

Indigenous traditions and the impact of war: An analysis of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes indigenous traditions and the impact of war on N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn*. This study aims to understand how the narrative portrays the struggles of Native American identity and cultural survival in the post-World War II era.

Research methodology: A qualitative literary analysis approach was employed, focusing on thematic analysis, character study, and the cultural context. The analysis examined primary and secondary sources, such as literary criticism and historical accounts, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the novel's themes.

Results: The analysis revealed that the novel intricately weaves indigenous traditions with traumatic experiences of war. The protagonist, Abel, embodies the conflict between Native American heritage and the alienation caused by modern society and war. The novel depicts the resilience of indigenous culture through rituals, storytelling, and community support, highlighting the healing process of individuals and communities.

Limitations: This study's narrow focus on a single novel may not fully represent the broader spectrum of Native American literature or experiences. Additionally, reliance on existing literary criticism may introduce bias, based on the interpretations of other scholars.

Contribution: This paper enhances the understanding of how indigenous traditions and the impact of war are portrayed in the Native American literature. This underscores the importance of cultural preservation and the role of literature in addressing historical and contemporary issues faced by indigenous communities. This study also offers insights into the healing power of cultural practices and community solidarity in the face of adversity.

Keywords: Trauma, war, identity, customs, heritage, roots, reconnection and Rebirth

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1. Introduction

N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* is a seminal work in Native American literature, offering a profound exploration of the intersections between indigenous cultural heritage and the experiences of war. It is the narrative of a young Kiowa, Abel, who is caught between two worlds of his native heritage on the reservation and the war trauma invading his psyche. Drawing from his painful personal upbringing on Jemez Pueblo during the tumultuous period of World War II, Momaday recounts:

Abel is a composite of the boys I know at Jemez. I wanted to say something about them. An appalling number of them died; they died young, and they died of violence. One participant was drunk and ran

over. The other was drunk and frozen to death. (He was the best runner I knew.) One man was murdered, butchered by a kinsman under a telegraph pole just east of San Ysidro. Yet, another committed suicide. Many who have survived this long are living under the Relocation Program in Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, etc. They are sad people (Momaday & Guidall, 1968).

Abel's journey is a profound struggle, as he grapples with the trauma of war. He experienced a fractured sense of identity. Moreover, his suffering was caused by the challenge of reintegrating into his community and reconnecting with his cultural traditions. The narrative is deeply rooted in the cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal lives of the Kiowa and Jemez Pueblo people. Through its depiction of ceremonies, storytelling, and the sacred connection to the land, *the House Made of Dawn* illustrates how these traditions shape individual and collective identities. Abel's disconnection from these traditions upon his return from war serves as a poignant commentary on the broader experiences of Native American veterans. These veterans face significant challenges in reinstating their societies and preserving their cultural distinctiveness. *N. Scott Momaday: Remembering Ancestors, Earth, and Traditions* by Weaver (2008) offers a comprehensive analysis of Momaday's works, including *House Made of Dawn*. Weaver examines how Momaday deals with the themes of cultural alienation and the impact of war on Native American identity. This book provides critical insights into the protagonists' experiences as war veterans and his subsequent alienation from both his native culture and dominant American society.

This study aims to delve into the rich tapestry of native traditions presented in the novel and examine how they intersect and influence Abel's post-war experiences. By analyzing key elements, such as spiritual practices, the role of storytelling, and the significance of the natural landscape, this study highlights the ways in which Momaday portrays the resilience of native cultural heritage. Furthermore, the analysis explores the psychological and cultural impacts of war on Abel, reflecting the broader implications for Native American communities during the mid-20th century. Through this exploration, this study seeks to underscore the novel's themes of alienation, identity, and healing. It will be argued that *the House Made of Dawn* not only presents a vivid depiction of the struggles faced by Native American veterans, but also offers a powerful narrative of cultural survival and renewal. Ultimately, the novel suggests that reconnecting with one's cultural roots and community can be a vital source of strength and healing in the face of profound disruptions caused by war and modernity. Kenneth Lincoln in *The Native American Renaissance* (Lincoln, 1985) situates *House Made of Dawn* within the broader context of the Native American Renaissance. It discusses how the novel reflects the struggles of Native Americans in the postwar era. This work analyzes the theme of alienation in the novel, particularly focusing on Abel's disconnection after returning from World War II.

Native American literature captures the essence of indigenous cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and historical experience. Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* is a seminal work in this literary tradition. Louis Owens, in his book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Owens, 1994), explores identity crises in post-war Native American literature, noting the profound alienation felt by veterans, like Abel. Arnold Krupat in *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989) discusses the bicultural struggle in Native American literature, emphasizing how *the House Made of Dawn* navigates the space between Western literary forms and native storytelling traditions. In her book *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Allen, 1992), focuses on the spiritual and cultural dimensions, arguing that native literature should be viewed through indigenous epistemologies. Melanie Benson Taylor, in *The Cambridge History of Native American Literature* (2020), looks at the rising trend of Native American literature in particular, referencing Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. Momaday's *The Names* (Momaday, 1987) captivates readers who wish to experience the Native American way of life. Matthias Schubnell in *Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (1997) included interviews in this volume, spanning the period from 1970 to 1993. Momaday responded candidly to questions relating to his multicultural background and his views on the place of the Indian in American literature. Chadwick Allen, in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (2012), is a scholarly journal in the United States that focusses exclusively on American Indian literature.

Charles Woodard in *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (1991) provides a broader historical context of Native American involvement in 20th-century war. Although focusing on Vietnam, Holm's (2010) insights are applicable to understanding the World War II experiences depicted in Momaday's novel. He discusses the dual identity of Native American soldiers who fought for a country that often marginalized them.

2. Methodology

When conducting a study on "Native Traditions and the War: A Study of *House Made of Dawn*, it is essential to use a comprehensive research methodology that combines literary analysis, historical context, and cultural studies.

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on textual analysis and historical contextualization, to explore the intersection of Native American traditions and the experience of war, as depicted in *the novel*.

2.2 Objectives

To analyse how N. Scott Momaday represents Native American traditions in *House Made of Dawn*
To explore the impact of war on Native American identity, as illustrated in the novel. To understand the protagonist's journey towards redemption within the context of native traditions and post-war experiences.

2.3 Data Collection

Primary Source: Textual Analysis of *Dawn Houses*: A close reading of the novel will help to identify key themes, symbols, and narrative structures related to native traditions and war. Examination of specific passages depicting the protagonist's experiences with war and his engagement with native ceremonies and traditions.

2.4 Secondary Sources

Literary Criticism and Academic Journals: Review of scholarly articles and literary criticism related to *House Made of Dawn*, focusing on themes of war, redemption, and native traditions. Analysis of existing interpretations of the novel's portrayal of Native American culture and the protagonist's struggle with his identity.

2.5 Historical and cultural contexts

Research on the historical context of Native American involvement in World War II. The study of Native American spiritual practices, particularly peyote ceremonies, provides a cultural background and deepens the analysis of the novel's themes.

2.6 Thematic Analysis

Representation of Native Traditions: Identify and analyze the depiction of native ceremonies, rituals, and beliefs in the novel. Examine how the experiences of war affect the protagonist and other Native American characters. Analyze the psychological and cultural repercussions of war on Native American identity as portrayed in the novel.

2.7 Interpretation

Synthesize findings from thematic and symbolic analysis to interpret how Momaday uses the protagonist's experiences to comment on broader issues of cultural identity, healing, and the continuity of traditions. Discuss the implications of the novel's portrayal of native traditions and war to understand the challenges and resilience of Native American communities.

2.8 Conclusion

Summarize key findings on the interplay between native traditions and the experiences of war in *House Made of Dawn*. Reflects on the significance of these findings in the fields of Native American studies, literature, and cultural history.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

Ensure respectful and accurate representation of Native American culture and traditions. Acknowledge the diversity within Native American communities and avoid generalizations.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 *The Impact of War on Native Identity, Alienation and Displacement*

Following his service in World War II, the protagonist Abel returns to his reservation in New Mexico. He is mentally destroyed by the battle, and when he gets there, he is too inebriated to recognize Francisco, his grandfather. Francisco, an elderly man with a crippled leg, used to be a revered hunter and strong devotee of the village's religious rituals. Following the passing of Abel's mother and elder brother, Vidal, he raised Abel. Abel was instilled with a sense of native customs and values by Francisco. This war and subsequent events broke Abel's ties to the world of mystical wholeness.

Abel's return from war was marked by a sense of dislocation. He found it difficult to reintegrate into his community and reconnect with traditional practices. As a result, the protagonist experiences trauma and is "broken down and depressed atop a hill in Los Angeles. The drums, singing, flute, and alcohol do not relieve his anguish" (Roemer, 2012). Momaday shows how it was challenging for Indian World War II veterans to reintegrate into their home culture. He has been in contact with Western materialism and, in this way, has lost his basic spiritual powers. The narrator states: "The people of the town ... do not hanker after progress and have never changed their essential way of life. Their invaders were a long time in conquering them; and now, after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky" (56). Abel was unable to define himself or find his position in the community. The novel captures the struggles faced by Native American veterans, who often find themselves alienated from both their own cultures and mainstream American society upon their return. This alienation is compounded by the loss of Francisco's grandfather, who represents a direct link with his cultural heritage. The war leaves Abel with deep psychological scars and unable to relate to his homeland.

This concept of alienation was summed up by Bhabha (1992) in his seminal work, *The World and Home*. His coinage of the term "unhomely" suggests a deeper, more internal sense of displacement than simply being without a physical home. It refers to feeling out of place, even within one's familiar surroundings. Unhomely captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" (141). This moment is described as creeping up "stealthily," meaning it comes unexpectedly and subtly, much like one's shadow that is always present but not always noticed. The reference to Henry James's character Isabel Archer from his novel *The Portrait of a Lady* emphasizes the sudden realization of feeling out of place. In this state of unhomeliness, the clear distinction between "home" (a private, personal space) and "world" (the public, external environment) becomes blurred. This confusion leads to a mingling of the private and public spheres, creating a sense of disorientation where what is supposed to be intimate and personal becomes intertwined with the broader, often impersonal, external world. In essence, "unhomely" captures a profound psychological displacement where familiar boundaries collapse, leading to a deep-seated sense of unease and disorientation in one's space. This idea is not about physical displacement, but rather about an emotional and existential crisis of belonging and security.

The impact of war on Abel was profound and multifaceted. Abel returns from World War II were deeply scarred and struggled with PTSD. His struggles with PTSD are mirrored by his physical and emotional detachment, manifesting in his inability to communicate and form meaningful relationships. After returning from the War, Abel is depicted as profoundly disconnected from his community and himself. His wartime experiences left him with the trauma that he struggles to articulate and process. This disconnection is evident in the opening chapter, when Abel returns to the reservation but feels out of place and is unable to engage with his cultural heritage. "He had been gone a long time, and he had come back to nothing. He was alone and by himself in the world, and it was all that he could do to feel the pain of it, to take hold and shake the pain to pieces and let it go" (4). Trauma disrupts one's sense of self-worth and belonging. His experiences in the war leave him emotionally detached and haunted by memories and unable to reintegrate into his community.

The war exacerbated Abel's sense of alienation from his Native American heritage. He finds it difficult to reconnect with the traditional ways of his people, feeling out of place, and disconnected from land and cultural practices. The brutality of war instills in Abel reflects a propensity for violence. He exhibits aggressive behavior upon his return, struggling to cope with his inner turmoil and often lashes out, as seen in his altercations with others. He found it challenging to reconcile his role as a soldier with his cultural identity as a Native American. The psychological scars from the war manifest in his behavior and interactions with others, often leading to violence and further isolation. "There was something in his eyes now, something he had not seen there before. They were open wide upon the world, but they were dead, like the eyes of the dead in war" (5). The war strips Abel from a coherent sense of self. He grapples with his identity, caught between his Native American roots and the alienating experiences of modern warfare. Abel's wartime experience led to spiritual disillusionment. He found it challenging to find solace in traditional spiritual practices, feeling disconnected from the spiritual world that once provided him with meaning and guidance.

The impact of the war on Abel is devastating, complicating his quest for identity, belonging, and spiritual peace. His struggle to heal and find his place in the world forms the core of the narrative. Abel's physical and emotional wounds from the war symbolize the broader impact of cultural disintegration and loss. His scars are a constant reminder of his experiences and the disconnection between his past and present. "He saw the marks of violence on his own body, and they seemed to be a part of the dead world of war, of terror and pain and death" (26). His attempts to reconcile his past with his present and find a path forward that allows him to make peace with himself and his experiences. "He felt the need of a high place, a rise of ground where he might stand and look out upon the world and see beyond it to something clean and good and new" (32).

Abel was the focal point of Indian culture in *the House Made of Dawn*. He participates in traditional activities, such as hunting deer, herding sheep, and engaging in ritualistic practices. Despite appearing to fit the tribal environment, Abel remains alienated from his people. He experiences seclusion both away from the reservation and within his community. "Prologue: The Longhair" chapter sets the stage for the novel by introducing the protagonist, Abel, as he returns after serving in World War II. The chapter paints a poignant picture of a man deeply scarred by his wartime experiences, illustrating the profound impact of the war on his emotional and psychological state. This prologue sets the tone for the novel and hints at the deep scars left behind by the war. Although it does not directly describe Abel's wartime experiences, it establishes the context of loss and dislocation.

In the subsequent chapter, Abel's experiences in war are elaborated. The narrative delves into the traumatic events he endured, which haunted him and affected his behavior and interactions with others. Abel's difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, his encounters with other veterans, and his flashbacks to the horrors of war are critical for understanding his character and the broader message of the novel. Throughout the novel, Abel experiences flashbacks to his time in the war. These flashbacks are fragmented and haunting, reflecting the internal turmoil and pervasive impact of his experiences. The trauma of war intrudes upon his present life, making it difficult for him to find peace or a purpose. "He had fallen. It is true that he was afraid. He lay at the bottom of the trench in a litter of blood and waste and death, and he was sick with fear" (24).

Momaday's book is a powerful poignant testament to the enduring legacy of war. This is a constant reminder of the scars etched deep within the protagonist's soul. The foundation of his life, built with the remnants of a war-torn past, speaks volumes about the weight Abel carries on his shoulder. For Abel, each piece of wood and each nail hammered in represents a brutal memory, a fragment of a shattered life for him. Momaday suggests that the house Abel lives in grapples with the horrors of war. It becomes a tangible symbol of internal conflict, as Abel faces. The echoes of battle reverberate within its walls, reminding him of the violence he witnessed, the friends he lost, and innocence stolen. The house, a sanctuary for Abel, also serves as a prison, trapping him in the cycle of trauma and preventing him from fully embracing life's beauty. The cracks in the walls, the uneven floorboards, and the fading paint — all of these flaws speak to the fragility of Abel's psyche, the deep wounds that refuse to heal.

Momaday presents a poignant metaphor for the lasting impact of war, and the scars of battle remain etched on the soul.

Subsequently, Abel's experiences in World War II introduced a man with profound dissonance in his cultural identity caused by his experiences of war. Abel's journey throughout the novel is searching for identity and meaning. His interactions with other characters, both native and non-native, reflect the broader challenges of maintaining cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures and personal trauma. The novel illustrates the tension between preserving traditional ways of life and adapting to modern reality. Abel's story is a microcosm of the broader Native American experience of the mid-20th century, navigating the complexities of cultural preservation in a rapidly changing world.

3.2 Native Traditions, Ceremonial practices as path to redemption

In Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, the exploration of native traditions and ceremonial practices as pathways for redemption is a central theme. The novel tells the story of Abel, who struggles to find his place in both the modern world and his cultural heritage. Through various ceremonial practices and connections to his native traditions, Abel embarks on a journey towards spiritual and personal redemption. Momaday masterfully portrays the transformative power of the native traditions and ceremonial practices. These rituals are not merely cultural remnants, but are essential for personal and spiritual redemption. Through his connection with these traditions, Abel finds a path to healing and reconciliation with his identity and heritage. Woodard (1991) in *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* offers theoretical frameworks for understanding the significance of ceremonies in literature. Roemer discusses the significance of ceremonies in the *House Made of Dawn* within the context of Native American culture and identity. He analyses how Momaday portrays ceremonies as integral to characters' lives, serving as vehicles for spiritual exploration, cultural affirmation, and healing. Roemer also explores how ceremonies function symbolically within the narrative, shedding light on broader themes of tradition, community, and resilience.

Momaday intricately weaves the themes of redemption and healing through the ceremonial practices of the Native American protagonist Abel. These ceremonies serve not only as cultural touchstones, but also as crucial elements in Abel's journey towards personal and spiritual growth. Ceremonial practices in the novel are depicted as vital mechanisms for restoring balance and harmony within oneself and the community. These practices are deeply rooted in the traditions and spiritual beliefs of Abel's tribe, offering a pathway to reclaiming a lost sense of identity and purpose. Momaday's novel is rich in the cultural heritage of the Kiowa and Jemez Pueblo people, embedding traditional practices, beliefs, and rituals in the narrative. These traditions are crucial in shaping characters' identities and their connections to the land and community. Momaday masterfully portrays how Native American ceremonial practices and traditions are not merely cultural artifacts, but vital processes through which characters like Abel find healing, identity, and redemption. The ceremonies and connection to the land serve as pillars upon which the narrative of personal and communal redemption is built.

3.3 Role Model and Mentor

Francisco, Abel's grandfather, played a crucial role in connecting Abel to his heritage through traditional stories and ceremonies. Kerr rightly pointed out that "Francisco works as a structuring principle in *the House Made of Dawn*" (Kerr, 1978). He represents the link between the past and spiritual teachings of their ancestors. "He took Abel into the mountains and taught him the old ways: the ways of the land and the ways of men. They prayed and offered cornmeal to the dawn, and Francisco told him the stories of the tribe" (75). Francisco's teachings and the ceremonial practices he imparts are central to Abel's understanding of his identity and path to redemption. Francisco embodies the role of the mentor and protector in the traditional Pueblo way of life. As a representative of the older generation within the tribe, he serves as a guardian of the community's cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation by passing ancestral knowledge and customs to younger members of the tribe. "They must know the

long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, and where all things were in time (78). This passage emphasizes the profound significance of understanding the cyclical journey of the sun across the Black Mesa for members of the tribe. This suggests that their connection to the world and its rhythms is essential for their sense of temporal and spatial orientations. By living in harmony with the movements of the sun, they can maintain a deeper awareness of their places in the world and the passage of time.

Francisco played a crucial role in teaching traditional Abel ceremonies. Francisco serves as a cultural and spiritual guide, preserving indigenous traditions and values that are central to their communities. Francisco embodies the living history of Kiowa and Jemez Pueblo traditions. By sharing stories, rituals, and ceremonies with Abel, he ensures that cultural heritage is passed on to the younger generation. The transmission of knowledge is vital for maintaining community identity and continuity. He acts as the custodian of his community's traditions, passing down the essential cultural practices and values to Abel. Francisco frequently narrates stories that encapsulate the history and values of his people. These stories are more than entertainment: they are a means of preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. "He told him old stories about the spotted fawn and the young bear, about the arrow makers and the long hard winters, about the blood and the flesh and the bones of men" (75). Francisco imparts spiritual wisdom to Abel through various ceremonies and teachings. He introduced Abel to sacred rituals that connect them to their ancestors and the natural world. This spiritual foundation helps Abel find a sense of belonging and purpose that is crucial for his personal healing and identity formation. His spiritual guidance helped Abel in his journey towards healing and reconciliation with his past. "Francisco's teachings and rituals were a way for Abel to reconnect with his roots, to find solace and understanding in the traditions of his people."

Francisco introduced Abel to various ceremonial practices that are integral to their cultural identity. These ceremonies connect Abel to his heritage and spiritual world. Francisco's spiritual guidance is the cornerstone of Abel's journey in *the House Made of Dawn*. By teaching prayers, conducting rituals, guiding Abel through rites of passage, and imparting spiritual wisdom, Francisco helps Abel navigate his personal struggles and reconnect with his cultural and spiritual roots. "In the summer they went into the mountains to gather herbs, to hunt, and to pray. Francisco taught Abel the old songs, prayers, and rituals of the land and tribe" (75). Francisco's knowledge of healing rituals also plays a crucial role in the cultural transmission. Weaver believes that "in *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday wove oral tradition - myth, prayer, song, story-together with novelistic forms in a way no other American Indian writer quite had before" (Weaver, 2008). These practices are deeply embedded in their cultural identities and worldviews. "Francisco performed healing rites with meticulous care, chanting the old prayers and using the herbs and medicines that he had gathered and prepared himself" (75).

Francisco teaches Abel the traditional ways of hunting and their relationship with nature, which is a vital part of their cultural heritage. "He showed him how to stalk the deer, to move with the silence and caution of a shadow, and to respect the spirit of the animal that gave itself to them" (75). Francisco guides Abel through rites of passage that mark significant transitions in life, reinforcing Abel's sense of belonging to the community and its traditions. "When Abel killed his first deer, Francisco performed an ancient rite of purification, instructing him in the sacred significance of the hunt and the proper way to honor the life that was taken" (75). Francisco's teachings encompass a broad spectrum of cultural elements from storytelling and ceremonial practices to healing rituals and hunting. Nelson comments that, "literature grounded solidly in Native American thought and experience proceeds from the proposition that the land itself lives, which is to say it functions not only as "setting" but also as "character"; landscape can therefore exert an influence that not only contextualises but also provides criteria for evaluating human events "taking place" taking place (Nelson, 1990).

Through these teachings, he imparts not only practical knowledge, but also the underlying values and worldview of their culture. Francisco's role in cultural transmission ensures that despite his struggles, Abel remains connected to his heritage, providing him with a foundation upon which to rebuild his identity.

3.4 Dawn Runners Ceremony

The running ceremony takes place in the early morning, just before dawn, emphasizing a connection to the natural cycle of the day. Participants in the running ceremony wore traditional attire, often minimal, and designed for mobility. They may also adorn themselves with symbolic items, such as feathers, paint, or other cultural markers that denote their connection to their heritage and the spiritual journey they are about to undertake. Elders, family members, and other community members gather to witness the run and offer prayers, chants, and encouragement. Abel's experience during a run is marked by physical exertion and moments of profound spiritual insight. The culmination of the running ceremony is a moment of Abel's transformation. Completing the run signifies a personal and spiritual victory, a reconnection with his cultural roots, and a step towards healing.

The novel opens with a ceremonial run, highlighting the importance of rituals for maintaining cultural continuity and personal identity. In an interview, Momaday recounts, "I see [*House Made of Dawn*] as a circle. It ends where it begins and is informed with a thread that runs through it and holds everything together. The book was a race. It focuses on race, that is, the thing that holds it all together. But it's a constant repetition of things too" (Evers, 1977). These races are more than physical contests; they symbolize a reconnection with his ancestors, the land, and the spiritual teachings of his people. Through running, Abel engages in an act of purification and renewal, aligning his physical actions with the spiritual rhythm of his culture. The ceremonial run, therefore, becomes a metaphorical and literal path for Abel to reclaim his place within his community and to restore his spiritual well-being. Abel's participation in the traditional race encapsulates his path to healing and reconnecting with his heritage.

He had seen the race in the old days, and he had heard his grandfather tell of it. He knew that the runners must go long distances over the black mesa, and beyond the point of the mesa, and then back again. The runners went singly in pairs. It was not like the usual races; it was a long, rambling kind of run, and it was meant to endure. The runners sang as they went, and prayed to the sun (86).

The description of the run as a long and enduring journey, accompanied by singing and praying to the sun, reflects its spiritual dimension and role as a rite of passage. The run is imbued with layers of symbolic meanings. It represents a return to traditional values and a reconnection with the land, which is a vital element of many Native American cultures. The act of running across the landscape is an expression of unity with the natural world, embodying a sense of harmony and balance that is crucial to Abel's healing process. The run also serves as a communal activity, highlighting the importance of community and collective identities in Abel's redemption.

Another important excerpt describes Abel's own experiences during the race.

Abel runs on, feeling the earth under his feet and the sky over his head. He felt the rhythm of his own body and breath, and he also felt the old rhythm of the race and timeless motion of the runners. He was alone, but was not afraid. He was alone, but felt the strength of his father around him (87).

Momaday vividly portrays Abel's connection with the land and his ancestors. Abel's sensation of the earth and sky, coupled with the rhythmic motion of his body, symbolizes his reintegration into the natural and spiritual world. The mention of feeling the strength of his fathers highlights the communal and ancestral support that the ceremonial run embodies. This emphasizes the significance of a run as a ceremonial act that facilitates Abel's redemption. Through the run, Abel reconnects with his cultural heritage, finds spiritual solace, and begins to heal from his trauma. Thus, the ceremonial run serves as

a powerful symbol of endurance, tradition, and the path to personal and cultural reclamation. It is an act that connects him with his ancestors and contemporaries, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Ceremonial practices are vital to the community's spiritual health and individual healing. Abel's ultimate path to healing is rooted in his reengagement with traditional practices.

A running ceremony, often referred to as dawn running, is a significant cultural and spiritual practice. This ceremony is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Kiowa and Jemez Pueblo cultures, symbolizing endurance, renewal, and connection to the spiritual world. Francisco, Abel's grandfather, plays a crucial role in teaching Abel about the importance and meaning of this ritual. The running ceremony represents physical and spiritual endurance. It is a test of strength and resilience, qualities that are highly valued in culture. Running at dawn is a way to greet a new day and seek spiritual renewal. This signifies the beginning of a new cycle, bringing hope and the promise of new beginnings. The ceremony is performed in the natural landscape, reinforcing the connection between the earth and the natural world. This bond with nature is central to cultural and spiritual identity. A running ceremony is a way to maintain and pass on cultural traditions. By participating in this ritual, Abel connects his heritage with the collective memory of his people.

A runner ceremony is a significant cultural and spiritual practice. This ceremony symbolizes endurance, spiritual renewal, and the connection to the land and traditions of the Kiowa and Jemez Pueblo cultures. The protagonist, Abel, is taught about this ritual by his grandfather, Francisco, who emphasizes its importance. Francisco teaches Abel the significance of the dawn running, highlighting its spiritual and cultural importance. "He remembered the first time he had run with Francisco, how they had risen before dawn and run silently through the dark, their breaths rising in white clouds before them. It was a rite of passage, a way to learn the land and the spirit of the people."

The dawn run is depicted as a symbol of endurance and spiritual connection, performed at sunrise to greet the new day and seek renewals. "At sunrise on the fourth day of the race, Francisco led Abel to the rise of the hill, and they ran. They ran with long, easy strides, their moccasins whispering in the sand, and the rising sun was warm on their backs' (87). For Abel, a running ceremony is a means of finding solace and healing, both physically and spiritually. It helps him reconnect with his cultural identity and heritage. "In the running, Abel found a kind of solace, a way to bind his wounds and heal his spirit. The rhythm of his feet on the earth, the beat of his heart, the rise of the sun, all these were part of the sacred ritual that Francisco had taught him." The ceremony reinforces the bond between runners and the natural world, illustrating the deep connection that the community has with the land. "They ran with long, easy strides, their feet whispering in the sand, and the rising sun was warm on their backs. The earth was alive beneath them, and the sky above was full of promise" (88).

For Abel, the running ceremony becomes a path to healing and reconciliation with his identity and past. "In the running, Abel found a kind of solace, a way to bind his wounds and heal his spirit. The rhythm of his feet on the earth, the beat of his heart, the rise of the sun—all these were part of the sacred ritual that Francisco had taught him" (87). A runner ceremony is a profound element that encapsulates the themes of endurance, spiritual renewal, and cultural identity. Through Francisco's teachings, Abel learns the significance of this ritual, which helps him to reconnect with his heritage and find a sense of belonging and healing. These textual references highlight how the dawn running ceremony is woven into the fabric of the novel, symbolizing the enduring strength and spiritual resilience of Abel's people. Lawrence Evers believes that "the race itself may be seen as a journey, a re-emergence journey analogous to that mentioned in connection with Navajo and Kiowa oral tradition" (Evers, 1977).

The novel suggests that reconnection with one's cultural roots can be a powerful source of strength and healing, even in the aftermath of profound trauma. The role of the community in supporting individual healing has been emphasized. Characters like Ben Benally and Father Olguin provide different

perspectives on how cultural and spiritual guidance can aid in Abel's reintegration process. This novel also explores the blending of native traditions with Christian elements. This is seen in the character of Father Olguin and the ceremonial aspects that incorporate both Native and Christian elements, reflecting the adaptive strategies of native communities in preserving their identity. Cristobal Cruz, Tosamah's assistant, and the fireman at the peyote ceremony, prays "in Jesus' name" (105). Momaday depicts various ceremonial practices, such as sun dance and night chants, which play a vital role in restoring cultural identity and fostering a sense of community among the characters. Participation in these ceremonies allowed Abel to undergo healing and transformation. Through ritualistic purification and communal bonding, he was able to confront his inner demons and seek redemption for his past actions.

3.5 Peyote Ceremony

"Peyote ceremony" refers to significant aspects of Native American culture and literature, particularly within the context of the novel *House Made of Dawn*. This novel explores the complexities of Native American identity, spirituality, and the struggle for redemption in the modern world. In the novel, the protagonist is a Native American who grapples with his sense of displacement and alienation as well as his efforts to reconnect with his cultural heritage and find redemption for past mistakes. The peyote ceremony, a central aspect of Native American religious traditions, is depicted in this novel as a powerful spiritual practice. This involves the ceremonial use of the peyote cactus, which contains psychoactive compounds believed to facilitate spiritual experiences and communion with the divine.

The ceremony takes place in a small enclosed space that is transformed into a sacred environment. The room is dimly lit, often with a central fire or candle, creating an atmosphere conducive to introspection and spiritual communion. The participants sat in a circle, emphasizing the sense of community and the equality among them. The ceremony includes a diverse group of young and old individuals, reflecting the inclusive nature of the ritual. Each participant has a specific role, from the leader or roadman who guides the ceremony to the fireman, who tends to fire. The peyote, a small cactus with hallucinogenic properties, is central to this ceremony. It is consumed in small amounts, often in the form of dried buttons or teas. The ingestion of peyotes is believed to open the mind and spirit to vision and spiritual insights. This aspect is crucial for Abel, as it symbolizes his quest for understanding and healing. Music plays a vital role in peyote ceremonies. The participants singing traditional songs and chants were often accompanied by drums and rattles. The participants offered prayers for guidance, healing, and blessings. Nelson sees the text as being "both a narrative of illness and a narrative of healing" (Qtd. in Nelson (1990)). These prayers are directed not only to the Creator but also to the spirits of ancestors and the natural world. The participants experienced vision or profound spiritual insights.

Abel's participation in a peyote ceremony can be seen as a symbolic journey towards redemption and spiritual renewal. Through the ceremony, he sought guidance, healing, and a deeper connection to his cultural roots. It represents his quest to reconcile his past, find meaning in his present circumstances, and forge a path towards a more authentic and fulfilling existence. The *House Made of Dawn*, referenced in the title of the novel, also has symbolic significance. It evokes the themes of rebirth, transformation, and the cyclical nature of life. Just as dawn marks the beginning of a new day, the *House Made of Dawn* symbolizes the possibility of renewal and redemption, even in the midst of darkness and adversity. The peyote ceremony serves as a powerful metaphor for the protagonist's journey towards redemption and spiritual awakening, reflecting broader themes of cultural identity, trauma, and healing within Native American literature and experiences.

The peyote ceremony served as a pivotal moment for Abel's redemption and spiritual renewal. This Native American ritual became a transformative experience for Abel, allowing him to confront his inner demons and seek forgiveness for his past transgressions.

The night of the peyote ceremony, Abel took the bitter drink and sat with the others in the circle, his heart heavy with guilt and regret. As the fire crackled and the shadows danced, he closed his eyes and allowed vision to come. In a flickering light, he saw the faces of the dead his friends, his enemies, and all the men he had killed. He saw himself broken and lost, wandering in a wilderness of pain and regret (115).

However, as he sat in the circle surrounded by the voices of his people, he felt a sense of belonging—a connection to something larger than himself. He felt the presence of his ancestors and their spirits guiding him on his journey. As he prayed for forgiveness, for redemption, and for a way to make amends for all the wrongs he had done, he felt a sense of peace wash over him, a feeling of grace and mercy that he had never known before. At that moment, Abel knew that he had been given a second chance—a chance to start anew. He vowed to live his life with honor and integrity to walk the path of his ancestors with humility and respect. As the ceremony ended, he felt a weight lift from his shoulders, a burden of guilt, and shame replaced by a sense of purpose and hope. The peyote ceremony was a journey of redemption, a journey that brought him back to himself. Through the ingestion of peyote and communal rituals, Abel confronts the pain and trauma of his past by seeking forgiveness and redemption. Abel's path to the beginning of salvation was difficult.

Abel's story is about a journey through and from placelessness. It is a sordid and seemingly chaotic journey through self-conscious and reflective uninvolvement, alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and not belonging. Abel's choices and outcomes are neither simple nor clear. It is more than just the matter of returning to the fulfilling pueblo from the nasty white man's world (Raymond 1983).

The ceremony becomes a transformative moment of spiritual awakening, guiding Abel towards a path of healing and reconciliation with himself and his community.

Towards the end of the novel, Abel's return to traditional ways and ceremonies marks his full circle of redemption. He began to embrace his identity and heritage fully. In the end, he was whole again, for he had returned to the place of his beginnings, and he was one with the people and land. This conclusion reflects Abel's journey back to his roots and the redemptive power to reclaim his cultural identity through traditional practices and ceremonies. In *House Made of Dawn*, Scott Momaday masterfully portrays how Native American ceremonial practices and traditions are not merely cultural artifacts but vital processes through which characters like Abel find healing, identity, and redemption. The ceremonies and connection to the land serve as pillars upon which the narrative of personal and communal redemption is built.

4. Conclusion

The House Made of Dawn offers a profound exploration of indigenous traditions and the harrowing impacts of war. The novel serves as a testament to the resilience and enduring spirit of Native American culture. Through its protagonist, Momaday articulates the struggle of returning veterans to reconcile their traditional identities with the psychological scars of war. Abel's journey symbolizes a broader narrative of cultural survival and a search for belonging. This novel underscores the importance of preserving indigenous traditions as a source of strength and identity. These traditions, deeply rooted in a spiritual connection to the land and community, provide a pathway for restoring balance and harmony disrupted by war trauma. Momaday's portrayal of rituals, ceremonies, and storytelling not only highlights their cultural significance, but also illustrates their therapeutic potential in addressing the wounds of war. The novel emphasizes that the healing process for individuals and communities lies in the reclamation and revitalization of their cultural heritage. It is a powerful reminder that despite the pervasive impact of war, the essence of indigenous identity remains resilient and enduring. The novel calls for renewed recognition of and respect for indigenous traditions, advocating their role in fostering resilience and reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict. Through this lens, Momaday's work makes a

vital contribution to understanding the intricate interplay between indigenous traditions and the transformative impacts of war.

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