Terror, Nation and Violence in Hindi Cinema∗[1]

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The violence of the oppressed is right. The violence of the oppressor is wrong. And to hell with ethics.

- Ruchi Narain et al. [*Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*]

1. Nation, State and Naxalism

In the past two decades, the literature on Hindi Cinema[2] has made a significant contribution to the understanding of cultural nationalism in the Indian context. In particular, it helped forge a renewed understanding of 'systemic' and 'soft' violence that breeds internal hierarchies within the nation across caste, gender and communal identities (Gabriel 2010; Chakravarthy 2005; Gabriel and Vijayan 2012). Yet, the films dealing with less tacit aspects of 'terror' and 'violence', such as the armed conflict of the Naxalites, have received little attention in secondary criticism. Pradip Basu's essay collection *Red on Silver: Naxalites in Cinema* (2012), which maps a historical journey of both Hindi and vernacular cinema on Indian Maoism from the 1970s to the present, is perhaps the only exception to this. This essay responds to the existing discursive gaps in theorizing

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[2] Hindi Cinema is often used interchangeably with commercial Hindi Cinema, Bombay Cinema, Bollywood and mainstream cinema in secondary criticism. I prefer using the term 'Hindi Cinema' given that not all films discussed in this paper could be qualified as 'commercial' or 'mainstream'. I avoid the term 'Bollywood' for its populist (mis)conception as an extension of Hollywood.

nationalism, violence and terrorism in three Hindi films on the Naxalite insurgency: A.N. Mahadevan's *Red Alert: The War Within* (2010), Sudhir Mishra's *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* (2003) and Prakash Jha's *Chakravyuh* (2012).

Following the 9/11 attacks, India's then ruling government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is known for its hardline policy against 'Islamic terrorism', had dramatically recast the Maoist insurgency as part and parcel of a wider terrorist network, and even extended diplomatic support to deal with the Maoist uprising in the neighboring Nepal. Although the Indian state approached the insurgency as a matter of an internal security threat for over three decades, it is only in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and particularly after the signing of a series of MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with various mining companies such as Vedanta, Tata and Essar for the extraction of mineral resources from the insurgency affected areas, that the discourse of 'terrorism' gained momentum.[3] As these developments were underway, the Maoists[4] began rolling out counter-propaganda: "the notion that a Naxalite is someone who hates his country is naive and idiotic"; and their "ultimate objective is to carry on and complete the already ongoing and advancing New Democratic Revolution in India as a part of the world proletarian revolution by overthrowing the semi-colonial, semi-feudal system" (Maoist Documents 2004).

Dubbed variedly as the Spring Thunder of Terai or the Naxalbari, the Naxalite movement in India was inspired by the Maoist doctrine of 'proletarian revolution' and had a strong tribal base since its inception. During the 1970s, the movement had reached its peak before being forced out of West Bengal with the capture of its founding leader Charu Majumdar

[3] See my earlier discussion of India's 'forked-tongue' policy towards Naxalites in Malreddy, Pavan Kumar. "Domesticating the 'New Terrorism': The Case of the Maoist Insurgency in India." *The European Legacy* 19.5 (2014): 590-605.

[4] Given their vernacular purchase, I have used the terms 'Maoists', 'Naxalites', 'Naxals', 'Maoism' and 'Naxalism' interchangeably throughout the essay.

(Chakravarti 2007: 98-99). In the 1980s, the movement shifted its base from West Bengal to the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, occupying the political vacuum left behind by a spate of failed peasant revolts against the Nizam regime in the 1920s and 1940s. By the 1990s, the movement split into several ideological factions, of which two emerged particularly strong – CPI (ML) Party Unity and CPI (ML) People's War (Andhra Pradesh) – which, along with the Maoist Communist Center of Bihar, merged into CPI (Maoist) in October 2004. At the time of the merger, a joint statement issued by the Party states: "since armed struggle will remain as the highest and main form of struggle and the army as the main form of organization of this revolution, it will continue to play a decisive role" (Maoist Documents 2004). Today, the Naxalite movement operates in seven federal states and boasts of running 'parallel governments' in the insurgency-controlled areas, supported by an estimated 40,000 armed cadres (Chakravarti 2007: 106).

For the Indian state, however, the post-9/11 political sensibilities presented an ideal opportunity to restructure its counter-terrorism policy by labeling all anti-state activity, including the Maoist insurgency, as 'terrorist' (Malreddy 2014: 591). As Sudeep Chakravarti observes, the Indian Intelligence agencies

> now claim ULFA [United Liberation Front of Assam] of passing hard cash and occasional shipment of arms and ammunition to Indian Maoists, adding to the logistics network that the Maoists in southern and central India have with LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam]. There are also reports of Nepal's Maoists training in the forests of Jharkhand and Orissa (2007: 188)

Complementing this view, Arundhati Roy writes: "while all the oxygen is being used up by this new doppelganger of the 'war on terror', the state will use the opportunity to mop up the

hundreds of other resistance movements in the sweep of its military operation, calling them all Maoist sympathizers" (2009). Yet, even as most non-normative theories on terrorism concede that there is no terrorism that is not inspired by a political cause (Tellidis 2008) – be it separatist, nationalist, ethno-nationalist or religious – just as in the case of India's Naxalite insurgency, the implied complicity between terrorism and armed nationalism remains largely unexamined in contemporary discourses on cultural politics. While theories on postcolonial nationalism are particularly concerned with forms of resistance produced by marginalized groups to the presumed homogeneity of national identities, there is an evasive tendency towards endorsing insurgency violence as *bona fide* nationalist resistance.

If, then, the discourse of terrorism can be read as an ideological extension of Orientalism (Morton 2007), it is entirely possible to conceive 'terrorism' as just another extension of nationalist and liberationist tendencies (Scanlan 2001). Countervailing Sartre's and Hobbes' views that "the state was brought together by fear and terror" (Tellidis 2008: 79), Frantz Fanon (1963) argued that redemptive violence is a legitimate, if not the most viable, response to the colonizer's violence. Accordingly, as in Anthony Smith's (1986) famous exhortation that nationalism is both imaginary and lived reality, Margaret Scanlan defines terrorism as "both actual killing and a fictional construct" (2001: 2). And "to call people terrorists", Scanlan affirms, "is to condemn them; those of whom we approve are, of course, soldiers, liberators, partisans, freedom fighters, or revolutionaries; even *guerilla* remains more neutral" (6; emphasis in original). Following Scanlan, other literary critics have emphasized the need for 'humanizing' the very figure of the terrorist by drawing attention to the human freedoms (s)he is bound to defend, and by turning the focus away from the victims of terrorism to the *victimization* of the terrorists themselves (Martin 2007).

This essay is inspired by the same intrinsic need to challenge the normative conceptions of terrorism and political violence. In doing so, it draws attention to sites of collusion and complicity between nationalism and terrorism that forge collective identities into popular imagination to carve out a postcolonial nationhood on account of states, minorities and other involved actors. Within this, the discourse of 'new terrorism' gains precedence as a rhetorical device to normalize, pathologize and even criminalize all minority voices against the state's account of normative nationhood. Accordingly, the essay challenges the forged complicity between the Maoist insurgency and the new terrorism discourse of the Indian state and, in the process, gestures towards the sort of necro-nationalism that the conflict has come to signify. By necro-nationalism, I refer not only to the necropolitics[5] of contested nationalism from 'below', or from the periphery of the nation, but also to the necropolitics of the putatively democratic state ('above') that resort to unauthorized forms of violence in the name of national sovereignty. Necro-nationalism, in that sense, is not simply the exegesis of political violence from both ends of the spectrum, but the clash of violence that is deemed necessary for the ideological defense of respective claims over national identity. Here, such necessity or even 'indispensability' of violence, I suggest, finds expression in the necropolitical violence against physical nature and physical life in which the 'bare life' of the *adivasi* is reduced to an ecopolitical object [6]– a necessary (or in

[5] Drawing from Foucault's thesis on biopower, Achille Mbembe (2003) defines necropolitics as the flipside of biopolitics. If biopolitics refers to the controlling of populations – all biological life in its totality – through disciplinary mechanisms brought about by the discourses on knowledge, then necropolitics refers to the biopolitical control exerted by way of controlling, organizing, (re)ordering and authorizing death.

[6] *Adivasi* (literal translation 'first inhabitant') is an umbrella term that encompasses a number of tribal societies in India, although most of them identify themselves in their own vernacular terms. My use of the term 'ecopolitics' is adopted from Peter Andrée's two-fold definition: 1) "discourses and practices which are directed towards large and complex bodies as objects of management: lakes, forests, ecosystems, cities, the biosphere, and the atmosphere" wherein 2) "considerable attention is given to the human individual as a subject, presented either as a destructive organism that needs to be tamed through scientific management, or as a consumer who must be taught to make more environmentally responsible consumption decisions" (2007: 71).

the populist phrase – 'collateral') sacrifice for competing claims over nationhood. Such necro-nationalism, I argue, in spite of its subaltern character, is eventually assimilated into the necropolitical discourse on the nation state by means of a post-Orientalist[7] discourse that reconfigures the *adivasi* subject as the nation's Other.

2. Postcolonial Nationalism, 'Terrorism' and Necropolitics

For postcolonial critics, nation-building processes in the Global South can no longer be understood in terms of state-centered discourses of cultural unity and homogeneity but only as competing narratives of indigeneity, identity and belonging. Anne McClintock, for instance, argues that postcolonial nation building is essentially a contested system "of cultural representation that limit[s] and legitimize[s] people's access to the resources of the nation-state" (1993: 61). Such inherent disunity of postcolonial nationalist projects, often championed in the name of unity (ibid.), is aptly theorized in Homi K. Bhabha's distinction between 'pedagogic' and 'performative' functions of nationalism. If the pedagogic function of nationalism is to forge a certain mythic past or an imagined collective of a shared history on account of the state, the performative function diffuses, if not disseminates, the received symbols of such pedagogies which are acted out by its subjects in myriad (performative) ways (Bhabha 1994: 145). In Partha Chatterjee's (1993) contention, the entire project of postcolonial nationalism is a populist enterprise *ipso facto*, one that is founded upon the 'derivative' discourse(s) of European modernity and

[7] Post-Orientalism refers to the diffusion of classical (Euro-American) Orientalist ideologies into micro-discourses of Othering. This process often involves the Orientalization of select groups of populations within Oriental societies. Unlike the classical Orientalism of European colonial and expansionist projects, which required an epistemic ground (racial, scientific and humanist discourses) of Othering non-European cultures, post-Orientalism is "conducive to various manners of disposable knowledge production predicated on no enduring or legitimate episteme" which "provide instant gratification and are then disposed of after one use only" (Dabashi 2009: 213; Kumar 2012)

its expectant national coherence. While most of these theoretical interventions are receptive to the interruptions produced by the 'performative' or generative tropes of 'lesser nations' perching on 'lower branches' (Bhabha; Chatterjee; McClintock), they do not necessarily account for an adequate exemplification of nationalist movements or projects, if any, in contemporary postcolonial societies.[8]

Yet, it is only the Marxist proponents of postcolonialism who seem to refute that the idea of nationalitarianism – nationalism as a liberating narrative – should be abandoned altogether (Malreddy 2015: 126). Ranajit Guha, for instance, reassures that the national liberation movement, despite its historical failure to represent the masses, is still worth the trouble if it is to forge ideological "alliances" that can "speak for the nation" (Guha qtd. in Lazarus 1999: 119). These views are reiterated in Edward Said's own critique of (the failures of) Irish nationalism, in which he anoints the gap between "nationalist anti-imperialism" and "liberationist anti-imperialist resistance" (Said qtd. in Lazarus 1999: 119), the latter being the more desirable form of "nation-wide resistance" that represents the aspirations of both the working classes and indigenous masses (ibid.). Notwithstanding these critiques of popular nationalism, as John McLeod argues, postcolonial theory falls short of accounting for sites of agency or the locus of resistance at the "nation's margins" (2000: 120).

While the historiography of the Subaltern Studies Group may be a notable exception to this, it is largely confined to the indigenous agency in the form of peasant insurgency and its tertiary discourse – one that counteracts both the primary and secondary discourses – in colonial history, and as such, it is more attuned to unveiling the indigenous alliances through local bonds of caste, kinship and peasantry rather than, say, the 'nationalistic' tropes of such insurgency. Accordingly, much of the 'insurgency' literature since the 1970s has been categorized

[8] I have benefitted from discussions with Birte Heidemann on these points.

under the rubrics of 'social movements', 'peasant movements' or 'resistance literature' in the postcolonial world. And any challenge to the nation's sovereignty, particularly revolutionary movements that resorted to armed struggles, was immediately, and often dismissively, labeled as ethnic-cleansing, civil wars, local insurgencies or religious fundamentalisms, much to the perceived 'incompleteness' of the postcolonial nation-state formation. This view, as Edmund Burke III argues in his essay "Orientalism and World History", has remained central to the Orientalist historiography of the 19th and 20th centuries, which refused to acknowledge the nationalist uprisings in the Islamic world, particularly in Turkey, Algeria and Iran, as authentic "subaltern struggles" (1998: 494). In the process, any "alternative voices were either recoded as nationalist, or simply erased" (ibid.), and were seen as a repetition of old patterns of Islamic sectarian conflicts or the result of communist propaganda.

By the 1970s, as Scanlan observes, there emerged a hidden complicity between terrorism and other forms of violence such as bombings, assassinations, massacres, ethnic-cleansing and so on. During this period, the Iranian hostage crisis (1979-81), the Munich Massacre (1972) and a host of plane hijackings by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) became the flagships of the populist discourses on Islamic terrorism in the Western media (Scanlan 2001: 11-34). Subsequently, the term 'terrorism' became an overarching signifier of any armed insurgency that threatened the state's authority and sovereignty, although the discursive precedents for conflating nationalism and terrorism were anything but arbitrary. For instance, Menachem Begin, Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela, all once labeled as terrorists, were "rehabilitated" as national heroes, and even honored with the Nobel Peace Prize (ibid., 6). Yet, between the 1970s and 1990s, a whole host of national liberation movements, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Kosovo

Liberation Army (KLO) or the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN), came to be classified as terrorist organizations both domestically and internationally. The emergence of Al-Qaeda, however, and its presumed lack of a 'national' character or attachment to a national boundary, is taken as a free pass to the 'new terrorism' of the post-9/11 era.[9]

Seizing upon the momentum built by the 'war on terror campaign', India's counter-terrorism discourse took a latent necropolitical turn with the implementation of the two anti-terrorism acts POTA and UAPA (2002-2004), which are known as India's versions of the PATRIOT Act (Gagné 2005). Like the PATRIOT Act, POTA defines terrorism purely in terms of the subjective "intentions" of the individuals who may "strike terror in the people or any section of the people" and "threaten the unity, integrity, security and sovereignty of India" (Kalhan et al. 2006: 155; Malreddy 2014: 599-600). Consequently, the Indian state embarked on two separate 'white terror' campaigns in June 2005 and in late 2006, led by a private militia known as the *Salwa Judum* ('purification hunt') in the Naxal 'infested' areas that are often referred to as the Red Corridor or Pakistan.[10] During the early stages of the 'white terror' campaign, which was actively supported by a local legislator named Mahendra Karma, over 600 *adivasi* villages were burnt, leaving 300,000 refugees in addition to 60,000 *adivasis* who were forced into roadside camps, guarded and controlled by the *Salwa Judum* militia (Suchitra 2010). As Ramachandra Guha (2007) claims, it is the state's own failures in attending to the grievances of the marginalized communities that enabled the Naxalite revolutionaries to move into indigenous territories and woo their mass support in the

[9] A number of differences between 'old' and 'new' terrorism bear notice here. Old terrorism is generally defined in terms of political aspirations which are rooted in a given national context. In old terrorism, the use of violence is primarily motivated by the desire to gain attention for their political cause. New terrorism, on the other hand, is understood as a loose network of insurgents who do not have a particular attachment to nationality or nation, and use indiscriminate violence that far exceeds the motives of media or public attention. See Gearson (2002), and Burnett and Whyte (2005).

[10] For my earlier discussion of these issues, see Malreddy (2014: 598-599).

first place. While a number of enthusiastic interlocutors of the Indian state went on to describe *Salwa Judum* as the true patriotic resistance of a civilian army to the 'Naxalite atrocities', the insurgents themselves proclaim that "a Naxalite is a good citizen fighting for justice and equality" (Naxalite Revolution 2010). Invoking an anti-bourgeoisie nationalism, the Maoists' ideological slogans such as "land to the tiller", "people's court" and "national democratic revolution" are informed by a decisive agenda for "agrarian revolution and fight for nationality (Maoist Documents 2004). According to Chakravarti, "the Maoists are patriots, by their own admission […]. India's Maoists do not want a separate country. They already have one. It's just not the way they would like it-yet" (2007: 15). Here, as Shrey Verma observes, the Maoists' "concept of 'nationality" seizes upon "the diverse and delicate fault lines that exist in India today" (2011: 9-10). And indeed, the Maoists claim that "India is a multi-national country – a prison-house of nationalities and all the nationalities have the right to self-determination including secession" (Maoist Documents 2004). In line with their consolidating vision for a deferred nationhood, Maoists began to pit regional political parties against the national outfits, "emphasizing the importance of regional sub-nationalism" (Verma 2011: 11). Supporting regional political interests, it was believed, would prevent "the Naxalite movement coming under severe strain against the might of a 'unified' Indian State" (ibid.). Inevitably, both the state-sponsored discourses of counter-terrorism in the interest of national sovereignty and the Maoist discourses on nationalism in the name of *adivasi* subalternity are acted out through modes of violence which I have described as necro-nationalism.

3. The Naxalite Insurgency in Hindi Cinema

Hindi Cinema provides an ideal platform for the exposition of necro-nationalism for two specific reasons. Firstly, as recent studies have shown, there is a historically grounded discursive collusion between Hindi Cinema or Bombay Cinema and

popular nationalism (Gabriel 2010; Herman 2005). Secondly, the "melodramatic" character of Hindi Cinema, which is defined as a "resolution for personalized, intensely enacted social conflicts that are often featured as primal ones, revealing its particular usefulness for narratives of family, community or nation" (Gabriel 2010: 66), has specific relevance to the way in which the discursive collusion between popular nationalism and its cinematic representation is played out. The normative processes of Hindu-centric hegemonies of the Hindi Cinema, as Karen Gabriel notes, are ideologically geared towards reinforcing "national coherence" through an uninterrupted discourse of Indian-ness, which are dramatized in the cinematic form as a "violent orientation" towards patriotism (66-80). Such a 'melodramatic' mode of Indian cinema, Gabriel concedes, poses problematic demands of "high nationalism" and patriotism, which invoke the allegorical unity of the Mother Nation or Mother India that impinge upon the "upper-caste Hindu" ethos, while relegating the diverse religious groups and contested communities to the margins of the nation (357), often Orientalizing them as the nation's internal Other.

In A.N. Mahadevan's film *Red Alert: The War Within* (2010), the tensions between popular as well contested nationalisms are played out through the shifting loyalties of the protagonist Narasimha. Based on real-life events, the film opens with Narasimha carrying food supplies to the Naxalites which inadvertently leads the police to the insurgents' hideout. The police take him for a Naxalite associate, while the Naxalites take him for a naïve peasant who does not know where his loyalties should lie. In a dramatic turn of events, Narasimha's character is transformed into an allegorical subaltern peasant of India, one who constantly wavers between the lure of mainstream life and the revolutionary left that promise him a way out of his crude realities. But it is the forced choice of reintegration, or rather assimilation, into the lawful national realm which seals Narasimha's fate, as his journey from the humble backwaters of

country life, coursing through the dangers of wilderness to the revolutionary promise, ends in a peaceful suburban house with a flat-screen TV. In line with Elleke Boehmer's (2005) exposition of the "male hero's journey" in the discourses on postcolonial nation-building, Narasimha's journey could be best described as the indigenous hero's national journey from wilderness to modernity which, even in its progressive form, is premised on an internal Othering of an untamed, wild, undesired self that is the excess of the nation. The narrative strategy of *Red Alert* revolves around this very ambivalent characterization of Narasimha as the nation's Other, whose selfhood is attained through a progressive reintegration into the nation's center, but with the hindsight of his journey from the periphery. Sure enough, Narasimha's ambivalence reaches a tipping point when two school children die in his arms in crossfire with the police forces. In a confused moment, he collaborates with the state to wipe out the entire *dalam* (guerilla squad) that he is part of, but balks when he is presented an opportunity to kill his leader Kishan Ji. The film ends with an unassuming twist wherein Kishan Ji reemerges as a folk hero of sorts, a savior of the nation's poor and the downtrodden under the pretext of an absent state. Yet, Narasimha's complicity in the death of his fellow comrades remains a necessary sacrifice, or a moral proxy, for the salvation of the folk hero Kishan Ji who eventually renounces Naxalism for progressive reformism, devoting his life to the welfare and wellbeing of the *adivasis*.

Likewise, Sudhir Mishra's film *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* (2003) deals with the tensions between popular and armed nationalism in post-Independence India, particularly during the Emergency period in the 1970s. As the story unfolds, the two conflicting characters Vikram and Sidharth come to represent the two contradictory facets of India – the urban bourgeoisie and the rural peasantry – while Geetha (as in *Bhagvat Geetha*), the British-educated female protagonist, stands for the allegorical Bharat Mata or Mother India. Sidharth, the son of a wealthy

industrialist, goes on to join a Maoist group in Bihar which had been fighting the upper-caste atrocities against the untouchables. The subversion of class ranks, social desires and civic responsibilities of the characters provide an ideal dramatic platform for the mutual effacement of the internal Otherness within the nation. Notwithstanding their rhetoric of class enemy and class struggle, the insurgency in Bihar takes up mostly caste and communal based agrarian struggles of the time. Interestingly, their campaign reveals a great deal of affinity to the 'derivative' discourse of anti-colonial nationalism, the sort of Gandhian nationalism which was built on the pacifist ideals of Gram Swaraj ('village self-rule'), much to the negation of their own ideological commitment to revolutionary socialism. While this suggests a paternalistic, if not a pedagogic, appropriation of the lower-caste struggles by the urban middleclass, it further alludes to a process of internal Othering wherein the intervention by the Self is enacted as an ideological imperative to the attainment of national coherence. Although it is the same self-appointed guilt of the urbanites over their perceived complicity with social injustice and corruption that draws Geetha towards Sidharth and to follow his path to the Indian villages, she cannot resist the pull towards her own bourgeois past and goes on to marry a civil servant. This ill-fated marriage, however, does not prevent Geetha from continuing her affair with Sidharth – just as how the national elite would not be separated from the indigenous subjects – who by now is a full-blown Naxalite serving in the villages of Bihar. Vikram, on the other hand, the son of a Gandhian nationalist, builds a successful career as a power broker. And when things start falling apart with her two lovers, Geetha turns to Vikram's corrupt schemes to fix her life. In a symbolic testimony of the rape of the Indian democracy under Indira Gandhi's regime, the Bihari police capture and rape Geetha during the Emergency riots in 1976. In a bid to save Geetha and Sidharth from police atrocities and state terror, Vikram risks his life, ending up in a

mental institution, later under the care of Geetha who, like a faithful Bharat Mata, returns to the Bihari villages to serve the lower castes and the Naxalites alike.

Like Sudhir Mishra's film, Prakash Jha's *Chakravyuh* (2011), too, is a tale of friendship, betrayal, misplaced loyalties and altruisms that are ultimately mediated through necropolitics. Adil Khan and Kabir are two childhood friends who begin their careers in the police service. Reminiscent of a doppelganger motif, the dramatization of the film unfolds through repeated episodes of testing each other's loyalties or foiling each other's schemes which, at a symbolic level, are played out as India's own Manichean fantasy for choosing between the 'good' and the 'bad' nation. While Adil represents everything that a post-independent Indian citizen *desires* and *ought to be* – an altruistic, urban-educated, morally upright, upper middle-class and hard working Indian –, Kabir is an obstacle to such desired traits of the Indian citizenry. He is at once poor, unstable, dependent (on his friend for education), wayward, and above all else, unwaveringly loyal to his friend Adil. Both Adil and his wife Rhea Menon succeed in their careers by remaining faithful to the civic code of a 'model Indian citizen'. Kabir's penchant for 'instant justice', however, lands him in frequent trouble, only to be rescued and 'corrected' by Adil. A decorated police officer, Adil suffers a huge setback when he loses scores of his policemen in an ambush laid out by the Naxalites in Nandighat, where a steel plant led by the Mahanta Group of Industries is due for construction. Despite repeated attempts to contain the growing strength of the Naxals in Nandighat, led by its charismatic leader Rajan alias Comrade Azad, Adil loses more of his men and is left mortally wounded. It is at this very moment that Kabir re-enters as the savior of Adil's life and career, and in a bid to repay his loyalties, he agrees to infiltrate Rajan's *dalam* as Adil's informer. Soon after this, Adil begins to see results in the seizure of a huge cache of arms and ammunition, and in the death of 64 Naxalites. Although Kabir

gradually grows into the Naxalite movement and begins to identify with their suffering, he reluctantly leads Adil to the capture of Rajan and replaces him as the *dalam*'s commander. But following the rape of his female comrade, Juhi, by the local police, Kabir turns the tables and declares a war against his friend, the state, the police and the Mahanta Group of Industries. As the village tribals refuse to sell or vacate their land for the proposed steel factory, the Mahanta Group, with the help of the state, the police and the private army, bulldozes the tribal villages while the inhabitants are inside their homes. In an epic battle that would determine the fate of the Naxalites in Nandighat, Kabir embarks on a suicide mission distracting the police forces to save his comrades, only to be shot by Adil's wife Rhea. In a typical melodramatic move, the film ends with a scene where Kabir dies in the arms of his childhood friends and his assassins Adil and Rhea with the confession that he regrets causing "pain and grief" to his friends. In this overt doppelganger climax, wherein the wayward Other is typically suppressed by the good Self, it is only the good Indian who prevails. And the only good Indian, as it were, is the Indian with a gun. Or rather, the only bad Indian is the dead Indian.

Here, if Adil and Rhea represent the ideal citizenry of the normative, if not the pedagogic, discourse of Indian nationalism, Kabir's 'less pain inflicting' gesture, suicidal as it may be, can be read as a necessary sacrifice for the legitimatization of two contested claims over the Indian nation. At once, Kabir is the wild, untamed, impulsive yet naïve twin of the *adivasi* insurgent whose nationalism impinges on tropes of emotive responses – the rape of Juhi, the bulldozing of the villages – and the passive victim of a misguided path who would eventually return to the care of the pedagogic nation that is gesturally configured by his death in the hands of his friends. Correspondingly, the Mahanta Group, the mining industries, the tribal landscape and their constituent physical violence serve as a mere background to the dramatization of the competing nationalisms of Adil and Kabir.

Such necropolitical encounter, however, is not restricted to the narrative elements of the three films under discussion. Instead, by virtue of their "melodramatic interruption", it extends to the films' very dramatic form. Borrowing from Ashish Rajadhyaskha's work, Gabriel defines "melodramatic interruption" as a "characteristic form of narrative and dramaturgy" (2010: 69). Arguing that such 'interruption' to dramatic form is produced by cultures that fall outside of the "ineffectual modernity-tradition dualism" (ibid., see Kumar 2011: 193), Gabriel's reading of nationalism points to the incorporation of various formal aspects of Bombay Cinema, including an emphasis on stability and family, "song and dance", which not only help modify the "structures of desire", but also ensure the continuity and stability of the nation-state's political status quo, patriarchy, and its various hegemonic elements (Gabriel 2010: 86; Kumar 2011: 192-193). In other words, in cultures that fall outside of the 'ineffectual modernity-tradition dualism', melodrama's dramatic form, along with its heightened emotional character, is sustained by the sheer veracity of cultural demands placed by local, vernacular and indigenous traditions, coupled with extremely polarized dramatic traditions that shape their cinematic expectations. 'Melodramatic interruption', in this sense, can be seen as a response to the diverse dramaturgic traditions that share the same cultural space under the guise of a unified nation.

If melodrama is understood as the representation of heightened dramatization of social desires as being normative, then it is perhaps the opening scene of *Red Alert* that makes a compelling case for such melodramatic interruption. The scene introduces Narasimha carrying food in a pedal rickshaw, and is set against the idyllic village background of lush green, with a fading background tune of an ancient Karantic *raag*. The implied serenity and innocence of country backwaters is quickly interrupted by a rain of bullets piercing through tree trunks, leaves and the bodies of the Naxalites. Trapped in the midst of

police forces and Naxalites, the innocent Narasimha is suddenly forced to taking sides. As he witnesses the mutilation of police bodies by the Naxalites, one of the insurgents reassures Narasimha: "Don't fret. They are revolutionaries, their mistakes won't be wasted."[11] Here, not only that Narasimha is reassured of the indispensability of violence, but he is literally drawn into the *literacy* of violence by forcefully acquainting himself with the use of guns, ammunition, transportation of corpses, and so on. His woes in the Naxal *dalam* are frequently contrasted with the euphoric flashbacks to his idyllic house in the middle of fields – curiously set in a village but with no signs of adjacent houses or neighbors – where his wife and two children await his return. Eventually, Narasimha's escape from the Naxal *dalam* is anchored on this very trope of a stable family, or the desire of it, one that is reassured by a melodramatic mode. Fittingly, the film ends with Narasimha watching a television show with his family in which Kishan Ji is featured in his new incarnation as a socialist industrialist, followed by a sub-frame in which Narasimha reassures himself in a soliloquy-like voiceover that fades out into the closing credits of the film: "But even a remote villager like me could show someone like Kishan Ji a different path for change". This soliloquy reconnects the audience to an earlier encounter between Narasimha and Kishan Ji in the film, at a clandestine meeting where the latter concocts a plan to kill a legislator who is lobbying to take away a mining company from the tribal areas that would otherwise benefit them. Following the meeting, Narasimha encounters Kishan Ji, questioning his decision: "It is our people on both sides, Sir, why this bloodshed?" "Why? Because this state is a terrorist?" retorts Kishan Ji. "They do the violence, we merely respond to it. Counter-violence, against capitalists." The innocent Narasimha brings his guard down: "Do we get to live good lives then, Sir? How long would it take?" "Seems you are in a hurry for

[11] All subsequent translations of the dialogues in the three films from Hindi to English are mine.

revolution?" responds an impatient Kishan Ji. "This is war, we might as well end up on the losing side. There is no guarantee that we will win. What is important is that we [the Naxalites] remain."

Such political imperative for the sheer existence of the Naxalites vis-à-vis the persistence of violence is also central to Sudhir Mishra's *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*. In a quasi-epistolary form, the film is narrated by its two male protagonists Sidharth and Vikram, and on rare occasions by female protagonist Geetha, all of whom represent contrasting sociopolitical positions, viewpoints and contexts. The opening sequence is narrated by Sidharth with a sarcastic twist on Nehru's Independence Day speech, which cuts to the scenes of student life in the 1960s. The overall left-wing and anti-establishment mood of the students is exaggerated by the narrator's praise for the Naxalbari movement and his epiphany that "the violence of the oppressed is right. And the violence of the oppressor is wrong. And to hell with ethics." This sequence is interrupted by Vikram's narration, which is set against a gathering of Gandhian leaders in his house that are suggestive of the narrators' conflicting viewpoints over revolutionary ethics and Gandhian morals. In the course of the film, this contrasting narration is melodramatized by a reversal of the social roles of its two male narrators: while the 'rich kid' Sidharth takes on a path for Naxal violence, the 'son of a Gandhian' Vikram embraces the soft violence of democratic politics. In either case, the film epitomizes violence as a necessary means both to obtain political power and to challenge it. However, the dramatization of violence in the film is relegated to the village domain, despite the fact that the narrative of the film is centered on Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule in the 1970s, which affected mostly the urban-based, upper middle-class intellectuals. More importantly, it is the same upper middle-class intellectuals who are depicted as the vanguards of the Gram Swaraj, while the villagers are portrayed as too docile to use violence ethically and righteously. This is exemplified by

Sidharth's narration of an event in a Bihari village, where a group of furious villagers, all set to kill the son of their landlord for the rape of an untouchable girl, is suddenly overcome by compassion for their master as he begins to feign a heart attack. Recounting this event, Sidharth remarks: "This strange compassion of the villagers towards their oppressor taught me something, which I am still trying to decipher."

Subsequently, the transportation of the Emergency-related violence to the countryside, coupled with a melodramatic mode of narration, remains complicit with the political status quo which sees the village as a natural site for corpses, rape, decay and destruction. Even rogue justice is portrayed as a natural part of Naxal violence. For instance, in his last letter to Geetha, Sidharth narrates: "The world hadn't changed in the ways I'd wanted to. I know that you are right, when you say it has. No one can rape a lower caste woman in that part of the world easily. He might get a certain body part chopped off. I know that it is a leap of about five thousand years." Such naturalization, or even inscription, of violence upon the bodies of the Naxalites and the lower caste villagers is characteristic of Giorgio Agamben's (2003) distinction between "bare life" and "political life" which, according to Mbembe (2003), is deemed necessary for the institution of necropolitical violence in the postcolony.

In *Chakravyuh*, however, the melodramatic interruption courses through a curious blend of realism, reportage-like narration and their melodramatization. Loosely based on real-life events, the film begins with the arrest of its ideologue, Professor Govind Suryavanshi, replicating the arrest of Binayak Sen in 2007. The Naxalite leader Rajan alias Azad is also modeled after a real-life Naxalite commander who bears the same pseudonym, and his interviews to the media, facing the camera with the back of the head, covered in muslin are also based on actual events in the Dandakaranya region. This realistic, reportage-like dramatization, however, is limited to rather formative traits of

Rajan's character. For instance, the portrayal of him being a charming yet ruthless Naxalite leader who advocates mutilating methods of punishment is grossly fictionalized. Such fictionalization, in turn, helps demonize the real-life character of Azad while valorizing Rajan's justification of counter-violence – "Every attack of ours is in defense of poor tribals who have been crushed by the police and the state" – which is at once dramatized as irrational, unsound and primeval, as opposed to the violence of the state and police forces which is deemed justly rational and purposive. This is particularly the case with the very first sequence of confrontation between the two forces, in which the Naxal cadres led by Rajan ambush and hunt down the policemen like hungry predators. In a replica sequence, but with reversed roles, Adil Khan's troops parade into a tribal celebration that is dramatized into an 'item song'[12], and kill 64 *adivasis* in a failed attempt to capture Rajan. While this sequence is loosely based on the real-life accounts of the killings of tribal protesters in Nandigram in 2007, its dramatization through an 'item song' sequence serves a specific melodramatic function, one that not only trivializes the Naxal's cause, but one which lends all the more legitimacy to the triumph of state violence.

In all three films, although it is the systemic soft violence of underdevelopment, failure of governance and the denial of tribal people's existence which are touted as the root causes of the Naxalite insurgency, it is the *necropolitical* violence which takes a lion's share of the screen time and its constituent dramatization. And on most occasions, it is invariably the tribal people and their huts, farms, lakes and natural habitat that find themselves at the receiving end of indiscriminate violence and physical destruction. Moreover, the films are replete with melodramatic interruptions of gross anomalous proportions such as rural landscapes whose vast, jungle-like habitat is often interrupted by

[12] 'Item song' in the context of Indian cinema is a reference to a dance-song sequence which interrupts the drama, and is typically featured by female characters whose sole purpose is to tease the audience with sexual innuendos.

the flamboyant parading of state-of-the-art SUVs and helicopters, explosions, carpet bombings and flying body parts. In essence, if the natural habitat, particularly the tribal habitat, is presented as the *terra nulla* of death and destruction, then violence itself is portrayed as an indispensable means for asserting nationalist demands. Accordingly, the discourses of safety and civility are constructed by relegating necropolitical violence to the tribal habitat of the dispossessed subject who is often recast into nature as the savage object, one who must be tamed and disciplined through the very violence that (s)he is presumed to embody. A similar strategy of Orientalizing the Indian tribals was employed by the colonial state, which governed tribal territories under the *res nullius* principle and labeled tribals subjects who trespassed into non-tribal territories as "innately criminal" (Bates 1995: 10). The postcolonial Indian state partially inherited these Orientalist traits of colonial governance, contributing to their segregation from the mainstream society ("Adivasis, Mining" 2010). However, following the discovery of mineral resources in the tribal areas in the 1980s, the Indian state launched a series of development programs with a decisive agenda to assimilate the tribal populations into the mainstream economy. As in Hamid Dabashi's notion of "*epistemic endosmosis*"[13] (2009: 222; emphasis in original), this "push and pull" Orientalist approach was designed to merely meet short-term goals – to segregate the *adivasis* where you can, and assimilate them when you cannot.

4. **Conclusion**

While the three films under discussion make a modest attempt at dramatizing the causes and conditions of the Naxalite insurgency from a fairly objective position, they remain complicit with the discourses of internal Orientalism, new

[13] Dabashi's "*epistemic endosmosis*" refers to the epistemology of Orientalism that is no longer static but has multiple, mutable trajectories and functions.

terrorism and pedagogic nationalism by virtue of their melodramatic interruption, which is historically shaped by, and invested in, the populist demands of homogeneous nationhood. As a result, instead of accounting for the systemic and soft violence of the state institutions, the excessive or heightened dramatization of necropolitical violence in the three films aids the pedagogic discourses of nationalism to restore an ideology of normative social order and its desired stability. While casting nature as the victim of its own congenital violence, the various post-Orientalist discourses of normative order call for "modernist" interruptions through "development", "progress", "assimilation" and "ecopolitical' governance (Andrée 2011: 71). In *Chakravyuh*, for instance, the Chairman of the Mahanta Group reassures that "we take social responsibility seriously; we will build houses for the tribals, hospitals, an international school, and even a world-class university." Here, it is none other than India's Central Minister Chidambaram who draws the complicity between pedagogic nationalism, internal Orientalism and melodramatic populism dramatically upfront: "Do you want the tribals to remain hunters and gatherers? Are we trying to preserve them in some sort of anthropological museum? Yes, we can allow the minerals to remain in the ground for another 10,000 years, but will that bring development to these people?" (Chidambaram qtd. in Navlaka 2010). While both 'development' and 'anti-development' assume a violent course of action, the return to the Indian indigene, the emancipation from lower caste oppression and the *adivasi* question are represented as the major undertakings of the Naxalite insurgency in the three films discussed in this essay, wherein a certain reinvention, if not redemption, of the Indian nation through necropolitical means is presented as no longer the *adivasis*', but the Brown Man's Burden.

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