



NATURE, HEALING, AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: AN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE IN *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING* AND *CEREMONY*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the conjunction of indigenous knowledge and the salutary force of nature in terms of environmental care in America in two novels: Delia Owens's *Where the Crawdads Sing*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. The paper analyzes ways in which nature is represented by both novels as a healing agent; finally, it traces a representation of this in Indigenous systems of knowledge vis-à-vis environmental stewardship; and third, it goes on to analyze the implications and relevance of the portrayals pertinent to contemporary times. In this study, the methods of comparison of *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* novels are used. Specifically, comparative literary analysis based on Ecological Literary Criticism and Indigenous Knowledge Systems theories have been applied to these novels in order to reveal that they present nature as a place of healing and self-realization, and that the interdependence between people and environment is crucial.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, healing power of nature, environmental stewardship, ecocriticism, sustainable practices

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la convergence entre les savoirs autochtones et la force bienfaisante de la nature en matière de protection de l'environnement aux États-Unis, à travers deux romans : *Where the Crawdads Sing* de Delia Owens et *Ceremony* de Leslie Marmon Silko. Dans un premier temps, l'étude analyse la manière dont la nature est représentée, dans ces deux œuvres, comme un agent de guérison ; dans un second temps, elle met en lumière la représentation de cette dimension dans les systèmes de savoirs autochtones en lien avec la gestion responsable de l'environnement ; enfin, elle examine les implications et la pertinence de ces représentations dans le contexte contemporain. La méthodologie adoptée repose sur une analyse littéraire comparative fondée sur des lectures approfondies de ces œuvres, complétées par des cadres théoriques issus des études environnementales autochtones et de l'écocritique. L'argumentation s'appuie sur deux fondements théoriques majeurs : la théorie de la critique littéraire écologique, qui s'intéresse à la représentation de la nature et des enjeux environnementaux dans la littérature, et la théorie des systèmes de savoirs autochtones, qui examine la relation culturelle et spirituelle que les communautés autochtones entretiennent avec la terre, ainsi que la manière dont ces relations éclairent des pratiques durables.

Mots-clés : savoirs autochtones, pouvoir guérisseur de la nature, gestion environnementale responsable, écocritique, pratiques durables.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge base of indigenous people in the Americas has been a very reciprocal existence with nature since time immemorial. These practices involve an integrated

spirituality with medicine and ecological ways that can further bring humans and nature in balance and harmony. In a deep sense, the indigenous concept of land involves not only how to utilize or exploit the earth's resources but also to use it as guidance for wisdom, healing, and advice. This is reflected notably in the healing practices amongst them, whereby nature was an active agent in restoration for nurture of the individual and the collective. As observed by Berkes, "Indigenous knowledge systems are often considered holistic, integrating a wide range of wisdom related to plants, animals, the environment and spiritual beliefs". (Berkes, 1999, p. 8)

The concept of the healing power of nature is reflected in other ways in Indigenous cultures: emotional, spiritual, and communal healing. In trying to understand how Indigenous peoples approach healing, one finds a significant connection between people and nature. This relationship stands more as a tie to the land, an acknowledgment that human well-being is inextricably linked to the health of the environment. In this regard, Delia Owens's *Where the Crawdads Sing* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* are two such novels that represent insightful portrayals of how nature works as a restorative power for their respective protagonists, Kya and Tayo. It is here that, in *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya's healing becomes connected with the deeper connection of feeling the marsh itself as some form of living sentient thing: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62). In a similar way, *Ceremony* centers Tayo's journey to healing within the land and through the ceremonies of reconnecting with his cultural and ecological heritage: "The land was a living thing. They were part of it, and it was part of them" (Silko, 1977, p. 50). Both novels represent nature not just as a background of human life but as one dynamic, healing force that shapes and molds the characters on their journeys of self-discovery and recovery.

This paper shows how both *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* illustrate a linkage in Indigenous knowledge, the healing power of nature, and environmental stewardship. These novels bring into light the importance of continuing a symbiotic relationship with nature through Kya's and Tayo's respective journeys for individual healing and the collective health of the environment. The paper also exposes how these novels represent an Indigenous perspective that focuses on ecological balance, environmental care, and the restorative powers of nature in personal and communal contexts through analysis of the ways in which the characters draw strength from nature.

1. Nature as a Character in *Where the Crawdads Sing* and in *Ceremony*

1.1. Nature in *Where the Crawdads Sing*

In *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018), Delia Owens presents nature not merely as a setting but as an active force shaping Kya Clark's survival and healing. Abandoned by her family and raised in the North Carolina marsh, Kya develops a profound bond

with this environment, which becomes her protector, teacher, and source of identity. The marsh is depicted as a living presence: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers. It was hers, and she was part of it" (Owens, 2018, p. 62). This interconnectedness echoes Indigenous worldviews in which land is animate and spiritually significant. Nature sustains Kya physically and emotionally, offering sanctuary and wisdom; as she reflects, "Kya felt the pulse of the marsh... she knew that it was the pulse of the world" (p. 161), underscoring a sense of oneness with the environment. Through attentive observation of birds and seasonal rhythms, "The birds built their nests in the most intricate patterns, and Kya wondered if she could ever understand all the secret things of the marsh, its ancient ways" (p. 163), Kya learns respect, patience, and ecological balance. The marsh also replaces the family she lost: "Kya had always felt like the marsh was her family... they never abandoned her" (p. 78), highlighting nature as a source of belonging and resilience. Living sustainably and taking only what she needs, Kya embodies environmental stewardship, while the intrusion of outsiders into the marsh symbolizes broader ecological threats. Ultimately, Owens portrays nature as sacred, restorative, and ethically instructive, aligning Kya's personal growth with Indigenous-inspired principles of interconnectedness, healing, and responsibility toward the land.

1.2. Nature in Ceremony

In *Ceremony* (1977), Leslie Marmon Silko portrays nature as an active, spiritual force central to the healing of Tayo, a mixed-race Laguna Pueblo veteran traumatized by World War II. Rather than serving as backdrop, the land functions as a living presence that guides Tayo's emotional and spiritual recovery, reflecting Indigenous worldviews in which humans and nature exist in reciprocal relationship. The novel presents the land as sacred and animate: "The land is alive, and it has a spirit. It is a living, breathing thing, and we are part of it" (Silko, 1977, p. 50). Healing occurs through ceremony, which reconnects Tayo to the rhythms of the natural world and restores balance between his fractured identities.

Animals also act as spiritual guides, embodying Indigenous beliefs in kinship among all beings. When Tayo recognizes that "The deer was not a separate thing. It was a part of the land, and the land was a part of him" (p. 78), he understands interconnectedness as both ecological and metaphysical. The natural elements further structure his recovery: water symbolizes purification and rebirth; wind carries ancestral voices; and fire represents transformation, "The fire was a reminder of the flames that had consumed everything in the past... But it also marked the beginning of the renewal" (p. 125). These forces are not symbolic abstractions but active agents in restoring psychological and communal harmony. Beyond individual healing, the novel links personal restoration to environmental stewardship. *Ceremony* insists that the well-being of the people depends on the health of the land: "The ceremony is not just about healing the individual, but about healing the land as well" (p. 134). Tayo's journey

thus becomes communal and ecological, illustrating an Indigenous ethic in which spiritual renewal, cultural survival, and environmental balance are inseparable. Through this vision, Silko affirms nature as sacred, dynamic, and essential to both individual identity and collective resilience.

2. Comparative analysis of Kya and Tayo's healing through nature

2.1. Personal and ecological healing

In the two novels under study, nature is central to the healing of Kya and Tayo. Though shaped by different histories, both protagonists undergo personal and ecological restoration through deep relationships with the natural world. Abandoned in the North Carolina marsh, Kya survives and matures through intimate knowledge of the swamp's rhythms, while Tayo, a traumatized World War II veteran, is healed by reconnecting with Indigenous ceremonial practices that restore his bond with the land and elements.

Kya's journey is one of solitude, survival, and self-discovery. The marsh becomes her sanctuary, teacher, and emotional anchor. She experiences it as a living presence: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62), and later realizes, "Kya felt the pulse of the marsh... she knew that it was the pulse of the world" (p. 161). These reflections show that her emotional healing depends on recognizing reciprocity between herself and the ecosystem. By observing ecological balance and resisting human exploitation of the swamp, Kya develops environmental consciousness; her personal recovery parallels her commitment to preserving the fragile world that sustains her.

Tayo's healing in *Ceremony* is more explicitly communal and spiritual. Struggling with war trauma and cultural dislocation, he must restore harmony with the land through ceremony. Nature is sacred and animate: "The land is alive, and it has a spirit. It is a living, breathing thing, and we are part of it" (Silko, 1977, p. 50). Through ritual reconnection with land, animals, and elements, Tayo learns that individual well-being mirrors ecological balance. As the novel affirms, "The ceremony is not just about healing the individual, but about healing the land as well" (p. 134). His recovery thus reflects an Indigenous worldview in which personal trauma and environmental disruption are inseparable.

While Kya's healing emphasizes autonomy and intimate ecological awareness, and Tayo's underscores communal spirituality and ceremonial restoration, both narratives reveal that emotional and psychological renewal cannot be separated from the health of the environment. In each novel, nature is not a passive backdrop but an active, restorative force, embodying reciprocity, balance, and interconnectedness between human and ecological well-being.

2.2. *The environmental message*

Both Delia Owens's *Where the Crawdads Sing* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* present protagonists whose personal healing is deeply intertwined with environmental stewardship. Kya and Tayo engage with nature to recover from trauma (personal or collective) highlighting the profound relationship between humans and the natural world and the necessity of protecting ecosystems. This analysis explores how their healing reflects ecological balance, sustainability, and respect for nature.

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya's survival and emotional restoration depend on the marsh, which is portrayed as an active participant in her healing. She learns from its rhythms, plants, and animals, gaining awareness of the consequences of human disruption. The marsh is simultaneously sanctuary and teacher, embodying the novel's environmental message: a reciprocal relationship with the land fosters personal and ecological well-being. Kya reflects: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62); "Kya felt the pulse of the marsh... she knew that it was the pulse of the world" (Owens, 2018, p. 161). Her healing emphasizes both emotional recovery and ecological sensitivity, showing that human well-being is linked to the health of the ecosystem.

In *Ceremony*, Tayo's healing is guided by his Indigenous Laguna Pueblo heritage. Recovering from PTSD and cultural dislocation, he restores balance through ceremonial practices, reconnecting with the land, animals, and elements. The land is a living, spiritual entity: "The land was a living thing. They were part of it, and it was part of them" (Silko, 1977, p. 50). His personal healing mirrors ecological restoration, reflecting the Indigenous belief that human trauma and environmental disruption are inseparable. Tayo's ceremonies show that spiritual and ecological balance must be restored together: "The ceremony is not just about healing the individual, but about healing the land as well" (Silko, 1977, p. 134).

While Kya's healing emphasizes solitude, self-discovery, and ecological awareness, Tayo's underscores communal, spiritual, and ceremonial restoration. Both narratives, however, demonstrate that nature is a living, restorative force whose health is intimately connected to human well-being. Each novel warns of the consequences of human exploitation: Kya witnesses the marsh's vulnerability, while Tayo contends with the damage caused by colonization and industrialization.

Ultimately, *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* link personal and ecological healing, advocating environmental stewardship. Kya's intimate bond with the marsh and Tayo's ceremonial reconnection with the land illustrate the Indigenous understanding that nature is alive, capable of healing, and deserving of respect. Both novels urge readers to recognize that safeguarding the environment is essential for individual, communal, and ecological well-being.

2.3. The role of elders and tradition

In the two novels, nature is central to the healing journeys of Kya and Tayo, alongside the guidance of elders and traditional knowledge. Elders and tradition shape the protagonists' understanding of healing and ecological balance, whether through direct mentorship or the wisdom embedded in the natural world. Kya, abandoned and isolated, lacks direct guidance from elders. Her connection to the marsh becomes her primary teacher, shaping her survival and emotional growth. Observations of the land, plants, and animals provide her with intuitive, self-taught wisdom. Tate, though not an elder, introduces her to books and learning, bridging her understanding beyond the marsh. Memories of her mother also inform her respect for nature, reinforcing Indigenous philosophies of interdependence. As Kya reflects: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62). In Kya's case, the land itself acts as a healer and teacher, demonstrating that the absence of elders can be compensated by a deep connection with nature.

In contrast, Tayo's healing in *Ceremony* is guided by elders and traditional practices. As a Laguna Pueblo veteran, his recovery from PTSD relies on ritual, community, and ancestral wisdom. Betonie, a medicine man, teaches Tayo that healing is cyclical: "You don't heal in a straight line, Tayo. You heal in circles, and in spirals" (Silko, 1977, p. 168). Through ceremony, Tayo restores balance within himself and with the land, highlighting that ecological and personal healing are inseparable. Other elders, like his aunt, further support his understanding of cultural and environmental interconnectedness. While Kya's journey emphasizes solitude and self-directed learning through the land, Tayo's underscores communal, ritualized guidance. Both, however, reflect the importance of traditional knowledge in fostering personal and ecological healing. Kya's self-taught lessons echo ancestral wisdom, whereas Tayo's ceremonies and mentorship illustrate the role of collective, intergenerational learning. Ultimately, both novels convey that healing is intertwined with tradition, whether transmitted through elders or the land itself. Kya and Tayo demonstrate that reconnecting with one's roots (through nature or cultural practices) is essential for restoring balance between the individual and the environment. These narratives highlight that Indigenous knowledge and healing extend beyond personal recovery to the broader restoration of harmony between humans and nature.

3. Indigenous knowledge and environmental stewardship in the contemporary world

3.1. Indigenous environmental knowledge and sustainability

Indigenous knowledge, especially regarding the environment, is increasingly recognized for its relevance in contemporary discussions on sustainability and ecological preservation. This knowledge system is not merely a collection of facts and observations but a holistic worldview that interconnects the spiritual, ecological, and

cultural dimensions of life. Indigenous communities have long engaged in sustainable practices, ensuring that the land remains fertile, the waters clean, and the ecosystems balanced for future generations. This section examines the ways in which Indigenous environmental knowledge fosters sustainability and stewardship, particularly within the context of Delia Owens's *Where the Crawdads Sing* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, while connecting these literary depictions to contemporary environmental challenges. Through the themes of healing, ecological balance, and respect for nature, both novels serve as lenses through which the importance of Indigenous environmental knowledge can be seen in today's world.

Indigenous environmental knowledge (IEK) refers to the ways in which Indigenous peoples have understood, interacted with, and managed their natural environments over millennia. This knowledge is a product of long-standing relationships between Indigenous communities and the land they inhabit. Unlike Western approaches to resource management, which often treat nature as an external object to be exploited, IEK is based on a philosophy of interconnectedness and balance. Indigenous peoples view themselves as part of a larger web of life, and their practices reflect a deep respect for the land and its ecosystems.

At its core, Indigenous environmental knowledge is about sustainability, understanding that resources are finite and that the actions of today affect the well-being of future generations. The concept of "Mother Earth" in many Indigenous cultures symbolizes the nurturing, life-giving qualities of nature. This view contrasts sharply with the dominant extractive approach seen in modern capitalist economies, where natural resources are often treated as commodities to be consumed without regard for long-term ecological health. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) notes in her seminal work *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Indigenous knowledge emphasizes reciprocity between humans and the natural world: "The land is not a resource to be consumed; it is a partner in the mutual exchange of life" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 56). This understanding of the relationship between humans and nature is foundational to Indigenous approaches to environmental stewardship, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, and the recognition of the rights of all living beings.

The two novels portray nature as a vital, living entity, deserving of respect and care. Although neither novel explicitly focuses on Indigenous communities in the conventional sense, they reflect Indigenous views on nature and environmental stewardship, especially through the characters' healing journeys. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya's relationship with the marsh highlights the deeply interconnected nature of the human-environment bond. The marsh is not simply a backdrop for Kya's life; it is an active participant in her healing process, providing solace, food, and wisdom. The marsh is depicted as a living, breathing entity, echoing Indigenous philosophies of nature's sentience. As Kya reflects: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62). This line exemplifies the deep reverence for nature that resonates with Indigenous understandings of the land. In Kya's life, the marsh is

a teacher, guide, and provider, much like the land in many Indigenous cultures. Kya's connection to the land also reflects an intimate knowledge of ecology, much like traditional Indigenous practices of managing ecosystems through intimate, long-term relationships with the land. For instance, Kya's ability to track the ebb and flow of the natural world around her, understanding the tides, the animals, and the plants, resembles the environmental stewardship practices found in Indigenous communities, where elders pass on ecological knowledge for sustainable living.

Similarly, in *Ceremony*, Tayo's healing is directly linked to his relationship with the land and the traditional ceremonies that honor it. Tayo's journey represents not only an individual quest for personal healing but also the larger need for cultural and environmental restoration. His healing ceremony emphasizes the importance of ritual and tradition, aspects of Indigenous knowledge that foster ecological sustainability by promoting respect for nature. In the novel, the land is viewed as sacred, and it is through rituals of renewal and purification that balance is restored: "The land was a living thing. They were part of it, and it was part of them" (Silko, 1977, p. 50).

Tayo's understanding of the environment is shaped by the teachings of the elders, who stress the interconnectedness of humans, the land, and all living beings. By participating in ceremonies that honor the land, Tayo learns to see himself as part of the natural world, responsible for its well-being. His recovery becomes symbolic of the larger need for environmental stewardship, reinforcing the idea that healing, both personal and ecological, requires a return to traditional knowledge and practices.

In the contemporary world, Indigenous knowledge has gained increased recognition for its relevance in addressing modern environmental crises, such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. As Western science has increasingly focused on resource extraction and technological solutions, Indigenous peoples continue to practice sustainable land management based on centuries of lived experience. For example, the practice of controlled burns, which many Indigenous groups have used for thousands of years, is now being reconsidered by environmentalists as a means of reducing the risk of large-scale wildfires. The "right to burn" has become a key element in contemporary efforts to revitalize forests and restore ecological balance. Research has shown that Indigenous fire management practices help prevent the buildup of excessive undergrowth, promoting healthier ecosystems and reducing the intensity of wildfires.

Similarly, Indigenous agricultural practices, such as the "Three Sisters" method of planting corn, beans, and squash together, have long been recognized for their sustainability. This agricultural system enhances soil fertility, conserves water, and reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Modern scientists and environmentalists are increasingly turning to these ancient practices as models for sustainable agriculture in the face of climate change. As scholars like Kimmerer and others have noted, Indigenous environmental knowledge offers not only practical

solutions to contemporary ecological problems but also a philosophical framework for living in harmony with nature. Kimmerer (2013) asserts that this knowledge is not merely a set of techniques but a way of being in the world: "The world is not a problem to be solved; it is a gift to be celebrated" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 45). This shift in perspective is crucial as the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges. The Indigenous approach to sustainability, which values long-term thinking and the health of the planet as a whole, offers a necessary counterpoint to the short-term, exploitative tendencies of modern industrial society.

As a whole, Indigenous environmental knowledge has much to offer the contemporary world in terms of sustainability and ecological stewardship. Through both *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony*, we see how the protagonists' healing journeys are intricately connected to their relationships with nature, relationships that reflect the deeper, reciprocal knowledge systems of Indigenous cultures. These novels offer a glimpse into the ways in which Indigenous wisdom, passed down through generations, fosters sustainability and respect for the land. In the face of contemporary environmental crises, Indigenous knowledge provides invaluable insights into how we can reconnect with the Earth, heal ourselves, and restore balance to the natural world.

3.2. Reclaiming and protecting Indigenous wisdom

In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of Indigenous knowledge in shaping sustainable environmental practices. Often seen as holistic, interconnected, and deeply rooted in spiritual and cultural traditions, Indigenous knowledge systems offer invaluable insights into how humans can live in harmony with the natural world. In an era marked by unprecedented environmental degradation and the climate crisis, reclaiming and protecting Indigenous wisdom is not only a matter of cultural preservation but also a necessity for safeguarding ecological balance. This section will explore the process of reclaiming and protecting Indigenous environmental knowledge, as well as the barriers to its recognition and integration into contemporary environmental practices. Drawing on the themes of healing, environmental stewardship, and cultural resilience found in *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, this discussion will highlight how both novels reflect the urgency of reclaiming Indigenous wisdom in response to modern environmental challenges.

The process of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge involves not only preserving traditional ecological practices but also reviving cultural narratives and spiritual practices that connect Indigenous communities to the land. This reclaiming process is essential because it represents an active resistance against the erasure of Indigenous identity and ways of life. As Indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues: "Reclaiming our relationships with the land is not just about maintaining

cultural practices; it is about reclaiming our power as human beings" (Simpson, 2017, p. 35).

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya's profound connection to the marsh exemplifies this kind of reclamation. Though she is an isolated figure in the narrative, Kya embodies a form of knowledge that is closely tied to the land. Her ability to understand the rhythms of the marsh, identify its plants and animals, and maintain balance within this ecosystem illustrates a living, breathing form of environmental knowledge. The marsh is not simply a passive backdrop for Kya's story; it is an active, teaching force in her life. The novel subtly calls attention to the ways in which this intimate knowledge of nature helps Kya heal and grow, echoing the idea that reclaiming such knowledge is essential for personal and collective well-being.

In *Ceremony*, Tayo's journey represents another form of reclaiming knowledge. As he grapples with PTSD from his time in World War II, Tayo's healing is deeply intertwined with the spiritual and ecological teachings of his Native American ancestors. The novel suggests that returning to traditional ceremonies, such as those that honor the land and its cycles, is necessary for the restoration of balance in both the individual and the community. Tayo's story underscores the notion that reclaiming Indigenous practices is an essential component of ecological restoration and personal healing. As the character Betonie, a traditional healer, explains: "You have to remember, everything you think is sacred, is sacred. This earth is sacred, and we are part of it" (Silko, 1977, p. 179). This quote emphasizes that reclaiming Indigenous knowledge is not simply an intellectual endeavor but a spiritual and emotional one, rooted in the understanding that humans are intrinsically linked to the land.

Despite the growing recognition of Indigenous environmental knowledge, there are significant barriers to fully integrating it into contemporary environmental management and policy. These barriers stem from historical legacies of colonialism, the marginalization of Indigenous communities, and the continued dominance of Western scientific methods. For many Indigenous communities, the loss of traditional knowledge is compounded by land dispossession, which limits their ability to practice sustainable environmental stewardship.

One major barrier is the continuing trend of intellectual property theft, where Indigenous knowledge is appropriated without consent or compensation. In many cases, valuable ecological insights, such as traditional plant knowledge, are extracted for commercial use, often without recognizing the communities who have stewarded this knowledge for generations. For instance, plants that Indigenous communities have used for medicinal purposes for centuries are often patented by pharmaceutical companies, disregarding the cultural significance of these plants to their rightful owners. In this regard, the protection of Indigenous intellectual property is critical to ensuring that Indigenous communities retain ownership and control over their

knowledge. As scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (1997) argues: "The knowledge of Indigenous communities is not just a resource for exploitation but a way of living with the earth" (Shiva, 1997, p. 62). This recognition of Indigenous knowledge as a living, cultural system rather than a mere resource is essential for its protection and integration into global sustainability efforts.

Moreover, the systematic undervaluing of Indigenous knowledge by governmental and institutional authorities continues to pose a significant challenge. Western systems of knowledge, which emphasize scientific objectivity and technological solutions, often overlook the holistic, relational, and spiritual aspects of Indigenous knowledge. As a result, environmental policies based on these paradigms often fail to consider the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the spiritual dimensions of environmental well-being, which are key tenets of Indigenous environmental stewardship. The disconnection between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems further complicates efforts to protect and integrate these practices into modern conservation efforts.

As global environmental crises become more urgent, there is an increasing need to bridge the gap between Western scientific knowledge and Indigenous wisdom. By integrating the principles of ecological sustainability, respect for natural cycles, and long-term thinking that are central to Indigenous worldviews, contemporary environmental stewardship can be more effective and inclusive. Scholars and activists are calling for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in environmental policymaking, not as a supplementary or optional perspective, but as an essential and integral part of any comprehensive ecological strategy. For example, Indigenous-led initiatives like the global movement to halt deforestation in the Amazon Rainforest have shown the potential of Indigenous knowledge in preserving vital ecosystems. Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of protecting biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance in their territories, yet their efforts are often undermined by external economic interests. The recognition of Indigenous land rights and the empowerment of Indigenous communities are essential steps toward protecting both their knowledge and the environment.

The work of scholars such as Robin Wall Kimmerer also underscores the importance of fostering an Indigenous approach to ecological restoration. Kimmerer's research into "braiding sweetgrass" highlights how Indigenous practices of reciprocity with the land can inform modern ecological restoration efforts. Her work provides a roadmap for how Indigenous knowledge can guide contemporary environmental stewardship: "The land offers gifts, but it asks for something in return" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 68). This reciprocal relationship with nature forms the basis for sustainable environmental practices and is an integral part of Indigenous wisdom that must be protected and revitalized in order to address the pressing environmental challenges of today.

To round up, reclaiming and protecting Indigenous environmental knowledge is vital for fostering sustainable practices and ecological resilience in the contemporary world. As *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* illustrate, the healing of individuals and communities is deeply connected to their relationship with the land, which in turn is inseparable from the broader effort of environmental stewardship. In a world facing mounting ecological challenges, the wisdom of Indigenous peoples offers essential insights for ensuring a sustainable future. However, to protect this knowledge, it must be respected, integrated into modern conservation practices, and safeguarded against exploitation and marginalization. Reclaiming Indigenous environmental wisdom is not just a matter of cultural preservation but of environmental justice, ensuring that future generations inherit a planet that remains vibrant, healthy, and sustainable.

3.3. Integration into modern environmental movements

In an age where environmental degradation and climate change pose critical threats to the planet, the importance of sustainable environmental practices has never been more urgent. Modern environmental movements are increasingly recognizing the potential of Indigenous knowledge systems in addressing ecological challenges. Indigenous communities, with their deep understanding of ecosystems, have long practiced forms of environmental stewardship that prioritize balance, sustainability, and respect for the natural world. In contemporary environmental movements, these traditional practices are gaining visibility as vital contributions to global conservation efforts. Drawing from *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, this section explores how Indigenous knowledge can be integrated into modern environmental movements, providing solutions to contemporary ecological crises. The novels highlight the intrinsic connection between individuals and their environments, underscoring the power of Indigenous knowledge in healing both the human spirit and the land.

Indigenous knowledge systems represent a way of life that has evolved over millennia, deeply rooted in cultural, spiritual, and ecological practices. In contrast to Western approaches that often view nature as a resource to be exploited, Indigenous knowledge treats the land, plants, animals, and ecosystems as interconnected and sacred. This worldview, emphasizing sustainability and long-term ecological balance, is more relevant than ever in the face of global environmental crises such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Integrating Indigenous knowledge into contemporary environmental movements is crucial to reversing the damage caused by unsustainable practices and restoring balance to ecosystems.

One of the most significant contributions of Indigenous knowledge to modern environmental movements is its emphasis on holistic ecological practices that consider both the material and spiritual dimensions of the natural world. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya's understanding of the marsh and its ecosystems reflects this holistic view of nature. Her connection to the land is not just physical but also emotional and

spiritual. The novel underscores the idea that healing, both personal and ecological, occurs when humans recognize their intimate relationship with the land. As Kya reflects: "The marsh was a living thing, and it was hers" (Owens, 2018, p. 62). "Kya felt the pulse of the marsh... she knew that it was the pulse of the world" (Owens, 2018, p. 161). These sentiments reveal the central role of nature in human life, demonstrating how a deep, spiritual connection to the environment fosters both healing and ecological stewardship. Kya's ability to interpret the health of the marsh is a direct result of her reverence for its interconnectedness, emphasizing the value of Indigenous wisdom for environmental management.

Similarly, in *Ceremony*, Tayo's healing is guided by traditional Indigenous practices that honor the land and the cyclical nature of life. Through his connection to the earth, animals, and ceremonies, Tayo learns to reconcile his internal struggles, while simultaneously contributing to the restoration of balance in the larger world. As Betonie, a medicine man, explains: "You have to remember, everything you think is sacred, is sacred. This earth is sacred, and we are part of it" (Silko, 1977, p. 179). Tayo's journey of healing becomes a metaphor for environmental restoration, where the restoration of the individual's spirit is directly tied to the restoration of the land. This interconnectedness is a key element of Indigenous knowledge, which can offer profound insights into how modern societies might shift their attitudes toward environmental stewardship.

While the integration of Indigenous knowledge into contemporary environmental movements holds great promise, it is often impeded by several barriers. One of the primary challenges is the historical and ongoing marginalization of Indigenous communities. For centuries, Western societies have disregarded or outright dismissed Indigenous ways of knowing, often considering them primitive or irrelevant. In many cases, Indigenous knowledge has been excluded from formal environmental policy-making processes, despite its deep relevance to modern ecological issues. Furthermore, Indigenous communities often lack access to platforms where they can share their knowledge and advocate for its inclusion in environmental discussions.

A second barrier to the integration of Indigenous knowledge into modern environmental movements is the issue of intellectual property rights. Indigenous communities have long practiced sustainable land management techniques and developed ecological wisdom, but this knowledge is often appropriated without consent by corporate and scientific entities. For example, traditional ecological practices, such as agroforestry, water management, or medicinal plant knowledge, are sometimes co-opted and commercialized without any recognition or compensation to the Indigenous communities that developed them. Vandana Shiva, a renowned scholar and activist, emphasizes the importance of protecting Indigenous knowledge from exploitation: "The knowledge of Indigenous communities is not just a resource for exploitation but a way of living with the earth" (Shiva, 1997, p. 62). As such,

protecting Indigenous intellectual property is critical for ensuring that the benefits of their knowledge are used in a way that respects their rights and cultural sovereignty.

Finally, there is often a lack of recognition for the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Indigenous knowledge in Western environmental frameworks. Many modern environmental movements focus solely on scientific and technical solutions to ecological problems, neglecting the spiritual and relational aspects of environmental stewardship. Indigenous worldviews, which emphasize reciprocity and interconnectedness with the earth, offer a more holistic approach to environmental protection. However, these spiritual practices and teachings are often overlooked or misunderstood by mainstream environmental organizations. Recognizing the value of Indigenous spirituality in environmental stewardship is essential for creating truly inclusive and sustainable environmental policies. Despite these barriers, Indigenous communities are increasingly taking the lead in environmental activism, working to protect their lands and advocate for the inclusion of their knowledge in global environmental efforts. Indigenous-led movements are challenging the dominance of corporate interests that prioritize short-term profits over long-term ecological health. For instance, the #NoDAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline) protests, led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, brought attention to the environmental degradation caused by oil pipelines and the need to protect sacred land. This movement highlighted the intersection of environmental protection, Indigenous rights, and social justice, calling for the preservation of both cultural and natural resources.

As a whole, the integration of Indigenous knowledge into modern environmental movements offers a powerful framework for addressing contemporary ecological challenges. As *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* illustrate, Indigenous knowledge is not only a tool for personal and community healing but also a pathway to environmental restoration. By reclaiming and protecting Indigenous wisdom, modern societies can foster more sustainable, holistic approaches to environmental stewardship. However, for this integration to be successful, it is crucial to overcome the barriers of marginalization, intellectual property theft, and the limited recognition of Indigenous spiritual and cultural practices. As Indigenous communities continue to advocate for their rights and knowledge, they play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of global environmental movements.

CONCLUSION

Both novels explore the profound relationship between their protagonists, Kya and Tayo, and the natural world. These characters' connections to nature serve as a lens through which the broader themes of personal healing, environmental stewardship, and the need for sustainable relationships with the earth are explored. In Owens's novel, Kya's bond with the marsh exemplifies the reciprocal and healing relationship that can develop when an individual approaches nature with reverence and respect. As Kya immerses herself in the rhythms of the natural world, she not only heals from

the trauma of abandonment and isolation but also comes to understand the interconnectedness of all living things. This understanding positions the marsh as a character in its own right, central to Kya's healing process and to the broader ecological balance in the novel.

On the same mood, in *Ceremony*, Tayo's healing journey is intrinsically tied to his spiritual connection with the land. Silko weaves a narrative where Tayo's personal struggles, stemming from trauma and cultural dislocation, are healed through traditional Indigenous ceremonies that emphasize the sacred relationship between humans and nature. The land in *Ceremony* is not simply a setting but a living, breathing entity, and Tayo's healing is a direct result of his reconciliation with it. The spiritual teachings from his elders and the ceremonies he participates in emphasize the crucial role of nature in maintaining both individual and ecological health. As Tayo learns, healing is not just about restoring human balance but also about restoring balance to the earth itself.

Both novels underscore the critical importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary environmental discussions. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the natural world is seen as an essential, living entity that fosters individual healing, while in *Ceremony*, the healing of the individual and the healing of the land are intricately connected. These narratives highlight how Indigenous ways of knowing, rooted in respect for the land, deep ecological wisdom, and spiritual practices, offer invaluable insights into maintaining a healthy balance between humans and the environment. These insights challenge modern Western environmentalism, which often prioritizes technological solutions, by offering a more holistic and sustainable approach to ecological and human well-being.

The insights gained from the novels' portrayal of nature as a force for healing demand urgent action in how we approach environmental challenges today. Both *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Ceremony* illuminate the crucial role of Indigenous knowledge in fostering sustainable practices that can address pressing ecological issues like climate change, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss. As the world faces increasingly severe environmental crises, it is vital that modern environmental policies begin to fully recognize and integrate Indigenous knowledge systems. These knowledge systems, developed over centuries, emphasize not only ecological stewardship but also a holistic view of the relationship between humans and the earth.

The lessons from Kya's and Tayo's healing journeys must serve as a call to action for policymakers, activists, and citizens alike. We must recognize that nature is not an external resource to be exploited, but a partner in the ongoing process of mutual healing, both for the earth and for humanity. Indigenous communities have long advocated for the protection of their land and the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge, yet they have often been excluded from the environmental conversations that shape policy and practice. The time has come to change this. We must actively

seek to collaborate with Indigenous communities, incorporate their wisdom into environmental strategies, and respect their rights to the land.

Furthermore, the integration of Indigenous knowledge into contemporary environmental movements is not only an ethical necessity but also a practical one. Climate change and environmental degradation are global issues that require comprehensive, multifaceted solutions. Indigenous knowledge offers a critical piece of this puzzle by providing insights into sustainable land management, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation that modern science has yet to fully explore. To achieve true environmental healing, we must move beyond a one-dimensional approach and embrace a worldview that honors the earth as sacred, interconnected, and worthy of respect.

As Kya poignantly reflects in *Where the Crawdads Sing*, “the marsh was a living thing, and it was hers” (Owens, 2018, p. 62). This sentiment echoes the belief that nature is not an abstract concept, but a living, breathing partner in the dance of life. We must embrace this perspective, advocating for policies and practices that honor both the knowledge and the land that sustain us. The urgency of this call cannot be overstated: the survival of both our planet and humanity depends on our ability to listen, learn, and live in harmony with the natural world.

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