

Challenging World Wars' epistemology of Existentialism in Selected Western and South Asian War Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to challenge and set out critique, interrogation, and reframing of dominant World Wars' Epistemology of Existentialism of in selected South Asian and Western war fiction through the Indigenous and decolonial lens by aligning it to the theoretical orientation of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Research and Indigenous people. One of the Research objective is to examine the way dominant Western war narratives shape west-centric epistemology of Existentialism in Western war fiction, A Farewell to Arms by the way marginalizing or ignoring Indigenous perspectives of war. This research also aims to cross-examine the way South Asian war experience from Indigenous perspectives offers different narrative and epistemologies in the novels Across the Black Waters by adopting alternative ways of knowing war. By emphasizing relationality, material purpose, and epistemic justice, Indigenous war literature like reconceptualizes war and highlights that war literature is far from a neutral intellectual activity rather a deeply political and epistemologically charged engagement. In this sense, war literature is not merely a record of human conflict but a site of debate over historical memory epistemological legitimacy.

Keywords: Existentialism, Epistemic Decoloniality, War Narrative, Reframing, Indigenous War Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The epistemological West-centric term of "Existentialism" has long been a championed construct of existentialist literature in the context of war, particularly. This epistemology of war literature is not a universal truth but a Euro-American-centric epistemological construct that is production of a specific, racial, historical and cultural location. The global application and ramification of Existentialism in war literature has been challenged in this research by adopting Indigenous research theoretical lens grounded in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. In literature, the concept of Existentialism is often developed through characters who experience personal sufferings, war and death. As result of these experiences these characters learn that life offers no resolution or cosmic justice. This existential epistemic concept is embedded profoundly in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), wherein war is not presented within the context of physical-description merely but with presentation of moral and spiritual collapse as well. The war epistemology of the Existentialism emerges through the protagonist, Fredric Henry in *A Farewell to the Arms* whose experiences develop existential trauma as result of their war engagements. In Western Existential war-narratives, the war is shown not as a political or colonial event, but as a metaphysical confusion with global application built on the personal experiences of white male soldiers while silencing the feelings

and war encounters of Indigenous seiyops. This is the very argument that this research seeks to challenge and dismantle particularly from Indigenous perspectives and this would be discussed in this paper that war is not as emblem of existentialist angst but a stepping stone to retrieve identity that is rooted in Indigenous land, culture, and community.

Statement of the Problem

Since long war literature has offered facilitation to the cultural site for developing concepts such as identity, trauma, and historical memory. Particularly, in Western literary tradition of World War fiction, the dominant narratives have been framed through West-centric epistemologies. These epistemic constructs center while male protagonist who experiences existential trauma as result of their immediate social existence. Above said dominant narratives of Western literary traditions have privileged metaphysical and aesthetic responses to war while marginalizing the cultural knowledge systems, lived experiences, and epistemic contributions of colonized and Indigenous people who participated in World Wars.

Research Questions

In light of the above problem, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do selected Western and South Asian novels construct or challenge dominant epistemology of Existentialism of the World Wars, and how can Indigenous research methodologies be applied to critically deconstruct these narratives?
2. In what ways do *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) reproduces Western epistemic construct of war, particularly in relation to Existentialism.
3. How do *Across the Black Waters* (1939) resists or complicate these frameworks by foregrounding colonial violence, racialized subjectivity, and subaltern memory?

METHODOLOGY

This research for the sake of challenging and investigating Western war epistemologies adopts a decolonial and qualitative methodology grounded in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Indigenous research framework for evaluation of texts of Selected South Asian and Western fiction. By applying decolonial literary practices to selected war novels, the study treats literature as a site of knowledge production, erasure, and resistance, not merely as a reflection of historical events but as an epistemological ground shaped by power, race, and colonial memory. This research while challenging Western world wars epistemologies in selected south Asian and Western fiction, applies four key decolonial methodologies:

- i. Exercising critical reflexivity with aim to interrogating the colonial assumptions embedded in Western World War I and World War II and epistemologies present in war fiction.
- ii. Enabling reciprocity and self-determination by ensuring Indigenous and postcolonial perspectives are engaged on their own terms.
- iii. Embracing Other(ed) ways of knowing through recognizing Indigenous storytelling as a legitimate historical method as Indigenous research practice and knowledge production.
- iv. Embodying a transformative praxis prioritizing the use of literary research as an act of decolonization and historical reclamation.

By applying Indigenous and decolonial methodologies, this study contributes to the transformation of war literature, ensuring that war is not just remembered, but remembered justly.

Adoption of Grounded Theory

This research incorporates essential principles of Grounded Theory, especially in its method of deriving theoretical insights from textual data instead of enforcing strict, predefined interpretative frameworks. Initially created by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory provides a structured yet adaptable approach for the inductive formation of concepts, themes, and patterns directly from qualitative data. Although usually employed in social sciences for interview-based data, its methodological robustness and theory development from the data itself connect seamlessly with the textual and interpretive emphasis of literary studies, particularly those associated with decolonial and Indigenous techniques. This methodology corresponds with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) advocacy for epistemic humility, emphasizing that the researcher should attend to the text, its omissions, and its relational significances instead of imposing West-centric theoretical frameworks to define meaning.

Frederic Henry's Existentialism

Existentialism is a 19th- and 20th-century philosophical and literary movement responding to the crisis of meaning in modernity. It emerged from the collapse of religious certainty, Enlightenment rationalism, and positivist science, asserting instead that individuals must create their own meaning within an absurd or indifferent world (Sartre, 1948/2001; Camus, 1942). The earliest foundations of Existentialism lie in the works of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Kierkegaard emphasized subjectivity and authentic existence, arguing that "truth is subjectivity" and that the individual must confront the anxiety of existence through a personal leap of faith (Kierkegaard, 1843/2004).

Frederic Henry is Hemingway's quintessential protagonist, a disillusioned American ambulance driver in the Italian army during World War I. His transition from military service to romance and ultimately to sorrow is characterized by alienation and a progressive loss of meaning. The demise of Catherine Barkley during childbirth marks the peak of Frederic's emotional disintegration, culminating in his ultimate act: going into the rain. According to Hemingway:

But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. (Hemingway, 1929, Chapter, 41, paragraph, last)

This rain setting symbolizes Western Existentialism, reflecting cosmic indifference. Nature provides no relief nor redemption; it reflects Frederic's own emptiness. The demise of Catherine and their child does not result in transformation or moral enlightenment. It affirms that existence is delicate, dependent, and fundamentally devoid of significance. This picture reflects Camus's concept of the absurd, highlighting the conflict between human yearning for order and the universe's indifference. According to Camus (1942), the Existentialism emerges from this clash. However, in Hemingway's literature, this interaction is exclusive to white protagonists. The narrative creates a mythology of personal suffering based on European wartime experiences, disregarding the epistemic significance of non-Western and colonized viewpoints. The rejection of meaning reflects disillusionment on broader level of Hemingway's "Existentialism", an epistemic agency of Western epistemology. However, this alleged universality marks a particular positionality: that of disillusioned white male soldiers who deliberately enlisted in European imperial war and became disgusted by the futility of war. For colonized individuals, the battle was neither theoretical nor existential; it was materialistic and matter of survival.

Epistemic Violence and the Colonial Politics of Representation

Smith's concept of "research as a colonial project" is specifically relevant here to interrogate West-centric hegemonic construct of "Existentialism" for intellectual decolonization of Indigenous epistemology. Hemingway's text of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) operates as narrative ethnography of white race in war. It also presents white sufferings, loss and grief while excluding Indigenous perspective of war participation. It also ignores Indigenous geopolitical perspectives and silenced them in narrative of war epistemology. This selected narration embodies what de Sousa Santos (2015) terms "epistemicide", the systematic annihilation of alternative forms of knowledge.

Exercising Critical Reflexivity: An Indigenous Research Methodology

This research seeks to critically analyze narrative of war, Existentialism, as well as its influence on the historical memory of Indigenous populations, through the application of Indigenous research methodology. The method necessitates Indigenous epistemologies through critical reflexivity, rather than relying on hegemonic frameworks that marginalize Indigenous modes of knowing and knowledge production. This research use reflexivity as a methodological tool to re-conceptualize storytelling as a decolonial act, framing war fiction as an alternative archive of marginalized histories (Battiste, 2000; Kovach, 2010).

Western Trauma as Global Template: The Existential Epistemology of *A Farewell to Arms*

In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Frederic Henry's walk holds profound significance, as his emotional collapse, culminating in his aimless walk into the rain following Catherine's death, is regarded within the Western intellectual tradition as the quintessence of Existentialism. Hemingway creates a realm in which fate is arbitrary, death is unavoidable, and meaning is vague. The epistemic construct of Existentialism is articulated by Frederic Henry, "You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you." (Hemingway, 1929, Chapter, 41) Frederic's understanding regarding war reflects existentialist concepts concerning life's inherent unpredictability. Similar to Sartre's assertion that humans are "condemned to be free" in a realm devoid of intrinsic regulations, Hemingway's characters confront a cosmos governed by merciless randomness rather than equity. In this way, Hemingway constructs a world where fate is random, death is inevitable, and meanings is indefinable. The epistemic construct Existentialism is articulated through silence, irony, and detachment. The line, "The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places" (Hemingway, Chapter, 34), is iconic of this framework. Contrary to traditional war narratives where trauma leads to growth, Hemingway subverts this by showing that trauma is arbitrary and without higher meaning. Judith Herman (1992) argues that "Hemingway's portrayal of Frederic Henry reveals the modern disillusionment with the idea that suffering ennobles; instead, it merely isolates" (p. 72). The Universality of Loss and Alienation is reflected through Frederic's detachment after Catherine's death. It reflects a broader existential trauma. Mark Spilka (1990) observes, "In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), love and war are both traps, the only universal truth is loss, and the only response is a stoic, if hollow, endurance" (p. 118).

Epistemic Violence: The Cost of Silence

The idea of "epistemic violence," as explained by Smith (2012) and Mignolo and Walsh (2018), is when non-Western ways of knowing are suppressed or invalidated. This shows up in war fiction as a story of totalitarian absurdity and disillusionment that says all troops deal with trauma in the same way, through existential alienation, and moral nihilism.

But Indigenous ways of thinking don't see pain as isolated or meaningless. Kovach (2010) and Wilson (2011) both say that in Indigenous worldviews, meaning comes from relationships, like community, memory, tradition, and spiritual continuity. Trauma affects more than just one person. It also affects groups and the past. In Frederic Henry's story, trauma is shown as a silent burden on each person. This is not a universal truth, but a regionally specific way of knowing that looks like a truth.

Exercising Critical Reflexivity

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Indigenous research methodology emphasizes the validation of many epistemologies. The belief that Existentialism and nihilism characterize all war experiences negates this diversity. Battiste (2000) asserts that Indigenous knowledge systems are founded on oral traditions, communal narratives, and land-based recollections. These frameworks interpret suffering not via existential dread but via resilience, continuity, and relationality. Indigenous research methodological tool of critical reflexivity contests to challenge for investigation the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). In these western narratives, the both protagonist assumed life as purposeless as result of their war experiences. Frederic Henry walks in bleak silence purposelessly in rain. This is not a final truth about war but a culturally contingent expression of West-centric despair. The Indigenous research methodological tool of Critical Reflexivity necessities self-determination by adjudicating Indigenous war positionality because *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) excludes, for instance, the worldview of a character like Lal Singh from *Across the Black Waters* (1939), who enters war with pragmatic hopes of economic restitution and social reintegration, a worldview grounded in structural materialism, not existential absurdity. On the account of above stated perspectives Indigenous research emphasizes the plurality of "ways of knowing." As Smith (2012) argues that there is no universal story about what research is or what it means. The same must be said for trauma and war: there is no universal narrative of what it means to suffer, to lose, or to survive.

Storytelling as Resistance: Toward Decolonial Narratives

Story telling has played crucial role in the projection of aforementioned western war trauma, anguish, despair and confusion with global ramification because storytelling has served as an instrument of colonial oppression. It may equally function as a locus of resistance to said colonial oppression as well because Indigenous research approaches perceive literature as not merely a cultural reflection but as a testimonial, a repository of marginalized histories, and a strategy of epistemic reclamation (Taha, 2018). The Western narrative of Existentialism in war literature should be contested not through the dismissal of trauma, but by pluralizing it. This includes recognizing stories like that of Lal Singh as valid epistemic counterpoint. By placing Hemingway's, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) Alongside *Across the Black Waters* (1939), a South Asian novel, this research aims to deconstruct the assumed neutrality of Western trauma. As de Sousa Santos (2015) insists, the fight against epistemic injustice is the fight for "cognitive justice."

Exercising Reciprocity and Self-Determination

Reciprocity and Respect for Self-Determination is an Indigenous Research Methodology in the Context of Reclaiming Histories Through Fiction. Indigenous research methodologies give preference to cooperation, relational accountability, and continuing consent than typical Western research paradigms, which often place the researcher as authority of knowledge production (Datta, 2018). These research tools are crucial to decolonize research methods because they ensure that historically marginalized groups, whether they be Indigenous peoples, refugees, or colonial population, are seen as active participants in the research process rather than passive subjects. (Clark-Kazak, 2017). This is the reason that Indigenous research methodologies put a strong emphasis on respect for self-determination and reciprocity as fundamental

ethical research tenets (Smith, 2012). This study employs reciprocity and self-determination as methodological tools to reclaim the historical narratives of colonial soldiers while analyzing war fiction. It endorses decolonial methodologies that challenge dominant war epistemologies and equitable knowledge-sharing.

Intersections of Identity, Memory, and Resistance

Reciprocity and Respect for Self-Determination is an Indigenous Research Methodology in the context of reclaiming histories through fiction. This is the reason that Indigenous research methodologies put a strong emphasis on respect for self-determination and reciprocity as fundamental ethical research tenets. Exercising of reciprocity and self-determination will be made by using Indigenous theoretical lens of Identity, Memory, and Resistance as proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her seminal work, *Indigenous Research Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. This research contends to investigate how Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) mirrors life and existence under the umbrella of modernism by comparing it with the identity of Lal Singh in *Across the Black Water*, with the application of Indigenous research methodological tools of identity, resistance and memory. Modernism was a movement which flourished in Europe and America in late nineteenth and twentieth century which is marked by particular culture of community of Western context. This modernism marks a break with existing values as result of disintegration of social values which resulted in collapse of culture, meaningless life and purposeless life and existence. What is noteworthy, the said Existentialism and identity is connected with land of west. This modern movement was flourished in western communities. Modern movement was deeply influenced by development of science, technology and economic growth. While on other hand Indigenous communities was non developed and even in this era Indigenous world is known as third world. Indigenous world was indifferent to modern movements of west because there was no direct effect of development of science, technology, and economic growth on Indigenous land. It is pertinent to mention that these Indigenous communities were generally in state of colonization at the time of world wars. When we connect modernism with land, community and identity, this highlights intellectual decolonization of Indigenous epistemic knowledge production system.

Frederic's Identity: Fractured, Universalized, and Epistemologically Western

Frederic Henry is product of modern fractured identity which is connected with western modern fractured culture. This tension is evident in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), where the protagonist, Frederic Henry, embodies a fractured modernist identity, a product of Western disintegration, existential despair, and the collapse of traditional values. Frederic claims, "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through". (Hemingway, 1929, chapter. 27) Frederic Henry's disillusionment with war signifies his overarching identity dilemma. The text emphasizes his repudiation of abstract ideals such as glory and honor that previously characterized his identity as a soldier. This illustrates Frederic Henry's disillusionment with conventional notions of identity rooted in nationalism, valour, and sacrifice. The sarcasm and cynicism expose his compromised moral compass and emotional disconnection, influenced by the harsh realities of war. His identity is now anchored in individual survival and uncertainty, rather than patriotism or communal principles. Frederic states, "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My God, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine." (Hemingway, chapter.32) Here, Frederic reduces his existence to primal instincts eating, drinking, and love, suggesting a retreat from intellectual or moral engagement with the world. His identity is no longer tied to duty or ideology but to immediate physical and emotional needs. This reflects the broader existential crisis of post-war Western society, where individuals, stripped of traditional beliefs, sought meaning in personal relationships rather than societal structures.

Unlike Frederic Henry in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) whose identities fragments under the weight of absurdity and emotional isolation, an Indigenous soldier, Lal Singh's identity in *Across the Black Waters* (1939) remains culturally rooted, even amidst imperial dislocation. Mulk Raj Anand presents a sepoy whose existential orientation is not formed through philosophical abstraction but through an embodied relationship with land, community, and tradition. His subjectivity is not Western and fractured but Indigenous and tethered to the soil of Punjab. Anand states:

The earth of his village was in his blood. Even in the alien trenches of France, he could smell the scent of ripening wheat, feel the wind from the canal, and hear the creak of the bullock carts on the dusty paths. Here he was a number, a rifle, a tool of the sahibs, stripped of his turban and self-respect. (Anand, 1939, p. 34)

This aspect of novel reveals the epistemological rift imposed by colonialism. Lal Singh is not simply alienated; he is forcibly dis-embedded from the cultural matrix that constituted his identity, his caste (peasant-soldier), his religion (Sikh), and his agrarian rhythms. Yet, even in dislocation, he remains ontologically tied to Punjab. His memory, sensory recollections, and moral compass remain aligned with the homeland, unlike Frederic Henry's estrangement, where the self dissolves into metaphysical silence. Anand further highlights this connection to land and community through Lal Singh's reflections:

It was all right to obey orders when one was in one's own country... but here, in the land of the white men, among the dead cows and forbidden flesh, everything was strange. His caste could not protect him. His gods were far away. (Anand, 2000, p. 36)

While colonial war subjects Lal Singh to epistemic violence, erasure of religious codes, caste customs, and language, it does not rupture his sense of self. Instead, it sharpens his awareness of cultural difference. His resistance lies in remembering: he resists assimilation not through rebellion, but through a refusal to let the war erase his land-based ontology. Later, when Lal Singh hears a wounded soldier moan in Punjabi, he exclaims, "Oye, a man of our village! A man of our village is here!" (Anand, 1939, p. 142). This moment demonstrates how identity is reinvoked through relational recognition, where shared language, land, and pain bind bodies beyond imperial ranks. It reflects what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes as relational Indigenous identity, maintained through memory and affective geography, not abstract individualism.

Thus, unlike the existential alienation that defines Frederic Henry in the Western canon, Lal Singh's identity remains relational, land-rooted, and shaped by colonially disrupted but not erased epistemologies. Even while serving as a "tool of the sahibs," his inner world resists colonial definitions of selfhood. He does not suffer from the absence of meaning but from its imposed irrelevance in a world where his gods, caste, and soil have no currency.

Memory as Reclamation

Indigenous research project of memory functions not merely as an archive of history but as a site of conflict between dominant and marginalized narratives. Postcolonial theorists like Edward Said (1978) and decolonial scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo (2011) emphasize the politics of memory within colonial discourse. Said, in *Orientalism*, attacks the selective recollection of colonial archives that obliterate or misrepresent non-Western histories. Mignolo (2009) asserts that decolonial thought necessitates epistemic disobedience, an active reclamation of memory and knowledge from imperialist paradigms.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) characterizes "remembering" as an essential Indigenous research project, contending that "to remember is not passive but active. It is a form of "resistance". In this context, memory serves as a decolonial instrument to address historical amnesia and reconstruct marginalized narratives.

Resistance and Memory in Across the Black Waters: A Decolonial Reading

Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) offers a profound critique of colonial modernity by reconstructing the figure of the Indian sepoy not as a mute participant in Western war, but as a conscious cultural subject whose identity is rooted in memory, land, and resistance. Through Lal Singh, Anand articulates a form of identity that actively contests its reduction to a colonial instrument. This is not a tale of existential alienation but of epistemic survival, a narrative in which resistance is enacted through memory, and remembrance becomes an act of decolonial defiance.

The oft-cited passage "The earth of his Punjab village was in his blood...", (Anand, 1939, p. 34) is not mere pastoral nostalgia. It constitutes an epistemic position: An Indigenous ontology where identity is interwoven with land, climate, labor, and sound. The land is not metaphorical, but spiritual and ontological. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), such memory-based connections form the core of Indigenous resistance, functioning as "sites of truth" that colonialism seeks to erase (p. 148). The trench becomes a site of violence precisely because it tries to sever the soldier from this land-memory complex, replacing it with the imperial uniform, commands, and insignia.

The line "he was a sepoy, a tool of the sahibs, cut off from his soil, his gods, his very self" (Anand, 1939, p. 77) encapsulates the ontological violence of colonial conscription. Lal Singh is not simply removed from India; he is dis-embedded from his cosmology, from caste systems, ancestral gods, village rituals, and agricultural rhythms that define Indigenous identity. This alienation, however, is not complete. It is resisted through sensory memory, smells, sounds, and physical sensations that refuse imperial erasure.

Collective Memory: Beyond Religious or Caste Divides

Anand further dissolves colonial binaries by showing how diverse Indian soldiers "Jats, Chamars, Sikhs, Muslims", transcend sectarian divisions when united by shared colonial subjugation. This transformation is not enforced by imperial discipline but emerges from shared memory and land consciousness, "The men huddled together, not as soldiers, but as sons of the same soil... In the darkness, they whispered of home, of revolt, of the day they would no longer be coolies of the Empire" (Anand, 1939, p. 132). This whispering is an act of resistance. It reclaims subjectivity not through overt revolt but through remembering, a decolonial strategy that re-inscribes silenced voices and restores cultural dignity. The shared land-memory, not religious uniformity or colonial order, becomes the basis of solidarity. In this way, Anand replaces the imperial narrative of 'loyal sepoys' with one of covert cultural insurgency.

Remembrance as Resistance

Lal Singh's journey through France is not one of transformation into a Western-style subject, but rather a narrative of reclamation, a slow, persistent return to selfhood through memory, land, and cultural belonging. In *Across the Black Waters* (1939), memory does not simply represent trauma; it intervenes against historical amnesia, countering the imperial tendency to erase native experiences from the archive of modern war. Anand's literary strategy, then, is not merely descriptive, it is decolonial. By centralizing the voices and memories of Indigenous sepoys, he disrupts the Eurocentric template of the soldier and offers an epistemic alternative grounded in relational identity, cultural rootedness, and political resistance.

Decolonizing Literary Analysis: Land, Community, and Resistance

Application of Smith's (2012) decolonial approach illuminates how *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) reinforces Western epistemic dominance by presenting a fragmented identity as a universal condition, while *Across the Black Waters* (1939) by Anand centers Indigenous resistance and collective memory. By connecting characters to their socio-historical landscapes, this analysis challenges the hegemony of modernist literature and advocates for a decolonial rereading of war narratives, one that acknowledges Indigenous knowledge systems and resists intellectual colonization.

The comparative study of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *Across the Black Waters* (1939) reveals divergent constructions of identity: one rooted in Western modernism's existential crisis, the other in Indigenous resilience against colonial violence. A decolonial lens, as proposed by Smith (2012), allows for a critical reassessment of these narratives, emphasizing the need to center land, community, and resistance in literary analysis. This approach not only disrupts Euro-American centric literary canons but also fosters intellectual decolonization by validating Indigenous epistemologies in global war literature.

The False Universalism of Existentialism

As a result of investigation with the application of Indigenous theoretical lens' intersection of identity, memory and resistance for the sake reciprocity and self-determination, it is established that Existentialism in war narratives is not a global experience but a local one, a west-centric experience, elevated through literary imperialism into a false universalism. This stoic nihilism is framed as universal, yet ignores Indigenous, South Asian war narratives that emphasize community survival. Tuhiwai Smith argues (2012) that decolonizing research requires centering land and collective memory over individual alienation. It is pertinent to mention that Indigenous soldiers are contacted with land and community. This research contends that war narratives must be evaluated through epistemologies that prioritize community, continuity, and land-based memory. This argument exposes Hemingway's Existentialism as a colonial epistemic construct, not a human universal.

Embracing Other(ed) Ways of Knowing: An Indigenous Research Methodology in the Context of Reclaiming Histories Through Fiction

Indigenous research methodologies challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies in knowledge production by highlighting the legitimacy and coexistence of multiple ways of knowing (Smith, 2012). Decolonial approaches in literary studies need a critical examination of whose knowledge systems are given priority and whose voices are ignored. In order to ensure that the stories of colonized and Indigenous peoples are acknowledged as core rather than marginal to war history, this study uses an Indigenous research framework to evaluate war fiction via Other(ed) modes of knowing (Battiste, 2000). Hegemonic literary frameworks that have traditionally treated non-Western histories as study subjects rather than independent knowledge systems are challenged by this method (Said, 1979). This study ensures that Indigenous ways of knowing affect the research method, data analysis, and knowledge dissemination by recognizing and incorporating Indigenous, postcolonial, and non-Western epistemologies (Taha, 2018). This decolonizes the understanding of war fiction. The perception that theory and knowledge generation are exclusively the domain of Western academia which has been reinforced by the historical construction of a narrow, west-centric epistemological framework by Western literary traditions (Smith, 2012). Because war is now often presented through existentialist crises rather than as a site of colonial struggle, non-Western perspectives have been erased from war literature. Unlike Western academic research, which often prioritizes individual expertise and data extraction, Indigenous

methodologies emphasize relational accountability. Through this lens, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is interpreted not solely as a modernist narrative of existential despair but as a contested terrain of knowledge production, one that marginalizes colonial voices while asserting Western paradigms of trauma, masculinity, and heroism.

War as a Site of Colonial Continuity

Aforementioned are reasons which provide justifications to Indigenous methodologies to claim that war is not solely an event but it is continuation of colonial projects and in this way Western knowledge production methods perpetuate this coloniality. The death of Catherine and Frederic's child in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) serves as a metaphor for the inadequacy of Western epistemology to foster meaningful futures or preserve life in the face of institutional brutality. Hemingway portrays war as a manifestation of existential breakdown, highlighting a white man's loss of significance in a godless universe. Yet it is not contextualized as the outcome of empire, economic extraction, or global colonial expansion. What is absent is the framing of war as a communal wound, as understood in many Indigenous storytelling traditions, where conflict entails shared suffering, historical memory, and intergenerational responsibility. This absence of war as communal wound in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) highlights its epistemological limitations. This act of war narratives centers individual alienation over collective trauma and obscures the imperial foundations of European wars. From an Indigenous perspective, this approach to war neglects the colonial continuity inherent in armed conflict, especially how contemporary fighting perpetuates racial hierarchies, economic oppression, and cultural obliteration.

Reclaiming the Archive: Fiction as Counter-History

Taha (2018) posits that literature can function as an alternative archive for marginalized histories; conversely, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) fails to depict colonial war experiences, hence leaving a gap that Indigenous and South Asian war fiction addresses. Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) depicts Indian soldiers as pivotal historical figures rather than mere footnotes. Conversely, Hemingway's novels serve as emblems of literary dominance, universalizing the trauma of white males while sidelining the knowledge systems of colonized populations. These canonical texts require critical re-evaluation from decolonial perspectives.

This analysis participates in the reclamation of war historiography by demanding narrative equity. It positions fiction not merely as a source of aesthetic pleasure, but as a battleground for epistemic justice, where literary representation shapes collective memory and legitimizes or resists dominant historical narratives.

Embodying a Transformative Praxis in the Context of Reclaiming Histories Through Fiction

With Aim to ensure that colonized war narratives are both reclaimed and actively support epistemic resistance, this study utilizes an Indigenous research method to assess the chosen Western and South Asian fiction. Researchers have opted to collaborate with marginalized communities to strengthen their perspectives and experiences, and the concept of the margin has been extensively utilized to analyze oppression, inequality, and power dynamics (Drame et al., 2011; Vatansever, 2020). Transformative praxis as part of Indigenous and decolonial research framework, is very important research tool to dismantle colonial system and to make sure that research leads to significant societal change. According to Freire (1996) and Smith (2012), authentic decolonial efforts require transformative praxis that integrates values, action, and contemplation.

Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) presents personal ethical anguish of Henry as an act of universal aesthetics of freedom and sacrifice. But what is point to be noted, is the act of framing re-centers Western subjectivity. Conversely, Indigenous war fiction, as demonstrated by Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939), embodies resistance through its narrative structure. It offers fragmented, communal, and relational narratives that reject linearity and individualism. These texts are not solely corrective; they encapsulate unique worldviews wherein relationality, reciprocity, and spiritual accountability guide both characters and readers. Such narratives do not confine trauma to the individual psyche but situate it within the larger frameworks of colonial disruption and communal resilience.

In conclusion, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *Across the Black Waters* (1939), when are examined through Indigenous and decolonial research paradigms of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, then these works appear not as comprehensive records of war memory but as fragmented, hegemonic narratives requiring substantial epistemic reformation for the sake of epistemic justice to avoid epistemic violence. Research channelized through proposed research tools by Linda Tuhiwai Smith for evaluation of said works suggests that hegemonic narrative is not final meaning of the said texts but of necessary critique is required for epistemic reformation. So, there is urgency of these texts to be read against the grain, so that suppressed, colonized, and Indigenous voices might finally be restored to the center of war's literary archive.

Purpose in *Across the Black Waters* vs. *A Farewell to Arms*: A Decolonial Reading

Contrariwise to Hemingway's West-centric presentation of "Existentialism" in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and its prevailing metaphysical despair, South Asian novel *Across the Black Waters* (1939) makes exploration of a grounded, decolonial narrative which is deeply rooted in family, material survival, and land. In the novel, the protagonist, Lal Singh offers a resistance to epistemic violence of Western narratives of war fiction by portraying war participation with different way to that of Frederic Henry's in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). This war participation is result of purpose driven, pragmatic motivation for war engagement, an approach that is different to the war participation concerns of Frederic Henry.

According to Anand, many Indian young people joined army for financial concerns, Anand states:

[A]s the second, third or fourth sons of a peasant family, overburdened with debt, they had to go and earn a little ready cash to pay off the interest on the mortgage of the few acres of land, the only thing which stood between the family and its fate. (p.168)

In *Across the Black Waters* (1939), Lal Singh joins the imperial war, names as so-called world war, from Indigenous land motivated by explicit economic concerns as he declares that he will buy his land back. He will no longer be slave to the moneylender. This statement makes it clear in a rational way that Lal Singh's war participation is result of land-based concerns which are different from existential crises of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Here war engagement is result strategic decision which aims to regain familial dignity and socio-economic design. Anand states:

He had joined the army with the hope that he would earn land of his own. Back in the village, he had been nothing—a tiller of other men's fields, a chamar's son, born to servitude and shame. But in uniform, he felt a kind of dignity. They had told him in the recruitment office that the Sarkar would reward those who served loyally. That land would be given to them. That they would return not as coolies but as men. It was this dream he carried Across the Black Waters (1939), believing that the world beyond would recognize his worth, and that the war might transform his fate. (Anand, 1939, p. 8)

In this case, Battiste's (2000) analysis really hits home: for Indigenous and colonized peoples, knowledge is tied to land, relationships, and the continuity of history. It is evident that Lal Singh's trauma is not existential like Frederic Henry but is by design and structure. He is not confused in meaninglessness but Lal Singh's anguish is tied to sound realities which are to repay debt and to get possession of land. Smith (2012) explains that philosophical ideas are often used to hide the real causes of trauma in Western study and narrative frameworks. Lal Singh's clarity, on the other hand, sees war again as something that was caused by colonialism and work, not by philosophy.

This change is important for epistemology. Indigenous ways of knowing stress how trauma, memory, and identity are linked to society and land (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2011). Lal Singh presents said principle very effectively because of desire to reclaim land in Indigenous world is not personal but a cultural phenomenon as in Indian context, land is a matter of special significance. It is strong cultural significance. In Indigenous research context it reflects a broader desire for decolonial restoration, a form of resistance embedded in daily life rather than abstract ideals.

Additionally, there is another aspect of narrative of *Across the Black Water* which develops its Indigenous perspective. In development of plot of the novel Lal Singh's narrative is built on collectivist ethics and oral tradition. Her war experiences are not in form of sufferings in isolation as there is the case of Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to the Arms*. Lalo shares his experiences with his fellow sepoys, elders, and family members. This aspect of the novel *Across the Black Waters* (1939) highlights that Indigenous experience of war is different from Western war experience because war journey of Lal Singh is not as solitary suffering but as a collective endeavor. Unlike Frederic Henry, who walks alone in the rain, it is evident from above discussed aspects that Lalo remains deeply connected with social and historical consciousness. It is pertinent to mention here that this portrayal of Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) falls within the discipline of what Smith (2012) and Battiste (2000) calls "ethical research". This "ethical research" is source of knowledge production that is accountable, relational, and situated. In this way the novel becomes a source of epistemological decolonization and recovery by describing that colonized war experience cannot be understood through Western epistemic constructs of the Existentialism.

In short, narrative of Lal Singh in the context of war is not merely counter narrative of Frederic Henry regarding despair and meaningless anguish rather it challenges the very epistemological foundations of western war fiction and rejects it by providing different perspective to the western concept that present life as absurd and meaningless. His clear sense of purpose, which is based on land and social justice, shows a decolonial worldview that sees war fiction as a place of resistance, reclamation, and healing relationships.

Comparative Synthesis: Absurdity vs. Purpose

The Indigenous and decolonial literary examination strongly emphasizes on the necessity to confront not only what is told but how and why it is told. In war literature, Western narratives like Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) universalizes personal despair as the core of wartime experience. This universalization, however, is grounded in a narrow epistemology that ignores the layered realities of colonial soldiers. In contrast, Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) foregrounds an Indigenous epistemology, where war is not an existential nothingness but a socio-economic strategy which is emerged by the concerns of land, labor, and survival. Using Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) decolonizing research framework and Marie Battiste's (2000) principles of land-based knowledge, this section juxtaposes Henry's narrative of Existentialism with Lal Singh's material struggle for land reclamation. Through this comparative synthesis, this research aims to dismantle the epistemic

colonialism embedded in Western literary canons and assert Indigenous voices as critical sites of resistance.

Indigenous research project of Reclaiming

Fiction is as an effective tool for reclaiming suppressed histories and narrative. For Indigenous research framework reclaiming is an epistemological strategy against cultural erasure and colonization because according to Smith (2012) Indigenous project of reclaiming underscores “the retelling of stories and the rewriting of histories” (P. 28) which were suppressed by colonial system and narratives. Indigenous project of reclaiming challenges the Western narratives. It prioritizes Indigenous voices and memories. As Smith contends:

Reclaiming in this sense is a powerful and significant strategy for connecting and understanding the ways in which Indigenous communities and peoples have sought to take back control over their lives, lands, and histories (Smith, 2012, p. 143).

The core of function of Reclaiming as research methodology is not just limited to intellectual decoloniality and recovery but it is also an intergeneration process. According to Smith, “The remembering of the past, the retelling of stories and the reliving of lives is a very powerful way of healing” (Smith, 2012, p. 147). In this way Reclaiming becomes an effective tool in Indigenous research paradigms for cultural continuity.

Reclaiming as Decolonizing Knowledge: Aimlessness vs. Economic Purpose

The role of reclaiming is very significant in Indigenous research methods because it insists on epistemic justice. Western knowledge production systems have delegitimized Indigenous ways of knowing in name of primitivism and superstition but reclaiming opposes said western practice by centering the western epistemologies. This is evident in case of *A Farewell to the Arms*. Henry’s journey in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is marked by an absence of purpose. His participation in World War I is neither ideological nor moral; it is accidental, detached, and ultimately meaningless. Upon the deaths of Catherine and the child, Henry is at a loss and seeks to reunite with Catherine. He enters her room but seeing her does not help; he is completely disillusioned and alienated. He perceives the absurdity of existence:

But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn’t any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. (Hemingway, 1929, chapter. 41)

Following the loss of his beloved and his child, Henry has abandoned the war. The narrative concludes with him solitary in the rain, utterly estranged. He now recognizes that everything surrounding him is deceptive. Henry now comprehends that the authentic manifestations of religion, patriotism, and love are mere empty symbols of hope. He discovers that all hope must originate from within oneself. Henry, now genuinely experienced, goes silently back to the hotel in the rain, and understands that he must frame his fate. Existentialism adopts a negative perspective on life and human existence, hence the conclusion of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is distinctly existentialist. Henry’s profound disillusionment with war and his alienation is evident. He was without purpose in war. A purpose of existence emerged during war as result of love and child which he also lost as death of infant and Barclay. His said disillusionment becomes emblematic of a broader existential crisis, where war participation is without purpose by an individual and human action is portrayed as absurd.

In this way, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) becomes a problematic literary instrument in the global canon. It universalizes the personal experience of the white male protagonist and applies it as a template for understanding war and legitimize Western knowledge production. The existential emptiness Frederic Henry embodies is often treated as representative of war trauma itself, thus suppressing alternative experiences, particularly those of Indigenous and colonized peoples whose participation in global conflicts was neither voluntary nor abstract.

Smith (2012) Indigenous project of reclaiming underscores the retelling of stories and the rewriting of histories which were suppressed by colonial system and narratives. Retelling of Western narrative highlights Western war literature's tendency to center white alienation and position it as universal. Indigenous project of reclaiming challenges the Western universalization of war narratives. It prioritizes Indigenous voices and memories. As Smith contends that Reclaiming in this sense is a powerful and significant strategy for connecting and understanding the ways in which Indigenous communities and peoples have sought to take back control over their lives, lands, and histories. In this way, by contrast, the Indigenous research framework insists that reclaiming narrative is an epistemological strategy against cultural erasure and colonial domination. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) explains, the Indigenous project of reclaiming emphasizes the retelling of stories and the rewriting of histories that were silenced by colonial systems. This provides counter-narratives to disrupt Western war literature's tendency to center white alienation and position it as universal. They instead foreground localized, material, and relational understandings of trauma, purpose, and resistance.

Within this framework, Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) offers a stark alternative for reclaiming narrative as an epistemological strategy against cultural erasure and colonial domination. The protagonist, Lal Singh, articulates a motivation rooted not in philosophical despair but in land, survival, and economic restoration. Unlike Frederic Henry, Lal Singh's decision to enlist is not accidental or emotional rather it is calculated and strategic, born of socio-economic necessity and a desire to regain dignity and autonomy. He was very badly humiliated at his own village. He was charged by the villagers and his face was blackened. He was forcefully seated on donkey which was walked through the whole village. This was humiliation which he faced at the village. In order to regain his dignity and get free his land from money landers he joined British army. Anand States about his love for land:

He had always defied his father and preened himself on his schooling, and he did not realize that he had inherited many of his father's qualities, not only the enduring ones such as his short, lithe wiry frame, his love of the land, his generosity, his stubborn pride and his humour, but also his faith and his naivete. (p.8)

Even at war fronts Lalu remembers his humiliation which was made at village. About this Anand states:

He recalled the brutality with which the fanatics of his village had blackened his face and put him on a donkey when he had had his hair cut. The humiliation had bitten deep into him and he hated all Sikhs. (p.19)

Due to nature of function, Indigenous research tool of reclaiming also necessities critical reflexivity from scholars because Indigenous researcher has to investigate their own positionality and the research tool they use. Smith (2012) argues that the project of reclaiming is not just for Indigenous peoples, it is also for researchers to understand the damage that has been done and to work towards a more ethical research practice. This shift from metaphysical to material reveals two opposing epistemologies. While Frederic Henry embodies existential drift, Lal Singh represents purposiveness grounded in the material realities of colonization. As Smith (2012) notes, Indigenous research must involve a purposive engagement with

colonial contexts. Lal Singh's war is not an internal philosophical battle, but a consequence of structural violence and economic dispossession. His journey reflects a deeply political act of self-determination within oppressive imperial conditions.

Ultimately, the contrast between Frederic and Lal Singh is not just character-based, it is epistemological. Frederic's alienation and nihilism are elevated as literary universals, whereas Lal Singh's clarity and purpose are often omitted from canonical war narratives. Yet it is precisely Lal Singh's relational worldview, his ties to land, community, and economic justice that offers a powerful decolonial intervention in war literature. His presence reclaims war as a space of resistance, survival, and reclamation, not just existential angst.

Comparative Epistemologies: From Absurdism to Grounded Resistance

The difference between Western war fiction and South Asian war fiction is not restricted to just thematic interpretations rather this difference is rooted at epistemic level which is chief concern of Indigenous reclaiming through story telling. As it already has been point out that in *Across the Black Waters* (1939), Lal Singh's war participation is rooted in economic necessity and social survival. It is not matter of existential confusion as it is case of Western war fiction. His trauma is contextual, with his pain associated with land dispossession rather than a search for metaphysical meaning. Battiste (2000) emphasizes that for Indigenous communities, meaning emerges from lived, land-based experience, not abstract speculation. Smith (2012) adds that storytelling in Indigenous cultures is genealogical, relational, and purposeful, not individualistic.

In this way it can be argued on the account of aforementioned qualitatively evaluated facts that Lal Singh in this research emerges as narrative counterweights to Frederic Henry. Lal Singh serves as clear contrasts to Frederic Henry; they are not mere passive participants of the absurdity of war, but rather colonized beings compelled to endure its violence while striving for survival, dignity, and cultural continuity. In contrast to the existential detachment exhibited by their Western counterparts, their resistance is rooted in collective memory, connections to land, and a defiance against erasure. Their narratives deconstruct the prevailing discourse of war fiction, which generalizes white disillusionment while sidelining the experiences of the colonized.

Relational Accountability to Empire: Blindness vs. Conscious Engagement

Henry stays predominantly unaware of the imperial frameworks that govern their presence in war. Their ideas concentrate only on personal suffering and individual chaos. They neither critiques nor recognizes the empire that recruited millions of colonial subjects. Henry says, "The war was a long way away. Maybe there wasn't any war. There was no war here." (Hemingway, Chapter. 34) This highlights that Frederic's fleeting moments of denial highlight his avoidance of the war's geopolitical realities. This epistemic blindness constitutes what Smith (2012) refers to as "the narrative construction of innocence" in Western literature. It is a literary strategy that absolves the center while marginalizing the periphery. Lal Singh, however, is fully aware of the power dynamics in which he is entangled. It is important difference from an Indigenous methodological perspective because Wilson (2008) emphasizes that Indigenous knowledge is about relational accountability. Lal Singh is accountable to his family, his village, and his future. Frederic, in contrast, is accountable only to his fractured self. Henry's character arc aligns more closely with Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability, though his journey is fraught with fragmentation.

Epistemic Sovereignty through Comparative Lens

This comparative synthesis reveals two epistemic projects: one of abstraction, the other of embodiment. Frederic Henry's narrative is the story of a man undone by the futility of life. Lal Singh's is the story of a man navigating empire to reclaim life. One is passive in the face of absurdity; the other is active in the face of oppression. Indigenous methodologies, as emphasized by Smith (2012), Battiste (2000), and Kovach (2010), reject the universalization of suffering. They root knowledge in lived experience, community, and land. Lal Singh's journey is not a counterpoint to Frederic Henry's but it is a reclamation of narrative space, a decolonial assertion that war cannot be understood through one lens alone.

By emphasizing South Asian and Indigenous war narrative, we assert epistemic sovereignty. We acknowledge that suffering is not universal, that absurdity is not unavoidable, and that meaning is derived not from silence, but from the narratives of individuals who were never intended to voice them.

Comparative Synthesis of Absurdity and Purpose for Reclaiming War Narratives through Epistemic Contrast

Indigenous decolonial research methodology highlights the urgency to address how and why story is told instead of just what is told. The wartime experiences of the white, Western soldier have been extensively universalized through the personal despair and existential suffering portrayed in Western war narratives, notably in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). However, said universalization of personal despair is established through narrow West-centric epistemology which privileges abstract sufferings over material history. This epistemic perspective erases the complex experiences of colonial soldiers, whose suffering is connected with land loss, economic oppression, and the brutality of imperial enlistment. In contrast, Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939) articulates an Indigenous epistemology wherein involvement in warfare serves as a socio-economic strategy, rooted in land, labour, and survival.

Through the theoretical lens of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) Indigenous decolonial research paradigm and Marie Battiste's (2000) principles of land-based knowledge, this section of research juxtaposes metaphysical absurdity of Frederic Henry and deliberate enlistment of Lal Singh in British army for land, reclamation and survival. This study challenges the epistemic colonialism embedded in the Western literary canon and assert that Indigenous voices are essential sources of resistance and narrative restoration.

By emphasizing relationality, material purpose, and epistemic justice, Indigenous war literature like *Across the Black Waters* (1939) reconceptualizes war as a historically contextualized conflict over territory, identity, and existence rather than an abstract Existentialism.

Cognitive Justice and the Right to Define War

Battiste's (2000) concept of cognitive justice demands that knowledge systems marginalized by coloniality be recognized as equally valid. In this light, Hemingway and Ondaatje's works, while literary masterpieces, fall into the trap of universalizing Western despair.

They produce what *appears* profound, but actually ignores Indigenous meanings. Lal Singh's pain, while less poetic, is more political. His suffering is not about *finding meaning* in war, it is about fighting for existence under colonial domination.

Toward a Pluralistic War Narrative

The challenge, then, is epistemic. Western war fiction presents loss of meaning as the ultimate tragedy. Indigenous war narratives present loss of land and life as the true trauma, and yet also showcase resilience and continuity.

In this comparative lens:

- *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) articulates war through existential introspection, often decontextualized from systemic colonial violence.
- In *Across the Black Waters* (1939), Lal Singh articulates war through material resistance and relational continuity, embedded in land, ancestors, and the future.

While Hemingway explore war as a site of existential collapse for the white Western subject, Anand's portrayal of Lal Singh offers an epistemologically distinct narrative, one rooted in land, kinship, and cognitive justice. To truly decolonize war literature, the relational, strategic, and survivance-based war motives of Indigenous protagonists like Lal Singh must not be marginalized, but foregrounded as legitimate and necessary counter narratives.

Toward an Indigenous Grounded Theory of War

Through a comparative analysis of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and *Across the Black Waters* (1939), this study has revealed not just differing representations of war, but clashing ways of knowing, remembering, and resisting. Mainstream war literature, particularly Hemingway's work, has historically been positioned as the universal voice of wartime experience. However, this so-called universality is a mask for epistemic imperialism, as Smith (2012) and Spivak (1988) have sharply warned. Through the emotional interiority of white male protagonists like Frederic Henry, Western fiction frames war as a philosophical or emotional rupture detached from historical structure or colonial consequence. This abstracted mourning, what Spivak might call a "sanctioned ignorance", elevates white suffering to the realm of the metaphysical while erasing the material suffering and agency of the colonized. In stark contrast, the narrative of Lal Singh functions not as aesthetic representations but as resistance epistemologies. They reflect grounded, relational, and historically-situated engagements with war that expose the colonial machinery behind global conflict. These characters enter war not for glory, nation, or existential purpose, but for land, survival, justice, and dignity. Their stories exemplify what Smith (2012) calls "purposive engagement with colonial contexts," and their actions constitute forms of resistance rooted in collective memory, not individual anguish.

Theoretical Contribution

Reclaiming War, Reclaiming Knowing: Toward an Indigenous Grounded Theory of War

As this research culminates, it becomes clear that the act of reading war literature is far from a neutral intellectual activity. It is a deeply political and epistemologically charged engagement. The canonization of Western war fiction, particularly Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) has shaped the modern understanding of war as a site of existential despair, individual disillusionment, and metaphysical tragedy. While these narratives reflect a certain cultural experience, their elevation as universal archetypes reveal an underlying epistemic imperialism that marginalizes and often erases the lived experiences and knowledge systems of colonized peoples.

By juxtaposing these dominant narratives with Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* (1939), this study has sought to disrupt that universalization. Characters like Lal Singh does not engage with war as a

philosophical or abstract question. Rather, they enter war through grounded, material, and relational motivations: land, survival, justice, and kinship. These motivations, far from being incidental, constitute an Indigenous epistemology of war, one that centers history, community, and resistance, rather than interiority and existential unraveling.

This project, rooted in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) Indigenous research methodology, has demonstrated that the epistemology of war is plural. It must be read through the lens of cultural specificity and political context. To apply the same interpretive frame to Frederic Henry and Lal Singh is to engage in an epistemic erasure that reproduces the very colonial hierarchies this research aims to challenge.

Indigenous Grounded Theory: A Conceptual Offering

Emerging from this analysis is a theoretical intervention: a **Decolonial Indigenous Grounded Theory of War**. This framework offers an alternative to dominant Western paradigms by privileging the relational, the historical, and the purposive. It includes five core pillars:

1. **War as Colonial Continuity**
War, especially as experienced by colonized peoples, is not a rupture from colonialism but an extension of it. The enlistment of colonized subjects is often coerced or economically necessitated, and must be seen as part of the larger structure of imperial domination.
2. **Relational Epistemology**
Indigenous narratives frame war not as a solitary journey but as a continuation of communal obligations, ancestral memory, and land-based identity. The trauma endured is interpreted through the lens of collective survival.
3. **Epistemic Survivance** (Vizenor, 1999)
Participation in war becomes a form of survivance, not merely surviving but asserting presence, resistance, and continuity within systems designed to erase Indigenous identities and histories.
4. **Narrative as Counter-Epistemology**
Literature becomes a battleground of knowledge. Indigenous and colonized narratives disrupt hegemonic literary traditions, refusing the aestheticization of white suffering as universal while asserting the validity of their own pain and purpose.
5. **Theory as Healing Praxis**
In Indigenous methodologies, theory is not an abstract system imposed from above; it is rooted in lived experience, memory, and ethical responsibility. It functions as a means of restoring dignity and relational balance.

Toward an Ethical Reading Praxis

This study advocates for a new mode of reading: one that is ethically accountable and epistemologically plural. War literature must be read with attention to whose history it tells, whose trauma it centers, and whose resistance it legitimizes. The elevation of Hemingway as the voice of wartime experience must be questioned, not to diminish his cultural significance, but to de-universalize his experience.

Lal Singh's story, as interpreted through Indigenous theory, is not merely another war narrative; it is a reclamation of knowledge, land, and self. It is a counter-archive that exposes the limitations of Western Existentialism and offers an alternative rooted in dignity, relationality, and resistance. His is a story of purposive engagement with colonial modernity, not of metaphysical despair.

Final Reflections

A Decolonial Indigenous Grounded Theory of War, as developed in this research, requires us to decenter Euro-American Existentialism as the exclusive lens through which war literature is analyzed. It insists that suffering must not be aestheticized into metaphysical reflection alone, especially when that reflection often depends on the erasure of colonial violence. Reading through an Indigenous framework compels us to reorient literature as a space of responsibility, not consumption. In this sense, war literature is not merely a record of human conflict but a site of contestation over historical memory, ethical interpretation, and epistemological legitimacy. The Indigenous story does not ask for empathy alone, it demands recognition, accountability, and a reckoning with the colonial legacies embedded in our reading practices. Through the lens of survivance (Vizenor, 1999) and relationality (Smith, 2012), the meaning of war itself is transformed: from heroic tragedy or existential absurdity to lived continuity, purposeful struggle, and ontological resistance.

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