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Utilisation Versus Enshrinement: Sibling Conflict over Heritage in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" from an Anthropological Perspective

EA Gamini Fonseka, BA, MA, PhD, FRSA

Professor Emeritus of English, Department of English & Linguistics, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka.

Abstract

Through Mrs Johnson's household, Alice Walker illustrates a microcosm of the Afro-American ethnic culture in the US. A victim of racial segregation and discrimination, Mrs Johnson remains a single parent with two daughters to look after, while living in a simple tin-roofed cottage located in a remote village. Despite her suffering from trauma caused by her previous house being burnt to ashes, she manages to play her role as a perseverant mother devoted to her two daughters, ancestors, religion, community, and above all her Afro-American ethnicity. The short story covers Mrs Johnson's painful meeting with her younger daughter Dee after several years of absence from home, which spans over a couple of hours but enlightens her on what is happening to her Afro-American ethnic community in the process of sophistication achieved through the institutionalised form of education that Dee has already received. Dee's repulsion against her new house which Mrs Johnson has qualms about, is ironically superimposed by her newly developed anthropological appreciation of the household goods of Afro-American ethnic character it shelters. Her passionate struggle to possess handmade items of ethnic value belonging to the house leads to a conflict between Dee and her sister Maggie who is backed by their mother Mrs Johnson. Her intervention in preserving the rights of Maggie appears to Dee as a retrogression in the current trends of ethnicity-inspired commodity culture. A headstrong outspoken woman by nature, Mrs Johnson reduces Dee's condescending criticism to laughter and celebrates her victory over the new fashion-centric value system.

Keywords: *Afro-American Ethnicity, Tradition, Modernity, Commodity Culture, Heritage, Sibling Conflicts, Motherhood Challenges, Americanisation*

INTRODUCTION

This is a cultural study of Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" with an emphasis on the ideologies the two sisters Maggie and Dee maintain in their conflict over the handmade products of household appliances and linen that are considered their heritage. Dee who rejected them as a schoolchild wants them all as a grown-up and Maggie who cared for them all her life must compromise. Their mother Mrs Johnson has an epiphany at the peak of their conflict and forcefully intervenes in preserving Maggie's rights. Dee's change of attitude can be attributed to a socio-political and cultural transition she undergoes as an adult while interacting with the multicultural society of the US as an educated woman of some social standing. Her interest in the goods lies in her plan to use them to decorate her house while Mrs Johnson considers them indispensable for everyday use to make Maggie's life comfortable. Following Alice Walker's trajectory the study is conducted as a discussion under eleven themes: 1) Fantasising Mother-Daughter Encounters on TV in Excitement to Receive Dee; 2) Ineffaceable Afro-American Ethnic Features; 3) Concern about Maggie as a Victim of Housefire; 4) Forebodings about Dee's Upbringing and Outlook as a Modern Individual; 5) Culture Shock at a Long-Awaited Family Gathering; 6) Showcasing Culture in Daily Life; 7) Raising Consciousness about the Roots; 8) Celebration of Tradition; 9) Appreciation of Ethnic Appliances and Commodities as Artifacts; 10) Heritage Being Treasured Materially; 11) Demonstrating True African Identity. Thereby it is endeavoured to establish Walker's position that a lifestyle equipped with domestic items of ethnic value supports the respective culture in its survival of various developments in fashions and values rather than one that considers them artefacts usable for decorative purposes. Culture is to live by rather than to feast upon.

FANTASISING MOTHER-DAUGHTER ENCOUNTERS ON TV IN EXCITEMENT TO RECEIVE DEE

In "Everyday Use", Alice Walker demonstrates "African-American women's struggles with racial identity and racism during a particularly tumultuous period of history and good old-fashioned sibling rivalry" (Tearle, 2023). The short story begins with the Afro-American mother Mrs Johnson preparing to receive her daughter Dee coming home after a few years of absence, studying at a college of higher education in Augusta, a city far away from her village. Preoccupied with her commitments as a mother, she keeps thinking aloud. Thereby she presents an elaborate account

of her feelings as an Afro-American woman highly devoted to the culture of her ancestors. In anticipation of Dee's visit, she and her other daughter Maggie had repaired the yard the previous afternoon. She is happy as the yard floor made of clay, in its present state, is as cosy and comfortable as an extended living room with so much ventilation and light, from where one can keep close to nature. In her excitement, Mrs Johnson fantasises what sort of an encounter it would be based on her experience with TV shows. Here, Alice Walker achieves sarcasm through Mrs Johnson's recollections of TV programmes such as the Johnny Carson Show where children and parents resort to play-acting to impress the spectators during such meetings. She is aware that they are instructed in advance on how to behave on stage. So, a child who has succeeded in something is supposed to meet the parents as if by accident so that they together achieve a pleasant surprise for the spectators to enjoy. They even achieve sentimentality by embracing themselves and weeping over each other in sharing the pleasure of relevant success.

> "As such, media are implicated in the accomplishment of numerous family functions, including defining role expectations, articulating the nature of relationships, and using economic and relational currencies in the negotiation of intimacy and power" (Alexander & Kim, 2019)

Accordingly, she imagines how she is driven to the venue in a soft-seated limousine, how an elegant and cheerful man like Johnny Carson shakes her hand and tells her how fortunate she is to have a fine girl like Dee, how she and Dee shed tears of joy while embracing each other, and how she pins on her dress a large orchid, despite her consideration of the flower to be of a cheap variety.

> It is evident that such "positive fantasies are linked to idealizing a desired future outcome as well as the process to get there, and that it is the experience of high positivity generated by thoughts and images that predicts low effort and little success" (Gabriele & Mayer, 2002)

Likewise, Mrs Johnson's familiarity with Dee's moods compels her to anticipate the meeting to be painful in one way or the other.

INEFFACEABLE AFRO-AMERICAN ETHNIC FEATURES

Self-conscious as "a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands", Mrs Johnson sarcastically considers herself not attractive on television with her clothing during winter in "flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day" and her masculine vigour shown in some rigorous domestic activities she is clever at such as killing and cleaning hogs, breaking ice to get water, eating cooked hot pork liver just from the fire, and slaughtering animals with a sledge-hammer. Thus, she is conscious of being good at masculine jobs, but she cannot sign well or carry a tune. She recalls how she loved milking until a cow headbutted her on the side with her horn. She understands her mistake that led to that accident and sympathises with the cows in general. Alluding to some domestic chores in African culture in this way, Alice Walker uses Mrs Johnson's sarcasm to expose the Afro-American women's attitude to the kind of beauty culture maintained in society through the demands her daughter Dee would impose on her for such requirements as weight control and skin bleaching. The body image Mrs Johnson maintains is an important aspect of her character which helps her streamline her life.

> Research suggests that how we perceive our body is more important for our body image than its actual appearance. This is important, because one's body image and sense of attractiveness are strongly associated with self-esteem, well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and it influences health-related quality of life. Our attitudes towards our bodies are shaped and change throughout the different stages of our lives. (Mazurkiewicz and Lipowska, 2021)

With this consciousness, she laughs at the artificiality of the fashion of the time through the transformations her figure would undergo in the process of beautification with the comparison of her skin to "an uncooked barley pancake" and the image of "her hair [that] glistens in the hot bright lights". Through all these bizarre allusions, Mrs Johnson reveals the invincible spirit of the Afro-American community in her remark that Johnny Carson would not find it comfortable to put up with her "quick and witty tongue". She wonders about getting known for being outspoken and "looking a strange white man in the eye". Here she reminisces about her past conflicts with the white folks. Then she recalls Dee's self-confidence in communicating with people irrespective of their colour. Considering Dee as a model, Mrs Johnson recalls her own destiny as a deprived child with schooling only up to grade two. Her explanation for it is the colour bar. (See Vaidyanathan (2016) and Douglas et al (2018) for information on discriminatory practices against Afro-Americans in American society)

CONCERN ABOUT MAGGIE AS A VICTIM OF HOUSEFIRE

For a minute, Mrs Johnson's reveries are interrupted by her elder daughter Maggie. She is concerned about Maggie who, not as fortunate as her sister, is stuck at home. Caught in the fire that licked away their house eleven years ago, Maggie was heavily burnt, and still, the scars she sustained thereby have not vanished. The burnt scars on her body seem to have affected her spirit as a woman and she is found to be envious and scared of her go-getter-type sister Dee. Announced Dee's home visit, Maggie, usually shy in her behaviour, wants her mother to comment on her look after getting dressed in a pink skirt and a red blouse. While Maggie is still "almost

hidden behind the door", Mrs Johnson orders her to "come into the yard". Again, she resumes her reveries, comparing Maggie to a lame animal, most probably a dog run over by a car. She regrets Maggie's deformities and disabilities that she sustained from the fire that razed her house to the ground. After a moment of pondering on Maggie's plight, she moves back to Dee. She considers Dee, now a woman, to be smart in her personality, unlike Maggie. She divulges that her trauma about the unfortunate housefire the family suffered about twelve years ago, recurs each time her eyes meet Maggie, suffocating her entire system. She visualises Maggie as a victim, her hair smoking, her dress falling off her torso, and her eyes glittering with the reflection of the flames and Dee concentrating on the fire that consumed the house in its entirety. The psychological imbalance resulting from the trauma of a child's agony is common to any mother.

> "There is often a significant impact on parents' psychological well-being following trauma to their child, including low mood and post-traumatic stress symptoms such as flashbacks, heightened anxiety, and sleeplessness." (Dainty, Accessed October 14, 2023)

She is sad for Maggie who has been the only one to keep company with her since Dee's departure. She remembers how Maggie reads to her with difficulty and gathers that she is passing various vicissitudes of life as a grown-up. Her remark on Maggie's fiancé John Thomas' mossy teeth and earnest face, suggests that she is concerned only about the protection and care he is supposed to give Maggie after marriage. She declares that she is waiting for him to marry her so that she will be free to relax and enjoy life singing church songs alone.

FOREBODINGS ABOUT DEE'S UPBRINGING AND OUTLOOK AS A MODERN INDIVIDUAL

The conflict precipitated by Dee's resentment of the African cultural influence of the traditional setting of her home and family members seems to have left an indelible scar on Mrs Johnson's psyche. "Why don't you do a dance around the ashes?" The question Mrs Johnson wanted to ask Dee while the housefire was on, alludes to a long dispute she had over Dee's dislike of that house too.

The traditional Afro-American's response to Western institutionalised modes of learning appears in Mrs Johnson's recollections about Dee's oral readings from school textbooks in front of her and Maggie. The painful feelings of punishment, torture, captivation, ensnarement, confusion, and indoctrination she used to harbour during Dee's textbook reading sessions suggest their alienation from Dee's outlook. Her negative perception of the knowledge aimed at being imparted to them as useless should be the reason for such apathy about Dee's effort to educate them in modern knowledge. However, Dee seems to have acknowledged that she received a modern education at a school in Augusta with community funds collected through the church.

Mrs Johnson has learnt by experience that Dee has cultivated a rich taste. She recalls how elegant Dee looked in her yellow organdie dress on her high school graduation day, and how she matched black pumps to the green suit she made at home, recycling an old one of hers. She is still amazed at Dee's calm and quiet deportment during various types of crises that confronted her during her efforts. "At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was." (Walker, 1973) She is confirmed that Dee has by now waged through the competitive world of fashion. According to Reddick-Morgan (2004), images that are transmitted globally through large tools such as print media, television, music and specifically music television bombard women with ideals of beauty that are not representative of themselves, and women attempt to construct their identities under the pervasive influence of the phenomenon called popular culture. So, carried away by such a cultural wave, Dee seems to have by now developed a new identity.

As if she has forgotten about it all this time, she observes the new house she built after the old one had burnt down. Comparing it with the old one, the only difference she finds there is its tin roof which has now appeared as a replacement for the old shingle roofing. Its number of rooms, window pattern, and ground situation have not changed from the previous house. Noticing a disparity between its structure and Dee's taste, she expects Dee's revulsion against it but makes up her mind as Dee has promised in a letter to visit her and Maggie, no matter where they live, but without any friends of hers.

"Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?" Maggie's question formulated on her long observation of Dee's character and demeanour, invites Mrs Johnson to relate Dee's association with peers in the neighbourhood. Boys were infatuated with her for her good looks. The girls admired her figure calling it "the cute shape". Dee commanded respect among them by reading to them, like she used to do with Mrs Johnson and Maggie. She was fully devoted to her lover Jimmy whom she was courting in the village but was always critical of him. When Jimmy could not withstand it anymore, "he *flew* to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy people." (Walker, 1973) Mrs Johnson remarks, "She hardly had time to recompose herself." (Walker, 1973) It is understood that Dee did not learn anything from their separation. That means Maggie is expecting aggressive behaviour on the part of Dee as a stiff character. She wants to keep aloof of Dee until she becomes familiar with Dee's present mood but there is no time for it as Dee's car appears in the compound. The two sisters seem to be poles apart from each other. Obeying Mrs Johnson's command, Maggie

stops running into the house but conveys her discomfort by clearing the sand on the ground with her toe.

CULTURE SHOCK AT A LONG-AWAITED FAMILY GATHERING

Despite the blazing sun, Mrs Johnson recognises Dee from the first glimpse of her leg out of the car. In the sight of Dee's neat-looking feet, an ardent follower of the Church, she thanks God for shaping them in an elegant style. Walker conveys here a mother's admiration for a daughter's virtues despite the long-prevailing ideological conflicts between them. She establishes the necessary irrationality motherhood retains for the sustenance of the ties within the family. Mrs Johnson's pride over her daughter Dee changes when "a short stocky man" appears from the car as her companion. "Uhnnnh", through her loud sigh of breath, Maggie conveys the shock she harbours from his sight. "Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail." (Walker, 1973) His look suggests his affiliation with Rastafarianism, "a religious movement among Black Jamaicans that teaches the eventual redemption of Black people and their return to Africa, employs the ritualistic use of marijuana, forbids the cutting of hair, and venerates Haile Selassie as a god" (Mariam-Webster) Commenting on Maggie's exhilarating behaviour in his presence, Walker compares her to the one that treads by accident "the wriggling end of a snake." In the meantime, Mrs Johnson feels uncomfortable with the outfit Dee is in. She finds it painful to her eyes to look at her dress long up to her ankles, made from a shiny cloth material with yellow and orange motives all over it that offensively reflects the sun. She feels herself ablaze in the heat it emanates in the sun. The exotic look of Dee's loose, flowy, and colourful dress is enhanced by the long golden tussles and the numerous noisy bracelets and bangles she wears. Despite the bizarre look of her outfit altogether, Mrs Johnson starts liking it as it transmits a genetic influence on her to appreciate it in a hereditary way. It is actually the traditional model of her ethnic community. It relates vividly to her traditional African roots. "Uhnnnh," Maggie holds her breath, this time regarding her sister Dee's hair. "It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears." (Walker, 1973) Overall, the culture shock Mrs Johnson and Maggie suffer in the presence of Dee and her friend suggests their difficulty in coming to terms with their own culture after a long period of indoctrination and acculturation under Americanisation.

SHOWCASING CULTURE IN DAILY LIFE

"Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" while Dee greets her mother and sister in Swahili in the Ugandan way, meaning "good morning" or "I hope you slept well", her friend Asalamalakim follows suit with her but in Arabic common to the whole of the Muslim world, meaning "peace be with you", "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" They both look exotic in their non-American outfits that suit their openly expressive relaxed demeanour. In this scenario, Maggie's coyness is explicit in her perspiration, fearful shuddering, and physical avoidance of the man which are symptomatic of her alienation from her own indigenous roots. Walker presents here the density of indoctrination against one's own culture evident in the Afro-American communities in the US.

Before talking to her family, Dee uses a Polaroid camera to make instant photographs of every object of ethnic value in terms of collecting cultural artefacts as if for an exhibition. Walker remarks that her heels look white as seen through her sandals, meaning that she in her comfortable life enjoys the luxury of keeping clean and neat. She takes photographs of Mrs Johnson and Maggie against the house as well as the objects in the surroundings, including a cow grazing in the yard. Only after the ritual of taking photographs is over, Dee kisses her mother on the forehead to mean she is there. Walker suggests here that although Dee is enthusiastic about her original African culture, she is influenced by the Western habit of prioritising, aligning, and programming her activities. Through Maggie's inhibition and escape attempt against Asalamalakim's offer to shake hands with her, Walker depicts Maggie's psychological drawback that has resulted from the burn injuries she sustained during the house fire.

RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT THE ROOTS

When Mrs Johnson calls Dee as usual by her given name, "Dee," the latter corrects her, "No, Mama, … Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!" (Walker, 1973) Flabbergasted by Dee's correction, she asks Dee in return, "What happened to 'Dee'?" Then Dee reveals the identity transformation she underwent within herself through her political consciousness as a descendant of an African slave in an American colony. Walker projects her protest against being named 'Dee' in the exchange, "She's dead, … I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me." (Walker, 1973) In her revulsion against her daughter's defiance of the family etiquette, Mrs Johnson explains how Dee inherited her name as the diminutive of her aunt's name Dulcie. Dee interrogates after whom her aunt Dulcie was named and receives an unconfirmed explanation from her mother that it was her Grandma Dee. Without stopping there, she asks after whom her grandma was named. The exhaustion caused to both by Dee's interrogation is indicative of the complacency that has prevailed for generations among the Afro-American communities who suffer discrimination in all public affairs for being black despite wearing white names. They are both driven back into a historical setting beyond the Civil War through the branches. Amidst Asalamalakim's approval of the argumentation and Maggie's sighing of amazement, "Uhnnnh", Mrs Johonson claims that there is no reason to get back that far. The eye signals Asalamalakim and Dee often exchange between themselves over Mrs Johnson's head

indicate that they are on a mission of consciousness-raising in the family during their home visit. The basis of Dee's mission can be perceived from the following account by Donaldson (2023).

> The colour black, in the Panther era of the '60s and '70s, was being reclaimed as power and pride, as beauty, refuting the stigma of black as bad. That's when the mantras "Black power" and "Black is beautiful" began to surface. And that's when the natural hair movement got underway, with the afro becoming a statement of its own. Rules dictating that only certain looks or behaviours were "right", were abandoned. (Donaldson, 2023)

Mrs Johnson shows her allegiance to her daughter's political consciousness by trying to learn how to pronounce her new African name, Wangero, and by voluntarily deciding to use it to call her in the future, despite Dee's indication that it is not obligatory. After sorting out Dee's new name as "Wangero", Asalamalakim's name becomes the discussion topic. He suggests that they can call him "Hakim-a-barber", explaining that his real name is twice as long and three times as hard. Walker achieves sarcasm through Mrs Johnson's curiosity about whether his family had anything to do with hairdressing. She presumes that Hakim-a-barber belongs to beef cattle people, based on the greeting "Asalamalakim" they use at each other when they meet, which was the name by which he introduced himself first. Walker recalls her experience with the beef cattle people:

> "Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd, the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight" (Walker, 1973)

In response, Hakim-a-barber admits that, although he is not a cattle farmer, he appreciates their Islamic religion. However, Mrs Johnson does not enquire from them whether they are married or not. What Walker aims to present here may be how people adopt their traditional culture when they come to their senses about colonisation and the price their forefathers had to pay for the literacy that has enabled them to probe into their history and realise their identity.

CELEBRATION OF TRADITION

Walker stages an interactive situation out of a meal for which the family members gather to discuss things related to their original African culture. As food is the most vital aspect of any culture, she presents their food habits first. The table is laid with several dishes including "collards", "pork", "chitlins", "cornbread", and "green". Hakim-a-barber's explanation for his refusal to "eat collards and pork" is that he considers them "unclean". In Islam, eating pork is prohibited on the same premise, and it can be presumed that he is an Afro-American Muslim, following Islamic traditions. While there are no food restrictions as such in her orientation to Christianity, Wangero goes "on through the chitlins and cornbread, the greens and everything else". "She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes." (Walker, 1973) Walker uses a Black American idiom here to mean the constant stream of words that flowed from her while talking.

> "Blues are melancholic music of black American folk origin, typically in a twelve-bar sequence. It developed in the rural southern US towards the end of the 19th century, finding a wider audience in the 1940s, as black people migrated to the cities. This urban blues gave rise to rhythm and blues and rock and roll" (Oxford Languages)

So, it is understandable that her endless talking had a powerful impact on the gathering by releasing so much emotional influence into the atmosphere where original African values are being revived. "Everything delighted her," Walker suggests Wangero's triumph over the gathering in her mission to re-establish the original African culture in her domestic environment. Delightful talking and delicious food together help achieve carnivalesque among the family members, and that ushers a revival of the traditional African values within the household as aspired by Wangero.

APPRECIATION OF ETHNIC APPLIANCES AND COMMODITIES AS ARTIFACTS

During the meal, Wangero realises the value of the benches her father made for the table at a time when he could not afford to buy chairs. The amateur pieces of carpentry that used to display a sign of poverty in the house suddenly became objects of attraction for everybody as exhibits of ethnic craftsmanship. Wangero shares with Hakim-a-barber the pride of having such pieces of furniture in the house. She demonstrates the typical African openness in the vulgarism she uses while commenting on them and running her hands underneath her and along the bench, "You can feel the rump prints". She makes a remark about the benches as never before. Soon Wangero's attention moves from the benches to her Grandma Dee's butter dish. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." (Walker, 1973) In this exchange, she conveys that she came home with the intention of obtaining this homemade piece of equipment. Even her gestural behaviour adds to her enthusiasm. She jumps up from the table and walks to the corner where the churn stands and looks at it carefully. She takes the churn top recollecting how her Uncle Buddy made it from a tree trunk and expresses her desire to have it. She does the same with the dasher too. When Maggie relates that the dasher was made by her Aunt Dee's first husband Henry who was also called Stash in answer to Hakim-a-barber's question, Wangero exclaims while laughing, "Maggie's brain is like an elephant's." Her simile of an elephant to acknowledge Maggie's memory suggests that she is being orientated to African culture along with the African way of speaking and

thinking. She finds both items of artistic value and expresses her interest in using the churn top as "a centrepiece for the alcove table" and the dasher for another decorative purpose. Before Wangero takes away the dasher that Stash made from beautiful light-yellow wood, Mrs Johnson holds it for the last time, admires its sophistication as a dairy farm tool, and recalls how it used to serve the family. The purpose of Wangero's home visit is now obvious. She wants to collect traditional African appliances to decorate her house. Without stopping after the dairy farm appliances, Wangero goes on to look for more things in the house that can be used as artefacts of African origin. She intently picks up two quilts from the trunk at the foot of Mrs Johnson's bed supposed to have been pieced by Grandma Dee, Big Dee, and Mrs Johnson together. They are designed in such a way that they carry two typical traditional African quilt patterns named "Lone Star" and "Walk Around the Mountain". The scraps of Grandma Dee's dresses, pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts, and the tiny, faded, and penny matchbox size blue piece of the uniform Great Grandpa Ezra wore in the Civil War stitched together on them relate a fabulous narrative of the family's ancestors that stretches over several decades. They preserve the memories of the older generations by stitching together pieces of clothes from their clothing and demonstrating their tastes and values. (See Gloyn et al, 2018) Using the best of her tricks, Wangero asks Mrs Johnson in a sweet voice like a bird, "Can I have these old quilts?" Considering the two quilts as family treasures inherited from Grandma Dee, Mrs Johnson wants to keep them for herself and offers to give Wangero two others. But Wangero refuses the others on the grounds that their borders are machine-stitched and rejects Mrs Johnson's explanation that it ensures their durability. Wangero conveys her stand on the sentimental value they retain as souvenirs of Grandma's taste, lifestyle, and handwork and her hold on the quilts pressed against her bosom suggests her determination to possess them by hook or crook.

HERITAGE BEING TREASURED MATERIALLY

As Mrs Johnson remembers, when Wangero was about to leave for college, she offered her a homemade quilt from the collection at home and she refused to accept considering that "they were old-fashioned, out of style." But this time when she reveals that she has "promised to give the quilts to Maggie when she marries John Thomas", Wangero gets angry as if she has been stung by a bee. Walker compares the information to a bee sting to mean the density of her revulsion about giving the quilts to Maggie. Her explanation is "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! … She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use." Mrs Johnson's response to it is quite rational and normal. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" She does not attach them any significance other than their value as domestic linen whereas Wangero claims, "But they're *priceless*!" In fact, from an anthropological perspective, they can be priceless in the context of their ethnic identity, indigenous folk art, and culture of Africa. Telling about their destiny in the hands of Maggie, she conveys her lamentation, "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!" (Walker, 1973) Mrs Johnson's response is again rational and normal. "She can always make some more, … Maggie knows how to quilt." (Walker, 1973) In reaction, Wangero stammers and gropes for words in anger. Amazed by the sudden change in Wangero's attitude to her household appliances and linen, Mrs Johnson elicits from her what she is planning to do with them. Wangero's answer that she is going to hang them amuses her. Immersed in a form of commodity culture "reformulated through the materialization of products/values to be purchased and consumed as private meta" (Sanli, 2021), Wangero is used to accord more value to cultural artefacts over cultural practices. In the meantime, Maggie on her own makes a compromise for the sake of peace and allows Wangero to have them. Like somebody who is never used to winning anything or having anything reserved for her, she declares, "She can have them, Mama, … I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts." (Walker, 1973) There is so much depth in her declaration made in utter submission. She communicates an idea of universal value. Memories about ancestors do not need any material agents to live on, but only the significant emotional bonds they had used to maintain with the living (Barclay et al, 2020) Walker establishes the veracity of her position about memories of relationships in her present mood after a snuff. "She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look." (Walker, 1973) Maggie manifests thus the opposite of Wangero's stand about cultural commodities and cultural practices.

DEMONSTRATING TRUE AFRICAN IDENTITY

Walker relates that it was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught Maggie how to quilt herself to convey how the African women preserved their memories by using it as a technique to stitch bits and pieces of cloth worn by their dead who had some significance for their lives. Their oral tradition gets support from those pieces of cloth sewn together in varied designs. Maggie's struggle to keep "her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt" suggests her sense of beauty. She does not want her burn scars to interfere with her social dealings. Her self-control in preventing conflict despite her consciousness of the formidable nature of her sister is portrayed as a model to follow as a quality of a traditional African woman's behaviour. She does not fight for the quilts that had been assigned to her as a wedding gift. She leaves it in the hands of God to decide what is due as her fight is against her own sister. Although her passive and innocent behaviour does not have any spectacular value, it could force Mrs Johnson as the mother into action to keep justice in the dispute between the two daughters.

> "When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open" (Walker, 1973)

She establishes Maggie's personality, identity, and dignity within the family, by emotionally overpowering her sister Wangero, and allowing her to have what is due for her. Mrs Johnson protects Maggie from deprivation by forcibly taking out the quilts from Wangero and handing them to her. Yet Maggie's response is again silence. She contrasts with her sister through her tolerance and patience as well as her compromise and sacrifice for the sake of unity within her family. Tearle (2023) identifies Mrs Johnson's behaviour at this point as the result of an epiphany, classic, with the elements of mysticism, realisation, and martyrdom it manifests.

Wangero is so adamant that she refuses the two other quilts Mrs Johnson offers to her, turns silently, and walks out to Hakim-a-barber. Highly self-opinionated, Wangero criticises Mrs Johnson and Maggie for their misperception of the value of their heritage. While taking leave of the two of them, she says to Maggie, "You ought to try to make something of yourself too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it." (Walker, 1973) Walker achieves sarcasm out of her "sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and chin." (Walker, 1973) Maggie's smile presumably at the sunglasses suggests her self-confidence and personal elevation achieved with the support of her mother. Walker is ironic about the car dust as it symbolises the consequences of colonisation as received by nature and terrain. Mrs Johnson's inhalation of a dip of snuff invigorates the jollity that she maintains in the house with Maggie as her daughter. But they both realise that Wangero's rationale for her Afro-American identity is affected by an exhibitionist mentality. She wants Maggie to make quilts but does not want to do it herself. It is very colonial of her.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted above under eleven subtopics deals with the entire short story with emphasis on the symbolic implications of each development it stages. First, it reveals the rustic Mrs Johnson's qualms about receiving at her home her college-educated fashionable daughter Dee after several years of absence. Then it introduces Mrs Johnson with her ethnic features as an Afro-American that have caused her so much discrimination and deprivation in society. Her frustration about her home-stuck daughter Maggie with burn scars on her body and reflections on the cultural disparity between Dee and her on the scale of Americanisation emerge as part of her mental preparation to receive Dee. The culture shock she and Maggie receive from Dee's adoption of the traditional African culture in terms of clothing and attitude to ethnic lifestyle add a dramatic element to the atmosphere. The value change Dee has undergone as a city woman and her anthropological appreciation for household goods of ethnic origin as artefacts suggest her integration into a new type of commodity culture as a result of her education. Finally, the dispute between Dee and Mrs Johnson over how crucial the craftsmanship of various material objects in preserving memories of ancestors allows Mrs Johnson to establish her stand that culture is to live by and not to feast upon. All in all, the paper endeavours to ignite an academic investigation into the anthropological and ideological bases of Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" from the perspective of cultural studies.

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