The Postcolonial Sequel : Form and Disillusion in the Novels of Tahmima Anam

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"'We fought, we won. It didn't make a difference in the end.'"

- *The Good Muslim*, p. 241

The novelistic sequel has been understudied in postcolonial literary criticism, despite the existence of several sequels of note. Although some of the most famous postcolonial writers have not published sequels of their own works, Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh will in 2015 complete a trilogy which spans the Indian Ocean to create a new postcolonial geography. Ghosh's use of the trilogy is no accident; the temporal pressure put on the novel by this form energizes the spatial expanse over which his plots range to outline a broad swath of nations, ethnicities and languages that for Ghosh contribute to a new imagining of the history of colonialism. Here, each work not only tells a story set at a particular historical moment, but simultaneously stands for its own partiality, of the inability of even a long novel to capture the wide historical landscape through which, for Ghosh, colonialism must be grasped.

Series of novels - sequels and trilogies - ask to be considered as special cases of the novel, and to be read as such. For one, this is because of the sequel's peculiar narratalogical implications. As Gerard Genette writes, "The sequel... differs from a continuation in that it continues a work not in order to bring it to a close but, on the contrary, in order to take it beyond what was initially considered to be its ending" (206). Garber avers: "In theoretical terms... the sequel is a more adventurous if not radical departure from the expectation of closure and the boundedness of the text." Here, the sequel implies openness, indexing not only the past - the text that came before - but an unknown future as well.

In this essay, I am interested in a particular kind of sequel, one that speaks directly to a pressing concern of postcolonial theory. This is a sequel that, as opposed to Ghosh's

trilogy, is deliberately historically situated to describe the ironic continuity between the idealism of an anti-colonial nationalist movement and the disillusioning realities of the early, post-Independence era - with, oftentimes, the first novel set on one side of national independence and the second on the other. This structure offers a formal counterpart to the significant theoretical claim that despite colonial discourse's suppression of nationalism, and nationalist discourse's radical opposition to colonialism - a binaristic formulation captured in the title of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* -colonialism and nationalism are in fact uncanny mirrors of one another. Not only do most of the political, economic, judicial structures remain the same when the mantle of power is passed from the white man to the brown, but the very language of rule remains, for the most part, constant.[i] The primary difference between the two periods, then, is that in the build-up to decolonization, the idea of national independence animates the present with a particular density, which temporarily makes unity possible even amongst diversity, and in which class and other divides are temporarily suspended, and the future looks bright. By contrast, once the reins have been transferred to the new national state, the present is emptied of its idealism, as for the most part and for most people, life goes on as before (Loomba 16). In its place, the postcolonial gaze turns back nostalgically to construct a glorious, unified, nationalist movement. Individual works of literature have represented this experience of first hope, and then profound loss. For instance, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the simultaneous births of Saleem and the nation are followed by an increasing sense of disillusionment, leading up to Saleem's aptly named "[s]perectomy: the draining-out of hope" under Indira Gandhi's Emergency (503). Ng˜ug˜i wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* uses the betrayal plot to undermine the triumph of Uhuru even as it is unfolding. And in his 2006 film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, director Ken Loach uses the trope of brothers to show how the nation deftly - and tragically - steps in the role of the colonizer once "independence" has been achieved. Drawing attention to this ironic continuity has been one of the most significant achievements of postcolonial literature, contesting what many assume to be the temporal negation of colonialism contained within the word "postcolonial." From this perspective it is clear how the sequel, with its "comfort of familiarity together with the small frisson of difference" (Garber) would be an ideal form in which to represent the postcolonial condition, by writing two novels which contain the same characters, but nevertheless suggesting that as idealism collapses into disillusionment, "they are not the same people" (Saleem).

Thus we see an intensification - a politicization - of the conventional view, coming out of English fiction, that the sequel merely satisfies our desire to know what happens to the characters after their brief novelistic lives are over (Garber). In this sense, the postcolonial sequel requires new interpretive practices. It requires not only attention to the narratological

particularities of the sequel, but also to the potential openness implied in what often appears as an as-yet unresolved form, with attention to how that openness serves to illuminate the postcolonial condition in specific ways. Ghosh for his part made it clear before the publication of *Sea of Poppies* in 2008 that the novel was to be the first in a trilogy, thus over determining readings of the novel in that respect. But other writers often do not know that a sequel is waiting in the wings - or do not publicize it. Tsitsi Dangarembga's 1988 *Nervous Conditions* ends with a promise, that the "long and painful" story of the protagonist Tambu after she left her homestead for boarding school "would fill another volume" (208) - but in fact the sequel, *The Book of Not*, was not published until 2006. For the intervening decades critics had no choice but to treat *Nervous Conditions* as if it were a stand-alone text, which meant that even some of the most compelling critical analyses were called into question when *The Book of Not* was eventually published.[ii] Now of course, it is no longer possible for *Nervous Conditions* to be read as if the boundaries of the individual book constitutes the entirety of the text. But the unique circumstances of that novel raise the possibility that any contemporary novel could potentially have a sequel, and might at some point in the future have to be re-read in that light.

Like the two novels that will be the subject of this essay, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* offer a particular interpretation of the disillusioning experience of decolonization that is made entirely possible by the sequel form. *Nervous Conditions* is often read as a Bildungsroman, as it utilizes the framework of the classical subgenre by representing the first-person protagonist as she comes of age, and as she begins to see the reality of the world around her with a woman's - as opposed to a child's - eyes. It is a feminist Bildungsroman insofar as it begins with Tambu's emergence from the marginalization imposed by patriarchal family structures, here with the novel's very first line: "I was not sorry when my brother died" (1). In an irony constitutive of female Bildung, the death of her brother becomes the incipient moment of her narrative (Bahri 5). Moreover, Tambu's individual growth coincides with the birth of an independent Zimbabwe (Slaughter 228). The novel is thus buoyed by a double hope - that Tambu will emerge from the oppressive structures of patriarchy and racism to realize her promise as an independent young woman, and that this will be accompanied by the overthrow of British rule and the realization of Zimbabwe's immanent nationhood. While the ending of the first novel suggests that both of these are possible, the second violently ruptures this arc by representing a psychically broken down "postcolonial" Tambu, for whom the fact of national independence - itself weakly realized - is an inadequate consolation to her profound anomie. Thus, "[d]espite her concentrated efforts to exercise agency over her life, Tambu is repeatedly thwarted: by the psychic damage she sustains as a result of internalizing a Eurocentric view of her African 'inferiority,' by her

mother's respect for tradition, and by the violent events she witnesses during the war" (Kennedy 89). This is conveyed in a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness narrative that contrasts with the more straightforwardly realist *Nervous Conditions*. The pair of novels then, allows Dangarembga to portray both sides of the postcolonial condition: the idealism of nation-building, conveyed through realism and Bildung, and the disillusion following decolonization, conveyed through the breakdown of realism and Bildung. The sequel form underlines the point that the relationship between the idealism of nationalism and the disillusionment of postcolonialism is one of both continuity and fundamental difference. The sequel holds in tension these two competing impulses, by presenting the same characters but making them almost unrecognizable from one book to the next.[iii] In this way, and to adapt Garber's more general formulation, *The Book of Not* "radically revises the 'original' by the very act of coming second."

Like *Nervous Conditions*, Tahmima Anam's first novel *The Golden Age* (2007) also represents the idealism of the nationalist movement, in this case focusing on the war of Bangladeshi independence in 1971. The novel is the story of Rehana, a young widow and mother of two teenage children. Rehana is fiercely protective of her children after a brief period in which she was unable to care for them, in the immediate aftermath of her husband's sudden death. Having been compelled by the courts to give her children over to her brother-in-law and his wife in Karachi until she was able to attain some level of financial security, she had found herself at an impasse, which she overcame only by stealing a jewelry case from a blind suitor, and selling the contents in order to build two houses on her land. Having made that ethically questionable decision, and now, having recovered her children, she is unwilling to let them go, in any form. Thus when East Pakistan - soon to be Bangladesh - is called on to fight a war of Independence against the brutally violent forces of the Pakistani Army, Rehana is torn. This is a cause, buoyed by leftist idealism, from which very few young people can remain aloof. At first Rehana feels that she must choose between protecting her children and joining the movement for her country. However, she finds that by making a few sacrifices, she is able to do both - at least for a while. The novel, which Anam explicitly wrote as the first in a trilogy,[iv] ends with the end of the war, but with the future still uncertain.

The novel's key irony, in being from Rehana's perspective rather than either of the children's, is that the national allegory of Bildung, so central to *Nervous Conditions*, is one that the protagonist, the character with whom the reader is positioned to sympathize, spends much of her energy attempting to undermine. Rehana does not want her children to join the nationalist struggle; she wants them to stay safe and protected in the world that she built for them - in the house that she built explicitly as a refuge from the unforeseen violence of the outside world. Moreover, insofar as Rehana does contribute to the nationalist cause - for

instance by allowing her house to be used as an illegal arms depot - she does so not out of feelings of solidarity but to keep her children close, knowing that it is to her house that they will be compelled to return. At another point Rehana makes a dangerous trip to Faiz, her brother-in-law, a powerful figure in the Pakistani Army, to plead on behalf of Sabeer, a former Pakistani soldier and the fiancé of Rehana's neighbor's daughter, Silvi, who has joined the rebel forces, and is now being held prisoner in Dhaka. The trip is dangerous because she must lie to Faiz about the whereabouts of her children, who, to their uncle's ignorance, are centrally involved in the nationalist movement. Despite being terrified, she manages to convince Faiz to release Sabeer. Later, after independence is won, Rehana is lauded by the new state for these heroic actions. Yet what these statesmen do not know, and what Anam's readers do, is that Rehana does neither of these actions for love of her country. She approaches Faiz because Sohail begs her to; deeply upset at Silvi's decision to marry Sabeer, having been in love with Silvi himself since childhood, Sohail sees Sabeer's redemption as a pathway to Silvi's heart. And she opens her house to the rebels simply because she wants to be close to her son :

> He was probably thinking she had done it out of some sense of duty, and looking at him now, the tightness of his grip still ringing in her fingers, she wished it had been so; not that the act was any less noble, having been done out of love for her son; even so, it was somehow bigger, in this room, and in this tall man's presence, to have done something for the country and not just in the service of her children. Perhaps she really was doing it for the country (111).

The long sentence, tracking from guilt to satisfaction and self-justification, underlines Rehana's "ambiguous feelings about the country she had adopted" (47), which contrast so starkly with "the hard, precise words" (47) through which others, including her own daughter, articulate the nationalist cause. Such passages ironize the national allegory, by decoupling the seemingly self-evident relationship between the novel and the creation of a nationalist consciousness.

A Golden Age takes Rehana's privileging of her family over her country even further in its ending. By the end of the war, Rehana has fallen in love with another soldier-turned-rebel - known as the Major - who has been injured in the fighting and is convalescing at her house. When the Pakistani Army arrests the Major near the end of the war, believing him to be Sohail, Rehana wordlessly asks him to pretend to be her son, to save Sohail from pursuit and imprisonment. As readers we have no access to the Major's subjectivity, but we do know that he is in love with Rehana, and he is one of the few to know the lengths she has gone to protect her children. Thus, he willingly "take[s] [her] affliction" (264) as his own.

Rehana is not apologetic about her decision; for her, this is a natural consequence of her love for the Major: the expectation that he will renounce his very life to protect her children. Yet it does contrast the idealism of the war with the reality of selfishness. For when it finally comes down to a choice, Rehana simply chooses her children over the nation. Insofar as family and nation are compatible, Rehana is a true patriot, but in this ending we see the breakdown of this unity. Thus the novel's final line ironically calls into question the nationalist era as "a golden age," suggesting that self-preservation was as important as self-sacrifice: "I know what I have done. This war that has taken so many sons has spared mine. This age that has burned so many daughters has not burned mine. I have not let it" (274).

Even more explicitly than *Nervous Conditions*, therefore, Anam puts pressure on the seemingly self-evident "national allegory" that Fredric Jameson has made it almost impossible to discuss in any useful way after his 1986 characterization of "[a]ll third-world texts" as "necessarily... allegorical" (69). Both novels point to a flaw - or perhaps an underappreciated lacuna - in Jameson's formulation, which is that the national allegory is rarely self-evident, but always self-conscious, referential both to the nation and to the paradigm by which the national allegory occupies a prominent place in postcolonial writing.[v] Thus far from simplistic allegories of the nation in formation, both novels identify a site of difference from the standard narrative: by centering on women protagonists, by questioning state-sanctioned narratives of the nation, and by representing the idea of allegory askance. From this perspective, the sequel becomes a key form in which not only to question the national allegory, but to describe the peculiar experience of rupture and continuity that marks the realities of national independence. While in both cases the sequels show the unraveling of the nationalist promise, I suggest that Anam's second novel also gestures towards a series of unanswered questions in postcolonial theory, surrounding the future of its critical project. In the rest of this essay, I read Anam's *The Good Muslim* as both a representation of the breakdown of the "golden age" of nation-building and as an allegory for the unknown futurity of postcolonial criticism in what many consider to be a "post-postcolonial" - or, more accurately, transnational - age.

The End of the Golden Age :

The Good Muslim is set in 1984, thirteen years after the end of the war, and introduces the different levels of postcolonial disillusionment that have set in through sporadic flashbacks that cover the intervening years. By 1984, the full implications of the war have become apparent, and the memories have become a sedimented part of the characters' lives. What we learn from the outset is that the powerful unit of Rehana's family has all but disappeared. The love that had bound them in 1971, and that had made it so difficult for Rehana to imagine losing her children, even in service of as noble a cause as nationalism, no

longer exists. As we learn in the flashbacks, Sohail returned from the war a broken young man. Although he survived in body, the violence he witnessed destroyed something within him, and led him to murder, for no reason, a random passerby as an irrational outlet to his undirected rage. Haunted by this act, and by his love for Piya, a woman he rescued from a Pakistani army camp where she had been held captive and gang raped throughout the war, Sohail gradually turns to religion to fill his disillusion and sense of loss. As Maya realizes, despite her apprehensions, Sohail's world of God, religious duty, and the afterlife was "a world in which it didn't matter that two of their presidents had been assassinated, and that they were now fully in the throes of irony, with their very own Dictator, their own injustices, their own dirty little war down south" (157) - in other words, where postcolonial disillusion has no place. As the years progress, and under the influence of his childhood love Silvi, whom he is finally able to marry, Sohail retreats further into a narrow version of Islam. He withdraws from his family and finds recourse in promises of the afterlife, in the Koran, and other aspects of his spirituality. The sorrows of the nation are thus no longer his to bear.

In contrast to *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* is focalized primarily through Maya, who is overcoming her own sense of loss following the war. In 1984 Maya has just returned from an extended stint as an obstetrician in rural Bangladesh. Chased away by conservative values in the village, Maya returns to Dhaka at the beginning of the novel and finds, to her consternation, that her brother has completely transformed himself. Meanwhile, her mother is struggling with her loneliness, and later, with uterine cancer. This is only made worse by the turn the newly independent nation has taken :

> Her broken wishbone of a country was thirteen years old. Didn't sound like very long, but in that time the nation had rolled and unrolled tanks from its streets. It had had leaders elected and ordained. It had murdered two presidents. In its infancy, it had started cannibalising itself, killing the tribals in the south, drowning villages for dams, razing the ancient trees of Modhupur Forest. A fast-acting country: quick to anger, quick to self-destruct (103).

Maya's former freedom-fighter friends, her erstwhile comrades, have settled into the routines of bourgeois domesticity, and have little interest in these issues. Sohail's turn to religion is thus part of a larger amnesiac ethos, in which the sacrifices and meaning of Independence have been shelved in exchange for a dull and ideal-less national future. Although Maya disdains religion, she finds equal revulsion toward her friends as she does toward her brother.[vi]

This loss is further visible in Dhaka itself, which Maya finds has reinvented itself with

a deliberate erasure of the energy, youth and idealism that had freed it from the occupier's grasp. For one, the road numbers have all been changed :

> Perhaps they were hoping the old places would not be what they had once been to people, the streets where they had marched and the streets to which they had taken to cast their votes. Road 27 was no longer the artery through which the army had driven its tanks. And Road 32 was no longer where Mujib had been killed, falling upside down on the staircase of his house, his pipe clattering to the chequered ground, the flower of blood pooling and colouring his hair. No, you could no longer say, it happened at Bottrish Nombor; you would have to say it was Road 26A, a new road on which no man had been killed, no man and his wife, sons, daughters-in-law, brother, nephew, bodyguards, drivers, gatekeepers (52).

This is more than the natural passage of time, but a deliberate, state-sponsored amnesia, in which the urban landscape is reconfigured to rewrite the history of the nation in an entirely different, and alienating, idiom. Likewise, Paltan Maidan, the spatial center of the resistance movement, "where Mujib had made all his speeches, and where the Pakistan Army had surrendered" has been covered over with a playground, and renamed Children's Park, so that "[n]ow their history would be papered over by peanuts and the smell of candy floss" (233). These changes convey to Maya how completely the ethos of resistance and comradeship that had marked the 1971 movement have been buried and forgotten.

The Good Muslim underlines this sense of irrecoverable breakdown by unraveling all the tropes that had bolstered the first novel's powerful nationalist sensibility. Shona, the house Rehana had built with the stolen money as a refuge for her children, and which is described in the first novel in such loving terms is, at the beginning of *The Good Muslim*, overrun by strangers. Compare the two representations :

> And then she found the money. Exactly how was a secret she had kept all these years, because she wanted to remember what she had done, how far she had gone, to get her children back, and also because the burden of it, she knew, should be only hers.

After that the house seemed to go up on its own: by the end of the year the walls had been raised; two months later the plaster was smooth; by March the fierce spring heat was drying the blue-grey whitewash, and Rehana was looking on as her carpenter Abdul scratched the letters on to a smoothed piece of mahogany she had saved from the building of the front door. Shona, she said, and he asked, "Your mother's name?" "No," she replied, "just the

name of the house." For all that she had lost, and all that she wanted never to lose again" (*A Golden Age*, 37).

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The house was modest: three rooms set out in a row, connected by a verandah that faced the garden. At the far end, a kitchen with its own small porch. This was where she headed now, sure she would find her mother bent over the stove or washing the breakfast plates.

Instead, she found the kitchen packed with women. They wore long black burkhas and squatted over the grinding stone, the sink, the stove. Maya hovered at the entrance, wondering for a moment if she had strayed into the wrong house.

...

She could go out and look for her mother. Maybe she was at the Ladies' Club, or visiting a friend. She might be at the graveyard, putting flowers on Abboo's grave. But the room was too crowded now for Maya to leave. The women seemed to have multiplied, taking every inch of space on the carpet. They leaned against each other and held hands. Maya packed herself tightly against the wall (*The Good Muslim*, 14-15).

In contrast to the image of long-awaited control, and even mastery, as presented in the first description, in the second novel the primary conceit is that of alienation. Despite her expectations, and despite having grown up within its four walls, Maya can barely recognize her mother's house, filled as it is with strangers doing strange things, and populating "every inch of space" with an anonymity particular to the burkha. Far from the image of triumphant domesticity, the house has turned not only against Rehana and Maya, but against the idea of family altogether, which has been recast in Sohail's language as a modern, secular formation which has no place in the life of a good Muslim.

Waning Family Ties

The loss of the house as refuge in the first pages of *A Good Muslim* anticipates the loss of the entire trope of family which was so central to *A Golden Age*. In the first novel, not only was family significant, but it became the primary conduit through which Rehana experienced the nationalist moment. Conversely, in the sequel, the family becomes the site at which the breakdown of national idealism is experienced. As Maya observes, "Once [Rehana] had given everything for her children. Now she was in retreat from them" (37). Maya in particular is hurt by being shunned by Sohail, whose new persona - both as conservative religious leader, who is allowed minimal contact with women, as well as one whose focus on the afterlife allows no consideration of the wounds of the past - she struggles throughout the entire novel to understand. When in the years immediately following the war Sohail begins his turn to religion, Maya underestimates the extent of his trauma, believing that Sohail will soon return to his old, familiar

self. When he burns all of his books, in a spectacular announcement of his new faith, Maya tells herself that she should "[d]o something. Your brother is turning, turning. Soon you won't recognise him" (249), but she finds herself able to do little else than mock his new beliefs. By the time she returns from the countryside, he is completely lost to her. His rejection of their childhood bond, when "[h]e was father and mother and bhaiya to her. Her closest human. Her only friend" (107), is perhaps the most violent realization for Maya, even more so - or inseparable from - the nation's rejection of its idealistic birth.

Alongside the breakdown of the fraternal bond, *The Good Muslim* shows the deterioration of filiation by way of Sohail's son Zaid. Maya finds upon her return that Zaid is neglected by his father, unkempt and prohibited from attending school. Although six years old, he does not know the letters of the Bengali alphabet, and on many occasions steals money from Maya's purse. Maya forms a bond with him, and whenever she finds the opportunity, urges her brother to send him to school - a possibility which Sohail rejects, firm in his belief in the superiority of an Islamic education, available at home. Yet when Zaid is caught stealing from a shoe store, Sohail decides he must be sent away, and he chooses an isolated madrasa on an island in the middle of the Jamuna River. While there, Zaid is unable to keep up with his studies and is deprived of food and sleep by the strict education. Moreover, he is sexually abused by one of the instructors. He makes an attempt to run away but Sohail unflinchingly sends him back. Finally, Maya hears of his trials and endeavors to rescue him, but on the boat ride out of the madrasa, Zaid jumps into the water and drowns. Although represented less as a suicide than as a misguided and futile attempt at escape, Maya feels responsible for his death.

The story of Zaid is a tragic rewriting of the centrality of the domestic unit in *A Golden Age*. Despite being a widow, Rehana's entire existence in the first book had centered on the health and welfare of her children - even to the point, as we have seen, of sacrificing other loved ones to keep this unit whole. This centrality of family is completely upended in Sohail's indifference to Zaid. Sohail is aware of Zaid's dismal state, "but had decided he would no longer be in thrall of [suffering]. That he would embrace it... There was a grand design, and it left no room for self-pity" (82). Likewise, putting Zaid in the distant madrasa is because Sohail "need[s] to spend more time at the mosque; [he] can't watch over Zaid" (170). If Rehana's commitment to her children was allegorical for the birthing of a strong and healthy nation, then Sohail's indifference to Zaid represents the deterioration of those ideals. If Sohail represents the youth who is the future of the nation in his earnestness and his idealism, Zaid is the unruly, uncared-for offspring of idealism, whose well-being has been reduced to a worldly offshoot of the more important afterlife, and thus who is left to meet his own fate, and to a premature death.

This breakdown of futurity through this stunted familial regeneration is underlined by the images of abortions and cancers that pervade *A Good Muslim*, which rewrite the story of the birth of the nation through tropes of sterility and decay. If Sohail feels complicit in the violence of the war because of his murder of an innocent man, Maya's sense of complicity comes from her work helping Bengali women in the months following the war have secret abortions of pregnancies induced by rape. While contributing to healing on the individual level, Maya remains ambivalent about the ethical implications of her work, in no small part due to the early nation's own rhetoric in which while raped women are recast as heroines having served the country - as birangonas, or heroines - the babies that are a product of their rapes are seen as shameful baggage that must be discarded for the nation to heal (142). In this context, Maya is unsure whether the abortions she has helped carry out are a means of female empowerment or another element of the national erasure of the war that she sees occurring at all levels of society. Thus Maya is also haunted by the figure of Piya, who is pregnant when she comes to stay at Shona, asks Maya for an abortion, and in the end cannot go through with it. While for Sohail Piya had embodied the unspeakable cruelty of the war, for Maya she lurks as the ghost of all the fetuses she helped abort, of her own involvement with "whatever dirty things had happened in the past" (76) which no one wants to remember.

Rehana's diagnosis with uterine cancer is another image that comes to represent the death of fertility and futurity in the nation at large. While in the first novel Rehana's love of her children was never staked to her actual reproductive capacity - which would have reduced the wide meanings of family for Rehana to a biological fact - nevertheless the cancer of the uterus clearly serves as a symbol for a stunted reproductive futurity. While initially Maya is optimistic that the cancer will not spread, since "[t]umours in the uterus were the best kind of tumour; they lay in the womb like a seed, and they grew within it, but the uterus could easily be disposed of" (112), she soon reconsiders this naïve, biological view of fertility, realizing in fact that what grows in the uterus cannot be so easily contained. Insofar as the movement of 1971 had been a "birthing" of the nation into existence, the transformation of that birth into a cancer, and the proliferation of that cancer beyond the site of its birth, foreshadows a future of decay and infertility in the nation to come.

The Good Muslim does end with a glimpse of redemption - of the futurity that the primary tropology had foreclosed. This futurity lies, the novel suggests, not in a whitewashing of the crimes of the past, but in recognizing the nation and the individual to be both victim and participant in the horrors of 1971. In an ironic way, it is Sohail who comes to this recognition before Maya; although religion is in many ways a retreat from his experienced trauma, at the same time it serves for Sohail as an incessant reminder of the impossibility of ever returning to

his pre-war self - a fact that Maya consistently denies. It is only when Maya realizes that she too has sinned, and that her attempt to prolong the golden years is an ineffective and misguided nostalgia, that she can begin to heal, and the nation around her as well. And it is only out of his devastating realization - brought on by the death of her beloved nephew Zaid - that reproductive futurity can be reasserted, although, interestingly, not in the pages of the text, but in the gap between the novel's end and its epilogue, set in 1992. Here we learn both that Maya has given birth to her own child, and that national healing has, albeit tentatively, begun.

In these ways, the novel uses the sequel form to rewrite the narrative of nationalist self-awakening as a story of loss and disillusion, redeemable only following the most difficult of sacrifices. The second novel systematically unravels the tropology of the first, exposing the implication of the novel with the story of the nation as itself a nostalgic projection. Thus, the sequel takes us beyond merely critiquing the novel form, as one, as Aamir Mufti's argues, that is unavoidably tied up with the secular, progressivist ethos of nationalism in its most mainstream form (11). By presenting the sequel as a supplement to the novel, Anam exceeds the closed contours of the traditional form, producing a text that is a metacommentary on its own formal status - in Genette's terms, a "transtextuality" (207). It writes both the nation and its critique within one textual gesture, illuminating one of the central features of the postcolonial condition in new ways.

Postcoloniality's Sequel?

Thus far, I have presented the novel and its sequel as, in a sense, a utopic form, for the way it presents the idealism of nationalism and the profound disillusionment of the postcolonial world as two discontinuous parts of a larger whole. As we have seen, by rupturing the textual integrity of the traditional novel and offering two works that are related but able to pass as integral to themselves, Anam recreates in form the myopia of both nationalist idealism and postcolonial jubilation. The works present the continuity that spans decolonization as a cognitive and formal challenge, when from the narrow perspective that fetishizes sovereignty they seem to represent such different worlds.

At the same time, however, Anam's works refuse to be completely assimilated within the well-trod critical paths of postcolonial theory. I suggest that even while illuminating crucial debates within postcolonial criticism, the novels raise some significant questions as well - questions that remain largely unanswered, and thus index a space of unknown futurity for postcolonial writing in general. This is embodied in the author's professed ambivalence around whether the third novel in the trilogy will be a prequel, in which the story of *A Golden Age* is prefigured through the narrative of Partition, or a second sequel, in which we see the directions Bangladesh goes and in which, as Anam has said in an interview, Zubeida, Maya's daughter, will be the protagonist.[vii] According to the author, she had initially intended a prequel, yet

now has changed her mind. Whatever the end result will be, Anam's equivocation bears some attention. It goes, to my mind, beyond the question of whether the war of 1971 ought to be situated within a longer historical framework, but is a reminder of how central the question is, of what is left after the jubilance of the nationalist movement has been replaced by the disillusioning reality of the postcolonial nation-state. What futurity is left for the novel - and, even more specifically, for postcolonial studies - after the ironic continuity between colonialism and nationalism has been thoroughly exposed? What will the vocabulary of postcolonial criticism illuminate about what happens after disillusionment sets in, that would not be better illuminated in discourses such as environmentalism, postmodernism, or transnationalism?

This openness surrounding the future of postcolonial criticism can be perceived in the titles of the two works. In contrast to the titles of Ghosh's novels, *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, both of which are richly allusive and lay out the complex chronotopes in which the respective works are set, Anam's second title is differently positioned from the first. The first refers clearly to the idealism of the nationalist movement and the particular vocabulary of Bengali independence, the "golden Bengal" - along with, as we have seen, the way that era gets nostalgically remembered. At one level, the second title also represents that novel's central thematic, which is the turn from secular nationalism to religious fundamentalism, as seen both with Sohail and the nation at large. In contrast to the broad idealism of the nationalist movement - in which young people were fighting not only for independence, but for equality, dignity and justice writ large, the dominant concern in the wake of decolonization seems to revolve around the relatively narrow question of whether one is a "good Muslim" and, if not, how better to be one. This shift represents not only an eclipsing of the historic possibilities immanent in nationalism, but also - and this is especially evident in Sohail - a turn inwards, from the domain of history to the narrower arena of the individual soul. Yet at the same time, the title seems to make metonymic reference to Mahmood Mamdani's 2004 *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Mamdani's nonfictional book rereads what is often considered "Islamic fundamentalism" as a form of political assertion rather than religious reactionism; his title echoes George W. Bush's speech, following the 9/11 attacks, in which he "moved to distinguish between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims.'" While the former "were clearly responsible for terrorism... 'good Muslims' were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support 'us' in a war against 'them'" (15). From this perspective, Anam's title suggests that the "good Muslim" is not only a postcolonial category, referring to the particular disillusionment following Independence in many Muslim countries, but - and even despite its overt intentions - a geopolitical one as well.

I believe that the coincidence of these two seemingly unrelated titles is symptomatic for the larger question of how Anam's works - and others like them - address and will continue to address the global "war on terror" and other contemporary crises, which are not completely assimilable to traditional postcolonial concerns. The rhetoric of difference that is central to the representation of Muslims in today's world is not new; what is significant is how, today, this rhetoric has been delinked from specific colonial arrangements and is now a generalized, globalized language, that is better illuminated by thinking about new transnational configurations than through the narrow lens of postcoloniality. Another example of this is Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which although dealing with questions of othering and the racialization of Muslims, and besides being partially set in the postcolonial world (in this case, Pakistan), is more convincingly read as a "deterritorialized" or "transnational" novel than a "postcolonial" one (Morey 138).[viii] In her second title, Anam seems to be gesturing in this new direction, even though to a greater degree than Hamid's, *The Good Muslim* takes up predominantly postcolonial concerns. Yet in the gesture, I suggest, there seems to lie a certain openness regarding the future of postcolonial criticism and its inseparability from new global languages of othering, precisely because the contours of those relationships have yet to be defined. The fact that a second sequel is on its way is an ironic reminder that we are never quite sure what is coming next.

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End Notes

i. This has been shown by several postcolonial critics, especially those interested in the critique of modernity, a concept which was valorized by both colonial discourse

and the native elites who took over the government at the time of independence. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty draws attention to "the language of modernity, of civic consciousness and public health, even of certain ideas of beauty related to the management of public space and interests... [which] is the language of modern governments, both colonial and postcolonial" (66). In Ashis Nandy's discussion of modern secularism, he similarly argues that "once the colonial concept of state was internalised by the societies of the region through nationalist ideology... the nascent nation-states of the region took upon themselves the same civilising mission that colonial states had once taken upon themselves" (64). The same occurred in most spheres of the new national society, including urban planning, development, and many others.

For example, in Deepika Bahri's essay on Nervous Conditions published in 1994, the author anticipates Tambu acquiring some of the "postcolonial pathology" that Nyasha exhibits, but assumes - quite justifiably, given the trajectory of Nervous Conditions - that Tambu's Bildung will continue to unfold nonetheless: "The promise of something gained is evident in the textual arrangement of the narrative... The novel, after all, is a kunstler and bildungsroman which catalogues Tambu's maturation even as she functions as the amanuensis of Nyasha's performances. Tambu's changing consciousness is the stuff of hope; it is no less than the promise of a different text, a whole new corpus, in the future" (26).

There are, unfortunately, still very few scholarly analyses of The Book of Not. The ones that exist focus primarily on the trauma of the colonial encounter (such as Kennedy), and therefore maintain a continuity between the Tambu of Nervous Conditions and the Tambu of The Book of Not. However, a brief glance of online readers' reviews of the latter novel, along with students' responses in class, makes it clear that for most readers, The Book of Not's Tambu is deeply disappointing. This is because she is indeed a shell of the strong-willed female character she was in Nervous Conditions. For me, this shift is not a sign of a weakened aesthetic, but a particular interpretation of decolonization that bears further analysis.

http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18004188, accessed 23 October 2012

See, for instance, Anjaria (esp. 60-65).

We find a similar sense of national amnesia in The Book of Not as well: "People throng[ed] the streets rejoicing so thoroughly that there was no place for remembering the acts that their hands and their feet and their teeth, and the fingers, boots, and mouths of their children committed'" (qtd in Kennedy 100). And, earlier: "When

Bougainvillea boldly states that 'there just might be a war on,' Tracey is shocked and insists that there is not a war, only 'a security problem.' Amongst Zimbabweans, there is no shared word for the war, only words used by particular groups in particular contexts: 'war,' 'security problem,' Chimurenga, Hondo" (Kennedy 101). http://www.bookslut.com/features/2011_07_017958.php, accessed 23 October 2012.

It is not that this "deterritorialized" literature - a term Morey borrows from Deleuze - is categorically different from postcolonial literature, especially insofar as it "forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, 'Them and Us' and so on - those categories continuously insisted upon in 'war on terror' discourse" (Morey 138). At the same time, "with its plot shifting between the US, South Asia and Latin America, its sub-theme of intercontinental business acquisitions and the reach of global capital, and its own status as a lauded and awarded international literary success, [The Reluctant Fundamentalist] could be open to an interpretation made through another, adjacent critical lens" (142) - in this case that of "world literature... bringing together in novelistic form the experiences of the individual when directly confronted by the effects of geopolitics" (145). The relationship between traditionally "postcolonial" concerns and this new transnational - what Caren Irr calls "geopolitical" - literature has yet to be fully fleshed out.