



## A New Historicist Perspective on the Transformation in Perception of Cultural Heritage in Alice Walker's Everyday Use

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### Abstract

Alice Walker is one of the pioneering writers stressing the discrimination against African Americans living in the Southern part of America. Since her mother worked as a maid in the houses of the whites for more than four decades, Walker endured the hardships of unequal and inhumane attitudes of the whites against colored people. She participated in the Civil Rights Movement to protest black oppression and segregation. In her short story, *Everyday Use*, she carefully organizes the scenario to describe two subsequent generations of oppressed black women and the ways they react to the difficulties dictated to them. Like Walker's mother, Mama internalizes the dictations of the whites and keeps a submissive lifestyle. However, she keeps her bond with her African roots by appreciating her cultural heritage. She is illiterate colored people are discouraged from education by white authorities. Unlike her submissive mother, Dee, goes to university and constructs a kind of awareness related to the equal rights of African Americans. While visiting her family, she prefers a pan-African point of view to stress her African roots, which was the motto of the Civil Rights Movement. She rejects the dictations and discrimination against the colored people. She demands some objects from her mother including the quilts containing some pieces of the clothes of their relatives, the churn top, and the dasher to show off in her house. This article aims to reveal the transformation of cultural heritage to superficial material culture for subsequent generations, represented by Mama and Dee by new historicist literary theory. This theory will be useful in shedding light on the historical background of the time implied in the story. The possible reasons for the change in the perception of cultural heritage will be analyzed by a new historicist reading of the story.

**Keywords:** Alice Walker, Cultural Heritage, Everyday Use, Civil Rights Movement, Material Culture, Fashion.

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## Alice Walker'ın Gündelik Kullanım'ında Kültürel Miras Algısındaki Dönüşüme Yeni Tarihselci Bir Bakış

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### Öz

Alice Walker, Amerika'nın güneyinde yaşayan Afrikalı Amerikalılara yönelik ayrımcılığı vurgulayan öncü yazarlardan biridir. Annesi kırk yılı aşkın bir süre beyazların evlerinde hizmetçi olarak çalıştığı için, Walker, beyazların siyahlara karşı eşitsiz ve insanlık dışı tutumlarından kaynaklanan zorluklara katlandı. Üniversite yıllarında, siyahilere yönelik baskı ve ayrımcılığı protesto etmek için Sivil Haklar Hareketi'ne katıldı. *Günlük Kullanım* adlı kısa öyküsünde, ezilen siyahli kadınların ard arda iki ayrı neslini ve bu nesillerin kendilerine dikte edilen zorluklara nasıl tepki verdiklerini anlatmak için kurgusunu dikkatli bir biçimde organize eder. Tıpkı Alice Walker'ın annesi gibi, kısa öyküdeki Mama da beyazların dayatmalarını içselleştirir ve itaatkâr bir yaşam tarzı benimser. Mama, okuryazar değildir çünkü o dönem beyaz otorite, siyahilerin eğitim hakkını engellemiştir. Bununla birlikte, sahip olduğu kültürel mirasın kıymetini bilerek, Afrikalı kökleriyle bağını korur. Dee, itaatkâr annesinin aksine üniversiteye gider ve Afrikalı Amerikalıların beyazlarla eşit haklara sahip olmaları gerektiğine dair bir tür farkındalığa sahip olur. Ailesini ziyaret ederken, Afrikalı köklerini vurgulamak için Sivil Haklar Hareketi'nin popüler görüşlerinden olan pan-Afrikanist bakış açısını tercih eder. Yeni tarzı ve bakış açısıyla, siyahilere yönelik dikte ve ayrımcılığı reddeder. Annesinden, evinde sergilemek üzere, akrabalarının kıyafetlerinin bazı parçalarını içeren yorganlar, yayık başlığı ve keser de dahil olmak üzere bazı nesnelere talep eder. Bu makale, Mama ve Dee tarafından temsil edilen iki neslin farklı yaklaşımlarının, kültürel mirasın sonraki nesiller için yüzeysel maddi kültüre dönüşme nedenlerini, yeni tarihselci edebiyat teorisi ile ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu teori, öyküde ima edilen dönemin tarihsel arka planına ışık tutmak açısından faydalı olacaktır. Kültürel miras algısındaki değişimin olası nedenleri, öykünün yeni tarihselci bir okuması ile analiz edilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alice Walker, Kültürel Miras, Gündelik Kullanım, Sivil Haklar Hareketi, Maddi Kültür, Moda.

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## Introduction

This study analyzes the different perceptions of the cultural heritage in Alice Walker's short story, *Everyday Use*, which benefits from new historicism as a critical literary theory. To understand the differing attitudes of the two generations toward their cultural heritage, we can analyze history and literature together, as new historicism suggests. Louis Montrose characterizes New Historicism as a collective interest in "the textuality of history, the historicity of texts" (Montrose, 1989: 20). Peter Barry defines new historicism as "a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period" (Barry, 1995: 171). As a literary approach, new historicism celebrates literary and non-literary texts together to reveal the issues not touched upon or ignored by the former literary criticisms. Power relations are a significant component of New Historicism. New historicists focus on power dynamics, including how they are maintained in society, the continuation of patriarchy, and the effects of colonization. (Barry, 1995: 179). The scope and role of literature for new historicists are significant to understanding the principles of the theory. David Gersham Myers states that literature is a social and historical construct. Therefore, the best way to understand literature is to know the culture and the society that produces literature. To Myers, like literary works, man is also a product of the social and political dynamics of his time (Myers, 1989: 28). The basic argument of new historicists is that it is impossible to understand a text by solely focusing on its context. Since, a text can't be isolated from the author's ideology, the social, cultural, and political context of the age it was written. Based on the basic principles of new historicism related to a network of literature, society, history, culture, and author, brief information about Alice Walker's life and the historical background she sets her short story on will be useful to understand the conflict related to cultural heritage in *Everyday Use*.

Alice Walker was born as the eighth child of a sharecropper couple in Eatonton, Georgia, in 1944. Besides her African American origin, her place and date of birth inspire her a lot in her writings. Walker witnesses the harsh conditions of the time, even from childhood. Her mother, working as a maid in the houses of the whites for more than fourteen years, internalizes the inferiority of the blacks, which is the dictation of the whites to all colored people at the time living there. The discrimination against colored people based on some rigid laws is an inseparable part of life for Walker. However, the growing consciousness of the 1960s among the new African Americans is her source of inspiration. She denies the system which reinforces the discrimination against colored people and participates in the Civil Rights Movement. As a poet, writer, and activist, Walker makes a great effort to resist the discriminatory system present at the time. Her writings revolve around the issues related to the hardships faced by colored people living in America. The main motivation behind Walker's works is the ongoing injustice the colored people endure and the resistance against the inhumane laws and dictations. Since this is the case, new historicism provides the background of the issues depicted in *Everyday Use*. Hence, from a new historicist perspective, the possible reasons behind the crisis in the story is evaluated according to the dynamics of the setting and the mindset of Alice Walker who resists against the discrimination against whites in the South of America. Within this context, new historicism will be useful to understand the possible reasons of the transformation in the perception of cultural heritage between old and new generations.

Alice Walker's *Everyday Use*, published in 1973 and set in the rural South of America, unfolds the cultural clash in the life of a black American family in the 1960s. Though there is no direct reference to the color-based problems and their results in the story, the conflicts of the characters stem from the issues related to segregation based on the slavery system in South America. The fashion issue turns out to be a vehicle for Walker to indicate the ongoing sufferings of both, the old and new generations of the blacks. Within this context, new historicism provides a solid basis to analyze the issues in the story to highlight the possible reasons behind the conflicts in the story. The story is narrated by the mother figure (Mama) who describes herself with male characteristics. She is a large woman responsible for household maintenance. There is not a father figure in the story and Mama has the burden of the family on her shoulders. Walker probably organizes her short story in this way to draw attention to the difficulties of black women at the time. Mama narrates that she couldn't get an education since her school was shut down by the white authorities in the 1920s. Taking into consideration the date Mama refers to, it seems clear that Mama experienced the dictations of Jim Crow Laws, a set of laws legalizing racial segregation between the 1880s and 1960s. As a result of the hard conditions she experienced over time, she regards herself as inferior due to her skin color. Her younger daughter, Maggie lives with her. Dee, the family's older daughter, is sent away to get an education with the church's funds. The family is poor and only one of the girls may have the chance of getting an education. Mama prefers Dee to Maggie who is timid and shy. The burn scars on her skin contribute to her unease but the main reason for her self-confidence stems from the dominant and scolding manners of Dee. The story opens with the scene when Mama and Maggie are waiting for Dee to visit them. She comes with her new style and name, stressing her African roots and rejecting anything related to the dictations of the whites. The conflict between Mama and Dee starts when Dee demands the quilts from her mother for hanging on the wall. Containing the pieces of the clothes of older relatives, the quilts are a symbol of cultural heritage for Mama and Maggie since they try to keep their heritage by appreciating the historical and cultural meaning behind the quilts and knowing how to make a quilt. Dee, with her new name and exaggerated hair and clothing style, attempts to imply her African origins. However, her aim is reversed, since the churn top, the dasher, and the quilts she demands are only the objects to display for her. Fashion seems to transform Dee's cultural heritage into material culture. Alice Walker, in *Everyday Use*, exposes the old and new generations through the context of her story. The clash stems from the different mindsets of the old generation represented by Mama and Maggie, and the new generation represented by Dee. Considering the dynamics of South America, including Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement, the conflict between Dee and her mother, stemming from their different approach toward the quilts, it seems that Dee falls short of her main purpose by attaching great importance to displaying the objects which are a part of her cultural heritage.

The cultural identity, defined by Henri Tajfel as "an individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his group membership" (Tajfel 1970: 292), has different reflections on the characteristics of Mama, Maggie, and Dee. The oppressed and traditional manners of Mama and Maggie and the heresy of Dee stem from their common cultural identity. The transformation from cultural heritage to fashion as a part of material culture resulted from a certain process for most Southern Afro-Americans. Considering the repository

side of the literature, *Everyday Use* serves as a critical tool for revealing the mindset of some regarding themselves as supporters of black rights. The familial structure of the family in the short story dates back to slavery, which can be regarded as a case study of the cultural dilemma of the slaves. The accumulating burden of slavery for every next generation resulted in some protests in South Africa, and this was the source of motivation for Alice Walker to bring forward the diversity of the perceptions among the oppressed African Americans. Due to constant confrontation with racial oppression and marginalization, the descendants of the slaves searched for new ways to get equality. The struggle of African Americans turned into a conceptual framework of Cultural Trauma, which characterizes “conflicts over the form and meaning of representation and culture in successive generations of Black Americans after slavery” (Hier 2004: 318).

Slavery is regarded as the crucial point in burning the fire of conflict for those experiencing cultural trauma. Still, it was the failure of Reconstruction “to grant the guarantees of the Emancipation Proclamation” (Elmore 2019: 9) that triggered the process. The addition of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution marked the Reconstruction Era. Subsequently, the abolition of slavery, granting citizenship, and equal protection to the blacks, and providing voting rights to all citizens were the main focus of these amendments. However, all these advances were tainted by Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws. To understand the issues referred to by Alice Walker, it is critical to be aware of the principles dictated to South American blacks by Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws. The Black Codes were described as “A body of laws, statutes, and rules enacted by southern states immediately after the Civil War to regain control over the freed slaves, maintain white supremacy, and ensure the continued supply of cheap labor” (Ediz, 2019: 2027). The rights given to the blacks after the Civil War were taken back under the pretext of “Black Codes” being supported by the white lawmakers, the landowners in the South had the right to re-construct master-slave relationships and white hegemony. Black Codes also prevented blacks from having the right to education and moving to other places. Afro-Americans were left helpless since the landowners were pushing them to work under low wages by preventing them from buying or renting lands. It was an attempt to re-establish, white supremacy, and the slave system which was present in pre-Civil War. The Black Codes were replaced by Jim Crow Laws which reinforced racial segregation in South America from the end of Reconstruction to 1965. “During the Jim Crow era, black Americans were treated as second-class citizens. Jim Crow legislation forced black and white Americans to attend separate schools, drink from separate water fountains, and ride in different sections of public transportation” (Zinkel, 2019: 237-238). Schools, businesses, and public transportation were the places the blacks were segregated legally due to Jim Crow laws. Besides, related to these laws, black Americans were barred from being hired by hospitals and service industries (Zinkel, 2019: 238). Besides, as indicated by Cincotta Howard, access to many public facilities like restaurants, parks, and hotels was forbidden or limited to blacks due to Jim Crow Laws. Besides the blacks were prevented from voting due to arbitrary literacy tests and imposition of poll taxes (Howard, 2004: 174).

The period Mama refers to in *Everyday Use* depicts the difficulties colored people endured after the Civil War and during the period when Jim Crow laws were applied to the colored people living in South America. The Civil Rights Movement was the reaction of the colored to the racial segregation held by white Americans in South America. Benjamin Muse defines the Civil Rights Movement as “all manner of activities related to the

movement and legislation looking toward justice for the Negro" (Muse, 1968: 17). The purpose of the Civil Rights Movement was to provide legal rights the blacks were deprived of for generations. One of the most significant components of the movement was the prohibition of racial segregation. It reinforced the relationship between Afro-Americans and gave them the self-confidence to appreciate their blackness and African roots. As a university student, Alice Walker participated in the Civil Rights Movement and put it at the center of her life by writing about it and the oppression that Southern Americans had to endure. Walker attempts to depict the oppression of the white Americans against South Americans which shaped their ideology and led to their inferiority complexes. She also criticizes how the Civil Rights Movement's motto of returning to African origin went beyond its main purpose by over-emphasizing fashion and ignoring the real value of heritage. The socio-political and cultural context of the story, along with Alice Walker's experiences, shows how the oppression of whites and the dynamics of the Civil Rights Movement contributed to the superficial treatment of cultural heritage as mere fashion.

### **Transformation in Perception of Cultural Heritage**

The conflict in 'Everyday Use' arises from Dee, the educated older daughter, who changes her name to Wangero Lee-Wanika Kemanjo to reject her name given by oppressive whites. Though there is not one single white character in the story, from the mindset of Mama and the reactive manners of Dee, the oppression that subjugated the Afro-Americans and passivated them and the reaction of the educated ones against oppression seem to be clear in the story. The description of Maggie, the younger daughter, and her role in the story is another parameter to consider the serious and ongoing influences of slavery, even if it was abolished at the time. Categorizing the characters according to their mindset may help the reader to understand the conflicting dynamics in the story. In his article *Cultures in Conflict: An Interpretation of Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"* Iman A. Hanafy makes the distinction between the old and the new generation. The demarcation of the two groups is determined by the reaction of the two against the oppressive culture of the whites. Mama and Maggie are the representatives of the old generation and Dee is the symbol of the new emerging women of the sixties (Hanefy 2010: 495) As the representative of the oppressed old generation the mother and her younger daughter Maggie behave submissively while, the only member of the family who has the opportunity of education, Dee is different from them in terms of her appearance and manners. Even from the first line of the short story, the hard life conditions of the mother and Maggie are clear. Since there is no father figure in the family, the mother has the burden of both father and mother. The mother didn't have the opportunity of education the reason for which she narrates tragically: "I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don't ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now" (Walker, 1994: 26). The discrimination toward blacks and the oppression they had to endure is clear from these sentences during the 1920s. While the process between the 1920s and the 1930s is regarded as the Jazz Age which refers to the great prosperity of America as a nation, the reality Mama refers to reveals the fact that life for the African Americans in the South was the exact opposite of the situation at the time. Mama's words point out the fact that deprived of the right to education, the blacks weren't entitled to question the reasons for being prevented from one of their most fundamental rights. As indicated above, Jim Crow Laws were present in the period Mama refers to in the story. Depriving the colored people of the most fundamental rights,

including education, was a component of Jim Crow Laws. Besides the burden stemming from her illiteracy and poverty, the dream of the mother reveals her admiration for the white majority which is the usual characteristic of the oppressed old generation. "Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin an uncooked barley pancake" (Walker, 1998: 24). In her dream, she is in a TV show to reunite with Dee. She has lighter skin and nicer hair in the dream and she speaks fluently. Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them" (Walker, 1998: 25). This dream reveals her inferiority complex stemming from not only the white masters but also Dee's mindset. It demarcates the difference between the two generations. The former generation witnessed the harsh dictations of Jim Crow Laws and had to subordinate their "white masters" while at the same time admiring them. Mama's dream about having "a hundred pounds lighter" skin and her later confession related to the fact only in dreams can she communicate with a white man looking straight into his eyes are all related to Jim Crow Laws at the time. All these hard conditions paved the way for the foundation of low self-esteem of African Americans. As a result, to cope with the injustice and oppression by the "white masters" they either stuck to their cultural heritage as the inevitable part of their collective identity or denied it hoping to find approval and acceptance among the whites. The new generation of the sixties however raised against the system that was seemingly providing equality to the citizens of America. The discrimination between whites and African Americans set the ground for the last longing fight of the latter for equality between the two groups.

What reverses the atmosphere of inferiority complex and submissive manners of the mother and Maggie is the presence of Dee. Despite Dee's extraordinary appearance, the mother keeps approving her privileged position. When she sees a woman taking off the car she says: "But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat looking as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style" (Walker 1994: 27). Her arrival with the automobile of a foreign man and her exaggerative wearing style increase Mama's awe toward Dee while Maggie can't hide her astonishment in her way:

"... Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhhnnh" again. It is her sister'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 1994: 28).

It is clear that with her new, exaggerated, and "African" style, Dee represents the supporters of the Civil Rights Movement. To understand the reason behind her new style, it is significant to be aware of the mindset of African Americans being the participants of The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Marry Vargas proposes that the demand for equality and black pride were the ideological foundations of the Civil Rights Movement. Black supporters and activists wore symbolic clothes, and accessories and preferred

symbolic hairstyles to reveal their uniqueness and support of this movement (Vargas 2009: 95). Vargas defines the context and influence of the movement as the following:

“Politics and fashion were fused during this time and the use of these symbolic fashion statements sent a clear message to America and the rest of the world that African Americans were proud of their heritage, that Black was indeed beautiful and that it was important to embrace one’s African identity” (Vargas 2009: 95).

The pan-African style of Dee, as a combination of the policy and the fashion of this movement was regarded as the symbol of the reaction of colored people against the inequality dictated to them after Reconstruction. Emphasizing the utmost impact of fashion in America during the Civil Rights Movement, in *The Fashion of the 1960s. A New Power Shaping the American Image* Alice Morin states that fashion was within the scope of American soft power in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Morin 2018: 5). The fashion of the Civil Rights Movement that prioritized the pan-African style reminds the concept of “bricolage”. Coined by Claude Levi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* (1962), the definition of bricolage in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* is “how societies combine and recombine different symbols and cultural elements to come up with recurring structures” (Bernard and Spencer 2002, p: 894). The symbolic meaning of clothing contributed a lot to political movements like the Civil Rights Movement. Within this context, as a “bricoleur,” Dee’s pan-African style is meaningful when she is among the supporters of the Civil Rights Movement but it is regarded as weird by her mother and sister since they are already suffering from the segregation dictated to them. Though Mama and Maggie are waiting for the arrival of Dee with tremendous excitement, Dee takes photos of the house and the family members before hugging them. Considering her first reaction toward family members, taking photos seems to be much more significant than the excitement of the reunion which refers to an abnormality in the priorities of Dee. Reducing the reunion excitement to some photos shows the replacement of Dee’s priorities. Soon after her arrival, the reasons for her exaggerated style and her new name are revealed. The dialogue between Dee and her mother who tries to find out the real reason for her changing name sets forth Dee’s changing mindset and her discomfort about the rules dictated to the colored people for decades:

“Well,” I say. “Dee.” “No, Mama,” she says. “Not ‘Dee,’ Wagero Leewanika Kemanjo!”  
 ““What happened to ‘Dee?’” I wanted to know. “She’s dead,” Wagero said. “I couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.” “You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie,” I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her “Big Dee” after Dee was born. “But who was she named after?” asked Wagero. “I guess after Grandma Dee,” I said. “And who was she named after?” asked Wagero. “Her mother,” I said, and saw Wagero was getting tired. “That’s about as far back as I can trace it,” I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches” (Walker 1994: 29).

Dee’s protest against the oppressive white culture and its dictations is understandable for her and her generation but what she ignores is that it has been a long time since such kinds of names were used among the blacks. As the mother states such kind of names are turned into a part of their cultural heritage among the blacks due to their long-term usage. While Dee focuses on the source of her name and rejects it due to its origin related to the oppressive whites, Mama’s concern is on the cultural value of the name which was used by several members of the same family. Dee’s rejection of her given name signifies her desire to distance herself from her past. In contrast, Mama embodies a deep appreciation for her heritage, which highlights the generational divide in their understanding of



cultural identity. This fundamental difference in perspective creates significant tension between the two characters. Besides, Dee's new style, new name, and new mindset seem to be related to the principles of the Civil Rights Movement. But as the dialogue among the family members progresses, Dee's "wholly" principles seem to be losing their way. The breaking point is when Dee demands the quilts from her mother and the epiphany of the mother after confronting the realities related to Dee. It is significant to pay attention to the cultural heritage value of the quilts for the readers to figure out Dee's main purpose in demanding them:

"...They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. ...In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War" (Walker 1994: 32).

From Mama's description, the real value of the quilts stems from their uniqueness in terms of their patterns and more significantly from the scraps of the clothes belonging to the old family members dating back to the uniform of Great Grandpa used in the Civil War. So, the historical heritage is mixed with the cultural heritage of the quilts making them unique and priceless. Taking into consideration the process of the slave trade and how the indigenous culture of the Africans was destroyed by the Europeans for the sake of commercial benefits, the quilts might be regarded as the remnants of the scattered culture. That's why the quilts mean a lot for both Dee and Mama reminding the strong bonds of kinship among the family members. Within this context, besides being essential parts of quilting, the scraps of the clothes in the quilts, belonging to different family members, also serve to reinforce the strong feeling of belonging to the same background. From the explanation above, it is clear that the meaning of the quilts goes far beyond their material value due to the memories they evoke:

"Everyday objects become mementos by virtue of what the owner has invested in them, be it time or emotion. Thus, it is not usually the physical characteristics of the objects that make them biographical, but the meaning imputed to them as significant personal possessions" (Petrelli et al 2008: 56).

Consisting of the investment of several generations, the quilts turn into "evocative objects" defined by Richard Heersmink as "physical objects or structures that in virtue of representational or non-representational properties evoke autobiographical memories" (Heersmink 2018: 1836). Beyond the autobiographical connotation of the evocative objects defined by Heersmink, the quilts here evoke collective memories. The significance of the quilts stems from the collective memories they are associated with and it is possible that to some extent such kind of cultural materials are the vehicles for the colored people to come up with the misery they had encountered for centuries and feel safe and peaceful. Emphasizing the strong familial ties among the colored people, in *Some Socio-Cultural Aspects of Growing up Black*, Joan S. Wallace and Samuel P. Wong propose that "this intense feeling of being related is, of course, an expression of the "we-feeling" in social life, and its presence in American society is more than a reaction to the past and present repression of Black people by the dominant group" (Wallace and Wong 1975: 346). The repression and harsh life conditions seem to be effective in constructing the so-called "we feeling" in Mama and Maggie. Mama asks Dee, what she would do with the quilts remembering the scene where she offered Dee the quilts when she went away to college and Dee rejected them claiming that they were out of fashion. This time with her new

“indigenous” and extraordinary style she wants the quilts. Mama wonders why she insists on those quilts and mentions her intention of keeping them for Maggie. Upon hearing this Dee underestimates Maggie proposing that “Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts! ...She’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use” (Walker 1994: 33). When Mama asks what she would do with the quilts her reply reveals her failure in her idealistic indigenous mindset since she wants to “hang them” (Walker 1994: 33) to show off. Dee’s insistence on taking the old quilts to show off points up the fact that despite the radical changes in her life from her appearance to her new name all of which are a kind of reaction against the oppressive dominant white culture, Dee sacrifices the essence for the sake of fashion. Realizing her failure, maybe for the first time Mama prioritizes Maggy and rejects Dee’s request. Being fashionable seems to be much more significant for Dee than appreciating the real value of her cultural heritage. Besides the quilts, Dee wants the churn top whittled by their uncle and the dasher whittled by Aunt Dee’s first husband for some other artistic purposes (Walker 1994: 31).

## Conclusion

Life in South America is chaos for both new and old generations of African Americans. The old generation of Afro-Americans had to endure the brutal slavery system and the subsequent racial segregation legalized by the laws of the “white Americans”. The new generation resisted the tyranny and stereotypes of the system dictated to them. The discrimination between whites and African Americans set the ground for the last longing fight of the latter for equality between the two groups. The submission of the old generation transformed into the protest and reaction of the new generation. In *Everyday Use* Alice Walker depicts the clash between old traditional generation and new modern generation. Dee’s scorning and patronizing manners toward her family members, and her priorities which are reduced to “showing off” her Africanism by taking photos or planning to use the quilts, the churn top, and the dasher for some artistic purposes, she tries to commodify her cultural heritage instead of appreciating it. Despite her radical and brave steps from changing her name to her exaggerated indigenous style emphasizing her roots, Dee seems to fall short of her goal. She can’t go beyond a kind of “faddish Africanism” (Coward 1996: 172) by reducing her cultural heritage to a kind of material culture for the sake of fashion. Dee’s failure to appreciate her cultural heritage might be evaluated as Alice Walker’s criticism of the material culture of the sixties which reversed the emphasis of returning to the African origin as the motto of the opponents of the Civil Rights Movement. While for Mama and Maggie the quilts, the churn top, and the dasher are the symbol of cultural heritage, for Dee, they are transformed into material culture to be displayed on the wall. Despite her inclination to indicate African origins through her exaggerated clothing and hairstyle, and her new name it is evident that Dee contradicts herself paradoxically. By the conclusion of the narrative, Dee’s disdainful manners and her genuine objective in requesting the quilts, the churn top, and the dasher elucidate that, even if she is not conscious of it, she demands them as a means of material culture. In light of the social, political, and historical background of South America, it can be proposed that Dee, the protagonist of *Everyday Use*, fails to achieve her goal. This is because she appears to prioritize fashion as a material culture over her main purpose and devastates the essence of the Civil Rights Movement. She falls short of her goal since she seems to ruin her prime purpose for the sake of fashion as a material culture. Besides, learning Dee’s real purpose in insisting on getting the quilts, the churn top, and the dasher turns out to be the reason for the awakening of Mama and the change in her attitude

toward her daughters. Focusing on this fact, *Everyday Use* is regarded as the awakening of Mama to the superficiality of one of her daughters and the deep-seated understanding of heritage of the other one (Tuten 1993: 125). Walker's critical approach toward the polarized family members, the submissive old generation, and the resisting new generation, in *Everyday Use* reveals the fact that, as an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement, she can judge the positive and negative aspects of both sides.

Alice Walker never directly touches upon the issue of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, or the Civil Rights Movement directly. However, the conflict in the story and the different approaches of the Old and New generations are closely related to some specific historical periods of Southern America. Being heavily influenced by the dictations of Jim Crow Laws, Mama is deprived of education. She is submissive and she is ashamed of her skin color, her social status, and her appearance due to her inferiority complex. Still, she is well aware of her past and she appreciates her cultural heritage by appreciating any single piece of it. Since the cultural heritage is also a kind of cultural memory for her and the next generations. Mama's epiphany reverses her long-lasting discriminative manner toward her daughters and she rejects her privileged daughters' demand by giving the quilts to Maggie. Within this context, she rejects the fashion-oriented superficial mindset of the new generation and emphasizes the fact that the real protectors of a specific cultural heritage are those who can appreciate it by being actively involved in it.

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<b>Plagiarism Checks</b>	Yes - Ithenticate
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<b>Etik Beyan</b>	<p>* Bu makale, 10. Uluslararası Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Konferansı'nda sözlü olarak sunulan "Alice Walker'ın Günlük Kullanımında Kültürel Mirastan Maddi Kültüre" başlıklı yayınlanmamış konferans sunumunun gözden geçirilmiş ve geliştirilmiş halidir</p> <p><i>* Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.</i></p>
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