

The Illusion of Absolute Knowledge in Cultural Studies

Lahoua El Oualid¹, Dr, Nadia Smaïhi²

¹Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University (Algeria)

²University Batna1 (Algeria)

The Author's E-mail: walidbarac@hotmail.com¹, nadia.smaïhi@univ-batna.dz²

Received: 06/2023

Published: 12/2023

Abstract

The present study contends that humanities and cultural studies research reflect the opinions and views of the researchers rather than providing conclusive information regarding social interactions and cultural surroundings. Because knowledge is influenced by context and perspective, it is crucial to critically examine our own position, acknowledge biases, and reevaluate methodologies. Failing to do so would perpetuate the fallacy of absolute knowledge ingrained in scholarly tradition. In addition to challenging this fallacy, a relational theory of knowledge allows for a fresh perspective on issues of substitution and objectification. Is it always the case that those being studied view their researchers as autonomous and authoritative? While it may seem unlikely that this relational gap can be easily bridged, this study identifies it as a point of tension. The presentation and organization of information in academic inquiry are subjects of debate. There have been allegations against the humanities and cultural studies for presenting partial findings. The formulation of research inquiries is shaped by the researcher's intentions. Cultural studies stresses the importance of both the queries and the responses. This underscores that interpretation, rather than objective truth, is our main focus. We are not just purveyors of information; our creation of knowledge is affected by preconceived notions.

Keywords: knowledge, absolute knowledge, Cultural Studies.

Regul Sci. TM 2023; 9(2): 3825 - 3831

DOI: doi.org/10.18001/TRS.9.2.244

1. Introduction

When we delve into the realms of belief and knowledge, we often presuppose a universal and complete objectivity. We have a certain faith that this kind of belief or knowledge accurately reflects the reality of the world and the nature of humanity. The current research aims to challenge that presumption because, in reality, absolute belief and knowledge may be nothing more than the grand illusions of philosophers over the past 2500 years. Building on this perspective, as it is widely accepted in the field of cultural studies, cultural studies itself acknowledges a power/knowledge approach. Why should the methodology and epistemology of its investigation assume an absolute and objective form of knowledge?

It is of significance to examine whether and in what manner Anglo-European philosophy embodied an unethical Eurocentric superiority. In this context, the discourse style is Orientalist-Western, focusing on the Self and the Other. Additionally, it is crucial to incorporate the notions of truth and the methods for establishing truthfulness, as well as resolving the dilemmas of understanding and existence (Salzmann-Erikson2024). Post-structuralism also plays a role in challenging the establishment of absolute and impartial knowledge, positing that knowledge is only relative and constructed. It appears to be a resurgence of the epistemological query, either within or in opposition to the lineage of theoretical thinking (Vasegh et al., 2022). As these inquiries are revisited from varying perspectives, the issues surrounding Western hegemonic knowledge and culture appear to be called into question. Individuals from a particular culture also have a tendency to perceive the world and themselves as relatively unchanging resultant entities.

2. Foundations of Cultural Studies

The evolution of cultural studies did not occur in isolation; it has progressed over time and drawn from specific knowledge foundations. Academic wisdom and interdisciplinary studies have been integral to the field from its inception. As a domain of scholarly exploration, cultural studies holds a distinctive place within the social sciences. The anthropological inquiries that influenced the initial iterations of cultural studies were centered on the observation and subsequent portrayal of cultures and tribal communities (Goddard et al., 2021). The observer's objective was to present an unbiased account of tribal customs and practices, free from value judgments and assumptions. A central focus of these early anthropological investigations was the issue of meaning within tribal societies.

The acknowledgment of the subjective and culturally relative nature of knowledge and science formed the foundational basis for the early stages of cultural studies. A shift towards a more humanistic and relativistic approach characterized the later years, with terms like "hegemony" and "mediatization" supplanting "structure" and "determination." This shift suggests a move away from the overly structuralist focus of earlier work towards a more historically inclined perspective (Briscoe et al.2021). The burgeoning research in cultural studies has led to a diverse range of descriptors, reflecting the broadened disciplinary and interdisciplinary boundaries of the field. These labels indicate a broader shift in perspective on culture and identity, which is largely a response to the perceived neglect of "interest" and "power" in conventional sociological and anthropological analysis.

2.1. Key Concepts and Theories

Cultural analysis frequently functions within the framework of cultural hegemony. In their daily routines, individuals embody ideas and beliefs rooted in ideology, necessitating the involvement of an established and surplus ideological apparatus. Put differently, the individual must be molded into a subject through coercive measures or extensive apparatuses. This process is referred to as interpellation. Thus, in the context of cultural analysis, neither truth nor objectivity can be achieved, as everyone perceives the world from the standpoint of the subject, a standpoint deeply entrenched in culture, ideology, and knowledge (Marginson & Xu, 2023).

In this perspective, reality is perceived as a web of representation, constantly tied to history and culture. As everything is a form of representation, there is no direct, unfiltered perception or

concept of reality (Luna & Dowd-Urbe, 2020). By asserting that knowledge is never impartial, as it is always influenced or influenced by power dynamics, cultural analysis challenges essentialist interpretations of knowledge, as well as notions of the absolute and transcendentalism. Power is not only repressive, but also constructive, enabling, and productive: it functions through us. What is crucial here is the interplay between culture and ideology – the interpretation or portrayal of things in culture, according to this theory, shapes the connection between culture and our beliefs, practices, customs, collective ideas, and systems of representation. Both are concerned with how the interpretation of events, texts, or other meaningful practices shifts in accordance with social, cultural, and political influences.

3. Challenges to Absolute Knowledge

The most profound challenge arose from philosophical theories such as postmodernism or New Historicism, or historicism. These theories intensified the recognition of the relativity of values and morals within each explanation of knowledge, or within the discourse of the time in postmodern theories. All of these epistemological positions began to argue that there is no absolute "Truth" at all, challenging the prevailing view of rationality paradigms. They no longer adhere to the concept of a single reality, but rather to the existence of multiple realities that shape discourses, or conversely, one reality always shaping the other (Price, 2021). Consequently, they assert that "there is no truth" that is "neutral" in any research that would impartially examine objects or subjects. The discredited "Objectivity" is supplanted by contextualisms and multiple subjectivities.

The researcher refutes both assertions that Immanuel Kant had uncovered "The End of History" in his a priori assurance, and that others reveal deeper truth and condemn the hypocritical modern ideology of "L'histoire éternelle." Without opposing relativism in opposition to objectivity or truths to values, the researcher resists or does not accept that relativism generally but automatically replaces the consensus model (Spencer & Carel, 2021). The existence of conflicts regarding intellectual values within and outside academia indicates a variety not of values but ways to judge. The credible voices within the "Hard Core" are in their own perspective edited and interpretive, as are they in the perspectives of the disagreements, collisions, or repressions. The researcher neither rejects any sort of "prejudices" nor is obsessed with an absolute "Truth" belief. The researcher and the biculturalism beyond reject the mechanistic view of cybernetics.

3.1. Postmodernism and Relativism

Under the sway of postmodernist thought, a strand of skepticism has emerged regarding the unquestionable nature of knowledge, advocating for the rejection of absolute knowledge. This critique of absolute knowledge is perceived as a significant and pioneering aspect of postmodernism, as it reinstates the significance of culture in the acquisition of knowledge and unveils the unforeseen methods used to perpetuate the facade of knowledge's absolute nature, while also dispelling the illusion of such a nature (Pérez-González, 2020).

The postmodern mindset, characterized by its skepticism towards overarching narratives and its belief in the fluid and multifaceted nature of meanings, cautioned against making bold claims about truth. It was acutely aware that such claims would not go unnoticed, particularly in comparison to those made by other cultures (Caron, 2021). The disparities in truth claims across cultures, stemming from differences in language, presented a challenge in terms of coherence and

organization. How could these discrepancies be reconciled, and what impact would they have on other cultures?

Acknowledging the ever-changing nature of cultures and the resulting diversity in perspectives, many philosophers have embraced cultural relativism as both a philosophical stance and a methodological approach in their cultural studies. This acknowledgment leads to the understanding that events and phenomena are perceived differently by various cultures, each having its own valid realities that must be respected and comprehended within their unique context. This pluralistic interpretation is rooted in postmodernism, which emphasizes the importance of cultural relativism in recognizing the global interconnectedness of the world (Tubadji, 2020). By considering cultural relativism, scholars have expanded their assessment of human culture, taking into account the nature of knowledge, a concept often overlooked in traditional epistemological frameworks.

4. The Role of Perspective and Bias in Cultural Studies

The acquisition of knowledge in cultural studies is heavily shaped by perspective and bias, both on an individual and collective level. Each observer introduces their own prejudices when constructing cultural knowledge. Whether in collecting information, interpreting data, or examining cultural occurrences, researcher bias seeps into every facet of the procedure. Reflexivity necessitates that researchers divulge the circumstances of their research to allow for self-evaluation. This process of examination can also be employed to cultural artifacts and occurrences, unveiling distinct interpretations when seen from deliberately different standpoints (Arregle et al.2021).

Self-critique also offers an opportunity to uncover and delineate alternative aspects in a phenomenon. Revealing the researcher's viewpoint can yield significant potential. When contemplating one's own role, or the influence of personal biases in analysis or interpretation, it is not simply a matter of discovering new evidence, but rather a wealth of information and perspectives that were previously overlooked. When researchers use their privileged position to conduct exclusive research or promote particular cultural or political agendas, it raises ethical concerns within the field of sociology. When standard research practices are used to favor certain individuals over others, it poses a threat to the democratic tradition of social science (Gray and Mehra2021). Introspective and interpretative work, especially among like-minded researchers, may appear inconsequential from a democratic liberal standpoint, as acknowledged by the authors. They recognize the benign nature of their own research endeavors.

The adaptability of research methodology and methods is essential for accommodating various types of research, researchers, and subjects. A multi-strategy approach, akin to the pluralistic perspective in the natural sciences, allows for the consideration of diverse individual truths, all of which are subject to rigorous criteria (Lomazzi & Seddig, 2020). Methodological techniques such as autoethnography, advanced digital voice capturing methods, and self-ethnography offer valuable insights, but their implementation requires meticulous planning and thorough peer review to prevent shortcuts and legacies that could have far-reaching societal implications. It is imperative to avoid allowing the reflexive style to give rise to hidden assumptions or intellectual pandering. Embracing reflexivity is part of the broader acknowledgment that attaining absolute knowledge in an unattainable goal (Jefferson, 2021). The recognition of the fallibility of the individual

conducting research has been overlooked in traditional sociology, yet it is of utmost importance to acknowledge that errors and misunderstandings are inevitable, making research a cumulative process that is subject to communal critique.

5. Implications for Research and Practice

The contention that our 'knowledge' is merely an 'illusion of wholeness' carries profound implications. In light of disputes, misunderstandings, and inadvertent errors, it becomes evident that comprehensive understanding of intricate subjects is unattainable, leading to findings and insights that are not fully justifiable. How might these considerations impact cultural studies research and practice? Firstly, recognizing knowledge as inherently limited and relational prompts a reevaluation of our methodological approaches. Ethnography, interviews, cross-cultural dialogue circles, focus groups, historical analysis, archival work, and textual/cultural analysis do not yield 'objects' with predetermined nature and properties (Elgendy et al., 2022). Furthermore, reporting these results does not produce 'generalized findings' but instead invites diverse interpretations.

Despite the prevailing discourse on 'interdisciplinarity', many scholars seek to capture the essence of their subjects without delving into how image and sound are experienced in people's life-worlds. Given the pervasive influence of popular media and the growing diversity in society, there is a pressing need for interdisciplinary studies of sound, image, language, and more, engaging a community of practitioner-theorists from various fields and lifestyles. Moreover, this perspective prompts a reconsideration of the 'field' and the 'interview', with implications for learning and teaching. Addressing the preliminary implications of illusory completeness for education, we are prompted to ponder whether research and education should be aligned or distinct. This stance also underscores the need for more ethical and responsible research practices and dissemination, as well as the imperative for cultural institutions, policy, and practices to be adaptive and inclusive, accommodating a diversity of knowledge and viewpoints (Lin et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

From the various perspectives presented, a challenge to the notion of absolute truth in knowledge arises. This is evident in the discussions on cultural understanding, knowledge generation, and theoretical frameworks, as well as in the acknowledgment of complicity and limited viewpoints as both a method and an ethical stance. Cultures intersect and clash, with their boundaries being complex and shaped by history and time. While we acknowledge these complexities, we can only grasp knowledge as incomplete, as genuine as it may be, yet always evolving and requiring reassessment (Fazey et al.2020). A cultural studies approach must adapt and refine its knowledge creation. This is particularly evident in post-colonial discussions and in European cultural studies research that encompasses tendencies of 'othering' and racist evaluations. We must heed the critique of power dynamics and the recognition of the historical construction of Western cultures, acknowledging that all knowledge is decentralized.

Hence, exchanges among diverse scholars within a global academic community may result in a collective and negotiated understanding of knowledge—thus, fostering a dialogic approach to knowledge creation that contributes to an ongoing and unrestricted process of deepening (Kellner, 2020) . As evidenced in this paper, the field of cultural studies is too vast and intricate to be governed by a single method. In addition to promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, scholars are

urged to devise their own instruments within established and tested methodologies. Rather than prescribing a set approach, these conceptual tools aid in cultivating partnerships within a research team or community. In the absence of a robust methodology aimed at unraveling complexity, it is the group and its interaction with the environment that guides the direction of the research. Moreover, the paper raises several unresolved issues that warrant further exploration. These inquiries can be pursued in future publications. Ultimately, we anticipate that the systematization of effective methodologies will foster future connections across content and regional literature, contributing to the advancement of the field, its heritage, and contemporary relevance.

References

1. Arregle, J. L., Chirico, F., Kano, L., Kundu, S. K., Majocchi, A., & Schulze, W. S. (2021). Family firm internationalization: Past research and an agenda for the future. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52(6), 1159–1198. [springer.com](https://www.springer.com)
2. Briscoe, J. P., Kaše, R., Dries, N., Dysvik, A., Unite, J. A., Adeleye, I., ... & Zikic, J. (2021). Here, there, & everywhere: Development and validation of a cross-culturally representative measure of subjective career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 130, 103612. [ssrn.com](https://www.ssrn.com)
3. Caron, J. E. (2021). Satire as the comic public sphere: Postmodern “truthiness” and civic engagement. [HTML]
4. Elgendy, N., Elragal, A., & Päiväranta, T. (2022). DECAS: A modern data-driven decision theory for big data and analytics. *Journal of Decision Systems*. tandfonline.com
5. Fazey, I., Schöpke, N., Caniglia, G., Hodgson, A., Kendrick, I., Lyon, C., ... & Saha, P. (2020). Transforming knowledge systems for life on Earth: Visions of future systems and how to get there. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 70, 101724. [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)
6. Goddard, V. A., Llobera, J. R., & Shore, C. (2021). Introduction: The anthropology of Europe. *The Anthropology of Europe*. [HTML]
7. Gray, L., & Mehra, B. (2021). Going against the current of hegemonic “white-IST” discourse: A doctoral program journey from critical student+ guide perspectives. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 62(2), 182–200. utpjournals.press
8. Jefferson, T. (2021). Stuart Hall, conjunctural analysis and cultural criminology: A missed moment. [HTML]
9. Kellner, D. (2020). Media culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics in the contemporary moment. [HTML]
10. Lin, C., Skufca, J., & Partch, R. E. (2020). New insights into prediction of weak π – π complex association through proton-nuclear magnetic resonance analysis. *BMC Chemistry*. [springer.com](https://www.springer.com)
11. Lomazzi, V., & Seddig, D. (2020). Gender role attitudes in the international social survey programme: Cross-national comparability and relationships to cultural values. *Cross-Cultural Research*. [ssoar.info](https://www.ssoar.info)
12. Luna, J. K., & Dowd-Urbe, B. (2020). Knowledge politics and the Bt cotton success narrative in Burkina Faso. *World Development*. [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)
13. Marginson, S., & Xu, X. (2023). Hegemony and inequality in global science: Problems of the center-periphery model. *Comparative Education Review*. [ox.ac.uk](https://www.ox.ac.uk)

14. Pérez-González, L. (2020). 'Is climate science taking over the science?': A corpus-based study of competing stances on bias, dogma and expertise in the blogosphere. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. [nature.com](https://www.nature.com)
15. Price, R. (2021). Postmodernism as theory and history. *Languages of Labour*. [HTML]
16. Salzmänn-Erikson, M. (2024). The intersection between logical empiricism and qualitative nursing research: A post-structuralist analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 19(1), 2315636. [tandfonline.com](https://www.tandfonline.com)
17. Spencer, L., & Carel, H. (2021). 'Isn't Everyone a Little OCD?': The epistemic harms of wrongful depathologization. *Philosophy of Medicine*. pitt.edu
18. Tubadji, A. (2020). Value-free analysis of values: A culture-based development approach. *Sustainability*. [mdpi.com](https://www.mdpi.com)
19. Vasegh, M., Mohammadi, A., & Heshmati, J. (2022). The criticism of bases and claims of post-structural geography. *GeoJournal*. [HTML]