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"Dama Ninao" est une revue scientifique interdisciplinaire qui accepte et publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines. A cet effet, elle s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques. La Revue "Dama Ninao", entendu "L'Entente" en langue kabyè du Nord Togo, est créée dans l'intention de matérialiser la mondialisation ou la globalisation qui s'opère avec l'esprit d'équipe et d'échanges et la désuétude du monde autarcique. Le monde scientifique universitaire ne peut échapper à cet esprit d'équipe qui fonde un creuset où « le fer aiguisé le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité.

La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue ... Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

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La taille des articles

Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

Ordre logique du texte

- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;
- **Nom et prénom(s)** du contributeur ou des contributeurs, **nom de l'institution** d'appartenance, **adresse mail**
- Un **Résumé (Abstract)** de 8 lignes en français et anglais, en interligne simple, suivi de 6 **Mots clés (Key words)**
- Une **Introduction** : elle doit avoir une problématique, une méthode et une structure.
- Un **Développement** : les articulations du développement du texte doivent-être titrées comme suit :

1-Pour le **Titre** de la première section

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1-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième section

2-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

2-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

3- Pour le **Titre** de la troisième section (si l'auteur de l'article le souhaite)

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En cas d'utilisation des tableaux, ceux-ci doivent être numérotés en chiffre romains selon l'ordre de leur apparition dans le texte. Ils doivent comporter un titre précis et une source. Les schémas et illustrations doivent être numérotés en chiffres arabes selon l'ordre de leur apparition dans le texte.

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Objectifs et portée

La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguisé le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

Professeur Koutchoukalo TCHASSIM

Université de Lomé

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**FROM SELFHOOD TO SURVIVAL: POSTCOLONIAL REFLECTIONS
ON PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR'S "WE WEAR THE MASK"**

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Abstract: People write, read and study poetry for various reasons. Beyond aesthetics, poetry explores human experiences and alleviates societal suffering. Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" (1895) depicts the horrible and difficult experience of being a member of an oppressed group. From the lenses of postcolonial theory, this paper analyses the symbolism used by the poet to portray and denounce the conscious and/or unconscious effort of the oppressed to behave in a hypocritical way in order to be accepted by others. The paper calls for the decolonization of the minds of the oppressed in order to be true to themselves and avoid wearing "masks".

Keywords: Postcolonial, mask, oppression, hypocrisy, self-assertion.

Résumé : Les gens écrivent, lisent et étudient la poésie pour diverses raisons. Outre son expression esthétique, la poésie traite des expériences humaines et contribue à soulager la société de ses souffrances. Le poème « We Wear the Mask » (1895) de Paul Laurence Dunbar dépeint l'expérience horrible et difficile d'être membre d'un groupe opprimé. Se basant sur la théorie postcoloniale, l'étude analyse le symbolisme utilisé par le poète pour dépeindre et dénoncer l'effort conscient et/ou inconscient des opprimés qui se comportent de manière hypocrite afin d'être acceptés par les autres. L'article appelle à la décolonisation de la pensée des personnes victimes d'oppression afin d'être fidèles à eux-mêmes et d'éviter de porter des « masques ».

Mots-clés : Postcolonial, masque, oppression, hypocrisie, affirmation de soi.

Introduction

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) is one of the greatest and influential black poets of American literature. His poetry is highly appreciated by many critics who rightly think he produces "poems of racial consciousness" (As quoted in Candela 1976, p. 63). The main focus of his writing is to help improve the social, economic and political lives of the Blacks who are racial minorities in the American society.

Despite the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, Blacks are still victims of all sorts of segregation in the United State. Because of racism, many Blacks in the US in

the twentieth century needed to develop their own survival strategies. Among many other strategies, committed writing is considered as a strong means to voice survival ideologies and strategies as well as protest strategies. Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask" is solid example of expression of the poet's ideas and calling on Blacks to be true to themselves and avoid all sorts of hypocrisy in a white supremacists' society.

Arguably, the 'mask' worn by Blacks can be seen as a means of protection and at the same time as a way for them to use hypocrisy as a survival strategy. A close reading of Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" leads the reader to ask a few questions like: What is the symbolism of the "mask" in the African American context? Why do many Blacks in the US wear symbolic masks? Can the "mask" worn by Blacks serve as a hindrance for their development in American racist society? How can Blacks successfully remove the "masks" they have been wearing?

The answers to the above queries serve as the core of this paper which is written in the framework of the international conference organized in the Republic of Benin in 2023 on the topic: "Principles and Ethics of Research in the Humanities: The Need to Re-examine Methodologies". As the title outlines it, the paper heavily depends on the postcolonial literary theory to develop the clusters of ideas. The cultural critic Edward Said is considered as "the originator and inspiring patron-saint of postcolonial theory and discourse" due to his interpretation of the theory of orientalism explained in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. This theory mainly focuses on critical strategies used to examine the literature and culture produced by former colonies and oppressed groups and their relation to the rest of the world. Postcolonial theory is relevant to this topic in the sense that it attempts to analyze the concept of otherness (doubleness) of the oppressed. This theory helps analyze the institutions such as slavery, racism, segregation, colonization etc. and also the dialectical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The deconstruction of "self" and "other" in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem reflects the "ambivalence" that the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes. Interestingly, Bhabha's ideas is related to hybridity—which is the mixture of different cultural, social, and historical impacts which shape the colonized identity through hybridization and negotiation (Dube

2018). Additionally, the critic Hussein Dizayi reflects on Frantz Fanon and Edward Said in his study. From his perspective, he explains:

Postcolonial theory, or postcolonialism, can be characterized as the investigation of colonial impact, and its legacy from post-WWII to the present day. It explores the socio-political, psychological, and political impact of the colonial legacy. Postcolonial theory also handles the investigation of the conduct of recently free social orders, as they struggle for self-determination. It considers the test and refusal of colonial social and political guidelines, and frameworks that were abandoned and overwhelmed colonizers for quite a while. Postcolonial theory additionally examining literary types and cultural viewpoints identified with the cutting edge after colonialism wanes, all through diverse ways and strategies (Dizayi 2019, p. 78).

For this study, postcolonial theory helps to investigate the aftermaths of colonialism and how the colonized try to figure out ways and means to assert themselves after being independent. Thus, the paper analyses first the symbolism used by Dunbar to depict and denounce the conscious and/or unconscious effort of Blacks in the twentieth century to behave in a hypocritical way in order to be accepted by their white counterparts. The paper equally scrutinizes the strategies used by the poet to advocate for the decolonization of the minds of the oppressed in order to be authentic and avoid wearing the “mask” to disguise their identity. It lastly emphasizes the challenging ways in which individuals in racist or colonial communities struggle with identity, oppression, and the desire for liberation to express themselves and get total liberation from the imposed masks by the oppressors or the colonial system. The paper uses the poem as a catalyst in promoting ethical values that the oppressed should use to avoid self-loathing and overcome all struggles of life.

1. Wearing a Mask: A Survival Strategy

In a postcolonial context, masks represent a survival mechanism. It heaps upon the oppressed group to hide their deep scares and resist oppression in hostile environments. African Americans design their own means of resistance through the wearing of masks to hide their true emotions in the face of racial discrimination. Likewise, the colonized and oppressed people often have to wear masks to navigate in the oppressive colonial systems. As mentioned above, the reason of wearing masks

for the downtrodden is pure strategic: the masks help them avoid persecution and navigate the complexities of discriminatory societies and colonial rule.

The reading of Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" through the lenses of postcolonial theory, unveils a hostile setting of the oppressed and their daily realities. It is believed that Blacks in America face systemic racism—and to resist this adversity, the masks allow them to express a false image to the oppressor. The mask "hides" the deep pain and allows them to survive. The speaker in the poem says:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, —
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties (Dunbar 1997, p. 64).

The mask symbolizes a metaphor for African Americans striving to maintain their dignity while enduring hardship. Their humanity is overtly or covertly preserved under their masks. Arguably, the "We" used in the poem, echoes to all the Blacks leaving in America who are experiencing atrocious deeds in the face the White supremacists—those who impose the masks on them. The masks also reflect an image to the outsider, this leads the African Americans to preserve their emotional resilience. For, "torn and bleeding hearts", they have to "smile". According to Marilyn Sewell in "The Masks We Wear", people wear masks because they are asked to (1993, p. 6). She additionally opines: "sometimes people put on the mask of respectability. We do what is expected, what is demanded, even when we're dying inside. We hide our pain from others, we keep them from getting too close, because we don't want them to know us as we are" (1993, p. 6). Although the mask offers another identity, people are compelled to wear it in the world where nobody values authenticity. The mask presents an image which is in total contradiction with the inner self.

As stated earlier, African Americans resist daily oppressions in America—and this hardship seems to be a "debt" leading to the dehumanization of the Blacks in America. Masks are used to dwindle the hard experiences of Blacks, and keep their roots while facing adversity. In "With torn and bleeding hears we smile" (Dunbar 1997, p. 64), the poet reminds Du Bois' theory of double consciousness. The mask is

a device that hides the deep pain which contributes to the creation of strong personalities among black people. It equips them with the necessary courage to face adversity while showing comfort with the smile and may embarrass the oppressor. This strategy creates a false identity for the Blacks. The mask represents a person with double identity. This double consciousness as expressed by Du Bois, helps the African Americans navigate in a world which wants to see them behave accordingly. From this perspective of double identity and double consciousness, Dunbar's poem aligns with the postcolonial idea. Arguably, colonialism misrepresents identity and forces the colonized to see themselves through the eyes of the oppressors. In a word, wearing a mask in a hostile environment is a way of coping and a survival strategy. However, while wearing a mask may heap upon the oppressed or colonized to navigate a hostile environment, this can also create a conflict between appearance and reality which leads to hypocrisy and a distortion of their authentic identity.

2. Wearing a Mask: A Sign of Hypocrisy and Identity Distortion

Colonialism has created a huge chaos among the colonized people. Saurabh Dube, a critic, thinks that the colonial encounter and its aftermath have produced a power relations, stereotypes, and hierarchies among the colonized and colonizers. Arguably, black people are endowed with certain cultural values which define their identity. These values represent their identity and cultural heritage. In fact, the contact with European culture creates a duality which leads to double identity or double consciousness. According Du Bois, "double consciousness refers to the internal conflict experienced by African Americans as a result of living in a society that views them through a lens of racial prejudice" (Stalling <https://duboisweb.org/double-consciousness-web-du-bois-profound-concept/>). Through this, Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" echoes as double identity—where the African American's external appearance contradicts with the internal one. The African Americans endure systemic racism; however, they show a different face to the world where they are oppressed. The speaker of the poem says: "We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries/To thee from tortured souls arise" (Dunbar 1997, p. 64).

The outside world of the colonized, the wearing of the mask, contradicts the authentic personality. Indeed, from the perspective of postcoloniality, colonialism has heavily impacted the colonized through double identity. In African American context, slavery and racial discrimination grant slaves and the Blacks in America a second identity. For, during their contact, the master has obliged the slave to take him as a model or an inspiration for their development. In doing so, the slaves have begun to be looked as the way the master wants it—which is a total hypocrisy.

The identity of the freed slaves goes against their true authenticity. Historically, the Jim Crow law favors the separation but equal law to both the Blacks and Whites; however, the Blacks were compelled to behave and see themselves through the eyes of their former masters. This idea is due to the relationship between both of them. Indeed, there is a history of Blacks struggling to free themselves from the ways and manners imposed by their masters. Nevertheless, they find it difficult to get rid of these ways and manners, for, rather than revealing their authentic face to the world, they often present an image which contradicts their true identity—while adopting white conducts. According to Nicole Stalling, “W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness illuminates the inner turmoil faced by African Americans as they grapple with the duality of their identities, encompassing both their African heritage and American upbringing” (<https://duboisweb.org/double-consciousness-web-du-bois-profound-concept/>). Also, it will be noted that, the wearing of the mask is a personal choice but at the same time a colonial imposition which keeps the colonized in a total conformity. The colonized were living in a hypocritical society where people highly value false identity and punish an authentic one. The life of the poet is delineated through the poem “We Wear the mask”. The following is said about him:

Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1872. His mother was a former slave. His father had escaped from slavery and served in the Union Army during the Civil War. When Paul was only 2 years old, his father left the family. His mother earned a living washing the clothes of white families. Young Paul began to write poetry at the age of 6. He was the only black student at Dayton Central High School where he was a member of the debating society, editor of the school newspaper, and president of the school’s literary society (The JBHE Foundation, Inc <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4133648>)

Through the above account concerning the life of Dunbar, it can be inferred that he “wears the mask” to survive in his school. As the only Black child in a racist school—there is no other Black child with whom he can build a friendship. That is why he is compelled to conform to the expectation of the Whites. By doing so, he is not true to himself as to his literary production. He posits that “Dunbar’s poetic sensibility led him to subtle uses of irony and veiled allusions to racial dilemmas as he steadily made incursions against the dominant stereotypes of his day” (Gabbin 2007, p. 227).

Additionally, the wearing of the mask garbles the identity of the colonized. The false identity of the colonized is a form of self-alienation. Because the mask has transformed the colonized—there is a lack authenticity, for, “Why should the world be over-wise, /In counting all our tears and sighs?” (Dunbar 1997, p. 64).

The lasting impact of colonialism distorts the identity of the colonized which forces them to wear masks. Wearing the mask hides one face under another one, the other one being ungenune. According to Poirion and Weber, “a mask hides one face under another. But where is the real face? Nature and culture lay disputing claims to it, as the place to inscribe our true identity (1999, p. 13). As stated above, the wearing of the mask aims to hide a true identity and present a false one to the external world—an action which leads to alienation. Clearly, this identity distortion confirms the concern of the postcolonial theory which claims that the identity distortion is due to the lasting effects of colonial power; however, it can also be noticed as personal choice of the colonized, for, they are pleased to conform to the society in which they live; however, removing the mask—will allow them to show their true identity.

3. Removing the Mask: An Expression of Freedom

Although the mask allows the colonized to hide their true identity; it is not quite obvious to hide oneself. That is, they need to remove the mask and face the oppressor. Dunbar's poem highlights the harsh reality of African Americans. They were under the yoke of the White supremacists—that has led them to wear masks; however, a postcolonial reading of the Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" suggests that the poet is calling on the Blacks to show their identity through hardship. For him, if they remove their masks, it will allow them to show their sense of responsibility and their expression of true freedom. Indeed, the prime goal of postcolonial thinkers is to deconstruct the identity imposed by the master and affirm one's own identity. For this, "We sing, but oh the clay is vile/Beneath our feet, and long the mile; /But let the world dream otherwise (Dunbar 64).

The substance of these verses reveals that even though there is still a long way for Blacks to go for their self-assertion, it is worth hoping for a bright future. The removal of the mask for Blacks symbolizes courage, full emancipation and total independence. Dunbar is fully aware of Black people's double consciousness. As the mask serves as a tool of survival, removing it will heap upon the Blacks to resist the oppression and free himself from the lasting colonial legacy and affirm their authenticity. In fact, racial discrimination creates a division between the white people and the black one. Even performing tasks, it is unfair to notice that, the black man whom, with his forced identity tend to imitate the master is not valued accordingly. For instance,

Dunbar was acutely aware that, even after the black man was freed from the chains of chattel slavery, he became man- acclaimed to the hard labor of menial jobs; Dunbar fought most of his adult life the notion that his race was suited only for the meaner jobs that most white men refused to do. The only black student in his graduating high school class and an honor student, Dunbar watched his classmates go on to good jobs while he was finally able to hire on as an elevator boy (Candela 1976, p. 70).

This quotation supports the idea that the poet is committed to fighting for equal rights for all American citizens.

To access their freedom, Blacks in America and in the diaspora have to pay a heavy price: face challenges and overcome them. This of course, is not an easy task. This is due to the Jim Crow laws and many other discriminatory regulations in the United State. It was not easy for the freed slaves to easily find jobs while they maintain their authenticity. Those anti-conformists to white standards were in trouble. For instance, “Berry and Fannie, who both struggled to maintain their Southern rural moral principles, become blasted, hollow shells-caricatures, unable to survive the unmasking of Dunbar's social vision” (Candela 1976, p. 72). From this perspective, the society where the Blacks live highly value conformism—and this is seen as a tool to rightly impose the masks onto the Blacks.

However, to express one’s own and true identity, it is evident that the Blacks should face difficulty. Blacks or the colonized must remove the mask and face the adversity to find their liberty. Indeed, this will be achieved through hardship and resilience. With resistance, the colonized can remove the mask which serves as a tool for survival.

For we all wear masks, you see – we have to—and at the same time we all need those places where the mask comes off, and we can feel free to choose another of our inner characters, so to speak – where we can let go of “competent” and become bumbling; where we can give up performing and just play; where we stop saying “I’m just nine” and admit that we’re hurting. (Swell 1993, p. 2).

The mask serves as both a weapon and a poison because it helps the African Americans or the colonized people to protect themselves from the white people; however, the same mask restricts their true self. Not only do they wear the mask just to survive in a society that value them unjustly but also use it as a defense to face discrimination and racial prejudice. The same mask that is used for protection can become a burden which will ultimately force the African Americans or colonized people to hide their emotions, thoughts, and cultural values. So, living for too long behind a mask can lead to inner conflict and a disconnection from one’s authentic self—which will lead to the alienation of one’s identity. While the mask confirms survival, removing it becomes vital for regaining identity, self-esteem, and true self-expression.

Removing the mask and fighting for social justice and freedom of the Blacks in America should be a preoccupation of the African Americans. In a society that “values” false identity, the Blacks should remove their mask for their own personal growth and self-fulfillment. As their identity is imposed by the master, the removing the mask they wear will mean to stand for equality and the potential quest for social change. From this perspective,

The famous poetic lines of Dunbar and Du Bois, which speak to “removing the mask” and “lifting the veil,” urge us to contemplate the conditions of late nineteenth-century and the color line. Woven into these longings for social acceptance and equality are also issues of ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and sexuality. Despite the labors of civil rights advocates, we stand in the twenty-first century with similar dreams, fears, and struggles: some issues of justice appear to be unsolvable, but for others, ... the hope for inclusion and social harmony have dawned over the horizon (Durr 2016, p. 151).

The substance of the quotation is that the poet advocates for equality at various levels of the society to ensure social justice.

African Americans have experienced and continue to experience injustice and social inequality in various areas of life. Although they pretend to resemble the master while wearing the mask. This survival mechanism does not allow them to be fully integrated in the American society. They heavily face racism and through the color line. However, removing the mask—rejecting white attitudes and expressing themselves will guarantee them a total emancipation. Additionally, the mask disguises them by offering them additional image which contributes to their marginalization—for, they are not authentic. Similarly, Dunbar renders the mask as a paradoxical facade, describing Negro respectability, deference, and agreeability that shield the truth of humiliation, pain, and anger (Durr 2016, p. 152).

Interestingly, the conformity of the Blacks by wearing the mask contributes to their humiliation and their marginalization. As they are not themselves, there is no need to respect someone who is aware of his identity and reject it. This proves the inferiority; and thus, leads to injustice and unfairness. For instance, “the veils of ignorance and self-congratulation have been rent as the nation witnesses how little

black lives matter in shooting after shooting, denial of voting rights, growing economic inequality, repudiation of differing life partner choices, and sexual assault” (Durr 2016, p. 152). The wearing of the mask leads to all the humiliation towards Blacks. However, the conformity leads to alienation, and this finally contributes to the humiliation. Black “must” remove the mask and show themselves to the world even though they are not valued accordingly. This act will allow them to free themselves from the emotional pain.

In addition, the mask hides colonial pain and emotional torture. As soon as the Blacks remove the mask, they will find a way to endure the remaining pain that will allow them to heal the various wounds. The speaker says:

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask! (Dunbar 1997, p. 64)

It is obvious from the quotation that the poet uses oxymoron by combining “smile” and “cries”, two contradictory actions in the same sentence to express the complexity of the experience lived by Blacks. The two verbs express opposing actions to depict the deep complexity of the African American experience in a difficult environment. Arguably, “smiles” by wearing the mask expresses joy, self-confidence, and self-acceptance, at the same time “cries” highlights discomfort, pain, and continued struggle. This contrast uncovers the double consciousness as expressed by Du Bois. For, the African Americans are deeply oppressed by the Whites, however they still have hope for their liberation. This use of oxymoron contrasts the whole life experience of African American. They suffer from colonial legacy and at the same time show hypocritical face to the world in which they are oppressed. In the end, by using this oxymoron, the poet skillfully conveys the tension between survival and suffering which uncovers inner struggle that explains the living condition of the African American or the colonized people in their daily lives.

The colonial injuries and pain lead the Colonized or black people to wear the masks. Although it is painful, everything ends someday. The poet dreams of a better future for the Blacks. Martin Luther King Jr. mentioned that dream in his 1963 famous speech “I Have a Dream”. The poet calls on the world to “dream” differently by fighting all sorts of injustice in the world. There is hope for the Blacks to dream for their liberation. There is hope for the Blacks to be true to themselves. There is hope for the Black to stand and fight in the hostile world. From “But let the world dream otherwise”, the hope and dream may be deeply rooted in American Dream. In fact, “Dunbar grasps the universal cry for freedom, the inevitable theme of African American literature since black poets tried to sing in a strange land” (Gabbin 2007, p. 228). Although African Americans are living in a racist society, their literary production is a means to claim for social justice and racial equality.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to analyze the symbolism used by Dunbar to represent and censure the conscious or unconscious effort of the oppressed to behave in a hypocritical way in order to be accepted by their White counterparts. The paper has found that the mask worn by the downtrodden is used as a survival scheme. The mask hides the colonial pain and the emotional turmoil of the colonized or the oppressed group, particularly the African Americans. Additionally, the paper has found that the oppressed group tends to conform to the expectation of the others—a way that offers a false identity with double consciousness. The paper serves as an invitation for the Blacks in general and the oppressed in particular to decolonize their minds in order to be true to themselves and avoid wearing the colonial “mask”. It has also emphasized the challenging ways in which individuals in racist or colonial communities navigate identity, oppression, and the desire for liberation while they continue wearing the masks imposed by the dominant culture or colonial system. In the end, Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask”, drives the colonized or racial minorities group in America to remove the mask, and the face their fear for their independence.

Indeed, not wearing the mask is symbol of emancipation, growth and complete independence. That is why the poem ends on a hopeful note: But let the world dream otherwise,/We wear the mask!

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