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## KEEPING A CULTURE ALIVE: SOME RELIGIOUS RITUALS, LEGENDS AND SYMBOLS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF AMERICA IN *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN*

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### Abstract

If it is asked what the strongest aspect of Native Americans is, the answer is probably 'their culture'. Dating back thousands of years before the Europeans invaded their lands, indigenous culture has reached the brink of extinction due to repression and prohibitions. But, just like a Phoenix, it was reborn from its ashes with rich and high-quality literary works given from 1950s onward. Writers and poets like Leslie Marmon Silko, Joy Harjo, Luci Tapahonso, Simon Ortiz, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Geary Hobson are the artists of a Renaissance for Native Americans in the field of literature. The person who is accepted to have started the renaissance is N. Scott Momaday. With his critically acclaimed novel *House Made of Dawn*, he and his native culture attracted too much attention. In his masterpiece, he tells the story of Abel, who is excluded by both his society and the white men. The story told contains many elements from Native American cultures, such as various legends, celebrations, dances, and religious ceremonies. In this study, some religious rituals, legends and images of the indigenous culture in *House Made of Dawn* will be examined in the light of the existing literature.

**Keywords:** Indian, Native American, Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*, Religious Rites.

### Introduction

Discovery of the New World by the white man, as a result of efforts to find new trade routes in the 15th century, can be considered as a fortune for Europeans; however, it was the beginning of destruction and extinction for the inhabitants of the newly discovered continent. Dozens of civilizations either disappeared completely as a result of wars and diseases brought by the Europeans, or had to adapt to the new conditions if they wanted to keep on living. They had to replace their lifestyles, traditions, rituals that they had practiced for thousands of years with the new ones, or they would perish. Not only did the white men usurped their fertile lands and natural resources, but they also exploited indigenous labor force.

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Old world countries such as Spain, France, England, and Russia occupied the New World immediately and exploited its resources. Each claimed sovereignty and rights in a separate part of the vast land. Spaniards colonized southeast, southwest, and California, and they made the local people into compulsory land workers serving the king and the church. The French occupied the area stretching from Louisiana to Canada today and the regions from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi river, appropriating everything that could be sold to improve their trade. They tried to ensure their security in this foreign land by having marriages with local people. The British followed an expansionist policy on the central and northern Atlantic coasts and the Hudson Bay. Unlike the French, they forbade marriage with indigenous peoples. Russians, on the other hand, pursued the aim of selling raw materials to Chinese markets by hunting marine mammals in the northwest coast and polar regions. For this purpose, they forced the indigenous peoples to hunt for them in these seas unknown to them. While trying to consolidate their dominance over the regions they colonized, these old-world countries fought each other from time to time. They often recruited indigenous peoples in these wars (Pauls, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian>).

The inhumane practices of the U.S. and Canada did not stop in the 19th century. The massacres against the indigenous tribes were continuing. In the developing and growing United States, the white man's need for arable land was increasing at a great rate. So, they confiscated native peoples' lands to meet this need. The natives whose lands were taken away were forced to live in the "reservation" areas under government control. Thus, they would be protected against "dispossession and extermination" until they were civilized enough (Wilson, 1998, 289). Indigenous peoples were prohibited from leaving the reservation zones without permission, so, it would be much easier to acclimatize these peoples to the culture of the white man. One way of cultural transformation was boarding schools. The children of those living in reservations were placed in these schools. Anything related to their own cultures such as local languages, religions, clothes, and hairstyles was restricted there. Those who acted otherwise were punished (Pauls, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian>). Boarding schools were not the only place where locals were prevented from living their own culture. Local peoples living in the reservations did not have the freedom to practice their religions. It was restricted by a law issued in 1883. With this regulation, local dances, feasts, and activities of medicine men were punished with imprisonment (Irwin, 1997, 35). The text of the law is as follows:

Dances-- Any Indian who shall engage in the sun dance, scalp dance, or war dance, or any similar feast, so called, shall be guilty of an offense, and upon conviction thereof shall be punished for the first offense by withholding of his rations for not exceeding ten days or by imprisonment for not exceeding ten days; for any subsequent offense under this clause he shall be punished by withholding his rations for not less than ten days nor more than thirty days, or by imprisonment for not less than ten days nor more than thirty days.

Medicine men--Any Indian who shall engage in the practices of so-called medicine men, or who shall resort to any artifice or device to keep the Indians of the reservation from adopting and following civilized habits and pursuits, or shall use any arts of conjurer to prevent Indians from abandoning their barbarous rites and customs, shall be deemed guilty of an offense, and upon conviction thereof, for the first offense shall be imprisoned for not less than ten days and not more than thirty days: Provided That, for subsequent conviction for such offense the maximum term or imprisonment shall not exceed six months (Irwin, 1997, 36).

This discriminatory attitude towards American Indians continued until a new law on religious freedom was enacted in 1978. This law was passed to compensate for the mistakes of past governments. The summary of the law is as follows:

Henceforth it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sacred sites, use and possession of sacred objects and freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites (Irwin, 1997, 35).

Between 1865 and 1875, most of the locals living in the United States were forced to live in the reservations. According to the whites, this was the only hope that would prevent the natives from going extinct. In this way, the civilization process of the natives would also accelerate. The confrontation between the locals and the white man was always disadvantageous to the locals. For this reason, an agreement was signed between some indigenous tribes and the government, securing reservation areas that white men, except officials, were prohibited to enter. Isolated from society, natives would cease to claim rights on their



old lands, and the government of the United States would offer them certain services. But the plans to imprison the natives in the reservation areas and bring them to the same level of civilization with the white man would fail for various reasons (Hagan, 1971, 333-334).

The ethnic group with the second least income in the United States was the natives coming right after the peasant blacks. Most reservation areas did not have the necessary infrastructure to start a business, nor did they have sufficient natural resources. The authorities were convinced that the locals would accommodate city life after they witnessed the indigenous people's enthusiasm for the war-related professions with good incomes during the world wars, their skills in doing their jobs, and adapting to life in big cities during this process. So, they developed new policies (Philp, 1985, 176). The reservations, which started to draw attention as a social problem, and the desire and skill of the natives to participate in city life resulted in a federal relocation policy in the 1950s. The purpose of this policy was in stark contrast to that of the reservation areas. The aim here was to terminate reservations and integrate the indigenous peoples by employing them in big cities and consolidating them into society and the economy. This program would not succeed due to insufficient funds, and the locals would find themselves unemployed and starved in the outskirts of large cities (Jaskoski, <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/h/house-made-of-dawn/about-house-made-of-dawn>). The Bureau of Indian Affairs, which was founded in 1824 and the establishment purpose of which is explained as "... to enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives" (*Bureau of Indian Affairs*, <https://www.bia.gov/bia>), received more applications than it could fund. People chose to participate in relocation programs instead of starving in their reservation areas. The other causes for this choice were racism, economic insecurity, and second-class citizen treatment. Some of those who rushed to the big cities with the relocation program came to important positions where they become successful. However, most of them could not progress financially. The economy after the war was one of the reasons that disrupted the relocation programs. Many of the locals who had to work with low wages had to return to the reservation areas. Those who remained were forced to live miserable lives in the suburbs trying to avoid high rents (Philp, 1985, 176-186).

### **Native American Renaissance**

The United States was shaken by both violent and peaceful human-rights movements and demonstrations that began after World War II, particularly in the '60s. In the demonstrations organized by the blacks, feminists, anti-war groups, and many more, people were roaring about equal rights and freedoms throughout society. Literature served as a means by those groups to make their voices heard by large audiences. This period was very productive for aggrieved American Indians, for they produced many precious written works to express themselves.

This period, in which the Native Americans contributed to literature richly, was called 'The Native American Renaissance' by Kenneth Lincoln. It has witnessed the rebirth of Native Literature. Lincoln starts this period with *House Made of Dawn*, which is subject to this study, written by N. Scott Momaday in 1968. After he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 with his novel, American public turned its interest to indigenous writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Joy Harjo, Luci Tapahonso, Simon Ortiz, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Geary Hobson (Huntsinger, 2007, 24-25).

Native American literature has already existed before the Native American Renaissance. It can be argued that the renaissance is not a beginning but a rebirth. It is possible to find examples of the written tradition dating back to ancient times in the old indigenous settlements in the southeast. Many rock inscriptions are found here, where ancient stories are engraved on the stones in the form of symbols and pictures. Another example of the written tradition is depictions describing important events that some locals embroidered on their tents and blankets. Oral tradition is one of the strengths of native literature. Verbal literature is an indispensable element of most indigenous tribes in shaping and conveying culture. Among the stories told are legends, religious stories, and stories about historical figures or events and educational children's stories. They still serve as a source of inspiration for most contemporary Native American writers (2007, 25).

### **N. Scott Momaday and *House Made of Dawn***

The Native American Renaissance begins almost simultaneously with *House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday. When the book received the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, the renaissance began, and American Indian literature attained the attention of a wider audience. As a novelist, poet, playwright, and painter,



Momaday is one of the leading Indian literary figures (McClinton-Temple & Velie, 2007b, 235). According to the Indian Affairs office, the real name of the author is Navarro Scottie Mammedaty, born in Oklahoma on February 27, 1934. In 1932, his father changed their surname to Momaday. He is a Kiowa by father and a partially European Cherokee by mother (Owens, 1994, 92).

While he was attending a Political Science program at the university, he studied English and Oratory. After teaching for a while, he started his Ph.D. at Stanford University. Following the completion of his doctorate in 1963, he started lecturing at the University of California. He later worked at the universities of Berkeley, Stanford, and Arizona (McClinton-Temple & Velie, 2007b, 236)

The identity problem is always at the forefront in almost all works of Momaday. In fact, his writings are the result of this search for identity. Momaday has always pointed out this in his articles, poems, novels, and lectures (Owens, 1994, 92).

Igniting the literary Renaissance for Native Americans, *House Made of Dawn* is Momaday's best work according to many critics. Momaday, who initially planned this work as a series of poems, later changed his mind and decided to publish it as a novel. In the novel, Momaday tells the story of Abel, who is from 'Walatowa', an imaginary version of Jemez Pueblo, where Momaday was born. Abel has just returned from the Second World War with post-traumatic stress disorder and suffers alienation. Abel's name is a reference to the Bible; however Cain is not the white man, but his fellow countrymen, the other natives. Abel's problems started when he was born, because he is an illegitimate child and this is why he is excluded from the society. (McClinton-Temple & Velie, 2007a, 172).

Abel kills an albino who humiliates himself during a celebration. The albino – Momaday calls him 'the white man' - takes the ceremonial rooster and hits Abel with it till it is dead. Abel takes his revenge by stabbing the albino. After spending eight years in prison for this crime, he settles in Los Angeles, getting in on the relocation program and finds a job there. There, he makes friends with Benally, a native just like him. One of the people he meets here is John Big Bluff Tosamah, who influences the course of his new life, and who is a native, too. As it is understood from the memoirs of Momaday, Tosamah is Momaday himself. Abel is fascinated by him and loses his job because of the rituals including excessive drinking arranged by Tosamah. He is severely beaten and hospitalized by an extortionist Chicano police officer. After he recovers, he returns to his home in Walatowa and holds a traditional funeral for his deceased grandfather. He takes part in the traditional running race once his grandfather won. As he runs, he mutters a hymn that Benally taught him including a verse "house made of dawn", which gave the book its name (2007a, 173).

The book, which has received great attention since its publication, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 and turned into an American classic. One can feel the poetic side of Momaday while reading *House Made of Dawn*. It is possible to find traces of Faulkner and Hemingway in his prose. A prominent nativity that absorbed the writing techniques of American modernism embraces the novel of Momaday (2007a, 173).

### **Some Religious Symbols, Legends and Rites in *House Made of Dawn***

A large part of the novel consists of rituals of local religions. Local religions and beliefs also got their share from the assimilation policies mentioned above. Since Momaday was aware of this, he devoted most of his work to religious rituals, the cornerstone of his native culture. For example, Francisco, Abel's grandfather, could not stay away from his own culture even though he was a priest assistant in the Christian church in his youth. He collects ritual prayer feathers whenever he has the opportunity. He hides these feathers in a closet in his room (Momaday, 2010, 5). Feathers have an important place in the native belief systems. They are used to integrate with nature and to make requests from it. For example, prayer sticks decorated with eagle chest feathers were the symbol of rainfall, so this ritual was performed when rain was lacked (Fulbright, 1992, 222).

The eagle is a symbolic bird for the natives. Momaday mentions various rituals about eagles in the novel. For instance, Abel sees something strange during a hunt. He spies on an eagle with its claws on a snake in the distance, which is described as a magical and sacred spectacle (Momaday, 2010, 10). There is a similar legend in the establishment of Tenochtitlan, the historic capital of Aztec, on the ruins of which the modern Mexico City is built. According to the legend, one day, the God of War addresses the Aztecs through a hummingbird. He orders them to migrate to the south until they reach the promised lands. Aztecs comply and start moving southwards. They continue to live as nomads for years, waiting for a sign from the God of War for the promised lands. During this search, their god tells them that they will no longer be called Aztec, but 'Mexicas' (meaning followers of God Mexi). Finally, the God of War tells them that when they see an



eagle with a snake in its beak, perched on a cactus, they will settle there, and that will bring prosperity for them. The country their descendants established, Mexico, uses this image in her flag today (Vigil, 2000, 3–4).

Momaday often uses the eagle image in his novel. One of the turning points of Abel's life is also related to this bird. Abel sets off to catch an eagle with a group called 'The Eagle Watchers Society'. This group aims to catch live eagles and obtain feathers from them for prayers. The origins of this group are based on a group of people living in a town called Bahkyula, who had to emigrate with less than twenty remaining people in order to escape destruction due to the great disasters they suffered and the persecution of the white man. When they left their village, they took with them a little more than nothing. Those items would remind them of who they used to be. Those were "a sacred flute; the bull and horse masks of Pecos; and the little wooden statue of their patroness María de los Angeles, whom they called Porcingula" (Momaday, 2010, 10).

What is described here almost matches exactly with reality. It was previously said that Walatowa, where Abel was born and grew up, is an imaginary version of Jemez. In real life, a holiday called 'Porcingula' is celebrated in Jemez on the second of August. This celebration is to honor the Pecos people who had to leave Pecos in 1838 and settle in Jemez. The patron saint of the Pecos people is Santa Maria de los Angeles, which is inherited from Christianity. The tomb of this saint is in Portiuncula, Italy. Thus, 'Porcingula' was used as a name for the Holy Virgin by the Pecos people. In these celebrations, a person in a bull costume entertains people. After a while, the bull is tied near Porcingula's house. Banquet tables are set, people eat and serve the bull from what they eat, and so the festivity continues (Fergusson, 2001, 61–64).

Another religious ritual in Momaday's novel is 'prayer offering'. Bahkyush eagle watchers pray and vow to make an offering before catching an eagle. Abel, too, does the same (Momaday, 2010, 15). For prayer offering, which has a place in most indigenous tribal traditions, there are special places reserved in common living spaces. Prayer offerings are presented to *kachinas* for the acceptance of prayers and usually consist of food (Hieb, 2005, 31). In return, abundant rain and fertility of products are expected (Martínez, 2005, 158).

There are various religious practices adopted by the Native Americans from the Catholic Church as a result of the assimilation and Christianization activities that have continued since the first moment the white man set foot on the New World. One of them was exemplified above where the Pecos people are discussed. Another is 'The Feast of Santiago', celebrated on the 25th of July. Santiago is the patron saint of the Spanish army (Cahill, 1999, 6). According to Momaday, Santiago is riding southward into Mexico in disguise. During the journey, he meets a poor but generous old couple. They give him water, and they cook and serve him the rooster, which is all they have for food. They give him their beds and sleep on the ground. In the morning, he declares his real identity, blesses them and continues on his way. After traveling for a while, he comes to the city of the king. On that day the king holds a festivity. Santiago participates in festive games. Nobody knows him and ultimately he wins the games. The prize is that the winner of the competitions marries one of the king's daughters on choice. The king regrets that he has allowed a peasant to take his daughter away, so he plans to kill him. He secretly orders the killing of Santiago as soon as they leave the city. The rooster offered by the old couple then comes out alive and in complete shape, warns Santiago against this conspiracy of the king and gives him one of its spurs as a weapon. By the time the assassins attack, he defeats them. Finishing the journey, Santiago does not need a horse anymore, and the horse tells him that he must sacrifice it. He does what it says, and a herd of horses, in a massive number, is born from the blood of the horse. Then the rooster tells him that he has to sacrifice it. He rips it up with his bare hands and spreads its flesh all over. Its blood and feathers turn into fertile plants and farm animals enough for all people (Momaday, 2010, 29–30). Abel, who is humiliated in the rooster contest that he participated during a festival in the memory of Santiago, will eventually kill his humiliator.

Another religious motif worth mentioning is the horned snake. Father Olguin, who is the priest in the church of Walatowa, comes across a section about Abel's grandfather, Francisco, while reading the diary of one of his predecessors. Fray Nicolás writes in his letter to his brother J.M.:

Listen I told you of Francisco & was right to say it. He is evil & desires to do me some injury & this after I befriended him all his life. Preserve this I write to you that you may make him responsible if I die. He is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their horns & hides & does worship that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy. Yet he is unashamed to make one of my sacristans & brother I am most fearful to forbid it (Momaday, 2010, 40).

The snake mentioned here is similar to *Mishebeshu* in Ojibwe mythology. *Mishebeshu*, the ruler of the aquatic creation, has the appearance of a creature combined of both cat and snake. Its name means Great



Lynx. It is such an extreme in might and scary that its name has to be voiced very carefully. *Mishebeshu* is one of the heroes of the Ojibwe creation stories. Unlike many creation legends, the Ojibwe version emphasizes that the present world has been recreated from the ruins of an ancient world that has been destroyed. This myth is about the friendship between *Nanabush* - the creator spirit - and a wolf. As the wolf walks on the frozen lake, the ice breaks, the wolf falls into the water and is killed by the underwater spirits led by *Mishebeshu*. *Nanabush* gets angry and approaches *Mishebeshu* in the guise of a frog and kills it. The supporters of *Mishebeshu* then fill the earth with water. *Nanabush* has to go up a tree. Then, it calls for help from animals that can bring soil from underwater to make the earth livable again. A muskrat does it. *Nanabush* spreads the soil brought by the muskrat and blows life to it. Thus, life begins on earth again. *Mishebeshu* is not a malicious being, nor is it very friendly. But one has to respect him to be protected from its evil. The wolf was punished for failing to respect *Mishebeshu* when it fell into the water (Smith, 2005, 675). The fact that Francisco is a farmer and needs water for the soundness of the products makes the ritual mentioned in the letter meaningful.

Other religious rites that bear great importance mentioned in the novel are ceremonial dances. These dances are integral parts of the native culture. One of the most well-known dances is 'The Sun Dance'. This dance, which is a bloody show, has attracted the reaction of Christian missionaries and is therefore banned. According to ancient beliefs, by gratifying oneself and sacrificing his body and blood, supernatural powers were given gratitude or asked for help. This tradition, which is common in many indigenous tribes, was called by various names. The Sun Dance of 1882, the last time it was performed, was interrupted by American military forces. Until the late 1920s, many local rituals, including the Sun Dance, were banned as a part of the assimilation policies. With a law enacted in 1934, the bans were somewhat relaxed, and since then many tribes have made the Sun Dance a part of their lives again. This dance ceremony is closely related to the spiritual and emotional lives of the peoples. It is the story of the good overriding the bad. It is to thank gods for the blessings given and asking for help for future challenges (Laubin & Laubin, 1977, 275-277).

Preparations for the dance begin months before. The wisest person is chosen as the high priest and he leads the dance. Those who attend the dance are usually those who have a vow. The smallest of the offering is to keep oneself from eating and drinking during the ceremony. But the most appropriate offering is a red blanket, as did the ancient warriors. The red blanket is created by cutting ten to a hundred small pieces of dancers' own skins. They can cut these pieces themselves or have them cut to their closest friends. Apart from this, fixing oneself from the chest or back skin to the sacred pole with skewers is also one of the methods frequently used in the ritual (1977, 277). Kiowa is a tribe performing this cultural dance. *Tai-me* is the holiest sun dance idol of the Kiowas. In *House Made of Dawn*, when Tosamah explains how *Tai-me* came to the Kiowa, he says:

Long ago there were bad times. The Kiowas were hungry and there was no food. There was a man who heard his children cry from hunger, and he began to search for food. He walked four days and became very weak. On the fourth day he came to a great canyon. Suddenly there was thunder and lightning. A Voice spoke to him and said, "Why are you following me? What do you want?" The man was afraid. The thing standing before him had the feet of a deer, and its body was covered with feathers. The man answered that the Kiowas were hungry. "Take me with you," the Voice said, "and I will give you whatever you want." From that day *Tai-me* has belonged to the Kiowas (Momaday, 2010, 73).

The things narrated here are really close to the existing culture. *Tai-me*, the strongest idol of the Kiowa, represents the transformation of a tribe from poor people who were struggling to survive into a brave and haughty one that made a divine bond with the sun (Raymond, 1983, 66).

Another fiction element that overlaps with the facts is the peyote ritual directed by Tosamah. Peyote is a kind of cactus that shows drug-like effects in eaters. Its use as a religious ritual goes back to the 1880s. Peyote faith has gained ground to become more widespread upon the bloody suppression of the Ghost Dance, which is based on the belief that ancient spirits will come to help expel the white man from their land. The fact that people are not satisfied with the existing traditional religions has an impact on the spread of this belief, too (Verges, 1974, 71). Another name for this belief is the Native American Church. Peyote rituals are mostly held once a week on Saturday evenings. During the night, songs are sung, various rituals are performed. There are attendants having tasks for the execution of these rites correctly. One of them is The Road Man. His task is to provide the community with peyote and manage rituals with ceremonial tools (Hittman, 2005, 603).

John Big Bluff Tosamah is a cleric who preaches at a Native American Church in Los Angeles, calling himself The Priest of the Sun. Together with those who gathered for the Peyote ritual, they first smoke a



ceremonial cigarette and pray. This is followed by the incense ceremony. He takes four of the peyote buttons from a bag full of them while the ceremonial scents fill inside, and he extends the bag to the next attendant. He smells a pinch of sage crushed in his hands and rubs his hands over his head and other parts of his body. Others mimic him. Then everyone puts the peyote buttons in his/her mouth. With the influence of the plant, they get carried away, and they dance and sing with songs and drums all night long. While describing the moods of those who attend the ritual, Momaday tells: "Everyone felt himself young and whole and powerful. No one was sick or weary. Everyone wanted to run and jump and laugh and breathe deeply of the air" (Momaday, 2010, 86). During this ceremony, attendants fill the night with prayers. One of them, Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber, prays as follows:

"Great Spirit be with us. We gone crazy for you to be with us poor Indi'ns. We been bad long time 'go, just raise it hell an' kill each others all the time. An' that's why you 'bandon us, turn you back on us. Now we pray to you for help. Help us! We been suffer like hell some time now. Long, long time 'go we throw it in the towel. Gee whiz, we want be frens with white mans (Momaday, 2010, 88).

Like ceremonial dances, prayers and hymns are also important parts of native culture and religious life. These hymns, which are elements of traditional native literature, are said to invoke spirits to heal diseases or fix negativities. The Navajo culture is rich in hymns. One of them is 'The Night Chant'. It is a ceremony in which a series of different hymns sang by both the healer and the sick. The purpose of this Night Chant ceremony, which lasts at least nine days and nights during the winter season, is to restore the health of a single person suffering from physical or mental disabilities. The role of the patient in this chant is only to listen to the chants sung at the beginning. As the days pass, the patient plays a more active role. On the ninth day, the patient chants the hymn three hundred times trice, and turns his/her face east at the dawn of the last day, and inhales the dawn and heals (Ramsey, 1989, 88-94). Momaday was inspired by these hymns while naming his novel. Benally, who helps Abel when he comes to Los Angeles, realizes that Abel's spiritual condition is getting worse and wants to treat him with a hymn from the Night Chant as follows:

*Tségihí.*

House made of dawn,  
House made of evening light,  
House made of dark cloud,  
House made of male rain,  
House made of dark mist,  
House made of female rain,  
House made of pollen,  
House made of grasshoppers,  
Dark cloud is at the door.  
The trail out of it is dark cloud.  
The zigzag lightning stands high upon it.  
Male deity!  
Your offering I make.  
I have prepared a smoke for you.  
Restore my feet for me,  
Restore my legs for me,  
Restore my body for me,  
Restore my mind for me.  
This very day take out your spell for me.  
Your spell remove for me.  
You have taken it away for me; (Momaday, 2010, 113).

Another chant in the novel is 'The Mountain Chant', which is widely used by shamans or healers of Navajo (Matthews, 1997, 3). This is a nine-day ceremony held in the winter like the Night Chant. For the first four days, every morning before eating, anyone can enter the hut where the ceremony is held. Different kinds of trees are burned inside the hut, and some sand is put in front of everyone around the fire. With the scents emitted from various plants, the participants are made to throw up on this sand. After vomiting, the



fire is moved to the corner at the north of the hut and is left there to extinguish by itself. Sand deposits of the participants are also gathered and collected in the north of the hut. The same ritual is repeated first four days and the deposits of each day are collected in a line to the north. At the end of the fourth day, the participants are blessed by the shaman, and a new fire is set in the hut. On the fifth day, the sick person enters the hut with the chanter. Chanter rubs the patient's limbs with some kind of a medicine. The patient kneels facing east and prays with the chanter. When the prayer is over the chanter puts some medicine in the patient's mouth, and rubs his/her head with the same medicine. Vows are made and prayers continue during the ritual that follows afterward. Various paints are prepared and symbolic pictures are made on the sand with these paints. At a certain stage, the shaman distorts the painting with the rattle in his hand in a certain order. When the entire picture disappears, the sand is collected and thrown out. Then the patient is laid down on the place where the picture used to be, and his/her limbs are pulled strongly. In the following days, after similar purification rituals, pictures are made and distorted. A large pile of wood is set up outside on the last night of the ritual. A fence of bushes is set up in the form of a circle with a diameter of forty steps. Those who want to enter the fence need to follow a certain path. Those who want can leave their belongings inside the fence. Small fires are set inside. With the onset of songs and dances that will continue throughout the night, the large pile of wood in the center is ignited. There are dances around the fire, and various shows are performed (1997, 36–62).

One of the legends at the center of the Mountain Chant ceremony is 'Changing Bear Maiden'. This legend is told by Benally when Abel is beaten and hospitalized by a police officer. A story told by Angela, who came to visit Abel at the hospital, is very similar to this legend. According to the legend, there are fourteen siblings, twelve boys, and two girls. It is time for the girls to get married. The story is about these girls and two old men, who are actually a bear and a snake. The snake and the bear climb the mountain and turn themselves into young and handsome men. The sisters are fascinated by the fragrance of the pipes they smoke and they follow them. The older sister asks where they come from. The bear tells her that he comes from the mountain and that the snake comes from the plains. The sisters pass out when they smoke from the pipe. When they wake up, they realize the true identity of the men: they have slept with a snake and a bear. They are scared and start to run. The older one runs to the mountain and the little one to the prairie. The older encounters the *Yeí bichai* temple. Servants of Divinity come out and embrace her. They clean her and give her their blessings. The woman gives birth to a baby girl, whose arms, legs and ears are covered with hair. *Yeí* commands his society to descant the Mountain Chant, so after that moment the woman becomes known as the Bear Maiden (Momaday, 2010, 149). Benally completes his story with the last part of the hymn named 'House Made of Down':

With beauty before me,  
With beauty behind me,  
With beauty above me,  
With beauty below me,  
With beauty all around me... (Momaday, 2010, 149)

## Conclusion

With the discovery of the new continent by the Europeans, the already difficult lives of the natives of the New World had become even more difficult. The goods and lands they owned were taken away from them, and they were enslaved. The white man, who was not content with this, forced the natives, who could survive despite all the negativities and massacres, to leave their traditions and religions that they have been practicing for thousands of years. According to the white man, it was primitivity and it did not suit his civilization level. So he developed policies to ignore natives by moving them out of society, in other words, to exile them in their own land. He imprisoned them in reservations and waited for them to die in misery. He sent their children to boarding schools and assimilated them there. He prevented them from living their culture with the laws he enacted.

These practices had to be abandoned for various socio-political reasons. Beginning in the twentieth century, locals' participation in social life was gradually permitted. A federal relocation policy was developed for this purpose. Thus, the idle indigenous people, who were living in reservation areas and were seen as a potential labor force needed by the production economy, could be redounded to the society, and therefore to the economy. To that end, the willing natives would be provided with jobs in the big cities and would be integrated into society. This program would also fail due to various false predictions. It would also





be very difficult for locals to adapt to their new lives because of decades of assimilation and repressive policies. Many were unsuccessful and had to go back to the reservation areas as alcoholics.

The latter half of the 20th century is a rights-seeking era for Indian Americans, as well as for many oppressed groups. Literature was a way of expressing themselves. Literary works, rich enough to be called the Native American Renaissance, were given in this period. Some researchers claim that this renaissance started with Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, which was awarded a Pulitzer in 1969. *House Made of Dawn* reveals the tale of Navajo Abel, who has returned from World War II and alienated from himself and his society. At the center of the book are the indigenous culture and religious beliefs that are on the verge of vanishing. Momaday seems to have undertaken the mission of preventing their disappearance by writing all these indigenous rituals. In other books he wrote, he acts with the awareness of this mission. All his works are full of stories, rituals, and legends about the cultures of the first owners of America. The national and international interest that *House Made of Dawn* attracted as a result of Pulitzer Prize has also contributed to raising awareness about native life and belief system. For this reason, Momaday's contribution cannot be denied in keeping the native culture alive.

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