

T.C.
DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI PROGRAMI
YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**THE USE OF HUMOR, DREAM VISIONS AND PERSONAL
RECOLLECTIONS AS SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN
SHERMAN ALEXIE'S *RESERVATION BLUES* AND *THE
LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN***

Burcu ERTUĞRUL AKSU

Danışman

Yard. Doç. Dr. Esra ÇOKER

2008

Yemin Metni

Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduđum “**The Use of Humor, Dream Visions and Personal Recollections as Survival Strategies in Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven***” adlı alıřmanın, tarafımdan, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı dűşecek bir yardıma bařvurmaksızın yazıldıđını ve yararlandıđım eserlerin kaynakada gűsterilenlerden oluřtuđunu, bunlara atıf yapılarak yararlanılmıř olduđunu belirtir ve bunu onurumla dođrularım.

Tarih

.../.../.....

Burcu ERTUĐRUL AKSU

İmza

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZ SINAV TUTANAĞI

Öğrencinin

Adı ve Soyadı : Burcu ERTUĞRUL AKSU
Anabilim Dalı : Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı
Programı : Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı
Tez Konusu : *The Use of Humor, Dream Visions and Personal Recollections as Survival Strategies in Sherman Alexie's Reservation Blues and The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Sınav Tarihi ve Saati :/...../2008:.....

Yukarıda kimlik bilgileri belirtilen öğrenci Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nün tarih ve sayılı toplantısında oluşturulan jürimiz tarafından Lisansüstü Yönetmeliği'nin 18. maddesi gereğince yüksek lisans tez sınavına alınmıştır.

Adayın kişisel çalışmaya dayanan tezini dakikalık süre içinde savunmasından sonra jüri üyelerince gerek tez konusu gerekse tezin dayanağı olan Anabilim dallarından sorulan sorulara verdiği cevaplar değerlendirilerek tezin,

BAŞARILI OLDUĞUNA O OY BİRLİĞİ O
DÜZELTİLMESİNE O* OY ÇOKLUĞU O
REDDİNE O**

ile karar verilmiştir.

Jüri teşkil edilmediği için sınav yapılamamıştır. O***
Öğrenci sınava gelmemiştir. O**

* Bu halde adaya 3 ay süre verilir.
** Bu halde adayın kaydı silinir.
*** Bu halde sınav için yeni bir tarih belirlenir.

Tez burs, ödül veya teşvik programlarına (Tüba, Fulbright vb.) aday olabilir. Evet
Tez mevcut hali ile basılabilir. O
Tez gözden geçirildikten sonra basılabilir. O
Tezin basımı gerekliliği yoktur. O

JÜRİ ÜYELERİ

İMZA

..... Başarılı Düzeltme Red

..... Başarılı Düzeltme Red

..... Başarılı Düzeltme Red

ÖZET
Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Sherman Alexie'nin *Reservation Blues* ve *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* Eserlerinde Mizah, Düş Görüleri ve Kişisel Anıların Hayatta Kalma Stratejisi Olarak Kullanılması

Burcu ERTUĞRUL AKSU

**Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalı
Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Programı**

Dünya görüşleri farklı olan Avrupalılar ve Kızılderililer ilişkilerinin başından beri birbirlerine ters düşmüşlerdir. Başlangıçta ticarete dayalı olan ilişkileri Kızılderililerin acımasızca muamele edildiği ve kullanıldığı bir ilişki haline dönüşmüştür. Kızılderililer Avrupalıların hem iç hem de dış kolonileştirme ve asimilasyon metotlarına maruz kalmışlardır. Karşılığında, asimilasyonu ve kolonileşmeyi engellemek için tepki vermişlerdir; kabile kimliklerini ve değerlerini korumak için çoğunlukla mücadele etmişlerdir, ve kabilesel miraslarını içeren hayatta kalma stratejileri geliştirmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda Sherman Alexie'nin iki eseri *Reservation Blues* ve *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* beyazların baskısından acı çekmiş ve hayatta kalma mücadeleleri yaşamlarının bir parçası olmuş Kızılderili karakterleri sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Alexie'nin eserleri üzerine yoğunlaşarak Kızılderililerin aynı zamanda dünya görüşlerinin önemli bir bölümü olan düş görülerini ve hayalleri, bastırılmış ve doyuma ulaşmamış isteklerini telafi etmekte nasıl kullandıklarını, aynı zamanda mizahı rezervasyon hayatını daha katlanılabilir kılmak için nasıl kullandıklarını açığa çıkarmak ve göstermektir.

Kızılderililerin beyazların baskısını yıkmak için çeşitli stratejilerle hayat mücadelesi vermesini göstermek amacıyla, ilk olarak rüyaların, görülerin, hayallerin ve mizahın hayatta kalma yöntemleri olarak önemini inceledim. Sonrasında, bahsi geçen hayatta kalma stratejilerinin *Reservation Blues* ve *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* eserlerindeki yansımalarını araştırdım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1) Hayatta Kalma Stratejileri 2) Düş Görüleri ve Hayal 3) Kızılderili Mizahı 4) Asimilasyon ve Kolonileşme 5) Kabile Gelenekleri ve Değerleri

ABSTRACT

Master Thesis

The Use of Humor, Dream Visions and Personal Recollections as Survival Strategies in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Burcu ERTUĞRUL AKSU

Dokuz Eylül University
Institute of Social Sciences
Department of Western Languages and Literature
American Culture and Literature Program

Different in worldviews, Europeans and American Indians have opposed each other since their early contacts. Their dealings with each other, which were based on trade at first, have transformed into a relationship in which American Indians are brutalized and exploited. American Indians have been exposed to both internal and external colonization and assimilation methods of Europeans. In response, they have reacted to avoid assimilation and colonization; they have mostly struggled to keep their tribal identity and values, and they have developed survival strategies embracing their tribal heritage. In this respect, Sherman Alexie's two works *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* present American Indian characters who have suffered from the oppression of whites, and their survival strategies that have become a part of their lives. The aim of this study is to reveal and demonstrate, by focusing on Alexie's works, how American Indians use dream visions and imaginations, which are also essential parts of American Indian worldview, to compensate for their suppressed and unfulfilled wishes; in addition, how they use humor to make reservation life bearable.

With the purpose of representing American Indians' struggle to subvert white-dominance with varying strategies, firstly, I analyze the significance of dreams, visions, imaginations and humor for American Indians as the means of surviving. Subsequently, I explore the reflections and evidences of these mentioned survival strategies in the works *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

Key Words: 1) Survival Strategies 2) Dream Visions and Imaginations 3) American Indian Humor 4) Assimilation and Colonization 5) Tribal Traditions and Values

**THE USE OF HUMOR, DREAM VISIONS AND PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
AS SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN SHERMAN ALEXIE'S *RESERVATION BLUES*
AND *THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN***

YEMİN METNİ	II
TUTANAK	III
ÖZET	IV
ABSTRACT	V
İÇİNDEKİLER	VI
INTRODUCTION	VIII
I. AMERICAN INDIAN SURVIVAL STRATEGIES	1
1.1. Dreams, Visions and Imagination as Survival Strategies	4
1.1.1. Importance of Dreams and Visions in Native Culture	6
1.1.2. Significance of Imagination as a Survival Strategy	
1.2. Humor as a Survival Strategy	8
II. DREAMS, VISIONS AND IMAGINATIONS IN <i>RESERVATION BLUES</i> AND <i>THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN</i>	11
2.1. Dreams, Visions and Imaginations as Defense Mechanisms	13
2.1.1. Compensating For Loss and Failures in Dreams and Imaginations	13
2.1.2. Satisfying the Feeling of Taking Revenge	17
2.2. Dreams, Visions and Imaginations about Worries, Fears and Despairs	18
2.2.1. Dreams, Visions and Recollections Reflecting Family Problems	19
2.2.2. Dreams and Recollections about American Indian and White Relations	24
2.2.2.1. Dreams and Imaginations about Fights between American Indians and Whites	25
2.2.2.2. American Indians' Personal Recollections about Whites	31
2.3. Fulfilling Expectations and Wishes in Dreams and Imaginations	35

III) USAGE OF HUMOR IN <i>RESERVATION BLUES AND THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN</i>	40
3.1. Humor: Survival Strategy with the Healing Power	40
3.2. Humor: As an Essential Part of American Indian Worldview	45
CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61
APPENDIX	69

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Native American literature written by American Indian writers in the English language flourished after the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s. In 1969, the re-known American Indian N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with his novel *House Made of Dawn*, and opened the road to other Indian writers who wanted to produce works about their own culture and life. As a result, the 60s have been called the “renaissance” period of Native American writing (Rebein, 2001; 135). This literature has also been considered as a means of survival by the Indian audience for whom “working with words” is traditionally significant (Coltelli, 1990; 6).

Contemporary works of Native Americans are the products of a rich tribal heritage that carry not only the signs of oral tradition but also the strong effects of colonization. This has created a “multiethnic” (Coltelli, 1990; 4) literature full of unique aspects. The writers of the renaissance period have generally dealt with social themes such as alienation, cultural conflict, isolation, assimilation and alcoholism that have generated as a result of white colonization of Indian land, people and culture. Since most of these writers focus on modern Indians, they mostly reflect the effects of white colonization process in their works. Sherman Alexie, the Spokane/ Coeur d’Alene writer, is a member of this celebrated group. Especially by focusing on his own tribe, he touches closely upon contemporary Indian problems that have resulted due to the process of colonization and assimilation.

This colonization process can be analyzed in two categories: External colonization and internal colonization. External colonization involves the running of a country’s economy and government by an outside colonial power (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 35). External colonization of Indians is about European’s seizure of Indian land by acts and treaties through consent or force. Internal colonization can be defined as the condition and subordination of an ethnic group as a direct result of the actions of government. Marion Barrera claims that internal colonization is based on “an interactive structure of class and racial stratification that divides U.S. society” (quoted

in Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 36). In this sense, the present poor economic conditions of American Indians in both reservations and cities, their lack of education opportunities, their conversion to Christianity, their suffering from intentionally spread contagious diseases and their frequent alcohol abuse are some of the results of the internal colonization process.

Indian Removal Act is one of the most important official acts that have accelerated the appropriation of Indian lands. Andrew Jackson, a slaveholding president who was critical of treaty making, encouraged the subordination of Indians and signed the Indian Removal Act. After this act was passed in 1830, many Indian groups in the East migrated 'voluntarily' or at gun point to lands west of the Mississippi as a result of the 'negotiated' treaties (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 133). Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 was a further step of external colonization. Congress opened the non-settled lands for white settlement by passing this act. Later, this act brought about the Homestead Act of 1862 and white settlers encroached on Indian lands. In 1887 the Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act, paved the way for the gradual extinguishment of tribal ownership of lands, by allotting 160 acres of land to the head of families, 80 acres to single adults or orphans and 40 acres to dependent children (Hicks and Mowry, 1965; 94).

European colonists developed various strategies to gain dominance over Indian tribes. Because of the wide differences between tribal and white culture, assimilation of American Indians became a very problematic issue. In their book, *American Cultural Studies*, Campbell et al. state:

...the concept of assimilation asserted that all ethnic groups could be incorporated in a new American national identity, with specific shared beliefs and values, and that this would take preference over any previously held system of traditions. Assimilation stressed the denial of ethnic difference and forgetting of cultural practices in favour of Americanization which emphasized that one language should dominate as a guard against diverse groups falling outside the social concerns and ideological underpinnings of American society. Native Americans and African Americans, as well as immigrants from Europe and elsewhere, were seen as a threat

until they were brought within the acceptable definitions of 'Americanness' or excluded from it entirely. These versions of assimilation focused on conformity and homogeneity as the way of guaranteeing democracy and equality for all in America. In case of Native Americans, the differences between tribal and white culture appeared too great for a satisfactory assimilation and reservation system was employed instead (Campbell and Kean, 1997; 44).

The aim of reservation policy was presented as educating and 'civilizing' Native Americans systematically. Indians' strong beliefs in "communal lands, tribalism, sacredness of the earth, and being suspicious of private property"(Campbell and Kean, 1997; 47) were too strong to cope with They were to be kept and controlled in reservations where the soil was not suitable for agriculture and life qualities were too poor.

The Spokane was one of the tribes that were persuaded (through so-called negotiations) to move from their original homelands to the designated lands. Today this land is located in eastern Washington, including small parcels of land in Stevens County and part of the Spokane River (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 178). When the council gathered in 1877, Spokane Garry announced that he wished to stay where he was and the other members of the tribe were also reluctant to leave their land. However, U.S. Indian Inspector Colonel E. C. Watkins explained that only by signing the agreement which declared they had accepted to move to the designated area (which included part of their homeland) that they could be citizens and could get title to the lands they had occupied. Shortly after the Watkins council, lower Spokane chief William Three Mountains persuaded some Spokane families about the advantages of this immigration. Spokanes' move to the land that was promised for them began in spite of upper Spokane Chief Garry's strong opposition (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 168-169). The only positive result of this was to remain in peace with the government (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 171). Nevertheless, due to the intense immigration to Spokane county, white population increased and this resulted in Indian-white conflict (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 173). The new settlers began to encroach upon the Indians and the Spokane Reservation was established by Rutherford B. Hayes in 1881 (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 178).

When Spokane Reservation was established, it was considered as “the most worthless and barren” land. In fact, the Spokanes wondered why the reservation was not established where they already lived (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 179). When Dawes Act was passed in 1887, each Native American was given a share of the reservation land and Indians’ understanding of communal ownership, being cooperative and non-competitive got a severe blow (Parillo, 2003; 253). This “historical catastrophe” for American Indians was designed to end traditional ways of life by the way of breaking communal tribal lands into individual allotments (Owens, 1992; 30)

In 1887, another significant agreement was signed by the Spokanes. According to that agreement, the Spokanes deeded to the United States “all right, title, and claim which they had, or ever would have, to any and all lands lying outside the reservation” (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 192). They got some assistance about protection and agricultural implement and ninety-five thousand dollars in return of their removal to the Coeur d’Alene Reservation. Secretary of Interior made land allotments to Indians of the Spokane Reservation (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 192). As a result, many members of the Spokane were deprived of their homeland and low standard of reservation living started for them. By 1969 the normal expectation on the reservation was that nothing could be actualized without the permission of the government (Campbell and Kean, 1997; 50)

Examining the implement and the results of the mentioned acts clarifies how the external colonization occurred gradually. That is the legal aspect of colonization. Equally important is the internal colonization process. Beside the fact that Indians were driven off their lands, and their subordination and exploitation were supported by the government, their tribal cultures, languages and their collectivities were devastated by national cultural policies that favored assimilation. Internal colonization strategies have been implemented in two ways: One way is to put American Indians into reservations and limit their life space and opportunities; the other is to try to integrate them into the existent culture of America by means of education of Boarding Schools, imposing Christianity with missionaries etc... That is

to say, internal colonization is mostly about the tribal people's suppressed place in the modern world.

Education has been one of the most influential ways used to assimilate Indians. Indian children were isolated from their families and sent to white-dominated and white-controlled Boarding Schools. These schools were run according to "Anglo-conformity assimilationist approach" (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 151). Indian spiritual values were destroyed by the racist white teachers and administrators who tried to make their students "less Indian". Indian students were punished for speaking their tribal language (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 151). They were stripped of their long hair and traditional clothes. Shortly after the Indian students arrival, Indian students' traditional clothing, such as buckskin or threadbare trade blankets, was exchanged for the standard school uniform (Adams, 1997; 103). Because of being seen as a symbol of "savagery," their long braided hair was cut short (Adams, 1997; 102). The haircutting policy in Boarding School was especially traumatic for Indian children. On the one hand, long hair was a significant symbol of their traditional style; on the other hand, hair cut was a sign of sadness or shame for Indians (Cooper, 1999; 34). Under the great acculturation pressures, they had to behave in European ways which damaged their self-integrity and created great stress. Moreover, some even committed suicide because of being caught between native culture and Anglo pressures (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 156).

Indians have always been subordinated in their contact with the European colonizers, especially in the field of education. Pariyaram Chacko states:

They are made to think that they are inferior in matters of their own lifestyle, customs, and folklore. Myths have been nurtured that tribal social formations are archaic hangovers, remnants of a bygone era, unchanging entities paralyzed by custom and thus their ways of life should be raised to the advanced cultural life enjoyed by the 'national society'. In order to maintain national integration, their identities must be replaced by loyalty to the 'national mainstream' or at least made compatible with national interest (Chacko, 2005; 42).

Assimilation process has also been carried out in the case of religion. European colonizers attempted to convert Indians to Christianity. Missionaries were sent to the reservations to spread Christianity among Indians. The aim of the missionaries was not only to Christianize the Indians but also to suppress indigenous spirituality (www.religiousmovements.virginia.lib.edu). As a result of strict missionary attempts, many Indians became Christians although they were not strong believers. In addition, reservations were divided up among the Christian denominations (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 152). However, as explained in the book *Racial and Ethnic Relations*,

In contrast to Christianity, most traditional religious beliefs and practices of Native Americans are not exclusive; a person can be a Christian and a traditional believer. Because of this, a great variety of traditional and Christian practices now coexist among Indians (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 153).

Internal colonization of Indians was not only caused by the destruction of tribal identity and traditional values. Epidemics were also an important factor. European colonizers who were determined to defeat Indians used epidemics as influential weapons. Smallpox, syphilis, influenza, measles and some other contagious diseases were intentionally introduced by the European colonizer to exterminate the American Indian who did not have any immunity to such diseases. This caused the rapid decline of Native populations in a short period of time.

Another serious social problem contributing to the assimilation process of Indians is alcohol abuse. High mortality rate, high terminal liver cirrhosis rate, as well as high crime and suicide rates is all due to consumption of alcohol. Moreover, rates related to use of alcohol among Indians are highly over national average. The reasons of drinking problem of Indians are generally connected with their “cultural marginality” (Parillo, 2003; 260). Indians try to maintain their tribal identity and cultural heritage while they want to be successful in the world of work and gain an approved mainstream life style. However, they are neither accepted as the equal members of the white society nor can they preserve their cultural heritage and tribal spirit properly. This conflict can be seen as the reason of the alcohol abuse among

Indians. In other words, Indians easily turn to alcohol in order not to feel the devastating effects of losing their identity.

However, Indians did not know about alcohol before the Europeans came to their land. Knowing that alcohol would have very negative effects on Indians' thoughts and reasoning, European fur traders, explorers, and visitors intentionally introduced alcohol to the Indian tribes. Alcohol was presented as a so-called civilizing implement and became a part of trading events. Their aim was to be lucrative in their trading and other dealings with the Indians. Ed Mcqaa deals with the issue of alcoholism among Indians from Indians' traditional view and asserts:

Native Americans had no alcohol before the white man came to these shores. For centuries upon centuries, there was no poisoning of man's brain in this land. Our leaders were honest and truthful; like the land, their minds were unpolluted. I have said many times that the Indians took their examples and signs from God-created nature. Animals and winged ones do not consume foreign substances that the Great Spirit did not intend for them. If it is not natural or does not grow here, it is not to be used (Mcqaa, 1990; 189-190).

Alcohol was first used to remove American Indian people from their lands and instill western values. Alcohol addiction still continues to be one of the greatest problems of American Indian life. Although alcohol has not been the only reason for loss of traditional culture, it has altered Indian existence and way of life negatively.

American Indians, often stereotyped by whites as culturally or intellectually inferior, have long suffered from and still face exploitation and discrimination in economic, political, religious, and educational spheres. According to government statistics on income, employment, and housing, American Indians are "the poorest of the poor" of all the minorities in the United States (Parillo, 2003; 256). Today, unemployment is a serious problem and life expectancy is quite low among American Indians. Violence, suicide, crime, substance abuse, and sexual abuse as a result of cultural degeneration, are the major problems nowadays, which did not occur in traditional societies.

Works of Contemporary Native American literature reflect American Indian experiences and sufferings; their being exposed to extermination and acculturation, and their survival strategies. Diana Glancy, in her essay *The Fire Dragon and Sweat* defines American Indians as “a diverse collection of those-who-were-here-when-the-others-came,” and contemporary Native American literature as “stories of resilience, defiance, power, vision, toughness, pain, loss, anger, sarcasm, a humiliation built on welfare, a humor built on irony” (1991; 13-14).

In his works, Sherman Alexie points out how colonization process has changed Indian destiny and how white policies have contributed to the different levels of acculturation and cultural assimilation that have occurred among American Indians. He confronts these serious issues facing current Indian community with his own subtle sense of humor. His ability to remain humorous while discussing the impacts of cultural assimilation such as suicide, alcoholism, rape, racism and oppression is fairly impressive; such a style portrays American Indians’ sense of humor as a part of their worldview that enables them to resist white man’s atrocities. While humor and imaginative power are represented as the survival strategy of Indians, dream visions and personal memories reflect Indians’ weaknesses and problems due to white men’s colonization. Despite all external and internal threats to their lives and dreams, American Indian peoples’ continuance and survival through time becomes particularly important. Jace Weaver comments on this issue by referring to Edward Said’s theory:

Native survival in the face of internal colonialism and the revitalization of Native traditions attests to the truth of Said’s repeated theme that there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how totally they saturate society, and that it is part of the oppressed that the oppressor cannot touch that makes change possible: in “every situation, no matter how dominated it is, there’s always an alternative” (Weaver, 1997; 11-12).

This study will examine Sherman Alexie’s usage of humor, dream visions, imaginations and personal recollections as survival strategies by focusing on his short

story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) and novel *Reservation Blues* (1995). These mentioned elements are, indeed, what Edward Said indicates as American Indian “alternatives” --new creative ways of cultural continuity and recovery.

Both works are generally set in and around the Spokane Reservation. Alexie, in both works, uses the same main characters: Thomas Builds-the Fire, Victor Joseph and Junior Polatkin. Thomas Builds-the Fire is portrayed as the misfit storyteller of the Spokane Tribe, whom nobody listens to, nevertheless, he still maintains and preserves the tribal values and traditions. Victor Joseph is an alcoholic who is an angry and thoughtless character. Being abandoned by his father and raped by a reservation priest, his childhood has been very problematic. Thus, he lacks a sense of belonging to his environment and is very skeptical about his Indian heritage as well as his present condition. He is the brave warrior with no battles to fight. He says to his father: “My great-grandfather had World War I, my grandfather had World War II, you had Vietnam. All I have is video games” (Alexie, 2005; 28). Junior Polatkin, who was named after a Spokane chief from 19th century, drives the reservation water truck. He is the drunken companion of Victor and Thomas. He commits suicide at the end of *Reservation Blues*, because, he, as an American Indian, does not want to experience great disappointments and to be drunk anymore.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven is the collection of humorous and poignant short stories that are set in the Spokane Reservation. All stories are interlinked and contain repeating characters and events describing hopelessness of reservation life. The stories reveal the contemporary life of American Indians through personal triumphs and failures, father-son relationships, dysfunctional families, and identity issues. Cultural marginality of reservation life, alienation and self destruction of American Indians are depicted in dream sequences and comic tones. Imagination and laughter lead to forgiveness, and this helps the characters transcend pain, anger and loss.

Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues* embraces similar issues with *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The novel demonstrates what it means to be Indian living under the poor conditions of reservation life. Poverty, malnutrition, hopelessness and various forms of self-destruction are elucidated in a humorous tone again. Dreams, imagination, personal memories and humor have a significant role in the narration. The novel is set on an imaginary idea: What happens if the legendary blues star Robert Johnson, who actually died in 1938, appears on the Spokane reservation in 1992? The significance of the Robert Johnson character is worthy to note; and this is emphasized in one of the short stories from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*: "The first time I heard Robert Johnson sing I knew he understood what it meant to be Indian on the edge of the twentieth century, even if he was black at the beginning of the twentieth" (Alexie, 2005; 35). Alexie emphasizes the "shared political, social and artistic sensibilities of black and Indian peoples" by using a black blues star figure (Pasquaretta, 2003; 287).

Thomas Builds-the-Fire meets Robert Johnson, who, like Faust, has sold his spirit to the devil, named Gentleman, in order to play the guitar better than anyone else in the world, and has come to the Spokane Reservation to find the woman in his dreams who has a healing power to free him from the evil pact. Thomas takes him to Big Mom, the medicine woman of the reservation, and then he realizes that Robert Johnson has left his magical guitar. Robert Johnson's leaving his guitar to Thomas is indeed a symbolic exchange from African American community to American Indian community; American Indians' present-life conditions mirror African Americans' second-rate and unfortunate lives under white-dominance in the early twentieth century (Grassian, 2003; 107). Thomas gets the guitar and forms the all-Indian rock group Coyote Springs. He becomes the lead singer and composes most of the songs that the band sings. Victor inherits Robert Johnson's magical guitar and shows an unbelievable ability. Junior plays drum. Two beautiful sisters, Chess and Checkers Warm Waters join the band after a concert in Flathead Reservation. They are of Flathead tribe and both have very beautiful voices. Although they are not accepted by the Spokane people due to the fact that they are Spokane Indians, they become the band members. The band's journey from Seattle to Manhattan and back again is told

with powerful references to survival, traditions and spirituality. The issues of cultural identity, Indian-White relations, and the power of the human spirit to survive are questioned and explicated in the novel.

Sherman Alexie deals with the issues and problems of the current Indians and examines the ways in which reservation Indians support each other in the face of colonized Native America by way of depicting different characters such as Thomas, Victor and Junior, who represent the various faces of cultural identity. Alexie is one of the distinctive voices who reject the stereotypes of American Indian identity, recognizing the significance of the diverse culture and languages of Indians, understanding the strong communal ties despite this diversity and being aware of the basic humanity of the American Indians (Lundquist, 2004; 201).

Both *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues* are prize-winning works. *Reservation Blues* has been awarded Shortlist for IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (1997), Before Columbus Foundation: American Book Award (1996), and Murray Morgan Prize (1996). *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* has won PEN/Hemingway Award: Best First Book of Fiction Citation Winner (1993), Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award (1994), and Washington State Governor's Writers Award (1994).

D) AMERICAN INDIAN SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

The idea of building a new nation, “one homogeneous American community”, by integrating all ethnic groups constructed the concept of assimilation of ethnic groups is the underlying principle behind Americanization (Campbell and Kean, 1997; 44). Assimilation and colonization of American Indians are parts of this policy. Their sense of community, strong ties to tribal values and cultural identity have been attacked in various ways As Feagin and Feagin state:

European colonists developed various strategies for dealing with those whose land they coveted. These ranged from honest treaty making with equals, to deceptive teary making, to attempts at extermination, to enslavement like that of Africans, to confinement in the often barren, prison-like called reservations (Feagin and Feagin, 2003; 133).

As a response to assimilation and colonization process, American Indians have developed survival strategies. They have resisted ideologically and have aimed to reconstitute their community and values in spite of all the pressures and oppressions of the white colonial system (Campbell and Kean, 1997; 48). As Campbell et. al. postulate in their book:

Native Americans faced near genocide in the face of ‘nation-building’, but have survived to rearticulate and promote their cultures within the United States. Although always uneasy and ambivalent position, their ethnic identity has not been made invisible and their culture and history still inform each generation (Campbell and Kean, 1997; 48).

To overcome their sufferings as a result of annihilation, genocide, isolation and broken treaties, American Indians have adopted survival strategies. While some American Indian tribes have advocated cultural adaptation and renewal, others have preferred to sustain strong ties to their tribal past and rejected an imposed American identity. Thus, assimilation methods perpetuated by federal government have created American Indian groups who differ in their levels of assimilation and acculturation. Differing reactions among American Indian tribes have contributed to different

standpoints and different levels of commitment. Michael Garret's and Eugene Pichette's five-levels of acculturation best depict the various differences among American Indian tribes:

Traditional: *May or may not speak English, but generally speak and in their native language; hold only traditional values and beliefs and practice only traditional tribal customs and methods of worship.*

Marginal: *May speak both the native language and English; may not, however, fully accept the cultural heritage and practices of their tribal group; not fully identify with mainstream cultural values and behaviors.*

Bicultural: *generally accepted by dominant society and tribal society/nation; simultaneously able to know, accept, and practice both mainstream values/behaviors and traditional values and beliefs of their cultural heritage.*

Assimilated: *Accepted by dominant society; embrace only mainstream cultural values, behaviors, and expectations.*

Traditional: *Assimilated Native Americans who have made conscious choice to return to the "old ways". They are generally accepted by dominant society but seek to embrace previously lost traditional values, beliefs, and practices of their tribal heritage. Therefore, they may speak both English and their native tribal language. (quoted in Parillo; 2003, 281)*

It is interesting that Garret and Pichette use the term 'traditional' to describe not only the elder generation of Indians who have stuck to their native language and way of life but also to the young assimilated generation who consciously seek to enliven their tribal heritage. Based on these definitions, Sherman Alexie's main characters Thomas Builds-the Fire, Victor and Junior exemplify different groups of American Indians who have been caught between two cultures and who stand at different points of adopting Indian heritage and embracing Indian identity.

As a visionary and compulsive storyteller who is ignored by most of the people on the reservation, Thomas Builds-the-Fire is a new generation traditional figure. Victor and Junior are marginal figures who challenge their Indian heritage. Their dialogue while they are naming the rock band gives an idea about their ethnic identity:

'We need a name for this band,' Thomas said after another well-attended rehearsal.
'How about Bloodthirsty Savages?' Victor asked.
'That's a cool name, enit?' Junior asked.
'I was thinking about Coyote Springs,' Thomas said.
'That's too damn Indian,' Junior said. 'It's always Coyote this, Coyote that. I'm sick of Coyote.'
'Fuck Coyote,' Victor said (Alexie, 1995; 44-45).

Victor's suggestion "Bloodthirsty Savages" is a popular misconception about American Indians. Europeans have regarded this as a suitable name for the American Indians because of their so-called warlike attitudes and their belief in retributive justice. Europeans have firmly believed in the image of the American Indian as barbarous scalping savages. However, American Indians have always avoided conflicts where possible (Parillo, 2003; 246). In this sense, Victor and Junior do not care about the white attitudes toward American Indian and mock at the white perspective. Thomas, on the other hand, holds tightly on his Indian heritage, and wants to name the band after the respected Indian figure "Coyote". No matter what their levels of acculturation are, American Indians who are able to integrate American Indian sense of humor and imagination to their daily lives are able to resist white colonization.

Afterward, the band is named "Coyote Springs", since right after Victor and Junior rejects this traditional name, lightning falls on the reservation, a small fire starts, Junior's track is lost and Coyote proves his strength in this way (Alexie, 1995; 45). Thus, Alexie wants to promote Indian heritage and prove the survival of Indian traditions. He focuses not only the tragedy caused by assimilation and colonization but also on the survival and means of survival that are tribal and specific (Hafen; 1997, 74). Humor and imagination are survival ways unique to American Indians. They have improved their capacity to survive by imagining and laughing. In Alexie's works, sardonic and sarcastic humor overcomes tragedy, and imagination is portrayed as one part of the equation for survival (McFarland, 1997; 38).

1.1. Dreams, Visions and Imagination as Survival Strategies

American Indians observe acts of dreaming, daydreaming, and imagining as the possible sources to use in order to solve their problems in postcolonial context (Fixico, 2003; 9). They try to manage and cope with the unexpected problems they have due to being exposed to colonization and assimilation in their own ways, which are not contradicting with their tradition and tribal identity. Donald Lee Fixico's comment on American Indians' understanding of mental acts such as dreaming, daydreaming and imagining clarifies the reason why they have adopted these acts as their survival strategies in the face of evil methods of the Whites:

An Indian way of "seeing" exists, according to a native perspective about all things. It is a cooperative effort between the subconscious and conscious mind and influenced by one's tribal culture and personal experiences. As a result, dreams, daydreaming, imagining, and visions are pertinent to "Indian thinking" and this realization becomes a part of logic and decision-making process of thought. In every dream and vision are clues of knowledge and/or revelations about what all people seek to understand. Although the conscious mind is the rational part of thinking, native people have learned to consider carefully what the subconscious part of the brain has to offer. "Seeing" in the Indian way is how traditionalists of indigenous cultures understand life, and it is the basis of their indigenous logic (Fixico, 2003; 9).

1.1.1. Importance of Dreams and Visions in Native Culture

In American Indian culture, dreams have always been highly regarded and respected as a means of obtaining sacred wisdom and guidance in life. Dreams and visions are among the core values of American Indian philosophy. John A. Sanford call such cultures as of American Indians as "dream cultures" "in which dreams are at the center of a deeply spiritual way of life" (Sanford, 1978; 6). Stanford presents American Indian culture as a good example of "dream cultures" and says:

Dreams, said Chief Seattle, are given men "in solemn hours of the night by the Great Spirit." The soul, it was believed by

the Red Man, is an individual expression of the Great Spirit, but the soul would wander in darkness unless it received a guiding light. Fortunately, visions and dreams would come from the Great Spirit to guide the soul. Without such guidance man's lower nature, which inclines to ignorance, cruelty, and apathy, would prevail. But the soul enlightened by dreams can achieve the nobility for which man was created; he can move forward and reach the source of all learning, which is the knowledge of God, for, as the Nez Perce Indian prophet Smohalla said, "Wisdom comes to us in dreams" (Stanford, ; 6)

Dreams, encouraged and facilitated, are regarded as a natural means for accessing knowledge and establishing relationship to the world (Cajete, 2004; 54). Jackson Steward Lincoln divides the American Indian dreams and visions into two categories: 'individual dreams', "the unsought, or spontaneous dreams occurring in sleep", and 'culture pattern dreams', sought or induced dreams of special tribal significance (Lincoln, 2004; 22). Differently from modern interpretations based on psychoanalysts' suggestions, dreams have symbolized and meant more than unfulfilled and unconscious desires for American Indians. American Indian culture values dreams as a source of insight and inspiration. Dreams have been considered as sacred forms of reality directing life and revealing potential for special skills and abilities (Pritzker, 2000; 41). Interpreting and analyzing dreams have been a central part of many American Indian healing ceremonies, the act of discovering the source of fears and taking decisions for future actions (Shimer, 2004; 23).

What we call 'dream therapy' today has already been used by American Indians as a way of getting to the source of pessimistic beliefs in order to be able to analyze and eliminate them (Shimer, 2004; 23). When their lives have changed as a result of white policies and colonization, American Indians have continued to look for a way to remedy their colonial life troubles in their dreams as well.

Popularity of dream catchers, traditional handicrafts originated in American Indian tribes, also illustrates the importance of dreams in American Indian daily life. Dream catchers function as the symbolic filters that trap the nightmares and let the

good dreams pass. They demonstrate American Indians' fascination and wonder about dreaming.

Dream sequences in Alexie's works have significant roles in the narration. His usage of dreams mostly reflects various tragedies of American Indians facing assimilation and acculturation processes. In addition, dreams occasionally function as out-lets that relieve American Indians from the losses and pains of contemporary life. In Alexie's works, they turn defeats into victories. On one hand, the importance and power of dreams in American Indian cultural life is emphasized and on the other hand, they reveal the characters' conscious or unconscious desires, unfulfilled expectations, fears, hopes and hopelessness.

1.1.2. Significance of Imagination as a Survival Strategy

*We have to believe in the power of imagination
Because it's all we have, and ours is stronger than theirs.*
Lawrence Thornton

The act of imagining, in the tribal context, offers the possibility of freedom from non-Native traditions and makes decolonization possible (Cox, 2006; 144). It is important to note that American Indians are highly imaginative individuals, and imagination, which is a significant part of American Indian worldview, enables them to grasp a holistic perception of life. Strong and positive connection to nature, strong sense of community, sense of the sacred and sense of beauty are the distinguishing aspects of American Indian worldview; and "in their imaginings they tend to see themselves as living in a good way, in a strong community, with an aesthetic and spirituality inspired by nature as a good and beautiful force" (Magoulick, 2003). In other words, they put the principles of their worldview into practice in their imaginings; certain values that American Indian worldview centered around arise in their imaginative power.

American Indians adopt imagining as their survival strategy and they regard it as a coping skill that strengthens the individual's capacity for surviving. The role of

imagination in their worldview is significant. However, of even greater importance are their great suffering and real pain, due to forced assimilation, which only can be escaped by the use of imagination. In this sense, for American Indians, imagination is a strategy of survival in order to maintain their sense of community, as well as a way of minimizing their suffering. N. Scott Momaday's commentary on the imaginative power emphasizes its importance for American Indians: "We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined" (quoted in Owens, 1992; 93).

In Alexie's works, characters imagine frequently and habitually. By way of day-dreaming, they fulfill their life-expectations or they remember their tribal past or personal recollections. Sherman Alexie himself is widely quoted for his "survival formula" from his short story *Imagining the Reservation* in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, which makes his view clear about the power of imagination: "Survival = Anger x Imagination. Imagination is the only power on the reservation" (Alexie, 2005; 150). Readers come across similar formulas not only in his short stories but also in his various poems. James H. Cox analyzes Alexie's usage of imagination in his book *Muting White Noise*:

Alexie suggests that imagining alternatives to narratives of domination and conquest (Columbus's voyage; the manifest Destiny conferred by the Christian God on Euro-westerners) is a powerful weapon. Imagining alternative histories might not change the present (impoverished urban Native communities; Lester FallsApart's crimes), but conceiving of other possibilities, or writing Natives back into the landscape, will influence the future by promising plots that do not assure listeners or readers of the inevitable absence of native Americans. As Alexie explains, imagination, fueled by anger at the colonial past and present, is the formula for Native survival (Cox, 2006; 158)

What Alexie means by this formula is that:

American Indians have to be emotionally and psychologically resourceful to keep their sense of humor and

their traditions alive in conditions hostile to their existence. Much of the imagination in his stories comes in the form of dark humor, a response to desperate straits in which many of his characters find themselves. Alexie himself demonstrates imagination and resourcefulness in the very way he has constructed the book as a kind of fictional memoir of his own life on the reservation (Bookrags, 2005).

Obviously it is clear that, imaginative power of American Indians has significantly contributed to their communities' survival in the face of evil whites. Also, imagination and humor coexist within each other.

1.2. Humor as a Survival Strategy

It has always been a great disappointment to Indian people that the humorous side of Indian life has not been emphasized by professed experts...

Indians have found a humorous side to nearly every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well defined through jokes and stories that they have become a thing in themselves... The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it. (Vine Deloria, Jr., "Custer for Your Sins: An Indian manifesto")

Humor functions as a key virtue in American Indian culture. American Indians have always been able to approach life with a sense of humor. Especially, after being exposed to long term discrimination and oppression by whites, humor has had more social and cultural meanings for them. Jace Weaver states that "Indices of Native identity have always been located in humor. Although it usually has been overlooked, traditional orature contains strong elements of humor. Since 1492, especially, it has also become a powerful tool of survival" (Weaver, 1997; 88). Humor has been a powerful medicine challenging fate, nourishing human spirit, giving strength and hope for survival (Gregory, 1998). As described by Wendy J. Rohrbacher, American Indian humor serves as "not only a weapon to fight conquest and assimilation, but also as a guide for framing a worldview" (Rohrbacher, 1999).

Considering the social functions, Kenneth Lincoln describes American Indian humor as "survival humor" that "transcends the void, questions fatalism, and outlasts

suffering” (Lincoln, 1993; 45). American Indians have used “survival humor” to subvert white colonization ways and their dominance in the society. Margaret Atwood states that “Humor is more than a mere tool but becomes an effective subversive weapon, when used by people who find themselves in a tight place without other, more physical weapons” (quoted in Hirsch, 2000; 107). Another function of humor for American Indians is that it creates social harmony within communities. This harmony helps to defuse and sublimate tension and negativity. In this way, humor allows tolerance and teaches social values (Fagan, 2000; 25).

Obviously it is clear that humor is one of the most important abilities and values that American Indians have in the matter of survival. It is an intrinsic quality of American Indians. James Luna, Luiseno Indian performance artist, explains the role of humor in American Indian culture as “a form of knowledge, critical thought, and perhaps used just to ease pain” (quoted in Birringer, 2000; 179). Drew Hayder Taylor, as an American Indian himself, comments on the issue: “Even in the darkest moments there were always sparks of humor. That’s how we survived 500 years of oppression. It was our humor that kept us sane. That does not mean that I am using humor to whitewash the problems of native communities. You can have humor and explore serious issues” (quoted in Hirsch, 2000; 104-105).

Native humor is difficult to define because of tribal diversity. All tribes have different ways of observing reality and expressing their perceptions. Differing perceptions and various tribal languages affect the expressing and understanding of humor. Mirjam Hirsch explains the tribal differences about “understanding humor” in her article “*Subversive Humor: Canadian Native Playwrights’ Winning Weapon of Resistance*” and affirms the fact that Iroquois and Haida are known for aggressive humor while Cree and Anishinabe humor is depicted as sly. However, “strong tradition of teasing” and “the self-deprecatory joke at one’s own expense” are the general themes in American Indian humor (Hirsch, 2000; 106).

As an important aspect of American Indian culture, humor has had a significant role in literary traditions and has gained even more importance in the

ongoing American Indian literary renaissance. According to the American Indian authors, “to free others to hope for the impossible” has been the most deeply healing function of humor (Hirsch, 2000; 114). These authors use humor “to ridicule fate and transcend sorrow” (Gregory, 1998). Mirjam Hirsch says:

Contemporary Native authors skillfully employ subversive humor as an artistic strategy both to heal from and to understand historical and personal trauma and to fight the adversity they face. Humor is a means of drawing attention to a range of serious issues, from the perpetuation of stereotypes to land claims, residential schools, forced integration, foster parenthood, benighted government policy, environmental destruction and attempted annihilation. With the help of the strong forces of humor, native writers challenge given power systems, lay open the relativity of all positions, subvert the process of domination, inspire social change and promote a new consciousness (Hirsch, 2000; 104).

American Indian writers regard and present humor “as offering a sense of relief and acceptance of circumstance in the face of danger and tragedy” (Fagan, 2000; 26). Sherman Alexie is one of these writers. His dark humor makes the pain and anger bearable in his works. Alexie is a thought-provoking writer and humor is one of his hallmarks. Georgia Bapst directs Alexie’s commentary on humor:

Humor was abundant on the reservation where he grew up, he says. He turned to humor because he was different and got beat up a lot. "You can't run as fast or throw a punch if you're laughing," he said.

And the more traditional the person on the reservation, the funnier they were, he says. "My grandmother was hilarious. My whole family was funny. I was the least funny. My family thought I was depressed and angry." (Bapst, 2002).

As a significant cultural value of American Indians, humor alleviates their emotional pain and helps them to tolerate the unfair treatment and impoverished living-conditions. Humor and imagining, one inside the other, are the essential facts which make American Indian culture viable.

II) DREAMS, VISIONS AND IMAGINATION IN *RESERVATION BLUES* AND *THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN*

The relationship between the real and imaginary, and the real and visionary are the essential themes in Alexie's works. In his works, the functions and roles of dream visions and imaginations vary. Alexie surveys the dream visions, whose traditional significance and meanings have changed for American Indians after white colonization and settlement of the New World. Also, he explores the ways in which American Indians use their imagination to struggle against their culturally and physically impoverished lives on the reservation. The characters can have dream visions and imaginations either to fulfill their expectations, to compensate for their loss and failures, or to conceal their conflicts. In addition, they use only dream visions, in traditional terms, as guidelines for making important decisions. Readers come across various acts of dreaming and imagining throughout both *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

The importance of dream visions for American Indians is highlighted through the character Junior, the college drop-out who is in his early 30s in *Reservation Blues*. In a humorous way, Junior points the importance of dream visions by connecting dreams to western psychoanalytic thinking: "He had majored in psychology during his brief time in college and learned a lot about dreams. In Psychology 101, Junior had learned from Freud and Jung that dreams decide everything. He figured that Freud and Jung must have been reservation Indians, because dreams decided everything for Indians, too" (Alexie, 1995; 18). Moreover, dreams also have prophetic and guiding functions that relate them to a more tribal understanding of the world:

Junior based all of his decisions on his dreams and visions, which created a lot of problems. When awake, he could never stomach the peanut butter and onion sandwiches that tasted so great in his dreams, but Junior always expected his visions to come true. Indians were supposed to have visions and receive messages from his dreams. All the Indians on television had visions told them exactly what to do (Alexie, 1995; 18).

When Coyote Springs gets an offer to play in Ellensburg, Seattle, for one thousand dollars, they feel suspicious and cannot make decision easily at first. Believing in the traditional guiding power of dreams, Chess suggests: “I think we all need to sleep on this” (Alexie, 1995; 125).

The importance of the imagining process and its power for American Indians is strongly emphasized in the short story “Imagine the Reservation” in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Imagining is presented as a process to challenge and question reality. The narrator in this story provokes the reader to think what could have happened if American history was re-written by the way of asking questions: “Imagine Crazy Horse invented the atom bomb in 1876 and detonated it over Washington, D.C. Would the urban Indians still be sprawled around the one-room apartment in the cable television reservation?” (Alexie, 2005; 152). “Imagine Columbus landed in 1492 and some tribe or another drowned him in the ocean” (152). The narrator also questions the imposed ‘realities’ which have affected and changed the whole lives of people concerning issues of religious and faith, by asking striking questions such as: “Didn’t you know Jesus Christ was a Spokane Indian?” (Alexie, 2005; 149). Besides these challenging statements and thought-provoking questions, imagining is also offered as a means that contributes to “survivance”, Gerald Vizenor’s term to describe “survival and endurance” (Lundquist, 2004; 309) of American Indians. In the very same story, the narrator states: “There are so many possibilities in the reservation 7-11, so many methods of survival” (Alexie, 2005; 152). Imagining is one of the most efficient of these methods. The narrator suggests that one should be strong in the face of hardships by imagining: “Didn’t you know? Imagination is the politics of dreams; imagination turns every word into a bottle rocket” (Alexie, 2005; 152). Imaginative power is a remedy for American Indians when they feel hopeless and helpless: “Imagine that your own shadow on the wall is a perfect door. Imagine a song stronger than penicillin. Imagine a spring with water that mends broken bones” (Alexie, 2005; 152-153).

The imaginative power and functions of dreams and visions are significant parts of American Indian wisdom since they offer a holistic perception of the world.

These elements have already been important for American Indians in traditional terms, however, their imagining ability and their strong belief in dreams have gained even more importance in the contemporary life due to the fact that these parts of their wisdom have made them stronger against European colonization methods, have given them the power to cope with the unfair treatment and to survive under poor and inferior circumstances.

2.1. Dreams, Visions and Imaginations as Defense Mechanisms

Disappointments and defeats in life activate people's defense mechanisms. Defense mechanism, the theory which has firstly been developed by Sigmund Freud and later clarified and conceptualized by his daughter Anna Freud, can be regarded as mental maneuvers to maintain psychological equilibrium. People develop ways and employ some coping strategies to protect themselves, their sense of self and their self-esteem (Cramer, 2006; 3). In Sherman Alexie's works, various dream sequences and visions are presented as significant coping and surviving processes for characters. Characters dream, day-dream and imagine in order to avoid painful reality, compensate for their loss and failures and alleviate their feelings of taking revenge.

2.1.1. Compensating For Loss and Failures in Dreams, Visions and Imaginations

As the outcomes of defense mechanism, dreams, visions and imaginations are devices which American Indians use to rationalize, deny or divert some realities which are difficult to accept. The characters in Alexie's works frequently dream and imagine intentionally or unconsciously. These dreams and imaginations keep them sane and protective.

Alcoholism, for example, is one of the problems that reservation Indians have to struggle against. Young people on the reservation are accustomed to drunken fathers although this makes them miserable. Thomas, Victor and Junior are so accustomed to a drunken father passing out that they immediately ask each other "Is it your dad or my dad?" when they see a man who has passed out on the lawn (Alexie,

1995; 95). Then, they discover that he is Thomas's father Samuel Builds-the Fire, who always passes out and has even gained a reputation in the reservation as "Drunk and Disorderly" due to his all-time drunken condition (Alexie, 1995, 95). These young men know that they probably will be sharing a similar fate with Samuel Builds-the-Fire. As helpless and hopeless as their fathers, they just ignore and sleep in order to cope with the situation: "Decorated veterans of that war between fathers and sons, Junior and Victor knew the best defense was sleep" (Alexie, 1995; 96). "Those two found it was easier to just sleep, rather than wake up and face the day" (Alexie, 1995; 260). They employ sleeping as their unique coping and survival strategy. Thomas and Chess, on the other hand, as helpless as the others, are aware of the massive destruction that alcoholism has brought upon them: "'Drinking that will kill them' 'I think that is the idea'" (Alexie, 1995; 100). Moreover, Thomas says that he hates his father. The reason of this 'hatred' is that he knows that his father regards alcohol as a way of self-destruction. Rather than resisting and struggling against broken-down economic and spiritual conditions, Samuel Builds-the-Fire's weakness and drinking causes Thomas to hate his father.

In the short story "A Drug Called Tradition" from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*; Victor, Junior and Thomas take a new drug and share their visions with each other. This effective drug, which has been supplied by Victor, causes them to have visions of "a better world" (Alexie, 2005; 14). They take the drug to avoid their poor life-conditions and to replace them with the imaginative ones just for a while. What they actually need is a temporary relief. However, the visions they have after the drug, which reflect their subconscious, include messages that relate to American Indians' survival and their defense mechanism.

Thomas, who has the drug first, has the vision of Victor dodging a white man by stealing his pony in order to be a hero and earn his name in traditional ways (Alexie, 2005; 15). This vision compensates for unconscious need of American Indians to take revenge from the Whites. This time it is the American Indian who steals something from the whites rather than vice versa.

When Junior takes the drug while he is driving, he has the vision of Thomas dancing. Junior mentions about the smallpox infected blankets that have been given by White men to speed the decline of American Indian population. In his vision, Junior himself is the last one from his tribe and he dances traditional Ghost Dance to bring his elders and dead members of the tribe back. In his vision, “with every step, an Indian rises” (Alexie, 2005; 17). They grow larger and larger and go on dancing the Ghost Dance in expanding circles until all the ships, with White people waving good-bye, return to Europe. Junior’s vision reflects the fact that, as an American Indian, he is disturbed and distressed he is due to the results of white colonization and assimilation processes. This vision clearly indicates Junior’s perspective that if he had a chance, he would make the time move backward and he would make things the way they used to be before white man’s arrival. However, his wish can be no more than a vision, where he can experience a temporary relief.

Impressed by the strong effect of the drug, Victor takes it, he sees Junior singing on a stage as a very famous music star. Then, Victor starts to tell his vision in first person narration:

I've been singing at the Plantation since I was ten years old and have always drawn big crowds. All the white folks come to hear my songs, my little pieces of Indian wisdom, although they have to sit in the back of the theatre because all the Indians get the best tickets for my shows. It's not racism. The Indians just camp out all night to buy tickets. Even the President of the United States, Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse himself, came to hear me once. I played a song I wrote for his great-grandfather, the famous Lakota warrior who helped us win the war against the whites:

*Crazy Horse, What have you done?
Crazy Horse, What have you done?
It took four hundred years
And four hundred thousand guns
But the Indians finally won.
Ya-hey, the Indians finally won (Alexie, 2005;
18-19).*

Being almost always insulted and regarded as inferior by White people, Victor diverts this reality in his vision; American Indians are so superior and mainstream that even

the U.S. president is an American Indian. In the song that he addresses to the elders of Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse, he states that “the Indians finally won” (Alexie, 2005; 19). Obviously, as an American Indian himself, Victor compensates for his wounded feelings as a result of being discriminated, colonized and assimilated in his vision.

The drug surfaces the unconscious ideas and wishes of the three young American Indian men. They have been sickened with the racial discrimination and hardships that they have come across so far. In other words, the visions they have, are indeed their defense mechanisms. They compensate for their lost or assimilated tribal values in their visions. “Although it is the twentieth century and planes are passing overhead, the Indian boys have decided to be real Indians tonight” (Alexie, 2005; 20).

In the short story “A Good Story” from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*; Junior’s mother complains about the pessimism and sadness of the stories that Junior tells and encourages him to write a story about good things and says: “Because people should know that good things always happens to Indians, too” (Alexie, 2005; 140). She wants the stories to heal since they are the products of American Indians’ imaginative power, which is their weapon to ensure survival. Upon this, Junior tells the story of Uncle Moses and Arnold. Uncle Moses is an elder American Indian who regards new generation American Indians as “the children who carried dreams in the back pockets of their blue jeans, pulled them out easily, traded back and forth” (Alexie, 2005; 142). Arnold, on the other hand, is a full-blood Spokane Indian child who has a great ability for playing basketball. Uncle Moses observes this ability of the little child as something given to all American Indians that can compensate for what they have lost (Alexie, 2005; 143). This story within the story emphasizes the fact that American Indians have naturally a strong power to imagine and this will enable them to feel strong enough against unfair treatments and to deal with their losses. This is the healing power of the ‘good’ stories.

The dreams, visions and imaginations of the mentioned characters do not reflect reality. Instead, they reflect their suppressed wishes, which are impossible to come true, and their displeasure and dissatisfaction with what has happened to them

as a result of European colonization process. What activates their defense mechanism and causes them to have such soothing dreams, visions and imaginations is the fact that they know intrinsically that they cannot change the disturbing realities and nothing can be like it was used to before. Victor expresses one of his recollections about his father; Victor's father tells such good things about, Victor's mother, his ex-wife, that they are hard to believe since they are full of exaggeration and make-up events. However, Victor's father explains his life philosophy as: "What's real? I ain't interested in what's real. I'm interested in how things should be" (Alexie, 2005; 33). Victor expresses: "My father's mind always worked that way. If you don't like the things you remember, then all you have to do is change the memories" (Alexie, 2005; 33-34). What Victor's father does is also what American Indians do to survive.

2.1.2. Satisfying the Feeling of Taking Revenge

When people have wishes that are almost impossible to fulfill in real life, they can revert to daydreaming as a means of satisfying unfulfilled wishes. The characters in Alexie's works generally have strong feelings of taking revenge from the evil whites due to being exposed to their unfair treatment. Because in real life they are the ones who are always defeated, it is only in their dreams that they can satisfy their desire for victory. These characters often take revenge in their imaginary world.

The vision-like recollection of Samuel Builds-the-Fire exemplifies this kind of delusional self-satisfaction. Samuel Builds-the-Fire passes out due to extreme intoxication and he recollects the day he and his friend Lester FallsApart, who is a homeless-alcoholic and comical figure, played a harsh basketball game against the Tribal cops. This game actually symbolizes the struggle of American Indians against the whites, who are always the advantageous side. While it is only he and his friend that make up the American Indian team, the team of the tribal cops consists of six players: Officer Wilson; a white man who hates the reservation life but has obtained a job by claiming Indian blood, Officer William; one of the cops who played basketball professionally in college years, The Tribal Police Chief David WalksAlong, and three more cops, ironically, called Plato, Socrates and Aristotle (Alexie, 1995; 103).

This “half-fantasy basketball game” becomes a replay of past wars between American Indians and Whites (Lee, 2003; 114). Samuel and Lester are quite assertive at the beginning. When David WalksAlong offers the first shot, Samuel gives the ball back and says: “It’s the only time you’ll touch it” (Alexie, 1995; 103). During the whole game the ‘teams’ attack and swear at each other. Samuel and Lester dedicate all their pointed shots to the ‘heroes’ such as Crazy Horse, Wounded Knee I and II, Martin Luther King and Jimi Hendrix. When Samuel and Lester are about to win the game, the Tribal Cops make a sudden effort and win the game. Although Samuel and Lester’s final shot does not change the result, Samuel does his best while he is throwing the ball. Lester says: “The shot was vain” and Samuel answers: “The shot was the best story I ever told” (Alexie, 1995; 121). American Indians lose the game against the whites. However, Samuel soothes his ambition and partly takes revenge from the whites by cursing at the Tribal cops and thanks to the pointed shots during the game.

This symbolic visionary recollection of Samuel is actually an outcome of his defense mechanism. The white tribal cops are his rivals and even though he loses as a result, he pours out his anger. This recollection is actually not narrated as a story clearly by Thomas; however, Chess asks Thomas to complete the story and she wants to learn the winner of the mentioned game: “You never told us who won that game between your father and the Tribal Cops.” Thomas’s answer actually shows the weakness of American Indians: “Who do you think?” he asks back, “Who you think won the game?” (Alexie, 1995; 129).

2.2. Dreams, Visions and Imaginations about Worries, Fears and Despairs

Dreams, visions and imaginations of the characters in the works are not only the outcomes of defense mechanisms but also they reflect the characters’ conscious or unconscious worries and fears about life, and their despairs due to the unfortunate events that they have so far experienced. The hardships that they have come across as a result of internal colonization process have made American Indians weak, miserable and problematic in various areas. Victor explains the cultural and physical

transformation, and American Indians' subsequent despair in the short story "Amusements": "But all the years have changed more than the shape of our blood and eyes. We wear fear now like turquoise choker, like a familiar shawl" (Alexie, 2005; 55). Family and health problems mostly caused by alcoholism, unemployment, and being exposed to discrimination are the main hardships of American Indians and they are reflected in their dreams and visions.

2.2.1. Dreams, Visions and Recollections Reflecting Family Problems

The main characters Thomas, Victor and Junior all have family problems one way or another. First of all, the father figures in their lives are problematic; drunken and jobless fathers who can never fulfill their fatherhood responsibilities. Victor and Junior have already lost their fathers, and although Thomas's father Samuel is alive, Thomas does not hesitate singing a mourning song, which is sung for dead people, when his father is lying on the kitchen table drunken and in a motionless position (Alexie, 1995, 100).

Mothers, on the other hand, because of having alcohol during pregnancy, are mostly responsible for the birth of unhealthy babies. They are too weak to raise their children properly. Victor's mother Matilda starts a new affair with Harold, a white man, just a few weeks after Victor's father Emery leaves home and goes to Phoenix (Alexie, 1995; 24-25). Junior's mother is as irresponsible as Harold when she leaves her five children in the car in freezing weather in order to get a drink from a bar (Alexie, 1995; 110).

The spiritual emptiness, which has been created and can never be fulfilled by these dysfunctional and awkward parents, has always created and still creates problems for Thomas, Victor and Junior. They all adopt "Indian identity" from different points; however, their different standings do not change the result. In the reservation, they share the same fate. They are the children of the American Indians who have been left no choice but to struggle in order to survive and keep their vital life values. While doing this, they have lost much of their vigor and strength to lead a

good life and to raise their children properly. Victor describes the in an ironic but provocative way the tragic circumstances American Indians are conceived in today's America: "I was conceived during one of those drunken nights, half of me formed by my father's whiskey sperm, the other half formed by my mother's vodka egg. I was born a goofy reservation mixed drink..." (Alexie, 2005; 27).

Thomas, Victor and Junior feel the lack of a family unit which is actually an indispensable cultural value for American Indians, and they reflect their injured feelings in their dreams, visions and imaginations. Junior often dreams of his childhood days and his family; two sisters, two brothers and his parents whose names he cannot remember in his dreams. He dreams of the short and cheap vacations that they had in Spokane when his father had got the rent money for his wheat field in harvest time. He dreams of his parents' funerals and he remembers in his dream that his siblings could not come to their parents' funerals because of not having enough money to pay for the travel expenses. Spiritually hurt, Junior dreams of these pathetic days and when his siblings could not even afford to mourn properly (Alexie, 1995; 24).

In another dream, again shaped by childhood memories, Junior undertakes the responsibility of taking care of his siblings when his parents in order to get a drink from a bar leave them in the car all alone in freezing weather. In his dream, Junior to save gas does not run the heat, but instead gives potato chips and Pepsi to his siblings, not forgetting to distribute them evenly (Alexie, 1995; 110-111). Junior cries in his dream until he saves his siblings symbolically; he cries and cries and they run away from the car, turn into adults and start their new lives. When the parents come back from the bar and see that their children have gone, they just accuse Junior and still continue drinking (Alexie, 1995; 111-112). Interestingly, Junior never accuses his parents in his dream. He dreams of one of his childhood recollections, and this dream clearly reflects how deeply the irresponsibility of his parents has affected Junior.

Victor, also, often has dreams reflecting his family problems and remembers his childhood years that touch him deeply. Poor conditions of reservation life and

other problems related to the impoverished conditions make him dissatisfied and displeased. These are the main reasons lead to Victor having dreams and visions. In the short story “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona”, in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and later in *Reservation Blues*, one of Victor’s most poignant memories, the death of his father, which he dreams of later, is described. In the short story, Victor finds out that his father has died of a heart attack in Phoenix, Arizona. He wants to go there to make arrangements; however, he has not got enough money. In other words, just like Junior’s siblings, he cannot afford the proper mourning rites for his father. Tribal Council gives a little money and Thomas adds some, then Victor and Thomas go to Phoenix to get the ashes of Victor’s father (Alexie, 2005; 59-60). What affects Victor more deeply than his father’s death is the way he has died: He has died of a heart attack during a heat wave and has laid on couch for a week before due to terrible smell a neighbor discovers him. This terrible smelling, which has never fully dissipated, comes to Victor in his dream many years later, in the novel *Reservation Blues* (Alexie, 1995; 25). He dreams of his mother and step-father and how they fell in love with each other in a cowboy bar. He has such a dream due to the fact that his mother’s love affair actually has hurt his sensitive feelings about family unit. That is why he associates the smelling of his father’s dead body with the love affair of his mother.

Another nightmare of Victor, again of his father, mother and step-father, reflects one more time how deeply he has been affected by family problems. In his nightmare, Victor’s step-father Harold packs everything and puts Matilda, Victor’s mother, into his truck where Victor’s real father Emery’s dead body lies. Victor runs and cries to go with them when Harold is about to leave with Matilda and dead Emery. Harold refuses to take him with them and rushes out. Victor runs after them in vain, and falls down at last. When he stands again, he finds out that he is bald and he sees a black robe. The black robe takes him and shows him a battle scene in a picture. After Victor sees the picture he starts bleeding and then he gets lost. Then he begins to dig the grass until his fingers and toes bleed with effort; “He dug because he had forgotten how to stand. He dug because his father, Emery, and mother, Matilda, waited on a better reservation at the center of the world” (Alexie, 1995; 109). Victor

has such dreams because of his displeasure with his broken family ties and his wish for a stable family life. In addition, his digging the grass while his parents waited on “a better reservation at the center of the world” can be interpreted as his futile effort to secure himself a better future.

Broken marriages also contribute to the problematic situations of the new generations as well as the unfulfilled responsibilities of parents towards their children. Victor complains about broken marriages’ being more destructive and painful than they used to be for contemporary American Indians while he is telling his recollections about the separation of his parents, and he compares the past and present of the breaking-ups: “The woman or man just packed up all their possessions and left the tipi. There were no arguments, no discussions. Now, Indians fight their way to the end, holding onto the last good thing, because our whole lives have to do with survival” (Alexie, 1995; 32).

In the short story titled “Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock”, Victor narrates many of his recollections about his father. One of these recollections is about how much Victor misses his father after his father has abandoned them as a result of strong quarrels with his wife. On the night he misses his father most, Victor cries in his bed with his father’s photograph in his hand. Victor says: “I knew I was dreaming it all but I let it be real for a moment” (Alexie, 2005; 35). He imagines his father’s motorcycle pulling up outside their house and hears his father calling him for a ride. Under the effect of his imagination, Victor puts his coat on quickly and rushes out although he is already aware of the fact that it is only an imagination (Alexie, 2005; 35).

Reservation children experience many hardships that affect them both physically and psychologically. Poor conditions in every field do not let their dreams come true. Moreover, they witness the helplessness and hopelessness of the people around them. These distressed experiences hurt the children’s minds and hearts deeply, which then lead to psychological problems in adulthood.

Victor remembers one of the Christmas Eves of his childhood, in the short story “Every Little Hurricane”. He is five years old when he witnesses the helplessness of his beloved father. Unemployment and poverty do not allow Victor’s father to buy Christmas gifts for his family that year. Seen from another perspective, Victor’s father’s being upset because of not being able to afford buying Christmas presents also signifies how assimilation methods work. Giving Christmas presents is not an Indian tradition and practicing it should not be very significant in traditional terms for an American Indian man; however, this touches Victor’s father.

Seeing his father crying leaves a permanent mark in five-year-old Victor. He imagines that “he held an empty box beneath his father’s eyes and collected the tears, held that box until it was full. Victor would wrap it in Sunday comics and give it to his mother” (Alexie, 2005; 5). Children witness and learn the grief of life in the reservation since very young. They learn the unfair reasons of their grief as they grow up. That is why they have symbolic hurricanes, which the title “Every Little Hurricane” refers to, that ruin them psychologically. However, Daniel Grassian comments on this issue from a different perspective:

Yet, Alexie sees an ironic, positive by-product of this internalized rage and disillusion. The repressed animosity that produces these mini-hurricanes also forges strong bonds between family members on the reservation. While Alexie claims that this bond ‘is stronger than most anything,’ he also writes, ‘It’s the same bond that causes so much pain’ (Grassian, 2005; 58).

Victor becomes an aggressive adult showing tendency to violence due to his ‘reservation childhood’. According to Thomas; “These little wars were intimate affairs for those who dreamed in childhood of fishing salmon but woke up as adults to shop at the Trading Post and stand in line for U.S.D.A. commodity food instead” (Alexie, 1995; 14). In other words, failed dreams, unfulfilled expectations and being exposed to unfair treatment create aggressive or problematic individuals, one way or another, like Victor, Junior and Thomas.

2.2.2. Dreams and Recollections about American Indians and White Relations

The relationship between American Indians and White men has always been complicated for many reasons from the very beginning. Besides the expected and normal problems originating from colonization, there have always been special problems due to two diverse cultures' dealing with each other, which are completely dissimilar in their worldviews. The relation between the colonizer and the colonized has always been problematic: American Indians have been exposed to many cruelties and always have been the exploited side. Because of the great differences between the worldviews, American Indians could not perceive the evil plans and intentions of white men easily. What destroys the psychology and self-esteem of American Indians is the injustice that they have been exposed to. James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson define the relation of American Indians and Whites in historical context in their book *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century*:

For more than 370 years Native American history, buffeted by a series of political, economic, social, and cultural forces emerging from both European American and Native American society, has been complex in the extreme. From the beginning of their contact, neither has adequately understood the other. The dominant society has exalted the Protestant ethic to a theological level, figuratively worshipping at the intricately related altars of individualism, materialism, progress, and technology. To Native Americans, European American society has seemed obsessed with the temporal rather than the spiritual, the individual rather than peace and harmony. For their part, non-Native Americans have viewed Native American life as hopelessly stagnant and inefficient, retarded by communal values, subsistence economies, and cultural ecologies. In these mutual misunderstandings, the twentieth century has been no different from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries (Olson and Wilson, 1986; 179).

The American Indian characters in *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* reflect how distressed they are about the disturbing historical facts and the problematic relations with the Whites in which American

Indians are always unjustly treated and victimized. They often have dreams and remember their personal recollections about Whites in both works.

2.2.2.1. Dreams and Imaginations about Fights between American Indians and Whites

The title of the short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* already refers to the struggle between American Indians and whites. The title basically originates from a popular radio and television program, *The Lone Ranger*, which was broadcasted between the years of 1948-1959 (Slethaug, 2003). In this program, Tonto, the Indian, is present only to serve the white hero, the Lone Ranger. However, Alexie challenges the white man's superiority by adding 'Tonto' to the title. Besides, their fistfight in heaven means that Tonto does not want to be the loyal companion of the Lone Ranger any more (Cox, 2006; 154). The Lone Ranger and Tonto fistfight; in other words, American Indian man struggles against the White man and he "refuses to occupy the subordinate social space defined and assigned to him by the Lone Ranger" (Cox, 2006; 154).

In the title story of the collection, the narrator, a Spokane Indian, is in strained terms with his white girlfriend. Their arguments are full of damaging words more powerful than fists (Alexie, 2005; 185). These arguments actually symbolize the fights of Tonto and the Lone Ranger. The narrator stands for Tonto, and the white girlfriend is for the Lone Ranger. The narrator often has dreams about their oppressive relationship. In one of these dreams, his girlfriend is a missionary's wife, and the narrator himself is a minor chief. They fall in love and keep their relation secret; however, the missionary learns about their relation and shoots the narrator. This is also the beginning of a war between the American Indians and Whites. The narrator's tribe attacks the whites all across the reservation; both sides kill each other. Other American Indian tribes and the United States Cavalry join, and the war escalates (Alexie, 2005; 186). Brutal and poignant realities about Indian and White relation are reflected in the narrator's dream. The narrator dreams of three mounted soldiers playing polo with a dead Indian woman's head. He narrates about his dream

later: “When I first dreamed it, I thought it was just a product of my anger and imagination. But since then, I’ve read similar accounts of that kind of evil in the Old West” (Alexie, 2005; 186). The American Indian boy and white girl’s relation, rather than a love affair, has deeper meanings; the individual arguments between the couple are actually the products of the commotion between the American Indians and Whites, which is reflected in the narrator’s dream.

Junior often has dreams that are the products of his anger, grudge and helplessness as a result of colonization process. Even though he does not seem to be as traditional as Thomas, he notices the absence and loss of his Indian heritage. He accuses Whites for American Indians’ loss, and he reflects his despair caused by the wickedness of Whites in his dreams. In one of these dreams, he hears bugles and gunshots coming from all angles. He looks for but cannot find the source of them. All Indians, except Junior, die because of gunshots. When the unseen attackers begin to materialize, Junior sees that they are white soldiers in blue uniforms. The general introduces himself as General George Wright, and then he shoots and kills Junior’s pony; in this way, he declares that that is a war (Alexie, 2005; 143). General Phil Sheridan joins them later, and both generals accuse Junior for murdering eighteen white soldiers and sentence him to capital punishment. General Wright and General Sheridan are significant because they are real historical figures who ordered their troops against American Indian tribes in 1858 (Ruby, 2006; 121). The soldiers at General Wright and Sheridan’s service murdered many American Indians and slaughtered their horses; moreover, they destroyed their lodges and structures (Wilma, 2003). General Phil Sheridan is also the source of the statement ‘The only good Indian is a dead Indian’, which becomes a cry for Indian-haters (Cox, 2006; 165). In this sense, Junior’s nightmare shows how desperate he is about the historical facts which are the reasons of their present conditions. In Junior’s dream, General Sheridan offers Junior to save his life on condition that he is going to sign “it” (Alexie, 2005; 144). Sheridan never informs Junior about what he is going to sign. Junior throws the pen that he is given for signing. Thus, he accepts the capital punishment by refusing signing. When Junior is asked for his last pray, he refuses praying in Christian ways and sings in his traditional way, then he is hung and dream

ends (Alexie, 2005; 145). Junior prefers death rather than losing his cultural values, which is also the source of whites' antagonism against American Indians.

In the short story "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire", Thomas is put on trial for unspecified crimes and he is sentenced to two concurrent life terms for his 'crime'. He answers the judge's questions by telling historical stories about the wars between American Indians and whites. According to James H. Cox: "Thomas establishes himself in this story as a transhistorical figure who can create victories for his tribe out of apparent defeats" (Cox, 2006; 160). Thomas starts his first story-answer in these words: "It all started on September 8, 1858" (Alexie, 2005; 96). Thus, he actually goes to the source of the problems of Indians and white settlers. Colonel George Wright is mentioned again this time in Thomas's story. Thomas tells about Colonel Wright's stealing 800 horses, the entire wealth of Spokane chief Til-coax, and killing them. He tells another story as an answer about Colonel Wright's taking Indian men hostage, threatening to hang them and telling lies (Alexie, 2005; 98). These stories are interesting since they are the products of Thomas's imaginative power reflecting reality. Thomas tells stories, admits his 'guilt' in these stories and gets punished as a consequence. Just like Junior, Thomas prefers to be punished rather than to lose his Indian values. This ironic result actually displays white men's prejudice and injustice against American Indians. Alexie wants to point out how irrational and cruel white men are in the matters about American Indians.

Thomas has another dream about the violent relation between whites and Indians. As a traditional character, Thomas is disturbed by the present-day realities about American Indians. The popular image of American Indians as having degenerated values and characteristics bothers Thomas very much. His dreams reflect such worries. In Thomas's dream we come across American Indians who are arguing among themselves as they are always portrayed. The 'wild' Indians, with bows and arrows, dismount and grab the telegraph wire. The cowboys, who say "We come in friendship" (Alexie, 1995; 70), start the generator and electrocute the Indians, and undoubtedly, Indians who are unable to release the wires begin to "dance crazily" (Alexie, 1995; 71). Thomas's dream actually presents the reason of American

Indians' distrust of whites. They do not trust them since the whites have always approached them in a friendly way, and then they have showed their evil side and American Indians have always suffered loss for this reason.

Chess, who has had many troubles so far in her life, is the Flathead member of the band. After joining the band with her sister Checkers, she begins to live in the Spokane reservation the other band members Thomas, Victor and Junior. She lives up to her nickname and plans all her moves in advance (Alexie, 1995; 55). In addition, she has such a feeling of being always measured by men: "Her father, her priest, her lovers, her employers, her God" (Alexie, 1995; 212). She is upset and worried for herself and her family's both economical and spiritual poverty, and she yearns for a life that she can live in her tribal ways. Chess has witnessed the helplessness of many American Indians around her through her life. This reality has always hurt her deeply. She has dreams about the fact that how reservation Indians are helpless both in individual and communal matters. In her dream, Chess sees American Indian men whom she does not know. She describes them as an unpainted and unbraided Indian, a tall Indian and an angry Indian (Alexie, 1995; 84). In her dream, whereas the unpainted Indian man has a knife, while the white soldiers have rifles. The soldiers shoot at the unpainted Indian. Apart from the tall Indian, no one helps the wounded Indian. The tall one takes him to a lodge and the others sing mourning songs for him. The unpainted Indian coughs blood and asks for his father, then his father comes and the tall one and his father watch the unpainted one die (Alexie, 1995; 85). Whites cause another great pain for the American Indians in Chess's dream. In Chess's dream, we see again the reoccurrence of white man as brutal colonizers causing great pain to American Indians.

Coyote Springs experiences a disappointing event, which affects the group members greatly, in their music career. Cavalry Records, a very well-known music company from New York, wants to hire Coyote Springs. Two executives of the company, ironically named Phil Sheridan and George Wright, the real historical figures who campaigned against Indians during the Civil War come to the Spokane Reservation to negotiate about a recording contract. They plan to have a lucrative

work by using popular Indian images out of original American Indians (Alexie, 1995; 189-190). The company's offer makes Coyote Springs excited and they get prepared for the studio work very eagerly; the traditional medicine woman of the Spokane tribe Big Mom, who has a great music talent and supernatural powers, prepares Coyote Springs for their vital test (Alexie, 1995; 206). Coyote Springs flies to New York to work in the studio. However, everything starts to go wrong in the recording studio at Cavalry Records. Mr. Armstrong, the president and CEO of Cavalry Records, refuses to hire Coyote Springs who are not able to show their talents. Victor, already an angry and aggressive man, explodes with anger because of being refused, and he damages many of the studio equipments until they are driven away from the company building.

After Coyote Springs is driven away, Victor and Junior disappear while Thomas, Chess and Checkers go to the hotel. Being aware of the fact that New York is dangerous for the "two small-town reservation hicks" (Alexie, 1995; 231) Victor and Junior, Chess and Thomas decide to search for them while Checkers stays at the hotel room and falls asleep under. In her dream, Phil Sheridan comes to the hotel room where Checkers is alone. Checkers feels anxious because of Sheridan's insincere visit. Sheridan accuses all American Indians for not taking responsibility in dealing with the problems caused by white-Indian controversies. He complains about how American-Indians' struggle to keep their tribal values and identity and he says: "We gave you every chance. All you had to do was move to the reservation. We would've protected you. The U.S. Army was the best friend the Indians ever had" (Alexie, 1995; 236). Wright and Sheridan actually function as the "reincarnations of American cavalry leaders" (Grassian, 2005; 94). In Checker's dream, while Sheridan is one of the executives of Cavalry Records, he speaks and behaves as if he is General Sheridan, the historical figure who fought against Spokane Indians, in Checkers's dream. He says: "I don't want to hurt you. I never wanted to hurt anybody. But it was war. This is war. We won. Don't you understand? We won the war. We keep winning the war. But you won't surrender" (Alexie, 1995; 237). Checkers's symbolic dream shows that she, subconsciously, identifies the unfortunate experience of Coyote Springs with the defeat of American Indians by Whites. James H. Cox comments on Alexie's using these historical figures:

Alexie resurrects Sheridan and Wright to play the role of record executives in the late twentieth century and conflates nineteenth- and twentieth-century manifestations of violence—the military campaigns against the Spokanes, the commodification of Native cultures, and domination of Native voices in popular culture—in order to illustrate the persistence into the present of Eurowestern cultural domination that might appear less overt to non-Natives.

In Checkers's dream, Sheridan emphasizes his anger about American Indians' keeping their tribal identity in the face of assimilation methods and accuses them to be ingratitude towards Whites. He says: "You talked like Tonto, but you had brains like fucking Einstein. Had us whites all figured out. But we still kept trying to change you. Tried to make you white. It never worked" (Alexie, 1995; 237). Checkers, both afraid and anxious, wants to wake up from this nightmare. In her dream, Sheridan tries to persuade Checkers that this is not a dream. When Sheridan says that he has dreamed of Checkers many times so far and that he wants to kiss her, this time, Checkers accuses all whites and says: "You're just another white guy telling lies. I don't believe in you. All you want to do is fight and fuck. You never tell a story that's true. I don't believe in you" (Alexie, 1995; 237). Checkers' nightmare displays both whites' anger against American Indians and American Indians' distrust of whites.

The great disappointment of Coyote Springs affects Junior most. He cannot overcome this disappointment that leads up to his committing a suicide. Junior's death becomes a turning point in Thomas, Victor, Chess and Checkers's lives. They question their present and future lives in their own ways. When they are in the graveyard for Junior's ceremony, Chess looks around; she sees "all the graves of Indians killed by white people's cars, alcohol, uranium", and she daydreams about a white woman and her half-Indian son (Alexie, 1995; 282). In her dream, she tries to tell the white woman that no matter what she does, her baby is going to be half-Indian all his life; "half of him will always want to tear the other half part" (Alexie, 1995; 283). Chess tells the woman in her dream: "All you can do is to make sure your son marries a white woman and their children marry white women. The fractions will take over. Your half-blood son will have quarter-blood children, and eight-blood

grandchildren, and they won't be Indians anymore" (Alexie, 1995; 283). In her dream, which symbolizes the gradual extinction of American Indians, Chess wants to save the white woman and her half-Indian son from the pain that other Indians would cause, and she wants to save the Indians from the pain that whites would cause. In other words, Chess, as an American Indian who has suffered a lot from the constant struggle, wants to end the "war" between whites and Indians.

2.2.2.2. American Indians' Personal Recollections about Whites

In *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, dreams and imaginations reflecting Indian-white relations do not strain credibility. Although these individual dreams and imaginations of the American Indian characters are the products of their imaginative power, they reflect reality just like personal recollections. American Indians are the colonized, assimilated, oppressed and discriminated side in their relations with whites. Therefore, personal recollections of the American Indian characters are mostly poignant rather than happy memories. In addition, they generally reflect the break-down of Indian culture and acquisition of white culture.

In the short story "Indian Education", the narrator Junior reports his memories about school where he has been exposed to assimilation methods and discrimination in every grade. Junior's memories illustrate how the BIA and mission schools are run according to Anglo-conformity assimilationist approach in order to destroy Indian ways. After his hair is cut short and he is dressed in uniforms in the first grade, the difficult school days start for Junior. His white missionary teacher Betty Towle always oppresses and accuses Junior in racist manners. One day she suddenly says: "Tell me you're sorry" and Junior asks surprisingly "Sorry for what?", and she answers "Everything" (Alexie, 2005; 172). Her answer reveals her irrational grudge and anger against Junior in all American Indians behalf. Junior remembers another memory about Betty Towle: She gives the class a spelling test and sets Junior aside and gives him a test designated for junior high student even though he is a second

grade student. When Junior spells all the words right, she crumbles up the paper and makes Junior eat it and she says: "You'll learn respect" (Alexie, 2005; 173). Betty Towle can't bear an American Indian's being successful.

Junior presents another perspective on Indians' relations with whites when he kisses a white girl on the lips on seventh grade. He feels guilty and unfaithful towards his tribe because of kissing a white girl (Alexie, 2005; 176). In view of the fact that American Indians have always suffered because of whites, to be in good relations with whites is not tolerable for them. Junior thinks that he should not fall in love with a girl whose race has caused great and irremediable pain for his people.

Whereas American Indians see whites as a treacherous people, whites also regard American Indians as a primitive people lacking of modern values. In the short story "Amusements", Victor and one of his Indian friends Sadie see Dirty Joe, an old alcoholic Indian man, in a white carnival. Dirty Joe is drunk as usual, and he passes out on the grass. Although Victor and Sadie do not want to carry him wherever they go, they also are not willing to leave him in the middle of a white carnival (Alexie, 2005, 55). They sit beside Dirty Joe and watch all the white tourists watch them "laugh, point a finger, their faces twisted with hate and disgust" (Alexie, 2005; 55).

In the short story "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor", the dialogue of the narrator Jimmy Many Horses and his wife Norma with a white traffic officer illustrates how white man discriminates against American Indians by the way of using his legal authority. When the officer stops them for not making proper signal for a turn a few blocks back, the narrator thinks: "That was interesting because I had been driving down a straight highway for over five miles. The only turns possible were down dirt roads toward houses where no one I ever knew had lived. But I knew to play along with his game. All you can hope for in these little wars is to minimize the amount of damage" (Alexie, 2005; 164-165). The narrator's idea also signifies his personal survival strategy against the white officer's hostile treatment based on prejudice. After the officer checks Jimmy's driving license, registration and proof of insurance, he asks whether he has had alcohol. Then he asks whether Norma has had

alcohol although she is not driving. Norma says “I don’t drink either” and “I wasn’t driving anyway”, the officer gives a racially prejudiced answer: “Washington State has a new law against riding as a passenger in an Indian car” (Alexie, 2005, 165). Jimmy’s response is worth noting: “That ain’t new. We’ve known about that one for a couple hundred years” (Alexie, 2005; 165). The officer wants a bribe from Jimmy, and when he takes the bribe, Jimmy implies that he is going to lodge a complaint against him and they begin to threaten each other. The racist officer says: “I can just take you both in right now. For reckless driving, resisting arrest, threatening an officer with physical violence” (Alexie, 2005; 166) Norma is able to give a proper and funny reply to protect themselves and says: “If you do, I’ll just tell everyone how respectful you were of our Native traditions, how much you understood about the social conditions that lead to the criminal acts of so many Indians. I’ll say you were sympathetic, concerned, and intelligent” (Alexie, 2005; 166). Norma’s clever answer actually shows the other side of the coin; even respecting American Indian values is intolerable for white men.

Relations between Indians and whites are always in terms of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’. White man always tends to see American Indian inferior. The narrator’s one of the recollections in the short story “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation” illustrates this tendency. In the story, the narrator adopts a parentless baby with Christ-like characteristics, names him James and gives up drinking, in spite of the fact that he is a heavy alcoholic, in order to grow James up. The problem with the baby is that he does not make any voices, neither speaks nor cries (Alexie, 2005; 116). When the narrator takes him to the Indian clinic, the indifferent doctor says “his physical development is slow but that’s normal for an Indian child” (Alexie, 2005; 118). When James is seven years old, he is still unable to speak, and one day the narrator takes James to the World’s Fair in Spokane. He has a short conversation about James with a white woman there. The narrator tells about this conversation: “One white woman asks me how old James is and I tell her he’s seven and she tells me that he’s so smart for an Indian boy” (Alexie, 2005; 129). A seven-year-old-Indian boy who is unable to speak is not surprising for a white woman since the Indian image in her mind is not more than ‘a savage’.

In *Reservation Blues*, Checkers remembers her early childhood. She remembers Indian zombies standing on street corners and holding their hands out in Missoula. Once, Checkers sees a white man spit into an Indian zombie's open hand. Checkers, as a little child, feels sorry for the zombie and she gives her last piece of candy to him (Alexie, 1995; 99). In her early childhood, she begins to observe the 'Indian image' in white man's mind.

Thomas and Chess question the painful realities caused by whites from different perspectives in religious context in the novel *Reservation Blues*. Chess tries to persuade Thomas who questions the existence of God. Thomas has suspicions about God's existence because of "so much evil in the world" (Alexie, 1995; 168). He thinks that God would not allow cruelties. Chess, on the other hand, thinks that these cruelties are choices of people, not of God. Thomas's suspicions are the results of the injustice that American Indians have been exposed to. According to Thomas, although white men are cruel, they have much better lives. Chess does not agree with Thomas's generalization about white people:

"That's why we have to believe in the good. Not every white person wants to kill Indians. You know most any white who joins up with Indians never wants to leave. It's always been that way. Everybody wants to be Indian."

"That's true," a voice whispered from the back of the van.

"Who's that?" Thomas and Chess asked.

"It's me, Betty."

"What's true?" Chess asked, irritated at the interruption.

"White people want to be Indians. You all have things we don't have. You live at peace with the earth. You are so wise."

In this striking dialogue not only imposed religious beliefs and divine justice are questioned from different perspectives but also American Indians are sublimated for their superior worldview by a white voice.

As Geiter and Speck explains in their book: “Relations have always been more complicated than a simple clash between ‘civilised’ whites and ‘savage’ natives” (Geiter and Speck, 2002; 38-39). Both cultural and diplomatic problems have contributed to the problems between Indians and whites. In their relations, Indians are always unjustly treated side and whites are always self-confident and have a feeling of superiority. In the short story “Junior Polatkin’s Wild West Show”, Junior questions the situation from a different standpoint: “He watched cars pass by and wondered if white people were happier than Indians. He figured that even white people can’t be happy at all the time but they must be happier most of the time. At least, they must spend more time being happy than Indians do” (Alexie, 2005; 235). Through the novel *Reservation Blues* and the short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Alexie depicts the spiritual and cultural distances between American Indians and whites.

2.3. Fulfilling Expectations and Wishes in Dreams and Imaginations

Many expectations and wishes of American Indians cannot come true mostly due to their poor economic conditions and impoverished life standards. That is why they fulfill their expectations and wishes, which are unlikely to come true, in their dreams and imaginations. In both works of Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, American Indians characters challenge their poverty and their lack of opportunities with their imaginative power “the better world” in their dreams or visions satisfy them.

One of the most striking examples of fulfilling wishes in dreams are “the wish sandwiches” (187) in the novel *Reservation Blues*. The rock band Coyote Springs stays in Thomas’s house while they are getting prepared for the contest ‘Battle of the Bands’ that offers one thousand dollars to its winners. During their stay, when they realizes that Thomas’s fridge is almost always empty, Flathead sisters Chess and Checkers eat wish-sandwiches: “Two slices of bread with only wishes in between”

(Alexie, 1995; 187). Chess's sitting at the table with an empty cup and her keeping bringing the cup to her lips and setting it back closely resembles the 'wish sandwiches' (Alexie, 1995; 260). They satisfy their hunger by the way of imagining.

In the short story "Imagining the Reservation", from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the narrator remembers his 'reservation childhood' days of hunger; he remembers that in order to overcome his hunger he would imagine potatoes, which were their usual food, growing larger and filling his stomach (Alexie, 2005; 151). Their imaginative power creates another solution for their lack of different kinds of nourishment: The sisters of the narrator, being fed up eating potatoes every day, paint the potatoes in different colors with food coloring. The narrator says: "For weeks we ate red potatoes, green potatoes, blue potatoes" (Alexie, 2005; 151).

In both works, readers come across with the American Indian characters who adopt the Indian heritage and identity from different standpoints. One of the main characters Thomas is undoubtedly the most traditional character in both works. Although the other characters are not as traditional as Thomas, they feel the effects of assimilation and they feel a strong need for tradition from time to time. Even Victor, who always questions the aspects of Indian heritage and mostly do not respect them, feels the lack of "tribal ties and sense of community" and suffers for this reason (Alexie, 2005; 74). Junior occasionally wants to live in traditional Indian ways, too. In the short story "Junior Polatkin's Wild West Show", he dreams of being a warrior speaking Spokane language. Since most Indians have forgotten their tribal languages, speaking in Spokane tongue has become possible only in dreams. He dreams of people singing ballads for him (Alexie, 2005; 232). He dreams of horses, and in his dream, he leads a large group of warriors attacking Whites (Alexie, 1995; 142). Rather than dreaming of being a winner or a hero, Junior dreams of being a gunfighter speaking tribal languages. Junior's dream not only shows how hybrid American Indians have become but also how detached and distant they stand to their tribal origins.

In the short story “Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation”, the narrator adopts a parentless baby with Christ-like characteristics, names him James and abstains from drinking in spite of the fact that he is a very heavy alcoholic in order to raise James properly. The problem with the baby is that he does not make any noises, he neither speaks nor cries (Alexie, 2005; 116). One day, the narrator hears James saying ‘potato’ and he says: “He said potato like any good Indian would because that’s all we eat. But maybe he said I love you because that’s what I wanted him to say or maybe he said geology or mathematics or college basketball” (Alexie, 2005; 127). His great wish about his adopted child comes true in his vision. When he takes James to the Indian clinic this time, the doctor says he has a very good imagination (Alexie, 2005; 127).

Poor conditions are always obstacles for American Indians for they prevent Indians to realize their dreams. However, they may have desires that cannot come true not because of poor conditions, but because of the social taboos, religious rules or forced regulations. Nevertheless, such suppressed wishes are also fulfilled in dreams or visions. Interest in the white-opposite sex and sexual desires are such wishes of the American Indian characters in both works. While American Indian woman is prejudiced against white men, American Indian men find white women quite attractive for some reasons. American Indians’ interest in the white-opposite sex infiltrate into their dreams and imaginations. Nevertheless, if this interest turns into a relationship, it becomes problematic or such an interest seems to be improbable; therefore, such genuine feelings as love and affection are buried before they can come into the open.

Checkers, “the most beautiful Indian woman on the Flathead Reservation, and quite possibly in all of Indian country”, likes elder men and ignores all the young men who flirt with her (Alexie, 1995; 55). She hates white women because she has been looked down on and discriminated by them since her early childhood, and white girls have always had what she did not (Alexie, 1995; 139-140). However, she falls in love with a white man; moreover, this man is Father Arnold, the priest of the Spokane Reservation. What turns her feelings into love actually results from her obsession

with whites. She writes in her diary: “How can an Indian woman love any white man like that, and him being a priest besides?” (Alexie, 1995; 205). She has imaginations and dreams about Father Arnold more than once. In one of those dreams, Father Arnold declares his love to Checkers, kisses her full on the mouth, and they make love (Alexie, 1995; 155-156). In this way, Checkers’s sexual desire about Father Arnold is fulfilled in her dream. Even though it is a dream, Checkers feels guilty because of having a sexual affair with a priest. She feels relieved again in her dream when Father Arnold says “I forgive you” while she imagines Father Arnold and herself having sexual intercourse (Alexie, 1995; 156).

In the eyes of American Indian men, white women are mostly unreachable because of many reasons related to racial discrimination. Victor and Junior’s interest in Betty and Veronica, who are white, exemplifies American Indian men’s fascination about white women. Betty and Veronica are the two white women having a desire to imitate Indian ways in their appearances by wearing turquoise rings and silver feather earrings. They come to every rehearsal of Coyote Springs as the great fans of them. Although they have great voices, they are not accepted by the tribe members as the back-vocals of Coyote Springs. Betty and Veronica sleep with Victor and Junior a few times before leaving the reservation. Indian boys, knowing this, creep around the house and try to see them through the window. All of them swear they have seen the white women naked. A naked woman might become an object of sexual curiosity; however, seeing a naked ‘white’ woman is perceived as a privilege by American Indian boys. The narrator states: “None of them had seen a naked Indian woman, let alone a white woman. But the numbers of naked women who had visited the Spokane Indian Reservation rapidly grew in the boys’ imagination, as if the size of their lies proved they were warriors” (Alexie, 1995; 42).

Junior’s thoughts about Betty and Veronica are not very different from typical American Indian boys. “He knew he loved to walk around with Betty and Veronica. Especially on the reservation. He loved to have something that other Indians didn’t have” (Alexie, 1995; 233-234). On one hand, beautiful white woman may seem like

an unattainable dream for many American Indian men. On the other hand, having white women may also be a way of taking revenge from white men for them:

Junior knew that white women were trophies for Indian boys. He always figured getting a white woman was like counting coup or stealing horses, like the best kind of revenge against white men.

“Hey”, Indian men said to white men. “You may have kicked our ass in the Indian wars, but we got your women” (Alexie, 1995; 233).

Somehow or other, American Indian men desire white women. Being always insulted by Whites is the most probable reason of American Indian men’s weakness towards white women. American Indian men enjoy having a sort of ‘privilege’, which they never have in social issues in the white dominant society, at least in the matters of love. If such wishes do not come true in real life, they ‘come true’ in their imaginations and dreams.

III) USAGE OF HUMOR IN *RESERVATION BLUES* AND *THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN*

3.1. Humor: Survival Strategy with the Healing Power

It is widely recognized that joking and laughter are integral to the traditions of many American Indian tribes. Sherman Alexie emphasizes American Indians' outstanding sense of humor and belief in the healing power of it, and he displays how they use humor as their survival strategy on and off the reservations:

...without humor how else could Indians have survived more than 500 years of concerted efforts to wipe out two thousand indigenous cultures in North America? "How," asks Sherman Alexie, "do you explain the survival of all of us who were never meant to survive?" Survive they did, however, and humor was many times their vehicle (Hölbling et al, 2003; 206).

According to Alexie, humor along with imagination is one of the greatest values to reinforce American Indians on the reservations (Grassian, 2005; 75). Alexie uses humor to make devastating situations bearable in his works. David L. Moore states in his essay "Sherman Alexie: Irony, Intimacy and Agency": "For all his humor, indeed in the heart of his humor, Alexie invariably circulates the grave themes of ongoing colonial history and its personal effects in Indian country" (Moore, 2005; 297). His humor, which is described variously such as "black", "sarcastic", "wacky", "biting", "caustic" (Hölbling et al, 2003; 208), is so artistic and efficient that this makes his works notable and distinguished. In addition to many commentaries about Alexie's great talent of using humor, even USA former president Bill Clinton said on the taping of the Bill McNeil Hour: "Sherman, you're goddamn funny" (quoted in Hölbling et al, 2003; 208).

In the novel *Reservation Blues* and the short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the characters make fun of the situations which are indeed quite tragic and heartrending. The priest of the Spokane Reservation Father Arnold, who has been sent there "to reach these Indians" when it is understood that discipline and strength have not worked (Alexie, 1995; 35), is impressed by the

Spokane Indians' ability to laugh. "He'd never thought of Indians as being funny. What did they have to laugh about? Poverty, suicide, alcoholism? Father Arnold learned to laugh at most everything, which strangely made him feel closer to God" (Alexie, 1995; 36). In addition, the narrator of the short story "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor" Jimmy Many Horses, who claims that laughter has saved himself from the brain tumor which was as big as a baseball, explains the significance of humor: "Humor was an antiseptic that cleaned the deepest of personal wounds" (Alexie, 2005; 164).

White people, whose colonization and assimilation methods have caused American Indians to have terrible life conditions, are also one of the greatest subjects of American Indian humor. Spokane Indian people tell their white priest Father Arnold: "Father Arnold, we're not laughing *with* you, we're laughing *at* you" (Alexie, 1995; 36). This statement makes their view clear. They cope with malicious whites by way of mocking at them.

Samuel Builds-the-Fire tells a 'traditional' creation story about white people. According to Samuel's story, Coyote, the creator of all human beings, sits on his clouds on the day after he created Indians and he is satisfied with his new creation. In a while, he gets bored and thinks about what to do next. He cannot find anything to do and he begins to clip his nails. He holds his clippings and search for somewhere to throw them. He cannot find anywhere to throw them and gets very angry. He almost goes mad because of anger and begins to jump up and down. Then, he inadvertently drops the clippings and they fall to the earth. The clippings burrows into the ground like seeds and grow up to be the white man. Coyote looks down at his newest creation and says "Oh, shit" (Alexie, 2005; 135). As an American Indian who has suffered a lot because of white colonization methods, Samuel makes fun of white people by way of making up a creation story about them.

White people almost always treat American Indians unjustly and discriminatorily. Even though this is an irritating situation for American Indians, they prefer to ridicule rather than bothering about it. In the short story "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor", a white traffic officer tries every way to fine Jimmy

Many Horses, who is a great humorist. He cannot find a certain reason to punish Jimmy; therefore, he threatens him and his wife Norma and demands bribe. He learns that they have one hundred dollars, he demands ninety-nine dollars in order not to leave them with nothing. Jimmy gives all of his money and says “Take it all. That extra dollar is a tip, you know? Your service has been excellent” (Alexie, 2005; 166). Jimmy teases the officer that way. Instead of lamenting for being penniless because of an absurd reason, he enjoys teasing a white officer by way of tipping him.

After Thomas has started up Coyote Springs, many people begin to come to their rehearsals. Every rehearsal turns out to be a concert. Being suspicious of Indians gathering at the rehearsals, CIA and FBI agents infiltrate into the band practices. However, although they get dressed like Indians, they cannot fool anybody, because “they danced like shit” (Alexie, 1995; 33). Instead of getting irritated because of the agents’ intentions, Spokane Indians ignore them and just make fun of the way they dance.

Unemployment is a big problem for American Indians who live on the reservations under the rule of brutal whites for whom materialistic values decide everything. In other words, money is power, and American Indians have neither money nor power. If an American Indian man gets some money accidentally, it gives him a temporary power. Conditions are so poor on the Spokane Reservation that even just one dollar is enough to change the social organization: When Thomas, Victor and Junior form the band, Thomas becomes the lead singer and he wants to be also the songwriter of the band. Victor wants to know why he is going to be both the songwriter and the lead singer; Thomas’s answer is simple: “Because I have the money” (Alexie, 1995; 46). All the money Thomas has just forty two dollars in his pocket and fifty dollars hidden at home. Yet, ninety two dollars are enough for getting authority since this is much more than Victor and Junior have together. Victor understands “the economics of the deal, how money equals power, especially on a reservation so poor that a dollar bill once changed the outcome of tribal elections. David WalksAlong was elected Councilman by a single vote because he’d paid Lester FallsApart a dollar to punch the ballot for him” (Alexie, 1995; 46). This tragicomic

event illustrates the poor conditions under which the Spokane Indians live and struggle to survive.

Another event that illustrates the poverty on the reservation is Thomas's fridge; Thomas hosts a party in his house and at the party, Junior opens Thomas's fridge and gets angry because it is always empty. Instead of complaining about reasons what make his fridge always empty, Thomas sits down inside the fridge and says "It ain't empty no more" and everybody in the kitchen laughs their head off (Alexie, 2005; 12).

Besides the poor economic conditions, education opportunities are also very limited on the reservations. In the short story "Crazy Horse Dreams", Victor meets a woman at a powwow. She describes herself as "an educated Indian" in order to mean that she is not a traditional Plains Indian woman using bows and arrows and riding a buffalo. Victor comments on her self-description "an educated Indian": "Reservation University"; they both laugh at the old joke. Narrator explains "Every Indian is an alumnus" (Alexie, 1995; 39). The old joke demonstrates the inadequate opportunities in the field of education in the reservations. Most American Indians are not able to complete their education and become drop-outs. On the other hand, while they are struggling to get education in the white-dominant schools, they are not able to maintain their tribal values. Actually, American Indians both lose their traditional values and are not able to get into mainstream as educated individuals in the world of whites who are quite ignorant of them.

In the short story "Indian Education", Junior narrates his school recollections. At the end of the story, Junior adds a postscript about Victor: "Victor said, "Why should we organize a reservation high school reunion? My graduating class has a reunion every weekend at the Powwow Tavern"" (Alexie, 2005; 180). Victor's statement which sounds funny at first actually signifies the Spokane Indians' unemployment, alcoholism and self-destruction. Powwow Tavern is a bar where Spokane Indians get drunk in order to forget their losses and devastating conditions.

Besides, young generation Spokane Indians, graduated from high school, gather there every weekend as a way of self-destruction as Victor states.

“Every Little Hurricane” is the first short story in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, in which Alexie introduces reservation poverty. Victor’s father who cannot afford to buy Christmas presents for his family opens his empty wallet and shakes his head. Victor watches his father at the doorway: “... his father put the empty wallet back in his pocket for a moment, then pull it out and open it again. Still empty. Victor watched his father repeat this ceremony again and again, as if the repetition itself could guarantee change. But it was always empty” (Alexie, 2005; 5). Narrator’s illustrating this “ceremony” makes reader smile for a moment because of the absurdity of Victor’s father. However, what makes reader smile is dark humor. This actually indicates how helpless a father is because of great poverty on the reservation.

Similar to Victor’s father’s “ceremony”, in *Reservation Blues*, Thomas opens his fridge, which is almost always empty, and discovers that he does not have any food. “So he closed the fridge and opened it again, but it was still empty. In a ceremony that he had practiced since his youth, he opened, closed, and opened the fridge again...” (Alexie, 2005; 47). By way of illustrating Thomas’s opening and closing fridge and adding “Thomas was hungry on a reservation where there are ninety seven ways to say *fry bread*” (Alexie, 1995; 47), narrator gives another example of dark humor.

Obviously, it is clear that humor is an important weapon for American Indians to survive. As Kanien’kehake (Mohawk) actor Garry Farmer explains:

If they didn't have the ability to laugh they wouldn't be existing today. So humour has been a means of survival, the only means.... For the last two hundred years they've had everything taken away from them, their ability to think, practically. Everything: what language they could speak, what religion they could do, and the things they couldn't do. It was all set out for them. All those decisions were taken from them. The only thing they had was their ability to laugh

their way through life because if they didn't they would vanish. (quoted in Hirsch, 2007).

3.2. Humor: As an Essential Part of American Indian Worldview

Humor is one of the significant elements that make up American Indian worldview. American Indians, who have a “comic spirit” (Weaver, 1997; 141), are spontaneously humorists and witty people. More than an ethnic characteristic, humor becomes a survival strategy for American Indians. Both *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* are full of examples that display American Indians spontaneous humor and comic spirit.

Coyote Springs is invited to Seattle to join a music contest. Victor and Junior feel delighted when they hear the one-thousand-dollar-prize for the winner and they display their exultation by dancing in a comic way: “They tangoed up and down the floor. Junior picked up a stray feather and stuck it in his teeth” (Alexie, 1995; 124). Whereas Victor and Junior are very eager to join the contest, Chess and Checkers cannot make up their minds since they have such poor economic conditions that they have to think every single detail. As a result, they set out to Seattle although Flathead sisters Chess and Checkers are unwilling. Their journey lasts more than six hours because their blue van refuses “to go more than forty miles per hour” (Alexie, 1995; 133). Instead of getting angry because of the tiring journey, Junior just personifies the van and says in a humorous tone: “This van don’t want to go to Seattle, enit?” (Alexie, 1995; 133). Chess, who is already hesitant about their decision, answers in a similar way: “Van might be the only smart one” (Alexie, 1995; 133). Both Junior and Chess personify the van because they think that the van is older than all of them and they should respect it. For this reason, Coyote Springs has never could think to replace the van with a new one although it has always created problems for them on the roads (Alexie, 1995; 87). When they arrive at Seattle, they go to a hotel and want to reserve rooms. When the white clerk asks them:

“And how will you be paying for your rooms?”

“With money,” Victor said. “What did you think? Seashells?”

“He means cash or credit card,” Chess said.

“Cash, then,” Victor said. “What Indian has goddamn credit card” (Alexie, 1995; 134).

Both Chess and Victor express their ideas and even anger in a humorous way. Their witty answers and making fun of the situations display that they have a penetrating sense of humor that becomes a part of their worldview.

Another example that displays Chess’s good sense of humor is one of her childhood recollections. Chess remembers one Sunday morning from her childhood: She and her sister Checkers got prepared to go to Flathead Reservation Catholic Church. They went into the room of their father Luke, who had just lost his wife and therefore consumed too much alcohol in a depressive mood. They saw that their father had passed out as usual; nevertheless, Chess wanted to let her father know that they were going to church and spoke to her sleeping father in a ridiculing way:

“Hey, Dad,” Chess whispered. “We’re going to church. Is that okay?”

Luke snored.

“Good. I’m glad you agree. Do you want to come this time?”

Luke snored.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea, either. Maybe next time?”

Luke snored.

“Don’t get mad at me. Jeez. If you walked into church, everybody might die of shock” (Alexie, 1995; 105).

Even though the facts that they had just lost their mother, their father was always drunk, and he never went to church were the disturbing for them, Chess just made fun of the situation.

Once, Chess succeeds in persuading Thomas, who is skeptical about God’s existence, to go to church (Alexie, 1995; 169). Upon that, Thomas goes to church early Sunday morning with Chess and Checkers. Feeling nervous and frightened, “He wondered if the Catholics had installed a faith detector at the door, like one of those metal detectors in an airport. The alarms would ring when he walked through the church doors” (Alexie, 1995; 176). Thomas’s satirical thought about a “faith detector” signifies whites’ paranoia about everything in a humorous way. Moreover,

Thomas actually does not feel himself belonging there and does things “more by habit than faith” (Alexie, 1995; 177). At the end of the religious ceremony, Catholics say “peace be with you” to each other; however, Thomas, who feels himself as an outsider and is not be able to adapt himself to the atmosphere, misunderstands:

*“Peace be with you,” an old woman said to Thomas, but he heard ‘pleased to meet you.’”
Pleased to meet you, too,” he said.
The woman looked puzzled, then smiled (Alexie, 1995; 179).*

This funny misunderstanding actually signifies Thomas’s not focusing on the pray.

American Indians sometimes make fun of the differences between their expectations and realities. Chess, as a young American Indian woman, expresses what qualifications the Indian women look for in an Indian men: “He has to have a job. He has to be kind, intelligent, and funny. He has to dance and sing. He should know how to iron his own clothes. Braids would be nice” (Alexie, 1995; 75). However, personal qualifications are so impoverished for American Indians that, eventually, American Indian women have to amend their list of qualifications: “Indian men need only to have their own teeth” (Alexie, 1995; 75). Chess is one of these women who had great expectations but has suffered a lot from unfortunate love affairs with her Indian boyfriends:

Roscoe, the champion fancydancer, who passed out in full regalia during the Arlee Powwow and was stripped naked during the night. Bobby, the beautiful urban Indian, transferred to the reservation to work for BIA, who then left Chess for a white third-grade teacher at the Tribal School. Joseph, the journalist, who wrote a powerful story on the white-owned liquor stores camped on the reservation borders, and then drank himself into cirrhosis. Carl, the buck from Browning, who stashed away a kid or two on every reservation in the state, until his friends called him The Father of Our Country. (Alexie, 1995; 75).

Instead of remembering how much she has suffered because of her irrational love affairs Chess just remembers the humorous sides of them and smiles. Whereas Chess cannot have an affair with an Indian man who fulfills her expectations, her sister Checkers always chases Indian men who are much older than herself. Once, Checkers

is in love with a man who is old enough to be her grandfather and when Chess gets introduced to Checkers's 'boyfriend', she satirizes by saying: "I know we're supposed to respect our elders, but this is getting carried away" (Alexie, 1995, 105). Instead of getting angry with her younger sister, she just caricatures the situation.

An additional example of caricaturizing is Spokane Indians' describing a crazy old Indian man whose tribe they do not know for sure: "He wasn't a Spokane Indian, but nobody knew what tribe he was. Some said Lakota Sioux because he had cheekbones so big that he knocked people over when he moved his head from side to side" (Alexie, 1995; 11). By way of caricaturizing this old man, Spokane Indians actually make fun of American Indians' physical appearance.

Victor is a character that Sherman Alexie often uses to illustrate the spontaneous humor of Spokane Indians: Once, Coyote Springs goes to a town called Vantage to give a concert. A policeman stops them and asks for identification. Whereas Thomas, Junior, Chess and Checkers show their driving licenses as their identity cards, Victor lifts his shirt and reveals his own name tattooed on his chest. When the policeman asks whether he is serious about the tattoo, he, ironically, says: "Yeah" (Alexie, 1995; 88).

One day, Victor surprises all Thomas, Junior, Chess and Checkers for his great ability for cooking omelets. The omelet he has cooked for breakfast tastes so great that all of them like it. "Victor wanted to say something profound and humorous about eggs, but he couldn't think of anything, so he farted instead" (Alexie, 1995; 74).

Victor and Junior talk about white women and they try to observe the reason lying beneath American Indian men's weakness about white women. While they are talking, Junior remembers his Irish girlfriend, his first white girlfriend whom gets pregnant from Victor and gives birth. Junior begins to daydream about his ex-Irish-girlfriend named Lynn. However, he daydreams 'loudly' about their conversation in which Junior learnt that his girlfriend was pregnant. While he is dreaming about the moment that his girlfriend said that she was pregnant, Junior says loudly "I'm

pregnant” (Alexie, 1995, 204). This is a great expression for Victor to make fun of; Victor laughs and asks “Who’s the father?” and he adds “Am I the father?”. Junior remembers the moment he asks his girlfriend Lynn whether she wants to get married and he says loudly: “Do you want to get married?”. Victor goes on ridiculing and says: “I ain’t going to marry you if I ain’t the father” (Alexie, 1995; 240). Junior says his striking sentence at this moment: “Nothing is as white as the white girl an Indian boy loves”; and Victor says: “I ain’t white. I’m lower sub-chief of the Spokane Tribe (Alexie, 1995; 240). This funny dialogue between Victor and daydreaming Junior actually shows how Junior is hurt. Junior’s girlfriend Lynn has not got married to Junior due to the fact that he is Indian. She has preferred to be a single mother to her child. The only reason Junior cannot parent his child is that he is American Indian.

American Indians easily find something to laugh at. Being witty and funny is one of the most noticeable characteristics of them. A simple misunderstanding, a question whose answer is evident or a simple joke may be the source of their laughter: In the short story “The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore”, Victor and one of his friends Adrian see that the only traffic signal on the reservation where about only one car an hour passes by, has stopped working. Adrian asks: “When did that fucking traffic signal quit working?”. Victor does not know when it has broken down, and he says “Shit, they better fix it. Might cause an accident” (Alexie, 2005; 48). Upon this, they laugh crazily and Victor narrates: “Laughed so hard that when we rearrange ourselves, Adrian ended up with my ass and I ended up with his. That looked so funny that we laughed them off again and it took us most of an hour to get them back right again” (Alexie, 2005; 48). Just a broken traffic signal, which already was not useful, might be a great fun for two young American Indian men trying to find something to laugh at.

One of Victor’s recollections with an Indian stranger shows how much they love laughing. Victor wants to drink terribly and buys some wine with his last coins. When he is about to drink, an Indian stranger comes and warns Victor: “Hey, cousin, you got to let it breathe” (Alexie, 2005; 90) and their conversation starts in this way. The stranger says that today is his birthday; and Victor asks how old he is. The man says “old enough”, and they laugh. Victor offers him a birthday drink and stranger

says: “Shit, you’re a generous drunk, enit?”, Victor answers: “Generous enough” and they laugh. When the man says that he is Cherokee, Victor says that he has never met a real Cherokee; the man say “neither have I” and they laugh (Alexie, 2005; 91). Ignoring all devastating realities, Victor and Indian stranger share laughter. As Jimmy Many Horses states in the short story “The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor”, “sometimes that’s all two people have in common” (Alexie, 2005; 162).

The fact that they are naturally funny and witty lets them observe painful realities with a greater tolerance. American Indian characters make fun not only of the harsh realities but also of themselves. James Welch makes positive commentaries on Alexie’s making fun of American Indians in his works. According to Welch, Alexie takes Indian literature in a slightly different direction: “There’s more humor and he even laughs at Indians, which I think is really good, because you need to laugh at yourselves. If you take yourselves too seriously, I think you really develop an image that only represents one side of the Indian personality” (quoted in Lupton, 2004; 55).

Thomas, “crazy Indian story teller with ratty old braids and broken teeth” (Alexie, 1995; 66), makes fun of his Indian identity when a passenger on the plane, who is an Olympic gymnast, asks Victor and Thomas whether they are full-blood Indians. He says: “I’m half magician on my mother’s side and half clown on my father’s” (Alexie, 2005; 66). Similarly, in the short story “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow”, Junior and his friend Norma dance in the Powwow Tavern. Junior cannot dance well and makes fun of his own way of dancing when Norma tries to encourage him saying “You can’t dance very good but you got the heart of a dancer”; Junior answers: “Heart of the dancer” “And feet like the buffalo” (Alexie, 2005; 201).

Once again, Junior and Norma are in the Powwow Tavern when Victor comes in “drunker than drunk” (Alexie, 2005; 203). He asks where the powwow is even though he is already there. Someone says that he is in the Powwow. Victor says: “I don’t mean this goddamn bar. I mean, where’s the powwow?”, and somebody else says “In your pants” that makes everybody laugh (Alexie, 2005; 203).

In the novel *Reservation Blues*, Spokane Tribal Police Officer Wilson stops Samuel and Lester, and he asks if they have been drinking, Lester Falls Apart plays

with the words and satirizes American Indians' alcoholism starting at young ages through himself. He says: "I've been drinking since I was five" and he adds "Kindergarten is hard on a man" (Alexie, 1995; 102).

Thomas ridicules even the survival of American Indians; when his father Samuel is lying as still as a corpse because of extreme intoxication, he suddenly stirs and coughs. Thomas says: "The only things that will survive a nuclear war are cockroaches and my father. Thomas actually implies American Indians' resistance and survival under terrible conditions as a result of colonization and assimilation. Moreover, American Indians tell jokes about even their being assimilated even though this is the worst pain for them. Once, Victor meets an old Indian man outside the Spokane reservation. This man calls Victor "nephew" and asks him what tribe he is. The narrator adds: "Indians always addressed each other intimately, even when they were strangers" (Alexie, 1995; 150).

"I'm Spokane Indian, uncle," Victor said.
"Oh, yeah, huh? Had a buddy who was Spokane long
time ago"
"Who was that?"
"Amos Joseph."
"That was my grandfather."
"No shit. Who you?"
"Victor Joseph."
"Hey, grandson. I'm Eddie Tap Water. Used to be
Spring Water. But I'm Urban Indian now" (Alexie 1995;
150).

The old Indian man makes fun of how he has changed through his surname. This joke makes reader smile; however, it also displays American Indians' changing values and assimilated identities due to colonization.

Sherman Alexie displays significance of humor for American Indians in both *Reservation Blues* and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Their ability to laugh is something that holds American Indians together in the face of devastating depopulation attitudes and compulsory assimilation methods of Europeans.

CONCLUSION

By way of analyzing the significance of mental acts such as dreaming, day-dreaming and imagining in American Indian worldview, and exploring the importance of humor as a notable characteristic of American Indian cultural identity, I have tried to demonstrate how these culturally important acts and characteristics are used as means of survival by American Indians who are exposed to discrimination, racial intolerance and genocidal oppression by European settlers. Especially by focusing on dreams, imaginations and humor, I have examined how Sherman Alexie depicts the cultural survival strategies of American Indians in his novel *Reservation Blues* and short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Alexie portrays dreams, imaginations, personal recollections and humor as survival strategies mostly through the same main characters Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor Joseph and Junior Polatkin, who are the inhabitants of the landscape of the Spokane Reservation. In addition to these main characters, minor characters also have significant roles in the manifestation of such survival strategies.

Being one of the most celebrated writers of Native American literature, Sherman Alexie deals with the current problems of American Indians and he displays the distances between both whites and American Indians and American Indians' past and present. He depicts the struggles of American Indians to survive in a world that remains hostile to their very survival in an honest and humorous manner.

As stated earlier, Sherman Alexie portrays American Indian characters who adopt Indian heritage and embrace Indian identity from different standpoints, and whose reactions and survival strategies against colonization, assimilation and acculturation methods differ. Accordingly, the survival strategies that American Indians employ give rise to different social and personal results. Even though the main characters Thomas, Victor and Junior struggle to survive under very similar conditions, they employ very different strategies to cope with the difficulties they encounter in their everyday lives.

The coming back of the rock band Coyote Springs becomes a turning point in their lives which also will determine their destinies. Due to their contract with Cavalry Records, Coyote Springs was seen as a traitor and hated in the Spokane Reservation. Their great disappointment as well as the hostile repercussion of Spokane Indians prevent them from continuing their usual lives. Thomas leaves the Spokane Reservation with the Flathead sisters Chess and Checkers, Junior commits suicide, and Victor decides to start up a completely new life and experiences failure one more time.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire is portrayed as a full-blood Spokane Indian who fully respects his Indian heritage. The tribal values compose his worldview. He is a “real” Indian both physically and spiritually; he practices the rules of conduct that are significant for Spokane Indians, he is a traditional storyteller, he believes in God in traditional ways rather than Christian ways, he respects the spiritual power of Big Mom, who is the traditional medicine woman of Spokane tribe, and he respects nature. Thomas who tries to lead a life in traditional terms has a love affair with Chess, who also can be described as a traditional character. Chess is a young Flathead woman. She believes in the necessity of Indian survival. She hates white women who chase after Indian men, and she thinks that her hatred is about “preservation” (Alexie, 1995; 81). Differently from Thomas, Chess has a strong faith in Christianity. Thomas and Chess’s love for each other stem from their being traditional Indians sharing similar worldviews. Chess, who believes that Indian men need Indian women, likes both Thomas and his “DNA” (Alexie, 1995; 82). In other words, Chess likes Thomas not only for emotional reasons but also for racial and survival matters. Thomas who is a traditional full-blood American Indian is just the right person for Chess. Thomas and Chess who are portrayed as the traditional Indian characters succeed in their struggle to survive and continue their tribal heritage:

“Thomas,” Chess said and took his hand, “let’s get married. Let’s have kids.”

Thomas was surprised. He couldn’t respond.

“Really,” Chess said. “Let’s have lots of babies to look up and see two brown faces. That’s the best thing we can give them, enit? Two brown faces. Do you want to?”

*Thomas smiled.
"Okay," he said.*

Thomas is persuaded by Chess to leave the Spokane Reservation for the city Spokane, "a mostly white city, sat on the banks of the Spokane River. Spokane the city was named after the Tribe that had been forcibly removed from the river. Spokane was only sixty miles from the reservation, but Thomas figured it was no closer than the moon" (Alexie, 1995; 258). Thomas, despite his very strong spiritual ties to his homeland, leaves the reservation with Chess and Checkers in order to continue his life (Alexie, 1995; 257). Thomas always prefers to keep his tribal values, and humor is his strategy to cope with the tragic situations. Self-destruction through alcoholism, which is very common among current Spokane Indians, never becomes an option for Thomas. As a result, he survives as a traditional character who keeps his tribal heritage.

Whereas Thomas prefers to struggle to survive whatever the conditions are, Junior commits suicide because of the fact that he cannot endure the difficulties he has faced as an American Indian on and off the reservation. After Junior dies, his best-friend Victor daydreams of Junior. In his realistic daydream, Victor wants to learn why Junior killed himself and Junior gives a clear answer: "Because life is hard" (Alexie, 1995; 290). Additionally, he explains: "Because when I closed my eyes like Thomas, I didn't see a damn thing. Nothing. Zilch. No stories, no songs. Nothing" (Alexie, 1995; 290). As we can clearly see, what gives Thomas the strength to survive is his close attachment to his tribal values that empower him. Telling stories is self-satisfactory for Thomas even though it is an act of imagination. While he is dealing with his stories, he forgets the harsh realities. Junior, on the other hand, does not employ imagination to feel better or to forget the brutal injustices he frequently confronts in real life. In his dreams and imaginations that reveal his unconscious, Junior is the last survivor of the Spokane Tribe who has the mission to save and resuscitate his tribe. He has dreams and imaginations that deepen his anxiety rather than bring him some relief from severe realities. In his real life, being aware of the gradual extinction and unfortunate lives of American Indians, he feels helpless and hopeless, and he consumes a lot of alcohol. Even though he does not appear to be as

traditional as Thomas, he suffers a lot for his tribe's cultural and spiritual losses. He thinks: "... when we look in the mirror, see the history of our tribe in our eyes, taste failure in the tap water, and shake with old tears, we understand completely" (Alexie, 2005; 178).

Differently from Thomas and Victor, Junior is an educated Spokane Indian. After high school, he could attend college for one year where he has an Irish girlfriend who becomes the mother of Junior's half-Indian, dark-skinned and blue-eyed son Sean Casey (Alexie, 2005; 240). Lynn's family refuses to accept Sean Casey's Indian blood and Junior can never fulfill his longing for fatherhood. Nevertheless, he keeps contact with his son through the mail, phone calls and visits. However, Lynn is very sensitive about her son's Indian heritage and does her best to raise him with the Spokane culture and language:

"Lynn continually reminded Sean of his heritage, read him books about Indians in the womb and crib, gave him Indian books to read when he finally could do it himself.

*Lynn taught Sean the Spokane word for love, *quen comanche*, but Sean could never get his tongue around the syllables. But he always tried"* (Alexie, 2005; 240).

Through Junior, Alexie portrays the situation of American Indians who go out of the reservation in order to get better education or to enter the mainstream and who are subsequently discriminated and not accepted by whites. Furthermore, Alexie stuns the reader with the relation between Junior and his half-blood Indian son. Junior's decision to return to the reservation reveals the situation of American Indians who try to adapt themselves to the mainstream and fail to do their strong attachments to their tribal identities. Junior's half-blood son Sean Casey is also a key figure. Although his grandparents ignore his Indian blood, he is reminded of his tribal heritage by his mother Lynn and he displays to what extent a half-blood child can practice the values of his Indian heritage in the white dominant world.

Junior is portrayed as a character who actually has great spiritual ties to his Indian heritage although he does not seem to be so. However, the circumstances that

he lives under do not allow him to keep his tribal values which are vitally important for him. The fact that he can neither enter the mainstream nor maintain his Indian heritage devastates him and finally he commits suicide. Junior's committing suicide also elucidates the high suicide rates among contemporary American Indians.

After Junior's death, Victor decides to give up drinking alcohol, become a teetotaler and have a steady job (Alexie, 1995; 289); however, when he is not hired he becomes more depressive (Alexie, 1995; 292). Victor, caught between community and his own individuality, becomes full of self-hatred and anger. The unfair treatment American Indians undergo, their impoverished life conditions and unfulfilled hunger for tribal and cultural values make Victor antagonistic. At first, readers think that Victor hates being Indian; however, later it is realized that what Victor hates is not his Indian heritage but the assimilation and colonization methods that American Indians are exposed to and the life conditions his tribe suffers from. He states: "It's hard to be optimistic on the reservation. When a glass sits on a table here, people don't wonder if it's half filled or half empty. They just hope it's good beer" (Alexie, 2005; 49). Moreover, what makes Victor feel helpless is the fact that he does not know how to survive under such severe conditions. He thinks: "...just like everybody else, Indians need heroes to help them how to survive. But what happens when our heroes don't even know how to pay their bills?" (Alexie, 2005; 49). Like Junior, Victor is also distressed because of the gradual extinction of American Indians. He implies his anxiety by saying "We watched a group of Indian boys walk by. I'd like to think there were ten of them. But there were actually only four or five" (Alexie, 1995; 44).

When Victor is asked what he is scared of, he says "Elevators, escalators, revolving doors. Any kind of forced movement" (Alexie, 2005; 40). As a member of a tribe which is forced to move from their land, to leave their tribal values, to live as dependants, Victor associates white man's technology and civilization, the "elevators, escalators, revolving doors" with the forcible acts that his tribe has experienced so far and these "forced" movements scares Victor. The fact that his people has suffered throughout history and that they now live under even worse conditions affects Victor

deeply and make him aggressive. His contradicting cultural values and present life engender a feeling of anger.

Assimilation and colonization methods oblige Victor to abandon his tribal life style; however, these methods cannot break the spiritual ties. He associates assimilation and colonization methods with “Crazy Mirrors”. Victor looks at himself at “Crazy Mirrors” and states:

Crazy Mirrors, I thought, the kind that distort your features, make you fatter, thinner, taller, shorter. The kind that make a white man remember he's the master of ceremonies, barking about the Fat Lady, the Dog-Faced Boy, the Indian who offered up another Indian like some treaty.

Crazy Mirrors, I thought, the kind that can never change the dark of your eyes and the folding shut of the good part of your past. (Alexie, 2005; 58).

Despite all the false stereotyping and cruel treatments that American Indians went through, they still tried to preserve Indian spirituality and maintain strong ties with their heritage, land and identity. Even the ones, like Victor and Junior, who do not seem to be strongly attached to their tribal values are actually ardent and faithful to the tribal culture and heritage. Whereas they live through white dominance, assimilation and colonization, they become psychologically devastated and they ruin themselves. The ones like Thomas can survive as long as they hold on to their traditional values. To be able to enter the mainstream is almost impossible for them for many reasons. Firstly, they have such strong spiritual ties that they cannot suppress or disregard them. Secondly, they are always disdained and they are not accepted by the mainstream people. Moreover, they are not given opportunities to make progress. In other words, they are neither allowed to continue their traditions nor live under equal circumstances. As a result, they have recourse to the strategies that make them survive. As long as they use their tribal and cultural values such as imaginative power and sense of humor properly, they succeed to survive like Thomas; otherwise, they fail like Victor and Junior. Seen from another perspective, however, Thomas's survival is not an ideal one. He has to leave his homeland and move to city where he

probably will not be able to maintain his tribal heritage. His is only a biological survival.

In conclusion, Sherman Alexie presents the survival of Spokane Indians in a diverse perspective. On one hand, the American Indians who cannot maintain their tribal identity despite their strong spiritual ties fail to survive are represented by Victor and Junior; on the other hand, Thomas represents the traditional American Indian who tries to maintain his tribal heritage by clinging to it in his imaginary world to feel better and eventually survives. However, even the ones who are able to survive do not have a life they can seek after. To be socially isolated and lead a traditional life like the one before the whites' arrival is impossible. Therefore, what Alexie suggests at this point is that American Indians should both adapt themselves to the mainstream life and maintain their cultural values. To be able to survive by combining the tribal and mainstream values is presented as the best way.

Alexie indicates his survival suggestion through Father Arnold and Big Mom's grouping at Junior's funeral. Big Mom sets off to direct Junior's funeral, and she comes across Father Arnold when he is about to leave the reservation. She proposes to undertake the funeral direction together as spiritual leaders. Father Arnold hesitates doing so and Big Mom encourages him saying: "you cover all the Christian stuff; I'll do the traditional Indian stuff. We'll make a great team" (Alexie, 1995; 280). In spite of being a traditional figure, she does not deny the importance of Christianity as well and tries to combine both worldviews to provide a reasonable solution. Her approach is significant because she is presented as the spiritual leader of Spokane Indians. Moreover, as M.J. Cutter states Big Mom functions as an important link to the Spokane community that existed in the past and that might continue in the present (Cutter, 2005; 130). Alexie wants to point out his suggestion, which is based on the analysis of the historical facts that have established the present conditions gradually, Big Mom can be a guiding model for today's Indians. American Indians cannot survive as long as they prefer only one way. They have to combine their traditional values with the mainstream values in order to survive. The rational choice is neither to be assimilated nor isolated. This is a rational choice. If there were a chance, American

Indians would rewrite history like they do in their dreams and imaginations and recuperate their traditional lives. However, from now on, this is not viable. As Victor states:

Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you . . . Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices. And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. But they're not necessarily evil, unless you let them be.

What you have to do is keep moving, keep walking, in step with your skeletons. They ain't ever going to leave you, so behind, and you don't have to worry about that. Your past isn't going to fall behind, and your future won't get too far ahead (Alexie, 2005; 21-22).

That is why American Indians have to practice an alternative plan, which is the utilization of mental acts such as dream visions and imaginations in order to feel better and the frequent use of humor in order to be able to cope with the brutal realities of life, to survive in the face of white assimilation, colonization and annihilation. Junior speaks for all American Indians, who are described as “the eternal survivors” (Alexie, 2005; 11), and he says “Jesus, we all want to survive” (Alexie, 2005; 198).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, David Wallace. (1997). *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Kansas UP: Kansas.

Alexie, Sherman. (1995). *Reservation Blues*. Grove Press: New York.

Alexie, Sherman. (2005). *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Grove Press: New York.

Bapst, Georgia. (2002). "Alexie Sends Strong Signals". Erişim: 19.10.2007. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=25632.htm>

Basso, Keith H. (1979). *Portraits of "The Whiteman"*. Cambridge UP: Cambridge.

Birringer, Johannes H. (2000). *Performance on the Edge: Transformation of Culture*. Continuum Press: London.

BOOKRAGS STAFF. (2005). "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven: Study Guide". Erişim: 20.10.2007. <http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-loneranger/copy.html>.

Cajete, Gregory. (2004). "Philosophy of Native Science". *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*. Ed. Anne Waters. Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 45-57.

Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. (1997). *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. Routledge Press: New York.

Cermody, Denise Lardner and John Tully Cermody. (1993). *Native-American Religions: An Introduction*. Paulist: New York.

Chacko, Pariyaram M, ed. (2005). *Tribal Communities and Social Change (Themes in Indian Sociology, Vol. 5)*. Sage Publication: New Delhi.

Coltelli, Laura. (1990). *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. Nebraska UP: Lincoln.

Cooper, Michael L. (1999). *Indian School: Teaching the White Man's Way*. Clarion Books: New York.

Cox, James H. (2006). *Muting White Noise: Native American And European American Novel Traditions*. Oklahoma UP: Oklahoma.

Cramer; Phebe. (2006). *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*. Guilford Press: New York.

Cutter, Martha J. (2005). *Lost and Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity*. North Carolina UP: North Carolina.

Drury, Clifford M. (1976). *Nine years with the Spokane Indians: The Diary, 1938-1948, of Elkanah Walker*. Arthur H. Clarke Co: Glendale.

Fagan, Kristina. (2000). "Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching: Laughter and Community in Native Literature". *Me Funny*. Ed. Drew Hayden Taylor. Douglas & McIntyre: Canada, 23-51.

Feagin, Joe R. and Clairece Booher Feagin. (2003). *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. 7th Ed. Prentice Hall: New Jersey.

Fixico, Donald Lee. (2003). *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*. Routledge: New York.

Geiter, Mary K. and W.A. Speck. (2002). *Colonial America: From Jamestown to Yorktown*. MacMillan: New York.

Glancy, Diana. (1991). "The Fire Dragon and Sweat: An Introductory Essay". *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing*. Minnesota Humanities Commission, 1st Ed. Minnesota.

Grassian, Daniel. (2003). *Hybrid Fictions: American Literature and Generation X*. McFarland: North Carolina.

Grassian, Daniel. (2005). *Understanding Sherman Alexie (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)*. South Carolina Press, Columbia.

Gregory, Leslie. (1998). *Native American Humor: Powerful Medicine in Louise Erdrich's Tracks*. Erişim: 25.09.2007.

<http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/vol1/issue2/erdrich.htm>

Hafen, P. Jane. (1997). "Rock and Roll, Redskins, and Blues in Sherman Alexie's Work". *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, Number 4. 71-78.

Hicks, John D. and George E. Mowry. (1965). *The American Nation*. 4th Ed. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

Hirsch, Mirjam. (2000). "Subversive Humor: Canadian Native Playwrights' Winning Weapon of Resistance". *Me Funny*. Ed. Drew Hayden Taylor. Douglas & McIntyre: Canada, 99-123.

Hirsch, Mirjam. (2007) "Healthy Humor: Subversive Weapon". Erişim: 25.10.2007.

<http://fwe.cwis.org/2007/09/01/healthy-humor-subversive-mohawk/>

Hölbling, Walter, Klaus Riesser-Wohlfarter and Susanne E. Rieser. (2003). *Us Icons and Iconicity*. LIT Verlag: Berlin.

Humfreville, Jacob Lee. (2002). *Twenty Years Among Our Hostile Indians*. Stackpole Books: Mechanicsburg.

Jorsengen, Karen. (1997). "The Use of Doppelgangers in Sherman Alexie's Reservation Blues". SAIL. Vol.9. No: 4. Erişim: 21.09.2007
<http://oncampus.richmond.edu/faculty/ASAIL/SAIL2/54.html#55>

Kachuba, John B. (2001). "Burning With Sherman Alexie". *How To Write Funny: Add Humor To Every Kind Of Writing*. Interview by John B. Kachuba. F&W Publications: Cincinnati.

Lee, A. Robert. (2003). *Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latino/A and Asian American Fictions*. Edinburgh UP: Edinburgh.

Lincoln, Jackson Steward. (2004). *The Dream in Primitive Cultures 1935*. Kessinger Publishing: LLC.

Lincoln, Kenneth. (1993). *Indi'n Humor*. Oxford UP: New York.

Lundquist, Suzanne Evertsen. (2004). *Native American Literatures: An Introduction*. Continuum International Publishing Group: New York.

Lupton, Mary Jane. (2004) *James Welch: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood Press: London.

Magoulick, Mary. (2003). "Native American Worldview Emerges". Erişim: 02.11.2007.
<http://www.faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~mmagouli/worldview.htm>

McFarland, Ron. (1997). "Sherman Alexie's Polemical Studies". *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, Number 4. 27-38.

Mcqaa, Ed. (1990). *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and Our World (Religion and Spirituality)*. Harpers Collins: New York.

Moore, David L. (2005) "Sherman Alexie: Irony, Intimacy and Agency". *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer. Cambridge UP: Cambridge. 297-310

Owens, Louis. (1992). *Other Destinies: Understanding The American Indian Novel*. Oklahoma UP: Norman and London.

Olson, James S. and Raymond Wilson. (1986). *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century*. Illinois UP: USA.

Parrillo, Vincent N. (2003). *Strangers to These Shores*. 7th ed. A and B Press: USA.

Pasquaretta, Paul. (2003). "African-Native American Subjectivity and the Blues Voice in the Writings of Toni Morrison and Sherman Alexie". *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature*. Ed. Jonathan Brennan. Illinois UP: USA, 278-293.

Pritzker, Barry M. (2000). *A Native American Encyclopedia: History, Culture, and Peoples*. Oxford UP: USA.

Rebein, Robert. (2001). *Hicks, Tribes, and Dirty Realities: American Fiction After Postmodernism*. Kentucky UP: Kentucky.

Rohrbacher, Wendy J. (1999). *Re)Invention And Contextualization In Contemporary Native American Fiction*. Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Alaska Anchorage, Alaska.

Ruby R. H., & Brown J. A. (2006). *The Spokane Indians: Children of the Sun*. Oklahoma UP: Norman.

Shimer, Porter. (2004). *Healing Secrets of the Native Americans: Herbs, Remedies, and Practices That Restore the Body, Refresh the Mind, and Rebuild the Spirit*. Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers: New York.

Slethaug, Gordon E. (2003). *Hurricanes and Fires: Chaotics in Sherman Alexie's Smoke Signals and The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Erişim: 17.10.2007.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3768/is_200301/ai_n9212955/pg_13

Stanford, John A. (1978). *Dreams and Healing*. Paulist Press: New York.

Steedman, Scott, David Salariya, Mark Bergin. (1997). *How Would You Survive as an American Indian?: (How Would You Survive? Ser.)*. Grolier Publishing: Danbury.

“Versluis, Arthur. (1993). *The Elements of Native American Traditions*. Wesleyan UP: London.

Vizenor, Gerald. (1994). *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Wesleyan UP: London.

Weaver, Jace. (1997). *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*. Oxford UP: New York.

Wilma, David. (2003). "U.S. Army Colonel George Wright slaughters 800 Palouse horses on September 8, 1858". Eriřim: 11.12.2007.
http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=5142

Wynecoop, David C. (1969). "Children of the Sun: A History of the Spokane Indians". Eriřim: 03.03.2007.
http://www.wellpinit.wednet.edu/sal-cos/cos_toc.php

"Alcohol abuse among Native Americans" Eriřim: 03.10.2007
http://ctct.essortment.com/nativeamerican_ragq.html

"Native American Spirituality" Eriřim: 04.10.2007
<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/naspirit.html>

APPENDIX

HISTORY OF SPOKANE INDIANS

The Spokane Indians have been living in Eastern part of Washington along the Spokane River and upper reaches of the Columbia River, whose watercourses have been lifeblood for them. They are generally known as a quite intelligent and peaceful tribe courting friendship (Humfreville, 2002; 307), having strong ties to family, land, language and their ancestors' traditions, and having a good sense of humor. They speak the Salish language that was also used by the other tribes of the Interior Salish group such as Kalispels, Coeur d'Alenes, Colvilles, and Flatheads (Wynecoop, 1969). In spite of being assimilated both economically and culturally, the Spokane are considered to be one of the most traditionalist American Indian groups (Drury, 1970; 3).

“Spokane” actually means “children of the sun”. When the tribal name is surveyed, another word with a different meaning, “Spukcane”, is encountered within in a tribal story: One day an Indian beat on a hollow tree and a serpent living inside made a noise sounded like *Spukcane*. Then, while the chief thought over this sound, vibrations came from his head, and thus *Spukcane* came to mean “power from the brain”. However, the only similarity between “Spukcane” and “Spokane” is their phonetic sounds. Nobody exactly knows how and why these two words were replaced (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 7-8).

The Spokane is one of the Indian tribes that has preserved their traditions at most in spite of being heavily exposed to white policies. Nevertheless, the white policies and missionaries' effects can be perceived in the Spokane's present Christian religious worldviews. For instance, the Spokane creation myth illustrates this fact with the biblical references in it: Coyote attempted to create Spokane man, because he was alone. However his first attempts failed because of the elements he used. Then he

mixed all elements he used before (pitch, clay, rock and reeds) and put some more additions in, thus Coyote created Spokane man. He created the Spokane woman in the same way and the creator Amotkan gave them life (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 7). Assuming the fact that Adam was created first, and then Eve was created in the biblical story, it is clear that the Spokane creation myth reflects biblical aspects.

According to the myth, after Amotkan gave them life, man and woman gave birth to the others. However, they did not live in harmony with them and they became wild. That is why a flood came and covered the land. Only a few could survive from the flood, others were destroyed. The survivors came together for safety, elected a leader and multiplied. Then, they were divided into small groups by the leader and thus various tribes were formed (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 7). While the creation of Spokane man and woman refers to Adam and Eve, survival of the other people clearly resembles the myth of Noah's Ark.

Creation myths of the sun and moon are also noteworthy because of the Spokane Indians close relation with nature. They explain many occurrences in nature with their mythical beliefs. In Spokane creation myth, the Creator Amotkan made light only after all the animals gathered to create it for themselves. The animals erected a high pole and sent Woodpecker up to the pole which was too hot for him. Then Coyote was sent up the pole. But he was too noisy and kept shouting down to his children. Upon being volunteer, Bear was sent but the top of the pole was too cold for him. The sound of thunder shattered their efforts, and then it loosened a piece of red rock, which turned into a handsome man. The red man wanted a brother, therefore Amotkan created a brother made from the root of spowaunch (a herb). Then two brothers went to a lodge where Lady Bullfrog, a witch, lived. Lady Bullfrog fell in love with one of the brothers who was formed of the root and she leaped onto and stuck on his face. In pulling loose, she tore out one of his eyes. Upon that, he wanted to ascend into the sky to prevent people from seeing his face missing one eye. He wanted to be light in the sky for the earth; thus he became the sun, and when people looked at him, they had to close one of their own eyes. Lady Bullfrog jumped onto the other brother's face, too. Then the other man joined his lonely brother in the sky and

became the moon. According to the myth, today when the moon is carefully watched, Lady Bullfrog, clinging to his face, can be seen (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 6).

Native American religious beliefs were generally based on human origins, natural world and spiritual world. Because of their strong belief in superiority of nature, they tended to associate the origins of human beings with the origins of the natural world as a whole (Cermody, 1993; 218). To understand the Spokane Indians' religious beliefs and principles may be a little confusing from the modern view; since, like many aboriginal cultures, their religious beliefs include traditions; visionaries and dreams; connection with the spirits; and worlds representing the different levels of the universe in spiritual terms.

Religious beliefs of Spokanes, like many Indian tribes, are based on different understandings of Shamanism. It is essentially indigenous visionary spiritually, in the practice of which the shaman either undergoes a visionary journey through the cosmos, or calls spirits to him in order to heal or to help the tribal people whom he represents (Versluis, 1993; 52). Parallels to this visionary journey, in Spokane culture there were quests for "the guardian spirit". To find the guardian spirit was the only way to become an adult (Wynecoop, 1969). Prepubertal children were supposed to learn to communicate with the spirits until they found their guardian spirit. This quest could last one day or several days. They generally found the visions in animal or human forms and waited to be taught a special song or dance by the spirit (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 27). To find a guardian spirit was an extremely important step for a child to attain adulthood.

Medicine men and women and their healing power were given great importance and respected in Spokane culture. Medicine men and women were generally considered as the people who thought more deeply and strenuously than the average men in the tribe. They can be considered as shamans with their healing power and intermediary between the people and the creator (Versluis, 1993; 58). They were advisers and prophets who were obliged to obtain success for their people in gathering food, fighting wars and wading off evils (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 28). They were

quite active due to their significant roles among the Spokane. As Larry Ellis explains in his essay *Trickster: Shaman of the Liminal*, “The power of the Native American medicine man, or shaman, is grounded in a unique bond with the otherworld that is often established in a ritual of isolation, fasting, and meditation...” (Ellis, 1993; 55). I refer again to Ellis who states that medicine man and woman, as the shamans, were mediators standing between the supernatural world and the world of people and the degree of their success was determined according to their ability to establish the harmony between these two worlds (Ellis, 1993; 56). This profession was hazardous as well. When the medicine man or woman failed to heal a sick believer, the family of the sick person, who paid the medicine man or woman at least one horse, could take his/her life. “These medicine men faced their severest test in the smallpox epidemic of 1782. When it passed, Spokane population, estimated by anthropologist James Mooney to have been fourteen hundred in 1780 (and somewhat excessively by Teit at about twenty-five hundred), was reduced by half” (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 28- 29). Nevertheless, medicine man or woman is “a valued and essential member of the tribe, but to some degree will always remain the outsid-er--powerful, unpredictable, and incomprehensible” (Ellis, 1993; 56)

As a reflection of “totemic symbolism”, many American Indian tribes believed in ‘three worlds’ (Versluis, 1993; 61). The Spokane was also one of the tribes who held the similar belief about the three worlds, one top of the other. Upper world, ruled by the god, gave them rain and made food plentiful; Earth was the middle world; and the lower world was ruled by an evil ruler, who was responsible for the poor conditions (Wynecoop, 1969).

Another important cultural figure which confirms the shamanic signs in Spokane culture is Coyote. Coyote, as a mythological and ubiquitous figure, belongs to two worlds and appears in different roles such as the Creator, messenger or culture hero. In this sense Coyote resembles the shamans. For these reasons, the relation of Spokane Indians’ religious beliefs with Shamanism becomes indisputable both spiritually and traditionally when the significance of medicine men and women, an

individual's connection with the guardian spirit; believing in three worlds and the traditional Coyote figure are considered.

As a common characteristic of all Indian tribes, the children were raised in a cooperative, noncompetitive, affectionate atmosphere. Moreover, rather than the nuclear families, Indian children grew up under the encouragement and discipline of the extended family. This fact did not change whether the tribe was hunting, fishing, or a farming society. This close and intimate relationship among the elders and children led to strong family ties in Indian tribes (Parrillo, 2003; 245). Among the others, the Spokane is one of the tribes who has the strongest family ties; and this characteristic played a very significant role in their identity and self-perseverance (Wynecoop, 1969). The studies that have been made about Boarding School experiences may be an example: Poor conditions in the Boarding Schools were already a threat for the Indian children; and parents were never satisfied with the Boarding School conditions. The children, whose immunity systems were accustomed to the medicine men techniques, could not adapt themselves (Adams, 1997; 214). As a result, the sixteen of the twenty-one Spokane children, who were sent to Boarding School, died. This high death rate was due to the fact that they greatly suffered from homesickness besides the unhealthy conditions (Cooper, 1999; 46).

Family unit was the centre of the Spokane society; and several families composed bands which were formed by a wealthy male. Those bands did not depend on very strict formations; and there was mobility between bands. Men usually went to live with his wife's family and women's being more in number caused a polygamic society (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 12). Elders cannot be ignored in such a society who has very strong family ties. Elders' roles and respecting them in the community were noteworthy. Yet, parents never interfere with affairs of the young or arrange marriages (Ruby and Brown, 2006; 13)

Compared to their neighbors, the Spokanes were not considered as warlike people. Robert L. Bennett, commissioner of Indian Affairs, states the fact that even in their legends Spokanes affirm peaceful and friendly attitudes (Ruby and Brown, 2006;

x). However, if the enemy were encountered, they were a superior force and formidable warriors. They sometimes made war against and sometimes allied with their neighbor tribes. In times of trouble, the bands, which were the basic Spokane units composed by several families, coalesced into tribes because of the fact that stronger leadership was more important in unsafe situations. Yet, war was not the prime activity; they did not spend much time struggling against man (Ruby and Brown; 2006, 15).