The Trauma of the Colonial Heritage in *Doumat Wad Hamid* and *The Wedding of Zein* by Tayeb Salih

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Abstract

In Doumat Wad Hamid and The Wedding Of Zein, Tayeb Salih avails himself of the gothic to underscore the horrors of the colonial past and condemn bourgeois superiority. Creatively, he brings the gothic from old castles, towers and bourgeois old mansions to the commonplace habitats to speak up the distress of the colonial past and the abuse of the bourgeois group. The Sudanese society is still troubled by the nightmare of colonialism and cannot move beyond it owing to a decadent postcolonial political system being applied. The gothic space and grotesque characters are staged to divulge the intensity of the colonial aftereffects still effective in current time. Thus, the postcolonial gothic engages with memory to voice the grim reality of everyday life. In the blurring of past/present, Salih speaks up the agonies of the Sudanese people.

Keywords: Colonialism, government, gothic, postcolonial, grotesque, legend, Sudanese, myth, culture.

Introduction

Some critics of the novellas, *The Wedding of Zein*[1] and *Doumat Wad Hamid*,[2]such as Berkley Constance (1979) and Wail Seddik Hassan (1998) have tended to underline the touch of mysticism and the spiritual regeneration of Zein and Wad Hamid. Zein is the prophet of love and peace and the village clown, too. He permeates love and fun wherever he moves in every nook and cranny of the village. Wad Hamid is "the God's pious man" (DWH 7) the saviour and the healer. Salih's vision shuttles between hope and disappointment filtered through fits of social indictment of a reactionary society, predisposed to license social change while sustaining its stability and cultural uniformity. Though Salih projects the crucial role of the secular authority in the village, working a great deal to maintain peace, the predominance of the dogmatic belief and the abusive governing stand against social progress. Social unity is a precondition for social progress. Zein, for instance, is a marker of social unity, especially during his marriage where people come from different social layers in droves. However, their integration within a social order that is governed by orthodox religious figures and corrupted secular authority is unlikely possible. Salih' s critical rage is raised against the following fronts: the futility of the syncretic belief to accommodate social progress, and, most outstandingly, the traumatic effect of the ghost of empire and the ensuing corruptive secular regime.

Literature Review and Major Findings

Some literary critics have tried their pens to study the literary world of Tayeb Salih. Constance E. Berkley's *The Roots of Consciousness Molding the Art of Tayeb Salih, A Contemporary Sudanese Novelist* (New York University, 1979) underlines the social and historical state of affairs in Sudan that shaped the formation of Salih's "consciousness" as an artist. Wail Seddik Hassan 's Tayeb Salih, *Culture, History and Memory* (Urbana, Illinois, 1998) analyses the significance of culture and history in determining the Sudanese society. Hussein Hasan Zeidanin, "Psychological and Cultural Borderlands in Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*", Australian International Academic Centre (Australia, 2016) focuses on the psychological and cultural import in *Season of Migration to the North*. Most critical studies were carried by *Season of Migration to the North*. Novellas, such as DWH, The WOZ among many others, are still underexplored. Few critics such asDavid McInnis, "Re-orienting the Gothic romance: Jean Rhys, Tayeb Salih, and strategies of representation in the Postcolonial Gothic" (2008)

[1]Hereafter refers to as WOZ
[2]Hereafter refers to as DWH

have focused on the gothic in Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* by projecting the gothic doubling in the novel.

The thrilling and mysterious description in Salih's other stories is an inviting research area to explore the artistic virtuosity of Salih in fusing myth, culture, history and gothic to speak up his mind. Through such an amalgam, basically in DWH and WOZ, Salih points to the persisting haunting effect of the colonial era.

The Myth

Salih's texts, DWH and WOZ, attest to his frustration with the blinding effect of the myth as a setback against all sorts of creativity and change. The text foregrounds the Sudanese as simple-minded in matters that are related to popular Islam. He aspires to abandon myth for progressive thinking in the Sudanese society. First, let's pin down the term Myth. Robert. E. Segal defines Myth as a story. He maintains:

That myth, whatever else it is, is a story may seem self-evident. After all, when asked to name myths, most of us think first of stories about Greek and Roman gods and heroes. Yet myth can also be taken more broadly as a belief or credo – for example, the American 'rags to riches myth' and the American 'myth of the frontier'. Horatio Alger wrote scores of popular novels illustrating the rags to riches myth, but the credo itself does not rest on a story. The same is true of the myth of the frontier. (Segal 4)

Myths then are simply not just stories about demons and gods. Literature that represents some of the traits of myths without making straight reference to stories about demons and gods may also be mythical. The texts suggest that Salih is not against the search for spiritual identity for the Sudanese of Wad Hamid as what they have in common is revealed in mystical myths and deeply entrenched in their collective memory. However, he is firmly antithetical to the ongoing impediment of the mythical thinking against social change and transformation. In an interview, he exclaims:

I accept the world of magic, and this is quite evident in *The Wedding of Zein*, written in the late fifties and ... published in the early sixties. In this novel, the world is not secular and things do not go according to scientific rules. There are miracles . . . because that is the reality in such a society, in such an environment where I grew up. It is not much different from Egyptian society. *I do accept the beliefs of the people on condition that they must be transformed. These beliefs, this collective potential must be exploited in a positive direction and transformed into ... a new myth.* . . . The most secular piece of work which I have written is *Season of Migration to the North.* If people think there are new miracles happening, then I don't show any signs of disrespect. (Berkley and Osman 7)

Salih emphasizes his approval of the overriding popular belief: "I do accept" at a time where the power of myths is shaping the Sudanese society though he disengages himself from it by the use of the distancing marker "such". Latently, he invites his readers to hold his belief that basically calls for a new myth appropriate to accommodate the diversity of Sudanese culture all at once, in a way that embraces the natural social metamorphoses in an age of modernity. DWH corroborates this reading:

'There will not be the least necessity for cutting down the doum tree. There is not the slightest reason for the tomb to be removed. What all these people have overlooked is that there's plenty of room for all these things: the doum tree, the tomb, the water-pump, and the steamer's stopping-place.'(DWH 19)

The Myth of the Doum Tree

The myth of the doum tree in the village of Doumat Wad Hamid deactivates their rational thinking since "it is like some mythical eagle spreading its wings over the village and everyone in it" (DWH 3). The village where virtually all the endeavours in Salih's stories are taking place is named after a saint or wali, Wad Hamid, a slave of a wicked man. The doum tree where the prayer- mats put him down after the journey of deliverance by God "holds its head aloft to the skies, its roots strike down into the earth" (6). It is like some "mythical eagle spreading its wings over the village and everyone in it" (7). The regenerative power of the doum tree derives its strength from the tomb of the saint, Wad Hamid, being placed under its shade in so far as "every new generation finds the doum tree as though it had been born at die time of their birth and would grow up with them" (6).Being gripped by its shadow, each generation fairly considers it their savior from diseases and troubles by dint of meeting the spirit of Wad Hamid in their dreams in its vicinity. The deeply–seated spiritual significance of the doum tree shaping the life of the villagers inhibits them to tolerate changes of modernity as they are mere slaves to its mythical power. Salih's dream is distinct from the villagers' dream of the doum tree that tightly grips them like a heavy incubus. The indulgence of "contradictions that came together in the WOZ" (WOZ 113) is part of his potential dream that comes true in the literary world of The WOZ as he confirms in an interview that "*The*

Wedding of Zein represents my hopes and dreams which I wish could be realized within human society"(Berkley xxxxiii).

His dream involves a haunting thrust as well that revolves around putting the Sudanese society into operation to catch up with modernity while preserving its unity. He firmly believes the "solution" is "to gather the contradictions within a (unifying) social fabric" (ixix).

Speaking to Sybil al-Muqabila, Salih claims that he idolizes his society. The text reads:"[e]verything that I write shows my respect and my admiration for that society in which I lived, and which I idolized" (xxx). However, his cultural hybridity makes him torn between two distinct worlds: the traditional Sudanese cultural heritage and the Western cultural values such as modernity, liberty and equality. Apparently, his texts celebrate the spiritual life of the native Sudanese but, on a close scrutiny, they bring Western modern values to the forefront.

To all appearances, DWH speaks for the Sudanese cultural values since the narrator (the old man) tries to cajole the visitor (the younger narrator) to adopt his frame of mind towards the myth of the doum tree as an identity marker. The reiterated use of the term of endearment in the Arab world, "my son", and the deictic verb of sensation "look" once the old man narrator is introducing the doum tree- "look how it holds its head aloft….look at its full, sturdy trunk" (DWH 3)- are taken to provide significant clues indicating a subjective narration heading to influence the addressee. The narrator-observer wants to confine his addressee and his readers overall to his point of view, vision, conception and interpretation of the central consciousness of Wad Hamid's villagers.

The frame narratives in the text of DWH are involved to give credence to the story of the doum tree, representing the essence of history and culture of Wad Hamid village. It is the museum where cultural and historical artefacts are kept connecting the past to the present. The text reads:

[b]efore you leave, though, let me show you one thing something which, in a manner of speaking, we are proud of. In the towns you have museums, places in which the local history and the great deeds of the past are preserved. This thing that I want to show you can be said to be a museum. It is one thing we insist our visitors should see. (DWH 2)

The doum tree is the cardinal object that dominates the narrative event of the exhibition. It stands for an archive of artefacts able to trigger memories both individual and cultural where past, present and future come together. It transcends the historical distance of time through memories and connects it to present, giving prominence to the cultural identity of the villagers. Commanding not only the spiritual life of the villagers but their physical world, it turns into a living idol. Once again, Salih succinctly states:

Here it is: the doum tree of Wad Hamid. Look how it holds its head aloft to the skies; look how its roots strike down into the earth; look at its full, sturdy trunk, like the form of a comely woman, at the branches on high resembling the mane of a frolicsome steed! In the afternoon, when the sun is low, the doum tree casts its shadow from this high mound right across the river so that someone sitting on the far bank can rest in its hade. At dawn, when the sun rises, the shadow of the tree stretches across the cultivated land and houses right up to the cemetery. (DWH2)

The idea of the sacred tree is well known in the cult of the Eastern world such as in Assyria, ancient Palestine, and Egypt. In Assyria, M. Menant posits from his thorough study of "the cylinders, that the worship of the sacred tree in Assyria was intimately associated with that of the supreme deity, its symbol being incontestably one of the most sacred emblems of the Assyrian religion" (Philpot 6). In Ancient Palestine, Amongst the Canaanites every altar to the god had its sacred tree beside it, and when the Israelites established local sanctuaries under their influence, they set up their altar under a green tree, and planted beside it as its indispensable accompaniment an ashera, which was either a living tree or a tree-like post, and not a "grove," as rendered in the Authorised Version. This ashera was undoubtedly worshipped as a sacred symbol of the deity (8).

In Egypt, trees were unreservedly revered, along with other objects, as the stronghold of diverse divinities."The splendid green sycamores", for instance, that grew next to the river Nile was worshipped by Egyptians wholesale (9).The village of Wad Hamid is anchored in the roots of the doum tree and is fed upon its spiritual energy. In the aforementioned passage, it is related to a graceful woman with a fetishistic power, wielding its supernatural power on the living villagers as well as the dead since they are under the auspices of its misty shade altogether. It symbolizes the idea of protection and growth. The villagers are also sheltered by the shade of the doum tree from the heat of sun and the eventualities of life as it furnishes them with healing qualities.

Its roots deeply stuck down into the earth represent the spiritual growth of the villagers that is indispensable to come to terms with the physical world.

In DWH, Salih applies the second-person narrative perspective: "you" directly referring to the addressee of the utterance (the young man visitor), where the homodiegetic narrator through the direct interaction tries to inform him by means of his beliefs and invites him to step into his role.The second- person perspective is customarily used for instructions and directions. The narrative also involves subjective analepses such as the story of the "crocodile" (10). In WOZ, Salih employs the third-person omniscient narrative stand where readers are kept within his perspective. The narrator stands between the reader and the story. The disadvantage of this narrative method is that the narrator is so subjective that his storytelling nurtures cracks and fissures to voice another reality; namely his town mates are blindfolded by their dogmatic belief in their search for a collective identity and belonging.

The Blinding Effect of the Myth of the Doum Tree

Though the doum tree is a marker of the identity of the villagers of Wad Hamid, it also unfolds the dogmatic belief reigning in the village, standing against any kind of progress. The other side of the same coin carried by the narrative is revealed by the narrator while speaking to the preacher sent by the government: "'O Sheikh,' I said to him, 'there is nothing in our village to show you" (2). This statement betrays Salih's avowal that everything he writes shows his respect and his admiration for the Sudanese society (Berkley xxx). In fact, the villagers stand against the building of a port in their village because it is planned to be established in the place of the doum tree, which they consider as consecrated. As the government official enthusiastically informs the villagers that a port is brought to their village, unexpectedly, they react coldly, "where will the stopping place be?" someone asks him after a period of silence. Fumbling for words, the official responds that "there is only one suitable place-where the doum tree stood". The villagers feel as astonished as seeing "a woman [who] had been brought and had her stand among those men as naked as the day her mother bore her" (DWH 10). Pursuant to the myth of doum tree, the villagers prefer mythic belief to progress and modernity. However, Salih's cultural hybridity is unfolded on the occasion the old man narrator responds to the visitor's question as regards the time to see reformation in the village:

I mentioned to you that my son is in the town studying at school,' he replied. 'It wasn't I who put him there; he ran away and went there on his own, *and it is my hope that he will stay where he is and not return*. When my son's son passes out of school and the number of young men with souls foreign to our own increases, then perhaps the water-pump will be set up and the agricultural scheme put into being- maybe then the steamer will stop at our village-under the doum tree of Wad Hamid.'(19 emphasis added)

The wishful thought of the narrator that his son would stay in the town to finish his study voices Salih's conviction that the dogmatic belief has to be exorcised by the power of science to catch up with modernity. Further, many a time Salih presents a grim reality of Wad Hamid' s village ranging from the gothic description of the space to the humorous depiction of its inhabitants.

The Gothic as a Backlash against the Colonial Lingering Effect:

Salih's novels are a hetroglot ground where competing discourses are at play. The hybrid multi-layered discourse is originated from the fusion of the traditional Sudanese heritage and his Western education. Along with the discourse of the celebration of the traditional heritage of the Sudanese culture, the narrative of DWH bears the traces of another discourse as a throwback to the haunting effect of the colonial past, projecting the gothic space of DWH and making the borders between both discourses very ambiguous. David Punter explains that postcolonial gothic does not restrict itself to writing back but it is a literature of loss (25). For Punter, it is implausible that we will find a colonized territory that does not suffer from its own ghosts of the past (60).

The texts examined in this article are not necessarily easily classified as 'gothic' in a traditional European sense rather they appear to be seeped in the Gothic. According to David Punter and Glennis Byron, the Gothic is "a notoriously difficult field to define" (Punter and Byron xviii). Actually, the gothic has long been considered as a genre that goes beyond boundaries; we might say that it transcends boundaries not only in its content but in its form as well. In this vein, William Hughes argues that contemporary literature involves both the Gothic and the postcolonial: "Gothic *has* to be the face of the postcolonial because," he maintains, "the culture of Gothic - grandiose, oppressive, deviant and yet awesome in the power of its presence – is somehow not merely the face of the past, but of the imperialist past also".

In DWH, the sinister site is not placed in the castle or the old mansion. But, its setting marked by violent acts of the past is located in "bewitched spot[s]", to use Rapaport's expression (415).

The space of Doumat Wad Hamid is under the spell of the relic doum tree. It is imbued with a ghostly mood making out of it a terrified place to reside in. The narrator keeps insisting to the visitor that tomorrow he will leave:"[t]omorrow you will depart from our village, of this I am sure, and you will be right to do so …Tomorrow you will depart, my son- I know that" (DWH 2). The gloomy atmosphere of the village's location is underlined from the outset of the story where the old man narrator exults in presenting the access to the village as hard as the entry to haunted old castles or wild jungles. The mood of darkness is highlighted by the gothic opacity attributed to the village from the first lines: "you would find that a dark cloud had descended over the village" (1). As the narrative moves on, the gothic mood is further exaggerated:

This, my son, did not will not be dust, nor yet that mist which rises up after rainfall. It would be a swarm of those sand-flies which obstruct all paths to those who wish to enter our village. Maybe you have seen this pest before, but I swear that you have never seen this particular species. Take this gauze netting, my son, and put it over your head. While it won't protect you against these devils, it will at least help you to bear them. (1)

Salih creates an intense mood of gloom and horror by the virtue of connotative epithets such as "pest" and "devils". The word choice and the figurative language contribute to the gloomy mood of the village. The diction being used reflects the disconsolate tone of Salih as well. Both the tone and mood invite the reader to participate in the moment, to become part of the scene, and to experience the same feeling. Through the gloomy atmosphere, Salih sounds referring back to underscore the ravages of the colonial system in a space haunted by the specter of the colonial ghost. The villagers are leading a dystopian life invaded by sand and horse flies, depriving even the government officials from making reforms. This idea is traced in the following passage:

That was in the time of foreign rule. The flies assisted them too-the horse-flies. The man was surrounded by the clamoring people shouting that if the doubter were cut down they would fight the government to the last man, while the flies played havoc with the man's face.(4)

The space of Doumat Wad Hamid inscribes familiar sites but it involves a monument namely the doum tree, as a "mythical eagle", "as cryptic as a talisman", (4-6) connected with haunting dream stories, making the narrative loose and boundaries ambiguous.

Dream-like stories, as the undermentioned woman hallucination story, looking for supernatural aid from the transgenerational vision of the pious man, Wad Hamid, are upheld by the colonial scheme to entrench false beliefs. Interrupting the narrative flow, the narrator recounts some of the villagers' dreams:

You can also hear one of the women telling her friend; 'It was as though I were in a boat sailing through a channel in the sea, so narrow that I could stretch out my hands and touch the shore on either side. I found myself on the crest of a mountainous wave which carried me upwards till I was almost touching the clouds, and then bore me down into a dark, bottomless pit. I began shouting in my fear, but my voice seemed to be trapped in my throat. Suddenly I found the channel opening out a little. I saw that on the two shores were black, leafless trees with thorns, the tips of which were like the heads of hawks. I saw the two shores closing in upon me and the trees seemed to be walking towards me. I was filled with terror and called out at the top of my voice, "O Wad Hamid!" As I looked I saw a man with a radiant face and a heavy white beard flowing down over his chest, dressed in spotless white and holding a string of amber prayer-beads. Placing his hand on my brow he said: "Be not afraid," and I was calmed. Then I found the shore opening up and the water flowing gently. I looked to my left and saw fields of ripe corn, water-wheels turning, and cattle grazing, and on the shore stood the doum tree of Wad Hamid. The boat came to rest under the tree and the man got out, tied up the boat, and stretched out his hand to me. He then struck me gently on the shoulder with the string of beads, picked up a doum fruit from the ground and put it in my hand. When I turned round he was no longer there. (7-8)

The woman is not to blame for her hallucinations since it is a common illusion handed down from one generation to another. The counter discourse here is that the lack of knowledge makes out of these simple-minded people blind believers in hollow relics, hindering them from capitalizing on the welfare of modernity. The gothic thrust colouring the whole scene in terms of the supernatural touch, the appearance of vision, and the feeling of terror disrupts the linear time as the vision appears in a time in which he does not belong, whispering to the readers the echoes of past memories, the ghost of empire, that still have their dire effects on the present living conditions.

What invites the readers' attention in the WOZ is the gothic space of the novella too, as a way of speaking back to the colonial encounter. The village's location is depicted as "a deserted ruin rumored to be haunted" (33), marking the Sudanese mythical conviction that deserted lands or buildings are occupied by evil spirits.

Most of the events are taking place at night in the Valley of the Jinn: "lights came into view, also the assembled shapes that rose and fell like devils in the Valley of the Jinn" (56). The eye-catching word "night" is repeated about 42 times in the narrative to epitomize darkness and regression.

Similarly, the events in DWH are taking place at night to add to the gothic atmosphere of the novella. Arguably, the old man narrator states: When you leave us tomorrow-and you will certainly do so, swollen of face and inflamed of eye- it will be fitting if you do not curse us but rather think kindly of us and of the things that I have told you this night (15). The night is connected with stillness, fear and death. The villagers suffer enormously at night from sand and horse flies that are grotesquely described as "enormous flies the size of young sheep". The exaggeration goes on:"They are savage flies, my son: they bite, sting, buzz, and whirr" (1). They play a havoc on each visitors' face so scarcely could anyone of them spend more than one or two nights successively in the village. The sordid atmosphere is communicated in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where the flies symbolize evil and backwardness:"It was hot there, too; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting, but stabbed" (20). Many a time, flies emerge in scenes of death:"the sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace" (21). If the hell imagery in Conrad's text comes to project Africa's dire need of light and colonisation, the squalid conditions of the village in DWH are the aftermath of the horror of colonialism that makes the villagers victims for the ghostly past shaping their shocking everyday reality. The living conditions of the village are ensued by the politics of colonialism that works great deal to stiffen the hygienic boundaries between the metropole and colonial territory by rewriting the imperialistic stories that reinforce the colonial legacy. In the cultural scheme of things, these stories breed and maintain a capitalist society in the colonies teemed with inherent contradictions, revolving around unfounded behavior.

The gothic spaces in DWH and WOZ exhibit unfamiliar farcical characters projecting the horror of colonialism. The Sudanese are freed and liberated from the physical bondage of colonialism but are still imprisoned by their material and psychological scars. Catherine Spooner claims: "[i]n Gothic texts, therefore, the past is a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved, an evil that must be exorcised" (18). In DWH, the villagers are presented poles apart from the mainstream:"We are thick-skinned people and in this we differ from others" (2). The preacher is grotesquely juxtaposed to a cow's lung: "He raised his face which was like the lung of a slaughtered cow; his eyes (as I said) were firmly closed; though I knew that behind the lashes there lurked a certain bitterness" (6). Salih attributes a grotesque imagery to the local villagers to refer back to the colonial scars still informing their current present. Alison Rudd justifies this reading: "postcolonial Gothic writers 'speak of culturally specific histories, traumas and locations' through 'culturally specific ghosts" (qtd. in Misha 169).[3] The preacher in a Moslem society has the function of enhancing the spiritual life of people, but in this case, he is used to unearth the social decadence of the Sudanese society as he concludes "that these are people who are in no need of me or of any other preacher" (DWH 3). As a matter of fact, they do not need spiritual awakening or expansion of consciousness but they are on a dire need to get rid of the delusions and fantasies of their society. They are fooled by an optical mirage and the government is fooling them to believe in "the delights of the primitive life" (2).

These grotesque characters transgress the borders separating the fantastic from the real, the imaginary from the historical and the human from non-human. The recurrent vision of Wad Hamid, the pious person, sets the frontier between the fantastic and flimsy reality. The dream world of the villagers has a great effect on their daily life making it an estranged world. Legends, such as Wad Hamid, are firmly and acutely associated to a society's past and, in this respect, they bring elements from the past to the present. Another side of the estrangement of the villagers' world lies in the degradation of the villagers to the rank of animals. The narrative of DWH goes so far to claim: "[w]e and our animals are alike: we rise in the morning when they rise and go to sleep when they sleep, our breathing and theirs following one and the same pattern" (13). The transgression of borders could initiate a sensation of fear and terror since the known is transformed and becomes unknown. This transgression carried by grotesque characters implies a fluid identity antithetical to the colonial static one and are attached to culture-specific elements that are a part of the ideological resistance.

[3] Quoted. in Kavka, Misha. *Review of Postcolonial Gothic Fictions from the Caribbean , Canada , Australia and New Zealand*, by Alison Rudd (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 148.

The grotesque imagery is applied to trigger the readers' thought to consider the effects of colonialism that makes local people paralyzed and transfixed in front of the dilemmatic predicament of precipitating social change without losing their collective identity.

The legendary portrait of Zein in WOZ is staged by Salih to strike an equilibrium between social change and the preservation of cultural values. However, the characterization of Zein is associated with borders transgression. Throughout the narrative, he plays two distinct roles, namely, the fool and the messenger of love.

Partly, Zein stands for Salih's hope to create a world full of hope and harmony. Once, he confirms: "As for Zein, the hero of *The Wedding of Zein*, he is all heart, and compassion, and love and life. The world is beautiful just as I wish it to be, it is the world of *The Wedding of Zein*" (qtd. in Berkley xxxxiv). The figure of Zein reverberates with laughter, love and spirituality.

On the authority of his mother, Zein was born laughing"[a]nd so it was throughout his life" (WOZ 33). Laughter "had become part of the village ever since Zein was born" (33). The presence of Zein brings an air of fun and pleasure in every nook and cranny he has visited: "continuing to give vent to that strange and singular laughter that resembled a donkey's braying". Inflamed by his contagious laughter, "everyone else would burst into loud reverberating guffaws. Collecting himself, Zein would wipe the tears away with his cuff" (34). His name is also associated with happy events such as wedding feasts and exchanging jokes with women:

[W]hen the wedding took place, if you looked around for Zein, you'd find him either working away at filling pitchers and large ewers with water, or standing bare-chested, axe in hand, in the middle of a courtyard cutting up firewood, or exchanging good-natured banter with the women in the kitchen, while from time to time they fed him with tit-bits and he'd burst out into that laugh of his, so like a donkey's braying. (43)

In this sense, Zein is treated as fool and not taken seriously even by womenfolk. Therefore, many a time, he shows up amidst women teasing and pinching them:

When at sunset work in the field comes to an end and the people take themselves off to their houses, Zein walks home from the field amidst a large crowd of young men, boys and girls, all laughing merrily around him, as he struts about among them, striking a young man on the shoulder, pinching a girl's cheek, and making leaps into the air. (38)

Zein is a single child in his family, but he manages with his merry nature to make the villagers love him specially the needy and disadvantaged persons like Al- Haneen , Deaf Ashmana and Mousa the Lame. Zein is a victim of love even before maturity age. He is well-known by his love stories in the village. The narrative goes as follows:

Zein was first slain by love when he had still not attained manhood. He was thirteen or fourteen at the time and was as thin and emaciated as a dried-up stalk. Whatever people might say about Zein, they acknowledged his impeccable taste, for he fell in love with none but the most beautiful girls, the best mannered and most pleasant of speech. (39)

As a women lover, each time he is slain by one of the most beautiful girls in the village. Without fuss, immediately as his beloved is betrothed to another man, he gets into a new romance. Zein is also known in the village by his ability to win the hearts of the destitute people. In this vein, the text goes on: "Zein had numerous friendships of this sort with persons whom the villagers regarded as abnormal, such as Deaf Ashmana, Mousa the Lame, and Bekheit who was born deformed with no upper lip and a paralyzed left side" (45). He is believed to have a supernatural power to lure the majority of the villagers to his vicinity. The narrative carries on:

The people of the village, seeing these acts of Zein's, would be even more amazed; perhaps he was the legendary Leader, the Prophet of God, perhaps an angel sent down by God in lowly human form in order to remind His worshippers that a great heart may yet beat even in one of concave breast and ridiculous manner such as Zein. (45)

Zein sounds to have a harmonizing force that inspires love and peace. He is a spiritual guide endowed by God's love in the Sufi tradition. Salih accounts for this reading: "Zein, in my opinion, represents the creative Sufi aspect. He has gathered them through love. He loves them all. Love is the only means of gathering people (qtd. in Berkley 41).

Antithetical to his moral portrait, his physical description does not bring to mind his good looking as his name "Zein" implies in the Arab culture. His figure is very different from all his town mates. His birth is distinct as a legendary hero since he was born laughing instead of crying.

His physical stature is digressive and eccentric as "on attaining manhood no hair had sprouted on his chin or upper lip" (34). This disposition brings Zein closer to the fool rather than the prophet of love. Accordingly, Salih States:
Zein had an elongated face with prominent bones to his cheeks, his jaw, and under the eyes. His forehead was rounded and jutted out; his eyes were small and permanently bloodshot, their sockets deeply set in his face like two caverns. His face was completely hairless, with neither eyebrows nor eyelashes, and on attaining manhood no hair had sprouted on his chin or upper lip. This face of his was supported by a long neck (among the nicknames given to Zein by the children was 'the giraffe') which stood on two powerful shoulders that straddled the rest of the body, forming a triangle. The two long arms were like those of a monkey, the hands coarse with extended fingers ending in long, sharp nails (Zein never pared them). His chest was concave, his back slightly hunched, while his legs were long and spindly like those of a crane. His feet were splayed and bore the traces of ancient scars (Zein disliked wearing shoes), and he remembered the story behind each one of them. (33-4)

The grotesque is applied in imperial literature to disparage the other, but it is staged by Salih to highlight boundary crossings. *The NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the grotesque as the following:
Anything distorted, ugly, abnormal, fantastic or bizarre to the point of being ludicrous or absurd . . . when applied to LITERATURE the term grotesque refers to a type of writing, to a kind of CHARACTER by exaggeration and distortion of the natural or the expected. A work of FICTION may be called grotesque if it involves physically or psychologically deformed characters whose actions are abnormal, incongruous, or comically absurd. (Morner& Rausch 93)

The reductive aspect of the grotesque is foregrounded as it disparages human beings to the ranks of objects and animals. In the above-mentioned passage, Zein is associated with a giraffe, donkey and a crane. He is fetishized as mere limbs: "elongated face, prominent bones, jaw, forehead, eyes, shoulder, fingers". Parsing Zein into metonymic icons and regressing him to inscribe animalistic behavior induce a mixture of fear, uncertainty and sinister laughter. In this respect, he is a mobile subject, representing the necessary frontier between man and chaos. He is a borderland, sharing the structures of different frontiers: he is neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown. The employment of the grotesque implies a desperate literary reaction to the decadence and the anxiety of the postcolonial Sudan. William Nelson sees the grotesque as "a reflection of the alienated world: that is to say, our world is turned into one that is strange and ominous, one that denies our ordinary perception of a universe familiar if not always safe, orderly, analyzable and thereby, to some degree, understandable" (50).
Salih turns the village of Wad Hamid into a grand fantasy-theater marked by queer performance and textual violence, reflecting the ghost of the colonial past still operative in an alienated present.

The Gothic as a Means to Question the Nation State

Through the narrative depiction of the space and characters of DWH and WOZ, Salih sounds putting the sovereignty of the nation state into question. To quote Said: "(I)mperialism…lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social practices" (8). The structure and performance of the Sudanese postcolonial state is still haunted by the colonial heritage. Ali Taisier (1989) argues that the state in the Sudan, "remained after independence, in essence unchanged" (60). Fatima Mahmoud vindicates that, "[a]fter independence in 1956, the nature of the state did not change " (15). She displays the impact of the Sudanese bourgeoisie in shaping the policies of the post-colonial state and, particularly, in manipulating the process of the accumulation of capital and the increase of wealth (6). The policies of the post-colonial state served the privileges of interest groups. The post-colonial state, on the other hand, was not unquestionably self-governing. Niblock maintains that, "the pre-1969 Sudanese state enjoyed only limited autonomy. It was controlled fairly directly by the 'incipient bourgeoisie!, through the influence which the Sudanese establishment could exert on the main political parties and on the military leadership" (233). Against this backdrop, Salih levels tacit criticism to the government by divulging its vulnerable policy towards social and economic change.

In DWH, Salih points at the prompt and groundless changeability of the governments in the post-colonial era. This quotation seems quite relevant:

One day they told us that the government which had driven out imperialism had been substituted by an even bigger and noisier government. 'And who has changed it?' we asked them, but received no answer. As for us, ever since we refused to allow the stopping place to be set up at the doum tree no one has disturbed our tranquil existence. Two years passed without our knowing what form the government had taken, black or white. Its emissaries passed through our village without staying in it, while we thanked God that He had saved us the

trouble of putting the mup. So things went on till, four years ago, a new government came into power. As though this new authority wished to make us conscious of its presence, we awoke one day to find an official with an enormous hat and small head, in the company of two soldiers, measuring up and doing calculations at the doum tree. We asked them what it was about, to which they replied that the government wished to build a stopping-place for the steamer under the doum tree. 'But we have already given you our answer about that,' we told them. 'What makes you think we'll accept it now?''The government which gave in to you was a weak one,' they said, 'but the position has now changed. 'To cut a long story short, we took them by the scruffs of their necks, hurled them into the water, and went off to our work. (DWH 15-16)

Salih notes that governments follow each other but all of them are much ado about nothing. They have done nothing for the village except "the marble plaque standing on a stone pedestal with 'The doum tree of Wad Hamid written on it "along with" the doum tree with the gilded crescents above the tomb. They are the only new things about the village since God first planted it here"(4). A new government capitalizes on the upheaval due to the case of the doum tree to topple down the previous one pays a reassuring visit to the village but after taking over, they have never shown up there. This case is not gratuitous but might be staged to poke fun at the manipulative and profiteering intent of the new bureaucratic regime.

In the WOZ, the government is represented through its agents such as Imam, Omda and the bourgeois group bearing the greatest nepotism, involving Mahjoub, Abdul Hafeez, Taher Rawwasi, Hamad Wad Rayyis, Ahmed Isma'il and Sa'eed. These agents foreground the abusive governing of the oligarchical government. Indeed, the government distributes power to these agents while disregarding the ordinary people. For instance, the government contributes to the speculation of the cotton by limiting its deal to Mahjoub, one of the most important member of the bourgeois group. The text reads: "The government, for the first time in history, had permitted them to cultivate it[cotton], whereas previously it had been restricted to specified districts of the country. (Mahjoub alone, and on his own admission, made more than a thousand pounds from his cotton) (WOZ 77). The regime is not conferring equal opportunities to its citizens as its policies are enlarging the gulf between social layers. A lot of people in the WOZ are living on the fringe of life such Mousa the lame, Deaf Ashmana, and the deformed Bekheit while the government encourages speculation and unequal division of wealth. This idea is well illustrated in the following passage:

Also true is the fact that the government, that creature which in their anecdotes they likened to a refractory donkey, decided all at once- again for no apparent reason- to build in their village, to the exclusion of the rest of the villages of the northern sector of the country, a large hospital for five hundred patients, a secondary school, and an agricultural school. (77)

Unexpectedly, the regime is associated with a refractory donkey. It implies its idleness and lethargy. Groundless, it launches some projects in the village of Wad Hamid to the exclusion of other villages which are in fervent need for these reforms.

Mahjoub's "gang", as they are known (99), plays the role of the surrogate government. They carry the greatest influence in the village, thereupon, no task could be realized without their permission. Their role throws the government's affairs into disregard. In this vein, the text puts:"Every government officer who turned up at the village, and anyone with any business to put through, soon ran this group of men to earth, for no task could be carried out successfully, no work accomplished, unless he came to an understanding with them" (92). Besides being not able to manage any job without seeking the gang's consent, the government officials have to be hosted for a distinctive dinner at the behest of the gang to discuss any matter before meeting the village's inhabitants:"If some government representative descended on the village- and they came but seldom-it was they who received him and put him up, killing a sheep or lamb for him, and argued matters out with him in the morning before he met any of the villagers (92). Hardly ever do the government agents visit the village and so doing they have to succumb to Mahjoub's gang regulations instead of the government's. Instead of the government, representatives in the village such Omda, Mahjoub's gang organize the village's affairs such as "making committee responsible for everything", "reprimand[ing]" women for misbehavior and dismissing foreigners (92).

Omda and the Imam have nominal power. They are not much lucky than the government agents as they cannot act out without Mahjoub's gang approval. Omda is an opportunist and a manipulative person. He takes advantage of Zein's love for his daughter, Azza, to assign him unbearable chores: "The Omda knew how to exploit Zein's emotions and gave him any number of arduous tasks which would have defeated the jinn themselves" (40). Still, he is at the mercy of Mahjoub's gang as they negotiate "taxes" to be collected by him (92).

The Imam is also at the mercy of Mahjoub's gang. He is not interested in his townmates' affairs but even "contemptuous" (88) of them. He is a source of pessimism and despair. With a sense of aversion, the narrator posits:"His eyes held a look of scorn and disdain, the impact of which made itself felt when a man had lost confidence in himself. He was like the large domed tomb in the middle of the cemetery (90)". The Imam is detested by the majority of the villagers including Zein, the youngsters and Mahjoub's gang (91). He is under the gang's thrall as they pay him his salary rather than the government.

Conclusion

Salih makes use of the gothic to underline the horrors of the colonial past and undermine bourgeois superiority. He does not apply the gothic "through a list of stock elements, such as crumbling castles, supernatural visitations and persecuted heroines" (Spooner 150) but as localized casual spaces to speak up the effect of the ghost of the colonial past on the current present. The Sudanese society is still haunted by the trauma of colonialism and cannot move beyond it owing to a decadent political system being applied. The gothic space and grotesque characters are the catalyst through which the horror of the past are disclosed and not quite exorcised.Thus, postcolonial gothic is found to be an effective genre for boundary crossing in as much as it permits authors to explore history, the ruins of the past and the decadent present. It is a potent genre to speak about the unspeakable, the tyranny of the present resulting from the trauma and legacy of the past. However, by analogy with Mustapha Said's[4] failure in London to lead a peaceful and productive life as he has been condemned by the Western culture, Zein makes a good start from the deep Sudanese culture that injects his soul with the true meaning of refined love, to be a beacon for the misled and the desperate and a bridge to bring folk people to embrace their past. He is the inner force that moves the events forward to establish a bond with the villagers' cultural and collective memory whose recovery is considered as one of the main elements of resistance by postcolonial theorists. The closing event of the wedding embodies Salih's dream of harmony within the Sudanese society through the compromise between conservatism and modernism, anchored in an aesthetic blending of Western-shaped language and the traditional Afro Arab Islamic cultural heritage.

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[4] Mustapha Said is the hero of *Season of Migration to the North* by Taib Salih 1966.

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