



Reimagining Architecture Through Decolonial Lenses: Insights from Smith, Tuck, and Yang

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How to cite (in APA style):

Lestari, Ayu Putu Utari Parthami., Made Ratna Witari., I Gede Gandhi Silantara. (2024). Reimagining Architecture Through Decolonial Lenses: Insights from Smith, Tuck, and Yang. *Architectural Research Journal*. 4 (2), pp. 34-38.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22225/arj.4.2.2024.34-38>

Abstract—Westernisation in architectural education, in particular, has for a long time eroded indigenous people's appreciation of building and design. This study reintroduces decolonization into architectural discourse by analyzing two key frameworks: Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies and the decolonial theoretical framework by E. Tuck and Wayne Yang. In doing so, the work discusses whether these frameworks are useful in deconstructing and diversifying architectural practices against Eurocentric epistemologies. It shows that the colonial mindset in architectural design has not changed and this paper underscores the necessity of integrating Indigenous peoples' knowledge for culturally appropriate and socially sustainable development. Co-authored by architecture students and professionals, this study maps out how decolonial architectural education and practice are possible. The research therefore is pleading for change in the wheels through the deconstruction of the dominant paradigm and an emancipation of the subordinate voices to perform an art of makeover on the existing architectural constructs.

Keywords: decolonization; eurocentrism; indigenous knowledge

1. Introduction

The built environment is said to be more than a reinforcement of man's ability in engineering and erecting infrastructure but rather a part and parcel of society and its might and past (Mikhelson, et al., 2024; Kose, 2016). Physical space in construction has, over time, been used as a tool. Colonialism, as a language, has pulsed through the built environment, erasing indigenous people and their sovereign dyad between the two types of power (Colombijn, 2022; Flahive, 2022; Boum and Mjahed, 2023).

Some forms of eradicating indigenous architectural identities date back to the colonial era, which came into force in the late 15th century and reached its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries (Stair, 2022). This process went hand in hand with the formation of colonial empires in Africa (Camara, 2020), Asia, America (Okajare, 2016; Subrahmanyam, 2006), and Oceania—where

indigenous people's cultures were eliminated to assert European colonial rule.

The first major break occurred in the mid to late 19th century during industrialization as Western architecture was increasingly associated with modernization and so-called 'progress' at the local level. The colonizers brought and mandated neoclassical, Victorian, or Gothic Revival architectural styles, located today's modern administration buildings, churches, and urban designs throughout colonized territories. These structures of power and civilization, while the indigenous designs, were mere savagery or crude.

Indigenous communities of Australia, the Americas, and Africa had their lands taken away from them and were forced to live in other dwellings (Kumar, 2024); this included traditional architecture like the tipi, the longhouse, adobe dwellings, and mud huts being either destroyed or abandoned. In the same way, in South and Southeast Asia, the colonial masters

adjusted the native local palace, temple, and communal form with architectures typical of colonial power and neo-classical reduced styles like the British colonial bungalows or the Indies architecture.

In the last years, the need for decolonization philosophy has been deemed imperative in several disciplines and these types of contexts remain. Another significant discussion in architectural discourse was the 2014 Venice Biennale Architecture, directed by Rem Koolhaas, which transitioned from focusing on Western architectural masters to local practices and materials; this caused conversations about non-Western societies' contributions to shaping architecture to transpire globally. In the same manner, Other conferences and initiatives like the 2018 conference, Decolonizing Architectural Pedagogy, organized by the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, have offered scholars and practitioners avenues through which they may question the biases architectural education and practice have inherited from the colonial masters.

In the context of architecture, this movement poses to architects and architecture scholars a radical reimagination of the very meaning of design and spatial practice to engage with difference, justice, and equity.

From the previous statements, it is seen that decolonization is the process of liberating and reconstructing colonialism, theories, structure, and practices that prevail in some or the other form in various sectors of life. It surpasses the political act of the decolonial liberation from colonial powers, as well as the ongoing process of decolonial disruption of the epistemological structures in which colonial power dominates. Therefore, the decolonial approach is in a critical and countering position to mainstream knowledge as it attempts to expose the epistemological and ontological vices in mainstream Western knowledge. Where existing theories and methods marginalize non-European ways of knowing as deviant or inferior, the imperative of decolonization is to recognize and embrace the other's form of knowing (Nabaggala, 2021; Seedat, 2023). It intends to loosen decolonial epistemology by subjugating indigenous knowledge and reinstating that which is commonly erased or side-lined.

Decolonization has emerged as an important approach to analysing how colonial power structures are embedded in these delicate dynamics of architecture. These embedded colonial structures have become a focal process for change through recent global movements acknowledging Indigenous people's rights, and cultural representation, and embracing sustainability in the design process. They fundamentally align with emerging architectural practices such as the appreciation of vernacular architecture and formal inclusion of Indigenous knowledge when developing environmentally, socially sustainable built environments. This research aims to bring these movements into closer relation with architectural practice and, in doing so, underline the necessity of decolonial endeavors to

transform design and education.

This emerging opinion calls architects (practical) and theorists to reckon concerning how historiographical and design discourses and spatial practices have been constituted, in part, by colonial epistemologies and, in so doing, have erased or diminished marginalized populations. In this regard, this research paper aims to explore how two foundational articles, Linda T. Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies (Smith, 2021) and E. Tuck and Wayne Yang's Decolonization is Not a Metaphor (Tuck and Yang, 2012), that advance decolonial thought but apply to the decolonization of architecture. These researchers stress the need to make the prejudice and problems of colonialism in architectural practice explicit and contest them; at the same time, they respond to the concentration on the everyday of marginalized populations.

Decolonization, in the practical sense, might, play out as a design that involves and feeds back into local communities as well as embraces Indigenous epistemology and decimates unsustainable and insensitive colonial practices. This also involves a critique of colonial city spatial order, that is, spatial order and segregation from separate areas to monuments that celebrate colonialism. Therefore, decolonizing architecture comes down to the creation of architecture that facilitates the retention of culturally appropriate identity and embraces a culture that responds to general societal needs for equity and social justice in today's built environment.

2. Methods

In this paper, the literature review uses qualitative methods to investigate how the decolonial frameworks proposed by Linda T. Smith, E. Tuck, and W. Yang have been received and how they can be applied in the architecture discourse. The thematic analysis that has been applied corresponds to the following coding scheme: Indigenous epistemology, colonial paradigms, and decolonial disruption in architectural practice.

Using thematic coding, key themes were identified including critiques of Eurocentric epistemologies, knowledge systems, and systems of power; Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainability; and decolonial projects for transformations of architectural pedagogy.

A comparison was also undertaken in an endeavor to compare and contrast these frameworks and their relationships with the current architecture education and profession. These methods guaranteed holistic coverage of the approach to apply decolonization in architectural practice and discussion and discover its weaknesses and further research potentialities.

The source of analysis used in this paper is secondary literature and is limited to peer-reviewed books, journals, book chapters, and other academic papers to develop an understanding of the researchers'

frameworks. In total, 15 other pieces of literature were analysed in this paper, than the primary books: Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples by Smith, and Decolonization is not a metaphor, by Tuck and Yang.

As the paper explores critical emerging discourses; major topics emphasizing indigenous epistemologies are established. It also examines concerns and missing links, including the struggle in articulating decolonial epistemology into deployable architectural designs as well as compromising representation in conventional decolonial architecture education and practice.

3. Results and Discussion

Literature around decolonization is widespread across researchers. At least there are Beyond the Master's Tools?: Decolonizing Knowledge Orders, Research Methods and Teaching by D Bendix, F Müller, A Ziai (2020) (Bendix, et al, 2020), The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options by W Mignolo (2011) (Mignolo, 2011), Decolonising the mind N Wa Thiong'o (1998), Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture by T Ingold (2013) (Ingold, 2013), Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Smith (2000) [13], and Decolonization is not a metaphor by E. Tuck, Wayne Yang (2012) (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

In this literature review, the discussion will be on the decolonial imaginations of architecture put forward by Linda T. Smith (Smith, 2021), E. Tuck, and Wayne Yang. Smith (Tuck and Yang, 2012). The term the kind of 'epistemological violence' colonial powers by Smith wrought on other cultures and systems of knowledge, which have ensnared the discipline of architecture in the past (Smith, 2013). Similarly, Tuck and Yang's work also sensitizes us about the fact that the foundational framework of colonialism calls for the 'disruptive' erasure of coloniality of knowledge and the process of asking about colonialism and how the dominant discourse of architecture does the disciplining of non-western societies (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Smith develops from this perspective when she includes the concept of epistemic violence that is inherent in colonial structures, which does not visibility.

Decolonization must take place at the levels of epistemology, ontology, and axiology by provoking theocratisation and practice by researchers and practitioners to use knowledge forms that embrace Indigenous and oppressed groups. This approach directly challenges cultural biases that have provided the bedrock that defines architecture as a culture and race-indifferent profession.

The following critique of architecture as a

product of colonial ideologies raises the imperative to decolonize architectural education. It demands an approach that goes beyond token respect for difference to the genuine openness to operate in other terms of knowledge. Decolonizing architecture is a thought that breaks the prejudices that have been set for a long in architectural theory and practice and is a chance to give a place and respect to cultural and historical differences inherent in marginalized people. This change is not a matter of simply 'Indigenizing' curricula and learning frameworks but about the realignment of architectural knowledge.

Alongside the dismantling process, Smith, Tuck, and Yang point to the need to draw upon indigenous knowledge systems in design. This entails partly questioning the notion of the exportability of Western theoretical and practical frameworks of architecture and instead beginning to embrace the plurality of cultural, social, and/ or physical environments within which architecture is situated.

An example of defying the assumption that modern Western architectural theories and practices are fully transferable is the intervention of vernacular architecture in modern constructions, especially in areas where traditional construction methods have been developed to fit the environmental and cultural conditions of the respective regions. For example, in tropical climates old-time architecture has elements such as roof eaves, floor space, windows, and ventilation to reduce temperature and humidity. These principles are still violated in the name of introducing modern architectural and confining structures with sophisticated systems like air conditioning, which can, at times, be inappropriate and even unhealthy for the immediate environment.

One other example is the application of adobe construction in arid areas, a technique that Indigenous people have innovated for generations because of the property's insulation and production of sustainably sourced resources. Western approaches may prefer steel or concrete; they may consider adobe culturally and environmentally irrelevant.

Urban planning in the Western context also doesn't consider natural patterns of people's occupation of the territories based on Indigenous or local cultures. For instance, the Balinese housing compound in Indonesia epitomizes communal spatial organization based on meeting places and shared living – something that could be overlooked or replaced with impersonal zoning laws borrowed from the West.

It links up with these local practices as part of learning from them and making all architectural solutions that are provided equally sensitive to needs that are physical, cultural, and environmental.

Furthermore, the frameworks proposed by these researchers pay much attention to the meta-cognition of the architectural profession. These important typologies press architects to acknowledge their contribution to these systems of oppression and to challenge themselves on the coloniality of power in architecture. This involves the active strategic process of breaking down exclusionary norms and cultivating more socially just design counter-hegemonic practices. Therefore, this approach is not only intent on changing how architectural theory and practice are conceived but also aims at the lower and the establishment of an equitable future for the discipline.

Smith, Tuck, and Yang also make a useful contribution to the call for architects to engage in critical self-reflection concerning how the profession and its practitioners have been involved in supporting colonial and racist systems [13], [14]. This means a readiness to challenge colonial legacies that have shaped design and to strive for more equitable design practices.

The books have provided decolonial approaches that are highly significant and useful in dismantling the colonial structure of the postcolonial architectural discipline. Their work shows how architects must engage in critical auto-reflection and seek to contest the paradigms and oppressive practices that have silenced the voices of global societies of colour.

This process will help architects be more sympathetic to Indigenous knowledge and afford more culturally appropriate and environmentally friendly solutions. This is a question of understanding not only the multiple contexts that define the construction of the environment but also the practice of deconstructing colonial epistemology within the architectural professions.

The revival of past building styles and materials, the recognition of cultural and ecological settings will define the spatial systems of dwelling places, and the recognition of the political/postcolonial injustices involved in the architecture of both the physical urban and the more numerate rural spaces. For instance, decolonizing architectural education might imply changing educational paradigms to incorporate marginalized histories from all the continents, especially post-colony, and engaging in self-examination a regard how architecture participated in oppression.

Based on the literature review, both students and professionals in architecture can construct changes by adopting decolonial frameworks within architectural education and practice environments into the transformational process.

In architectural practice, it means addressing decolonisation through engaging architectural students and professionals in the process of re-reading curricula, histories and theories, and in introducing new epistemologies, such as Indigenous ways of knowing and doing architecture. Scholars have embraced this approach as it helps to dismantle Eurocentric frameworks and start to work with design paradigms connected with local culture and practices.

Decolonizing practice in the context of the built environment entails questioning the normative processes of designing, constructing, and delivering professional projects and redefining these through processes of inclusiveness and cultural relevance. These principles should be adopted by the architects and urban planners to engage the respective minorities, especially those excluded from the formal society where the designs are to be implemented in the first place, let alone their dreams and aspirations. They present a constructively integrated manner of designing the built environment that adapts to the cultural and social differences of users.

The study shows that decolonial perspectives involve a more suitable approach that can be used to cope with colonial imprints in architectural training and profession. Some of the most important are, first of all, the leading Eurocentric paradigms continue to prevail over the idea of aesthetic relativism meant to capture the cultural scenarios of design. For example, some of the issues that critics of modern architecture observe include the normally excluded recognition of the vernacular architecture and Indigenous housing typologies that exist and that are deemed to offer sustainable solutions given their resilience. Real-life applications like the specification of local content and communal architecture in Indigenous housing demonstrate the viability of these paradigms to contribute positively to social justice and sustainability.

To some extent, the discussion effectively reorients the readers from the Eurocentric frameworks, but it is important to strengthen the link between theory and praxis. For example, the idea of embedding Indigenous knowledge systems into architectural curricula could entail readjusting paradigms of design studio work in a way that centralises engagement of group work and culturally appropriate answers. Moreover, guidelines of professional practice might include elements of decolonization whereby a local community is consulted during the process of designing a product. These concrete suggestions help fill the gap between research and implementation, and emphasize the importance of decolonial approaches to design critical practice in architecture.

4. Conclusion

Linda T. Smith, E. Tuck, and Wayne Yang's work is an addition to the attempts at indigenous architectural practices. The two provide an important decolonial analysis of European imperialism, which has shaped the architectural profession to date. They challenge architects to work with local people in response to their needs.

It embraces a system of analysing and reframing colonial approaches to design and planning, as well as the representation of the built environment. Predominantly, there has been an alignment between the practice and teaching of architecture with Eurocentric values that integrate European aesthetics, construction materials, and principles, ignoring other world cultures, particularly indigenous peoples.

Combining Indigenous ontologies and design paradigms with the engagement in the colonial and postcolonial philosophies and practices that have colonized non-Eurocentric knowledge systems and cultures; architects can strive for design justice and sustainable design.

Acknowledgment

The authors were introduced to this literature by Smith, Tuck, and Yang by one of his study supervisors at the University of Sheffield, Dr Tanzil Shafique, and would like to thank him so that this publication can be written. The advanced study that forms part of this publication was funded by the Lembaga Pengelolaan Dana Pendidikan-Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency (LPDP) of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia in 2024.

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