing development, business arrangements or whatever, well giving a collective factory and developing it and redesigning it and upgrading it, so a bigger family group can live in it, and go to school and go to the private schools as well as go to uni and the rest of it... that should be allowable in a Treaty deal. And, there are 25,000 Aboriginal people living in Melbourne, and only about 2000 that are traditional owners from here, the rest are from all over the country, including in Australia. And some of them will never go home, they'll probably be in these parts for generations. So if we're gonna give them treaty benefits, then there should be an option of doing those benefits where they live. That's a new thing that is going to be hard to win, but I don't see no problem with that at all.



J Janet McGaw 34:48

Look, I could talk with you forever. There's so much knowledge and wisdom you can share, but that's about all we have time for. It was a pleasure talking to you today, Uncle Gary.

U Uncle Gary Murray 35:00

All right thank you, Janet, and everybody else organizing this, it was a pleasure.

J Janet McGaw 35:04

Thank you, listeners, also as always for joining us.