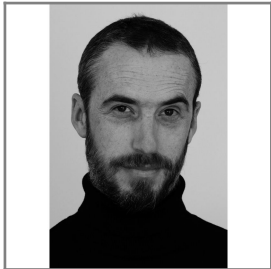


Feyerabend and Decolonisation

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The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in literature on decolonisation of knowledge. The impression often given in recent literature is of wholesale neglect of the concerns of the decolonisation literature in what might be called 'Western thought' of preceding decades. This paper argues that Feyerabend was a notable figure within Western epistemic communities who expressed positions analogous to those of proponents of decolonisation.

The first section presents the most striking contributions from Feyerabend's work that, I suggest, bear on questions of decolonisation. Four specific issues are identified based on those: the curriculum and the role of universities; the inspirational role of student protests; the concept of 'epistemicide'; and, indigenous knowledge systems. The second section suggests a range of limitations of, and weaknesses in, Feyerabend's analysis: no substantive engagement with history or literature on decolonisation; implicitly accepting the claimed inherent association of science, rationalism and various forms of modernity with Western countries and cultures; the (rhetorical) construction of an unnecessary binary choice between science and traditional knowledge systems; underplaying agency through a form of othering; creating an unnecessarily stark binary of Western science and non-Western indigenous knowledge; and, as a consequence of all these, providing no substantive analysis of how science might be integrated with other knowledge systems and cultures. The concluding section provides a brief summary and identifies areas for future work.

Keywords: Feyerabend, decolonisation, indigenous knowledge, scientism, epistemicide

Фейерабенд и деколонизация

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В последнее десятилетие наблюдается бурный рост литературы по деколонизации знания. Создается впечатление, что так называемая «западная мысль» предыдущих десятилетий полностью игнорировала вопросы деколонизации. В данной статье утверждается, что Фейерабенд, будучи заметной фигурой в западной эпистемологии, выражал точку зрения, которая аналогична позиции сторонников деколонизации.

В первой части статьи представлены наиболее яркие положения концепции Фейерабенда, которые касаются вопросов деколонизации. На основе этих положений выделены четыре проблемы: программа обучения и роль университетов; вдохновляющая роль студенческих протестов; концепция «эпистемцида»; системы знаний коренных народов. Во второй части выявляются ограничения и слабые места концепции Фейерабенда: отсутствие серьезного взаимодействия с историей и литературой по деколонизации; имплицитное допуще-



и, как следствие всех этих недостатков, отсутствие основательного анализа того, как наука может быть интегрирована с другими системами знаний и культурами.

Ключевые слова: Фейерабенд, деколонизация, локальное знание, сциентизм, эпистемцид

Introduction

The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in scholarship on, and broader societal interest in, the ‘decolonisation’ of knowledge.¹ This recent literature, however, often gives the impression of wholesale neglect of the concerns of the decolonisation literature in what might be called ‘Western thought’ of preceding decades. Furthermore, some contributions to this literature – and more contributions to associated social movements – have framed decolonisation and modern science as being in inherent opposition to each other.

While the charge of neglect is largely true, it may also be the case that scholarship which did engage with these questions was disregarded or marginalised *at the time* – with the consequence that later scholars would be less likely to be aware of it. The subsequent neglect of critical contributions from within mainstream literatures and Western scholars is not just of interest as a matter of intellectual history: it potentially has substantive import for further intellectual work on these subjects.

Feyerabend, who is the subject of this paper, may be the most striking example from among scholars of philosophy of science. Yet an earlier example can be found in the persona of Bertrand Russell, whose sentiments following his experience teaching in China [Rošker, 2021] pre-empt similar ones on the part of Feyerabend four decades later.

The argument that Feyerabend is best known for concerns the merits of anarchism as applied to philosophy of science, and indeed science itself, based largely on his writings in *Against Method* [Feyerabend, 2010]. The phrase ‘anything goes’ has been taken as representative of his broad epistemological position. This in fact is part misreading and part caricature, but for which Feyerabend nevertheless must take some responsibility because of his sometimes trite choice of language and always deliberate provocations [Shaw, 2017]. The fundamental basis of his argument in philosophy of science challenged the epistemic supremacy assigned to ‘Western science’ in the 20th century and, therefore, its role within and across societies.

This paper examines the significance of Feyerabend’s remarks as regards the imposition of (what he calls) Western science on other societies. These

¹ See Ndlovu-Gatsheni [2018, pp. 43–69] for a valuable effort to provide an overview of key contributors to this literature and its origins.



have been largely neglected in both scholarly and biographical literature on Feyerabend. One exception is the work of Ian Kidd [Kidd, 2016; Brown, Kidd, 2016], who has sought to emphasise the role of the Cold War in shaping some of Feyerabend's views on science, the state and society.² The following description from Brown and Kidd provides a sense of the overlap between Feyerabend's concerns and those of scholarship that emphasises the necessity of 'decolonisation':

What Feyerabend called the 'conquest of abundance' is, at least in part, both a celebration of the cultural and epistemic diversity evinced by the history of human cultures, both 'Northern' and 'Southern', and regret and anger at the erosion of such diversity at the hands of the forceful imperialistic political, economic, and epistemic policies of certain institutions, groups, and traditions from the global North.

Indeed, one reason why Feyerabend urges us to be 'against method' and to bid 'farewell to reason' is because of his sense that these epistemic ideals – of a transculturally legitimate methodological norms and rational values – have been used to justify epistemically, socially, and environmentally ruinous policies, thereby 'conquering' the 'abundance' of the natural and social worlds. [Brown, Kidd, 2016, p. 5]

Another exception is Muller [2021, pp. 196–198] who draws on Feyerabend's work both in warning of the consequences of incentives exacerbating epistemic dogmatism and chauvinism within scientific and intellectual communities, as well as in relation to the implications of such dynamics for such communities in globally 'peripheral', often formerly colonised, societies.

Such observations have nevertheless been made in passing. Remediating the oversight more substantively raises a range of intellectually productive questions, a subset of which are the subject of preliminary analysis here.

The first section presents the most striking contributions from Feyerabend's work that, I suggest, bear on questions of decolonisation. Four specific issues are identified based on those: the curriculum and the role of universities; the inspirational role of student protests; the concept of 'epistemicide'; and, indigenous knowledge systems. The second section suggests a range of limitations of, and weaknesses in, Feyerabend's analysis: no substantive engagement with history or literature on decolonisation; implicitly accepting the claimed inherent association of science, rationalism and various forms of modernity with Western countries and cultures; the (rhetorical) construction of an unnecessary binary choice between science and traditional knowledge systems; underplaying agency through a form of othering; creating an unnecessarily stark binary of Western science and non-Western indigenous knowledge; and, as a consequence of all these, providing no substantive analysis of how

² There are important links to be made between the Cold War and decolonisation but those are outside the scope of the present paper.



science might be integrated with other knowledge systems and cultures.³ The concluding section provides a brief summary and identifies areas for future work.

Feyerabend's Decolonial Philosophy

In his earlier work, Feyerabend was concerned with 'greater tolerance' and 'pluralism' in matters relating to epistemology, as well as pushing back against excessive deference to experts. The core of much of his subsequent, famous work is concerned with the relationship between science and society, and the arguments for reining in science are quite clearly intended to apply to the Western societies in which he had lived. That is reflected in the early version of *Against Method* [Feyerabend, 1970]. In these respects, there is nothing that could be directly related to the concerns of the decolonisation literature.

Yet towards the end of his most famous book, *Against Method*, he made the following remarks which for our purposes merit quoting at length:

From 1958 on I was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of California in Berkeley... In the years around 1964, Mexicans, Blacks, Indians entered the university as a result of new educational policies. There they sat, partly curious, partly disdainful, partly simply confused hoping to get an 'education'... What an opportunity, my rationalist friends told me, to contribute to the spreading of reason and the improvement of mankind! What a marvellous opportunity for a new wave of enlightenment! I felt very differently.

For it dawned on me that the intricate arguments and the wonderful stories I had so far told... might just be dreams, reflections of the conceit of a small group who had succeeded in enslaving everyone else with their ideas. Who was I to tell these people what and how to think?.. Their ancestors had developed cultures of their own, colourful lan-

³ My criticisms here are different from harsher ones such as Rowbottom who, in commenting on the *Tyranny of Science*, complains that: "The work is unrelentingly negative. Yes, scientism is a naïve doctrine. Agreed, it is valuable to curb the excesses of its advocates. But what does Feyerabend give us to put in its place? He writes positively by implication, in his quaint rhetorical flourishes, of 'compassion, love and personal understanding'... But what does he tell us about these things (on which he does not declare, after Wittgenstein, that he must remain silent)? Not a jot. There is no philosophy here. No love of wisdom. There is only a hatred of ignorance." [Rowbottom, 2013]. One might note, for example, that Rowbottom's second-last assertion is patently false, since Feyerabend was at pains to emphasise his love for *different kinds* of wisdom and knowledge such that one of his primary objectives was to condemn the thoughtless or deliberate destruction of other forms of it.



guages, harmonious views of the relation between man and man and man and nature whose remnants are a living criticism of the tendencies of separation, analysis, self-centredness inherent in Western thought. These cultures have important achievements in what is today called sociology, psychology, medicine, they express ideals of life and possibilities of human existence. Yet they were never examined with the respect they deserved...

Now there was much talk of liberation, of racial equality – but what did it mean? Did it mean the equality of these traditions and the traditions of the white man? It did not. Equality meant that the members of different races and cultures now had the wonderful chance to participate in the white man's manias, they had the chance to participate in his science, his technology, his medicine, his politics... Experiences such as these convinced me that intellectual procedures which approach a problem through concepts and abstract from everything else are on the wrong track and I became interested in the reasons for the tremendous power this error has now over minds.

This excerpt touches on wide range of issues: physical dispossession, imperialism, the disparagement and erasure of local knowledge and wisdom, the superficiality of claims to equality, the role of Western universities in relation to oppressed peoples, the role of the philosopher of science in expounding dominant epistemic positions, and so forth. Ultimately, Feyerabend rejects any epistemic hierarchy with Western science and rationality at its pinnacle, and refuses to play his designated role as proselytiser. He extends his endorsement of epistemic equality beyond specific topics, to entire societies and belief systems.

Despite being amongst his most strident of arguments, the views outlined above are almost entirely neglected in the many discussions of Feyerabend's work.⁴ One may speculate that this reflects not just the lack of interest in such views at the time, but also the intellectual concerns of his readers and critics – thereby in some sense further strengthening the points in question.

In this section I briefly discuss four specific topics connecting Feyerabend to the modern decolonisation literature: the role of the curriculum and universities; student movements; indigenous knowledge; and, epistemicide. The list is certainly not exhaustive but serves to demonstrate how Feyerabend's observations as a philosopher of science writing in the 1970s find resonance in the multi-disciplinary decolonisation literature of recent decades.⁵

⁴ Feyerabend's positions on such matters are at best mentioned only in passing in accounts primarily concerned with his contributions to more mainstream philosophy of science [Kidd, 2016; Brown, Kidd, 2016; Muller, 2021].

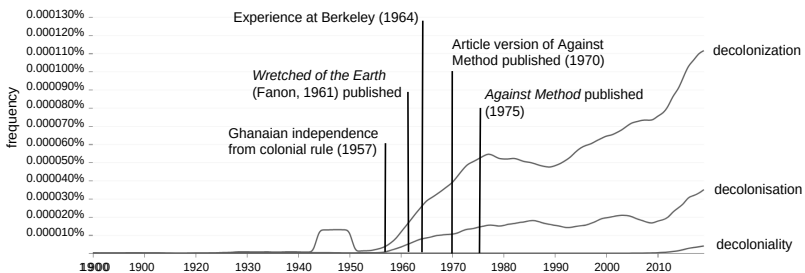
⁵ One issue that bears mentioning in this context, is that Feyerabend appears to have inadequately addressed the actions he was associated with in his youth by virtue of having been drafted into the German military under the Nazi regime.



Curriculum and the Role of Universities

The epiphany that led Feyerabend to his own ‘decolonial turn’ appears to have come not from directly engaging with the scholarship of anti-colonial or postcolonial scholars, or even the political developments at a time in which many formerly-colonised countries were obtaining independence. It came rather more simply from considering the realities of the more diverse university student cohort that faced him in his classroom.⁶ This anecdote and associated arguments are repeated, largely verbatim, in later works such as *Science in a Free Society* [Feyerabend, 1987] and *The Tyranny of Science* [Feyerabend, 1996].

Figure 1 locates Feyerabend’s remarks relative to the literature on decolonisation, by overlaying a few key dates on a graph of the frequency of occurrence of terms related to decolonisation in publications indexed by Google using its ‘Ngram’ tool. It shows that Feyerabend’s experience and remarks occurred at a time of heightened interest in decolonisation after the Second World War, but decades before the more recent surge in interest in this topic.



Source: Author’s own construction using Google Ngram 2024

As a societally-designated locus of knowledge generation, transmission and critical engagement, the university plays a crucial role in either reproducing or challenging dominant epistemologies. A recurrent theme in the decolonisation literature has been critique of the university, alongside analysis of the origins and demographic composition of its faculty, and the content of its curricula. Indeed at present the predominant concern regarding decolonisation is that of the curriculum. Whether responding to the substance of calls for decolonisation, or institutional

⁶ This takes Feyerabend’s account at face value. As noted in the conclusion, the origins and development of Feyerabend’s decolonial sentiments warrant greater attention from intellectual biographers.



imperatives, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines including philosophy and the physical sciences ask: “how can we decolonise our curriculum?”⁷

Feyerabend criticises the content of standard curricula: on the scientific method, on rationalism, and on the history of thought. Even a comparative moderate like Kuhn [1996] had noted the role of textbooks in presenting (misleading) narratives in which the history of scientific thought and discovery led towards the presently-dominant paradigm in a linear fashion. Feyerabend could be viewed as, in effect, making a similar argument but in relation to an even broader category: not just the history of science but the history of thought, knowledge and culture.

Student Protests

Staying with the university, another important influence on Feyerabend’s work – shifting it in more radical directions – appear to have been student protests.⁸ Based on unpublished correspondence between Feyerabend and Imre Lakatos, Martin [2019] suggests that student movements and protests had an important influence on Feyerabend at the time of writing *Against Method*. He suggests that, “there is archival evidence for the way Feyerabend was moved – decisively left, it seems – by and in sympathy with leftist student movements” [Martin, 2019, p. 22].

Student protests have also played a notable role in the renewed interest in decolonisation, particularly within higher education [Ndelu, Dlakavu, Boswell, 2017; Ahmed, 2020; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Daniel, Platzky Miller, 2022].

However, there is no inherent link between the experience of such events and a corresponding sympathetic shift in thinking or sentiment. In the case of philosophy of science, Martin contrasts the effect on Feyerabend with that on Lakatos:

The dramatic and highly visible student protests on their own university campuses moved these thinkers in opposite directions regarding their analyses of scientific method and reason, entrenching Lakatos’s view that there must be an overarching rationality to the natural sciences, and

⁷ This author has been on the receiving end of such queries for almost a decade, from disciplines ranging from economics to physics. Ultimately the answers are best found by those who know the areas of inquiry best, but more can be done to provide a common framework in which such endeavours can be understood.

⁸ In Europe, some scholars have linked decolonisation to Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the United States, whereas BLM is largely considered a separate, albeit related, issue by those involved in the movement emanating from ‘RhodesMustFall’ and ‘Fees-MustFall’ movements in South Africa.



encouraging Feyerabend to push some limits in the denial of that claim, as Feyerabend saw scientific rationality as a potentially oppressive threat to scientific creativity and to human freedom more generally. [Martin, 2019, p. 28]

These observations further bolster the suggestion that there is a substantive congruity between Feyerabend's philosophy of science and knowledge, and the core propositions of the literature on epistemic decolonisation.

Epistemicide

One of the most influential concepts in this literature is that of *epistemicide*, which its originator describes as:

epistemicide, the murder of knowledge. Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it. In the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide. The loss of epistemological confidence that currently afflicts modern science has facilitated the identification of the scope and gravity of the epistemicides perpetrated by hegemonic Eurocentric modernity [Santos, 2016, p. 92].

The author's explicit philosophical inspiration comes from elsewhere, yet the resonance with Feyerabend's arguments is striking. Consider the following paragraph from *Against Method*:

I wanted to know how intellectuals manage to get away with murder – for it is murder, murder of minds and cultures that is committed year in year out at schools, universities, educational missions in foreign countries. The trend must be reversed, I thought, we must start learning from those we have enslaved for they have much to offer and, at any rate, they have the right to live as they see fit even if they are not as pushy about their rights and their views as their Western conquerors have always been.

In the postcolonial and decolonial literature these sentiments have a longer history. Besides more recent scholars such as Thiong'o [Thiong'o, 1998], Santos draws on Fanon [Fanon, 1963; 1967] for related insights, but one could add Nkrumah [Nkrumah, 1970], Rodney [Rodney, 1972] and Biko [Biko, 1987] among many others who wrote before or in parallel to Feyerabend. Thus we have a strong connection between the realisations that Feyerabend appears to have arrived at largely independently, albeit under the influence of student radicals and the successes of anti-colonialism, and an important strand of the decolonisation literature.



For Feyerabend, the framing of modern science as being at the pinnacle of an epistemic hierarchy necessarily plays a crucial role in the disengagement and erasure of alternative ways of understanding the world. The critique of the former, and its positioning as the consequence of a long path towards cultural superiority, inexorably carries over to a critique of the latter. The imposition of material control is facilitated by, and facilitates, the imposition of epistemic superiority.

Unfortunately, much as Feyerabend's links to decolonisation have been neglected, so too are such potential linkages in this and other biographical accounts. Nevertheless, Martin's study further confirms the importance of Feyerabend's encounter, within the university, with peoples of different origins and quite different concerns.

Indigenous Knowledge

Unsurprisingly, one of the predominant concerns of the literature on decolonisation of knowledge is the protection and validation of what is referred to as 'indigenous knowledge' or indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). A leading example is the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith entitled, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* [Smith, 2012; Lee, Evans, 2022]. The title itself reflects a remarkable resonance with Feyerabend's *Against Method*.

Consider the following principles proposed by Feyerabend [2002, pp. 39–40]:

R2: Societies dedicated to freedom and democracy should be structured in a way that gives all traditions equal opportunities, i.e. equal access to federal funds, educational institutions, basic decisions. Science is to be treated as one tradition among many, not as a standard for judging what is and what is not, what can and what cannot be accepted.

R3: Democratic societies should give all traditions equal rights and not just equal opportunities.

Thus, Feyerabend proposes equal status for what is often referred to as indigenous or traditional knowledge. The influence of that strong position can be found in the resolutions of the International Council for Science (ICSU). Feyerabend features in an ICSU report endorsing greater recognition of traditional knowledge:

The main reason is a growing awareness of the extreme inner diversity of science. Different sciences are much more dissimilar to each other than previously thought, and there is little hope to expose the unity of science by an appeal to a unique scientific method or any other means (see, e.g., [Feyerabend, 1993]).



Very similar sentiments to those of Feyerabend on traditional knowledge can be found in the work of scholars such as Odora Hoppers and Tuhiwai Smith [Smith, 2012; Lee, Evans, 2022] and in more recent literature on epistemic injustice [Koskinen, Rolin, 2019]. Unsurprisingly, a range of scholars have connected the epistemic injustices or epistemicide perpetrated in relation to indigenous knowledge with the role of the university [Odora Hoppers, 2000; 2001; Bhabra et al., 2018; Santos, 2017].

Limitations and Weaknesses in Feyerabend's Account

Intellectual developments in philosophy and other disciplines currently reflect favourably upon Feyerabend's stance, more so relative to that of his counterparts. Nevertheless, the contributions outlined above also exhibit a range of weaknesses and limitations.⁹

The first and perhaps most obvious of these is Feyerabend's failure to engage with any substantive scholarship or other literature on the decolonisation question. There is no need to elaborate that point, though it remains to be confirmed in more detailed biographical analysis.

Linked to this first failure is his tendency to engage in what might be called 'well-intentioned othering'. Mirroring the tone of the excerpt from *Against Method*, he makes the following remarks in a letter to Lakatos:

Today I saw my first class, about 300 people... there are a lot of black people... I do not know anything about their wishes and interests and I do not know how to talk so that I do not force my interests upon them... ([Feyerabend, 1968], cited in [Martin, 2019, p. 21]).

⁹ My criticisms here are different from harsher ones such as Rowbottom who, in commenting on the *Tyranny of Science*, complains that: "The work is unrelentingly negative. Yes, scientism is a naïve doctrine. Agreed, it is valuable to curb the excesses of its advocates. But what does Feyerabend give us to put in its place? He writes positively by implication, in his quaint rhetorical flourishes, of 'compassion, love and personal understanding'... But what does he tell us about these things (on which he does not declare, after Wittgenstein, that he must remain silent)? Not a jot. There is no philosophy here. No love of wisdom. There is only a hatred of ignorance." [Rowbottom, 2013] One might note, for example, that Rowbottom's second-last assertion is patently false, since Feyerabend was at pains to emphasise his love for *different kinds* of wisdom and knowledge such that one of his primary objectives was to condemn the thoughtless or deliberate destruction of other forms of it. There are other unfortunate flaws in Rowbottom's review but the details need not detain us here.



Feyerabend's stance is admirable relative to what appears to have been that of many of his peers, who appear to have encouraged him to proselytise about Western science and rationalism to students from colonised and oppressed groups.¹⁰ He is honest about his ignorance and suitably concerned about the potential harms of imposing a set of views on these students – whether favourable to Western science or not.

However, in both excerpts cited in which Feyerabend refers to the new demographic of students his description both homogenises them and renders them impenetrable: their histories, cultures, knowledge systems and purpose are simply deemed inaccessible. Of course, such extreme relativism is not unique to Feyerabend and in recent times has emerged in a different form within 'standpoint epistemology'. Yet it seems an unjustifiably extreme position.

This assertion of inaccessibility may be the source of another weakness in Feyerabend's position: the presentation of an unnecessarily extreme, binary choice between Western science or traditional knowledge. I do not believe Feyerabend would actually endorse such a binary position, since other parts of his writing suggest a more nuanced position. For example, his emphasis on the *imposition* of certain ways of thinking reflects a view that peoples unfamiliar with a particular, perhaps dominant, epistemic position be given the opportunity to engage with it on their own terms. Nevertheless, in his remarks that are most clearly linked to topics that arise in the modern decolonisation literature, Feyerabend is somewhat guilty of encouraging what I have elsewhere suggested are fatally flawed inclinations to reject 'Western science' in its entirety.

The association of the West with science and rationalism is itself somewhat problematic.¹¹ Feyerabend recognises the insights within knowledge systems of other societies. Yet in his rhetoric he appears to frame those as separate from Western science, rather than overlapping with it. The role of scholarship in North Africa and the Middle East in contributing to the development of what is often referred to as 'Western science' is well-established. And the contributions of scholars from a wide range of colonised, oppressed or marginalised societies and groups to more modern developments is increasingly being unearthed and recognised. A more nuanced point is that no scholar can be said to have convincingly established the claim that something like Western science

¹⁰ It would be interesting to know more of the backgrounds of the students Feyerabend refers to. Were the 'black' students solely African American, or were some from other parts of the world? The global positioning of African Americans in the 1960s being quite different to that of black people living in African countries, albeit that there was important efforts to forge solidarity between these groups.

¹¹ Preston [Preston, 2016] has raised a different set of concerns with Feyerabend's account of the development of Western rationalism.



would not, or could not, have developed in other societies; thus to frame Western culture, science and knowledge as *inherently* intertwined may risk the same error as those who frame science as a unique outcome of Western cultural superiority.

Finally, much as he is guilty of homogenising the new students in his classes, so too is Feyerabend culpable of denying a certain degree of agency and epistemic sophistication. He does not, it seems, think to inquire what it is that the students hope to obtain from attending his classes – or Berkeley as a whole. If it is to imbibe the narrative of Western superiority and the supremacy of the scientific method, would it be appropriate to deny them that? Would it not be paternalistic to do so? A more nuanced version of this concern is to consider the possibility that such students may be capable of framing Feyerabend's lectures in the very same way that he does, and therefore position them appropriately relative to the knowledge systems they are familiar with (assuming those are not the same). This is not to say that a lecturer has no duty to avoid the sins that give Feyerabend his doubts, but rather to recognise that a student may be sufficiently equipped *ex ante* to know they are the subject of proselytising. And an alternative to not doing so would be to begin the process with a brief aside locating it relative to the concerns Feyerabend outlines.

As a consequence of these limitations and others, Feyerabend's position lacks substance and nuance. And it tells us nothing about the many ways in which science might be integrated with other knowledge systems and cultures. As just one example, consider the case of the African philosopher Paulin Hountondji. In his analysis of what he refers to as 'scientific dependency', Hountondji is not primarily concerned with the imposition of the scientific way of thinking *per se* [Hountondji, 1990]. Rather, he is concerned with *how* it was imposed and the associated consequences that render African scholars and their countries perpetual dependents on knowledge generated in the North. His concern is not with whether a microscope is useful to the African scholar or citizen, but rather with the fact that one had never been manufactured on the African continent:

This phenomenon can be observed in a variety of ways. First, as far as equipment is concerned, not only the most sophisticated, but even the simplest technical apparatuses in our laboratories are made in the North. We have never produced a microscope. We do not master even the first step in the chain – the making of research instruments, the production of the means of production. [Ibid., p. 10]

Such a perspective is not precluded by Feyerabend's broader arguments and commitments, but rather appears to be excluded by his simplistic and overly hasty rhetorical assertions.



As noted at the outset of this section: all these weaknesses and limitations can be addressed within Feyerabend's own framework. That, however, must be the subject of separate work.¹²

Conclusion

Above I have sought to show that Feyerabend made statements about the nature of knowledge and the history of Western scientific imperialism (or scientism) that resonate with subsequent scholarly and popular thought on decolonisation, yet those contributions and the associated linkages have been almost entirely neglected. The discussion above relies only on excerpts from Feyerabend's most well-known, published works. It would be valuable if subsequent, detailed biographical work on Feyerabend's thought were to give this topic explicit consideration when examining his lesser-known works and correspondence (published or unpublished).

This is not, I suggest, merely of historical interest. It illustrates the potential for connecting deep and substantive debates in 'mainstream' philosophy of science and knowledge with the concerns of decolonial thinkers and movements. Such connections have been made in more recent decades with what have traditionally been less mainstream literatures, such as standpoint theory [Harding, 1986], black feminist thought [Collins, 1986] and feminist philosophy of science more broadly [Longino, 2002], contributors to the sociology of scientific knowledge such as Latour and Woolgar [1986], alongside more recent strands of literature based on concepts such as epistemic injustice [Fricker, 2007]. Yet there is a sense in which these connections are tenuous, haphazard or incidental. Feyerabend's work, I suggest, bolsters the possibility of a closer, more deliberate connection between fundamental questions in philosophy of science, epistemology and epistemic decolonisation.

Feyerabend's contributions themselves are, however, subject to a number of limitations and weaknesses. Many of these likely arise from the primary one: namely that he failed to substantively elaborate on his assertions. Among the consequences of that were a wholesale lack of engagement with extant scholarship on related issues, underplaying the agency of individuals from colonised or oppressed societies, and the construction of a stark binary choice between oppressive and harmful Western science or local, indigenous knowledge systems. An alternative approach, benefiting from progress in societal and scholarly thinking since Feyerabend's time, might develop these ideas more substantively by considering

¹² Muller [2021] provides a brief set of thoughts as to what such a more nuanced approach might look like.



how members of colonised and oppressed societies may integrate modern scientific thought with their historical knowledge systems – in a manner that best serves their societies. There is much more work to be done along these lines. And I would suggest that it is the inevitable path to which these literatures converge.

Feyerabend himself might have resisted this conclusion to the extent that it may, in his view, seek to ‘impose too general an organising structure’ on such questions. The reality is that modern societies cannot escape the confrontation between the forces Feyerabend feared and what remains of their own knowledge systems, cultures and histories. And humanity may not be able to afford much longer the failure to integrate a broader range of worldviews into the conduct, governance and use of science.

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