

The lost identity of Mother India: Rape, mutilation and a socio-political critique of Indian society

Šarūnas Paunksnis

Vytautas Magnus University

Abstract. The article discusses a film by Deepa Mehta, a filmmaker who is a part of the so-called Indian Parallel Cinema, and a critic of Indian culture and society. The main argument of the article is that in the landmark film *Earth*, Mehta portrays a character to personify the idea of Mother India. Mehta's vision of Mother India is rendered psychoanalytically as being raped by her sons—something that had started during the partition of India and continues till our times. The article introduces and re-thinks categories of Indianness, rape, alienness, which are vital to our understanding of contemporary Indian culture and society. One of the main operating categories of the article is *identity*—what it means in our modern times, and what it means to lose it—something that happened in 1947 during the partition, and is still continuing. The article also stands in opposition to the traditional understanding of the Mother—in contemporary times, as it is argued, Mother is not cherished by her Sons, instead, she is raped and mutilated, as a consequence of ontological insecurity and desire for identity.

Introduction

This is the story of India—of India being mutilated, raped and being slowly stripped of its children. This is the story of Mother India through the eyes of Deepa Mehta, a visionary filmmaker and her film *Earth*. In fact, there are two films in this film: one tells a story of a girl growing up in turbulent times and of her family, the eccentric Parsees trying to imitate the British way of life. (I will not follow this path.) The second film-in-the-film is more relevant to this study: the story of a small group of people with different religious identities and at the same time one national identity—that of being Indian. Mehta's film is about the partition of India, which took place in 1947, but at the same time it is a highly metaphorical tale of identity and what it means to lose it.

Far too often, the postcolonial condition is taken for granted as being 'a sort of bliss'. A nation under the rule of the colonists suffers, but one day the occupiers leave and the nation is left on its own.

A beautiful picture one should think.

But the problems faced by postcolonial nations run deeper than it might appear at first glance. I argue that the main problem is that of identity and the desire for identity. Here two different notions mingle into one—on the one hand we have desire, a psychological

condition, on the other—identity. And what happens when two notions mingle into one? This is what erupted in India in 1947, and is continuing into the 21st century—a desire-for-identity; the fear of not having one. One of the key concepts I re-work in this essay is that of Mother India—a country and an idea of a homeland. As all mothers, Mother India has her own children that gather around her full of love and admiration—men and women with different religious identities and different points of view, but at the same time with one large identity—that of being Indian. In the first half of the film we witness the India that was before the partition, where everyone ‘seemed to be at home in the world’, using the psychoanalytical terminology. But then things changed.

What happened in 1947 did not happen because of political decisions or religious sentiments. The tragedy of the subcontinent, which took one million lives, happened because of two intersecting discourses—the discourse of modernity and the discourse of tradition. The culmination of the intersection of these two discourses was reached in the first half of the 20th century. This produced confusion and alienness—a sense of being thrown out of time and place, a sense of non-belonging. What we see in the movie is the intersection of three categories—wholeness, oneness and alienness, and in this discourse only alienness has a chance to survive, for oneness and wholeness both belong to a time when two separate discourses of tradition and modernity existed.

This is a story both of losing identity and trying to retain it at all costs. This is a story of three lives that intersect, that affect one another and in the end get lost between the discourses. This is a story of the discourse of Indianness as well—what makes one Indian and what it takes to remain one, for lives are washed away, but discourses remain—indestructible.

The film discussed in this essay is by an Indian—Canadian director Deepa Mehta, who is regarded as being one of the leading Indian diasporic filmmakers while at the same time, criticized in India for her critical attitudes towards Indian culture and politics.

Analyzing Deepa Mehta

The analysis of Mehta’s films is not new. Scholars from various fields are working on her oeuvre, and taking sides. I would argue that there are two types of critique—a left-wing and a right-wing. The former is represented by postcolonial critics who assume that Deepa Mehta managed to grasp a very important issue in the development of Indian society in 20th century (Desai 2004, 159–93).¹ I would also argue that in her work, Mehta clearly positions herself as a leftist author, concerned not only about the feminine identity, but also with the portrayal of the subaltern, unprivileged and unrepresented. However, most of the criticism for Mehta’s work comes from those

¹ While Jigna Desai is analyzing *Fire* in her essay, some generalities about Mehta’s work can be extracted from this.

who could be categorized as the traditionalists. This is quite obvious, because Mehta portrays the struggle for a unique Indian identity as a pathology—something that is very painful to accept. According to some authors (Jain 2007), Deepa Mehta's work lacks the deep understanding of Hindu culture and Hindu worldview. I would say that when it comes to exposing the problems that Indian society is facing, there is always a clash between those who are not afraid to speak about it, and those who simply reject that there are problems in the first place. This article assumes the left-wing position in the discourse, and sides with those who think that the contemporary developments in India in the 20th century are more problematic than they seem for the Hindu nationalists like Hindutva and Shiv Sena—two organizations that have attacked Mehta very sharply, pushing the discourse towards physical destruction of the film theatres and the set of *Water* in Varanasi, the last part of the trilogy—which had to be shot in Sri Lanka in order to avoid the violence provoked by *Earth* and *Fire*, the first two parts.

While Mehta is admired by the upper educated classes in India and Indian diaspora, she remains a very controversial figure in the artistic critics of Indian society. Even more, she is largely unknown to the masses in India as her films are a major departure from the so-called Hindi masala films. While the discourse of the critique of Deepa Mehta is out there, this article takes a completely different angle of her film *Earth*. That is to say, the film has never been analyzed from the perspective of India as the Mother and violence against her. In this sense, the present critique is very Kleinian, and looks at Indian society as a pathological one. It is possible to argue over this, of course, but I assume that there is not a single society that does not have its own pathologies and India is no exception.

Desire for identity

Just imagine this scene: a Muslim, a Hindu and a Sikh in one single frozen frame, sharing a single space, shyly looking at the breasts of Mother India with amazement and wonder. This is one of the opening scenes of the movie by Deepa Mehta called *Earth*. Many would argue that the central character of the movie is a little girl and her family, the eccentric Parsee family trying to imitate the British way of life. I argue that the main character, the central figure of the movie is Shanta, the servant of the family, and that she embodies India as such. In the scene at the beginning of the film Shanta represents India, she's Mother India with her breasts and everyone looks at them, everyone desires them. There is silence in that shot, no one is moving, just observing India with amazement. This is the India that is about to crack, to be torn apart, raped and mutilated. As Sudhir Kakar notes, the Mother is the strongest love-object for her son, and obviously here he quotes Sigmund Freud, who wrote about this back in 1938 (Kakar 1978, 52). In India, as Kakar notes, sons are preferred

to daughters, and we clearly see this in *Earth*—there is no sight of a Daughter, only Mother and her Sons (Dil Nawaz and Hassan). We should not look at the Mother in Sri Aurobindian terms as a pure being (Heehs 2008, 347). Here I would like to stress a huge departure from the traditional image of Mother India (Bharat Mata) that Mehta makes. We can assume that the age of idealization and a perceived enlightened life is over, no matter how fictional and unreal that idealized life in a cocoon was. In the real world and in the dystopian claustrophobia of Mehta there is no place for the enlightened Children of Mother India in the style of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who conceptualized the notion for the first time in his *Anandamath* (Chattopadhyay 2005). There is no place and quite simply—no moral justification for the chanting of *Bande Mataram*. In Mehta's universe such breaks from reality would be grotesque and ridiculous. It is true that the image of Mother India as penned by Chattopadhyay served the common good—the arousal of nationalistic sentiments, but it should also be noted that the idealized world of the pure is fiction, even more—it is a refusal to accept reality and a reinforcement of the pathologies in the society that could prove (and actually did) dangerous for the society in general. To live in a dream world, to dwell on the sugary ideas of a society guided by the righteous in the pursuit of an ideal is precisely what it is—a dream world, a utopia with no connection to reality. Of course, it mobilizes the masses when a nationalistic goal must be achieved, but in the long run it is more harmful than useful. And while the chants of *Bande Mataram* and the righteous struggle of the Children of the Mother India of Chattopadhyay helped in mobilizing the society, Deepa Mehta showed us what happened after the party was over. The Mother was deflowered by her own devoted Children. The Mother of Mehta is at the core of the violence, the object of this violence and rape. Like I said, this contrasts a lot with the typical image of a woman and a Mother, where she should be at the core of affection (Michaels 2004, 124). We see this at the beginning of the film, but in the second part this idealized vision disappears and all we see is the postcolonial condition where cold, rational, masculine Western ideals prevail over perceived irrationality and the femininity of the Tantric Orient (Urban 2010, 1–31).

The film focuses on identity, the desire for identity, having no choice but to choose identity and to wear it like a mask to hide your true feelings and true belongings. There is no identity without desire, and this film is about the mingling of desire and identity. Here, two questions arise—what is desire and what is identity? How do we define these categories? More than that—how do we define these categories in relation to India, having in mind that we are stripping ourselves from the neo-Orientalist point of view, and more—of missionary liberal democracy? I propose that we start with a simple idea that colonialism and capitalism are deeply interrelated (Young 1995, 166–68). Greed, and the search for lands to exploit, caused colonialism, and at the same time, the exploitation caused the growth of capital and started to widen the gap

between the rich and poor of the world—something that we are feeling till our brave times. The convulsions of capitalism that were (and are) felt on the whole planet produced the general crisis of identity on various levels. We should not, however, think that the crisis of identity was caused only by colonialism. To a certain extent, yes, but it is not limited to the colonized people, to whom modernity caused shock and stripped them of their fixed identity—something that was always complicated, yet tranquil, acting as an anti-depressant in order to soothe the condition of man. The crisis of identity started to happen in the centre—a sort of psychosis that started to spread throughout the world from places like London or Paris. What is this psychosis I am talking about? Madness happens when a person does not feel at home in the world, when he feels alien, when he feels left out alone to scream in darkness. This is the primary symptom of schizophrenia (Laing 1990). With the changes caused in Europe by greed and the lust for gold, tea, spices etc., people started feeling insecure, that is, identity and self-understanding started to change dramatically, which led to what we may call the crisis of identity. The eternal question arises—why? Why might someone start feeling insecure because of, say, a variety of spices is available in the market? Everything is much more complicated than that. If we want to understand the world, first we must understand ourselves; thus, if we want to understand the crisis of identity in India, first we must look at the crisis of identity in Europe, because it is from Europe that modernity, together with psychoses, crises, and all the other inventions started to spread throughout the world. If we want to understand identity and the divided selves of India, first we must look at the divided selves of Europe and America (if we talk about neo-colonialism). If we want to understand colonialism and its effects of Indian society, we must first analyze capitalism and the madness it has caused first and foremost in the West.

First of all we need to define identity-in-modernity in order to discuss the problem of desire for identity. Identity could be defined through the concepts of ontological security and anxiety, or to be more precise, having in mind that we are talking about identity-in-modernity—existential anxiety (Giddens 1991). A human being feels secure when, in the words of R.D. Laing, ‘he/she is at home in the world’. This ontological security is being developed in a person from the very early days of childhood—it is the security of a person in their surroundings, in the environment that is familiar. Beyond that lies chaos, that is, things that are unfamiliar. A human being that in our society is labeled as ‘normal’, believes in an ontological reality and the solid surface it creates.² It is the trust in others, in objects, and an emotional, cognitive orientation towards other people, objects and self-identity (Giddens 1991). That is to say, the unconscious feeling of self-identity comes with us from

² This, of course, is unconscious.

childhood, and of course is conditioned socially. So, identity is a feeling, a feeling at home in the world and with others. In other words, this is the opposite of madness. Identity and madness are two opposites that always go together; that draw a picture of our world and the world beyond—a chaos. It is obvious, that this is something that everyone would desire, this feeling of belonging, this trust in others and in the objects that are around. From here we can extract a simple notion of desire for identity—something that is natural, unconscious, justifiable and understandable. No one wants to live in a state of existential anxiety, because this is a source from which madness comes into our minds, a feeling that shatters everything that we are used to, smashes our trust in others and in ourselves into small pieces. The desire for identity comes at a stage when this homeliness and trust leaves a person. He/she is no longer secure, no longer at home in the world. As it is obvious, identity means normality. The loss of identity means madness, and the desire for identity means a wish to come back to a state that one left, to come back out of that chaos that lies beyond the world that is understood. This is when the Real comes out of the unconscious and starts to manifest itself, in Lacanian terms.

Something very interesting happened in India in 1947.

Over a period of time before 1947, the British were experimenting with the Indian identity, that is, they were trying to convince people that they were not who they thought they were, and were pushing them to adopt new identities—something that was simply created out of thin air by the nationalists and by the colonizers. To be at home in the world, as Deepa Mehta shows us, was to sit together in a garden and to watch the breasts of Mother India. As we can see in the beginning of the film, identity was neither questioned nor desired, but something quite simply taken for granted.

It is widely accepted that the film is about the partition of India looking through the eyes of a child. This might be so, but I argue that the film is about the desire for identity, and Shanta is at the centre of discourse. It is possible to call it a discourse of Indian identity, which coincides with India stepping into modernity, accepting the challenges of modern life and at the same time sacrificing itself on the altar of modernity. India allowed itself to be raped and mutilated, turned into a street whore for the sake of being a modern nation. I would argue that this sacrifice happened because of the blindness caused by the changes in the patterns of ontological security and the rupture that it caused—existential anxiety. It would be very wrong to argue that life in India was 'simple' before colonialism and modernity. Traditional societies are never simple; they are as complicated as any modern society, only on a different level. A human being in pre-modern India had the ontological security that was discussed above. In Mehta's words, it was simply an afternoon in a park among friends of different religions, different identities, but at the same time without the divisive understanding that religion could be something that divides. India at the birth of

modernity could be understood in a similar fashion—as an afternoon in the park among friends of different religions and identities all looking at the breasts of Mother India. The postcolonial condition could be visualized as a tranquil afternoon in the park where a Hindu conspires against a Muslim and Mother India sits in a corner with a black eye wondering when her schizophrenic children would let her be.

This scene at the beginning of the film signifies that all the people of India had ontological security; they had their identities fixed. With the coming of modernity, which is signified by industrialization and capitalism, the fixed identities and life to which everyone was used to—a life that was simply a being at home in the world, were disturbed. This scene of the film is crucial to our understanding of the changes in identity and in the understanding of the coming of uncertainty. This scene, or the scene in the park, continues throughout the movie, and we can observe how the relationships inside this group of people are changing. Once again, Shanta, as the embodiment of Mother India is at the centre. She is Mother India because she treats everyone in the same manner, and in fact it is explicitly expressed in the movie, where the men say that they are all like moths drawn towards the lamp. Everyone is drawn to Shanta, to India, disregarding their identities. Mehta shows us that apart from being an Indian, there are other identities in India—that of a Hindu, a Sikh and a Muslim. However, they all love the idea of a motherland in the same way—and this love signifies an identity, a single identity of Indianness, and in the discourse of Indianness where everyone is equal, everyone shares the same desire—a desire for identity, for belonging, for ontological security. Even the only colonist shown in the movie says that India is the only home he knows.

What is at stake here is the desire for identity. 1947 and the religious segregation was an eruption of this desire, a nearly sexual obsession for a flag, an identity and a homeland. Of course, homeland was always there, and there was no need to look for a new one. What caused this desire for identity was the disruption in the ontological security. Obviously, this is not limited to South Asia—we can observe this disruption in ontological security in all the colonies throughout the 20th century. Frantz Fanon was probably one of the first to analyze psychoanalytically this issue, though he never spoke about ontological security or existential anxiety. He produced a sharp critique of the West together with developing a psychology of colonialism (Sardar 2008). We can apply his analysis to India. The colonizers took away the pride from the local culture and gave an inferiority complex (Fanon 2008). In other words, the colonizers took away the ontological security, those calm afternoons in the park, and what they gave was existential anxiety—something new, coming together with modernity and its consequences. Security was replaced by anxiety, by the desire for identity. The old identities of India were taken away, were disrupted and destroyed, people took arms and started slaying each other—Hindus against Muslims against Sikhs. What happens

when security is taken away—when there are no more afternoons, no more quiet times in the company of the Mother? Identity is replaced by madness, as I discussed above. And in order for the madness to go away a desire for something fixed develops. Of course, these issues are not understandable for the subjects for this happens only in the unconscious. But when the unconscious starts to manifest itself in the real life, we have a mental problem. A mental problem of a nation is a mental problem not on an individual level, but on a collective level. We have dreams of the past and hopes for the future and everything is infused with anxiety. We have bodies. We have black bodies, as Fanon might say, looking for warmth and security. In the process, a difference is developed and we have a split in the consciousness of a nation—we have three categories in the place of one Indian identity, something we may call Indianness—wholeness (a synonym for Indianness, an identity on the run), oneness and alienness. In the film we have bodies that represent these three categories. Shanta as Mother India creates a discourse and the scene of her bare breasts is a clear evidence of this. But what should concern us is the love triangle between Shanta (wholeness), Dil Nawaz (alienness) and Hassan (oneness). The discourse of Indianness is marked by these three categories. What should be of concern is the intersection of these categories, and I argue that the intersection proved to be lethal for India, as wholeness.

The character of Dil Nawaz clearly represents alienness and being lost in the discourse. Alienness came to him, he never chose it as no one chooses it, and it came to him as a disruption of his homeland, of wholeness. He loves Shanta, that is, he loves India, but at the same time a desire for identity is born in him—an identity as a fiction; an unnaturally formed identity of being outside of discourse, outside of India and what India represents. This, of course, is false concept—everyone is part of discourse. Being lost in the discourse is what alienness is all about. Here we can also talk about the problems of modernity, or a discourse of modernity and a discourse of tradition. In 1947, at the time of the partition, there was already no clear separation between the discourse of modernity and a discourse of tradition. The mingling of the discourses negated the opposition of tradition and modernity and their separate discourses—we can now talk about one discourse in the globalized world brought together by the forces of colonialism, where the tradition gets disrupted by modernity, and at the same time modernity gets affected by tradition, by colonies, by the wretched of the earth and transnationalism etc. This is where the concept of alienness can be introduced. Everyone is lost between the discourses because all that was taken for granted gets simply disrupted, both at the centre and in the periphery of the colonies. Dil Nawaz is the embodiment of this impossibility to accept the change in the world; he loses himself in the insanity of love and violence—these two categories define the alienness of Dil Nawaz—he loves Mother India, but in the end he takes part in her destruction. Love and violence here are deeply related to the category of a desire for identity to a desire to feel at home in the world and a wish to escape madness. We can

see that Dil Nawaz is not blinded by the partition, by the hate against Hindus, which was a product of colonialism. Dil Nawaz has innocence inside him and love for his homeland—his only tragedy is that he is being rejected by it; he is thrown out of his fixed identity of his love for Mother India. To a certain extent, though the central character of the film is Shanta, Dil Nawaz is the most complex one. He is the clear expression of desire for identity—a mental state that was and still is very much part of each and every human being on the subcontinent. But what happens when desire and identity mingle into one? Desire for identity was discussed above, it is clearly defined and a natural state of consciousness, it is the wish to escape madness and once again, to be at home in the world. But desire and identity, or desire-through-identity, or identity-through-desire are all quite different issues.

In 1947, the categories of wholeness and alienness collided in the discourse of Indianness and were embodied in questioning identity—what makes one Indian. In the discourse it was decided that it was religion that defines India—a false and forged concept imposed on the people by themselves. Both sides suffered, and the film re-creates this suffering on the basis of love. There are many scenes in the film that show a deep love of Dil Nawaz for Shanta, for instance, the kite flying scene. Dil Nawaz teaches Shanta how to fly kites, and explains to her that one should treat a kite like a lover, and then hugs Shanta from behind helping her to fly a kite. Shanta laughs and simply says 'A flatterer'. What can we extract from this scene? We have the innocence in identity, where alienness has not yet shown its presence. A Muslim embraces Mother India, and thinks of himself as her lover. We can feel the love and affection in this scene, a possibility for preventing the crisis of identity in the discourse of a mutual disruption, which in this scene is only latent. Mother India flirts with Dil Nawaz and he has hope for the love to happen in reality—in his reality—but things turn out the other way around. This is probably the last scene of hope in the film, after that we are forced to watch the appearance of the Real, and its appearance brings only insanity.

Let's discuss another fascinating character, which is equal in innocence to Dil Nawaz at the beginning of the film—Hassan. He is also a Muslim in love with his Mother India, but being equal in innocence to Dil Nawaz he is different. He represents what is possible to call oneness, he never loses his mind, and he seems to be not affected by the madness surrounding him in any way. His innocence and oneness with Mother India helps him to escape it, and that is really fascinating—he is a true Indian, the way Indians were before the dividing forces of postcolonial insecurity, he still seems to be living in the discourse of tradition, not being aware that times have changed and the discourse that he thinks he lives in no longer exists. He is simply taken by Deepa Mehta out of time and place and thrown into a reality he does not understand and which has no effect on him. And being in this way he silently wins the love of Mother India. Here we can take several examples. First, the kissing scene: Shanta and Hassan are alone in the park, and they simply get close to each other,

though Shanta shows a great deal of shyness in this scene. The scene is crucial in understanding the relationship of India and Indian identity—we are told that religion does not matter, it is a category that is simply not valid, we are explicitly told that the whole discourse of Indianness is simply false, it is imposed on the people by the people. By winning the love of Mother India Hassan proves that in reality it is the relationship between wholeness and oneness that is possible, that holds a promise and hope. However, we must not forget the category of alienness, which in this particular instance is decisive. Oneness and wholeness cannot exist in their reality because of the intrusion of alienness and the birth of the postcolonial condition, which starts to manifest itself in the second half of the film.

Tradition, modernity, insanity

Tradition versus modernity is what the second half of the film is all about, no matter how forged and forced this opposition is, and this part should concern us most, because we can see the clash between the categories of wholeness, oneness and alienness. The clash is about identity, a desire for identity without realizing that identity is there as it has always been, only it is lost in the discourse and it is not visible. In this part of the film the characters of Dil Nawaz and Hassan come into full bloom. As the partition of India approaches and riots break out, so do our three characters. Mother India is lost—she has to choose between Dil Nawaz and Hassan, between alienness and oneness, but in fact the choice is not hers. She fancies oneness (Hassan), but she also feels fear while watching alienness approaching her. For instance, the scene when Dil Nawaz asks Shanta to marry him while saying the reason for his desire—to stay away from insanity. It is clear the Dil Nawaz feels that he is being consumed by the forces of the colonial mentality, that he feels alienness approaching him and he makes a simple choice—to marry Mother India, that is, to stay with his old identity that is cracking, as the subcontinent cracks. He fears alienness as a new kind of identity that he is forced to accept, that he is left with no choice but to accept: an identity of being thrown out of India and the identity of Indianness. He is forced to accept that he is no longer an Indian, that he is a Pakistani, and he does not want this to happen to him. But the choice is not his; the alienness makes a choice for him. Shanta refuses to marry him, and in this scene we can see the confusion and great sadness in her face—Mother India has rejected her own child, but she did this unconsciously for the excesses of colonialism and alienness coming together, it started to have a great effect on her, a vital effect, which produced a tragedy of the subcontinent.

What happens to Dil Nawaz after a failed attempt to propose to Shanta reflects what happens in 1947—disrupted lives, death and fear. Dil Nawaz loses himself in the insanity of the partition; he becomes a murderer and a victim at the same time.

His one and only hope was to be accepted by Mother India as her lover and as her child, but in some sense Mother India lost herself in the insanity as well. We can see that from the confusion on her face. In a scene that follows we see Dil Nawaz offering a gold coin to Shanta, which she refuses to accept—this is another attempt to retain a familiar identity, to be accepted, not to be thrown out of India into an unknown territory in terms of identity.

Things have been quite obvious and simple so far, and quite predictable. But we must not forget the character of Hassan and his place in the great game of newborn hatred and disruption. Now we come to a crucial scene which decides the fate of India—the sex scene of Shanta and Hassan. Mother India accepts a man with a Muslim Indian identity as her lover. On the other hand, in the same way she could have accepted Dil Nawaz—as was stated before, he and Hassan were identical in terms of identity in the beginning. What is crucial here is the identity of Hassan—the identity of old India, when no one ever imagined the partition. Mother India is willing to accept a Muslim the way Muslims and Hindus were before being caught in the insanity of the alien and imposed notions of the nation and nation state. Here sex is highly symbolical—a unifying category between Mother India and her child—and here Hassan proves to be both a lover of Mother India and her child, and Mother India is willing to accept her child, and she does. In the scene that follows Shanta says to Hassan: ‘I will always be yours’. That is to say, Mother India will always be willing to accept a person with the Indian identity; everything depends on a child. And Hassan proves to be a perfect child and a lover of his mother unlike Dil Nawaz. Insanity here is not acceptable. I will always be yours. These words are crucial, because they reflect not the present, but the future—Indianness will always be an indestructible identity, no matter what happens in the future. You can rape and mutilate identity, but the discourse of Indian identity is and always will be ever living, ever present.

The insanity of the partition most clearly manifests itself at the end of the film. We have to have in mind that the partition of India was caused not by political decisions or religious sentiments—on the conscious level that was what we were told and that was what people like Muhammad Ali Jinnah thought was their driving force, but our conscious decisions are dictated by the unconscious movements, and the rest is just an apologetic way of making excuses and believing that these excuses are a part of real life. In reality, if we really want to understand what was behind the partition and the massive mass movement of the population, we should turn our attention to the unconscious processes involving the categories of desire, love, identity and the massive amount of forgery that was produced, in a way unconsciously, to justify the actions on the political level. In real life, brother killed brother. And in the film Dil Nawaz kills Hassan out of passion for Mother India, as he was not chosen by her. The killing, though it is not shown explicitly, is also highly symbolical. Alienness destroys oneness; the new and disrupted identity destroys the old and familiar one. It does not

matter that both Dil Nawaz and Hassan were Muslims, that is to say, brothers. Here, religious identity should not be considered important. Obviously the official line is that the partition happened out of the wish for the Muslims to have their own state so they would not be trampled on by the Hindus in an independent India. It is just a cynical and forged justification without a slightest attempt to understand the brutality of the forces of the Western imperialism and all the ethereal notions it carries with itself wherever it goes, be it South Asia or the Middle East, Africa or Vietnam.

What is important in our case is that alienness destroys the child and lover of Mother India, someone that was always hers. A child is being taken away from his mother; though in the film, the Mother never becomes aware of that, at least, we are not shown this. In the end it is alienness that triumphs—the subcontinent, or Mother India has no choice but to accept the disruption, her own partial death, the partition and the creation of Pakistan, a new country with an identity that needs to be created out of alienness, in the middle of the discourse of mutual disruption.

The end of the film could be simply called a betrayal. Dil Nawaz, out of rage and after killing the child and the lover of Mother India, hands her over to a gang of radical Muslims, and all of them could be seen as possible lovers of Mother India, lost in the alienness of the discourse and the loneliness of postcolonial claustrophobia. We are boldly told that no one ever came to know what happened to Shanta after that, we are told that maybe she married Dil Nawaz (which is highly unlikely), and what is crucial, we are told that someone saw her in the brothels of Lahore. In the end Mother India is sacrificed by her possible child and lover and sold into prostitution, raped and mutilated and turned into a whore. It is possible to say that the ending of the film is very radical; it is a statement that Mother India simply becomes a prostitute. Obviously, it is not her own choice; she is forced into this by the forces of the discourse. And though the identity of Indianness can never be destroyed, it is mutilated for eternity.

Conclusion

History eats its own children. In our case, history was eaten by its children in order for the children to steal it, to possess it, to own it and to use it for their own pleasure. Deepa Mehta's film *Earth* is a highly metaphorical example of what happened to India in 1947. Here we don't have political statements or heroes, or villains. We have men circling around one woman—Mother India, which they are trying to possess, but all fail to do that. The film is about the desire for identity, the desire to retain old identity of Indianness, and a failure to do that. The partition of India, or as it is possible to say, the rape of Mother India is a direct consequence of Western imperialism on the unconscious level, and the category at work here is alienness—the inability to connect oneself to identity, the inability to quench the thirst of desire for identity, and that results in insanity and the stealing of the object of desire—India itself. In

Mehta's film *Mother India*, the one and only woman that means something to the men is desired, loved, and in the end—betrayed without a clear and rational understanding as to why. Religion? Shanta was a Hindu woman in post-partition Lahore. Does that mean that *Mother India* is a Hindu construct? What about Muslims, cannot they claim that India is their Mother too? That is precisely what drove those who demanded separate countries based on religion. That is what drives communalism in present day India. That only some can claim to be the legitimate children. Politics? Are we really going to believe that it was just a decision by the politicians? It was much more in the idea of the partition that is visible on the conscious level of decision making, much more than even the architects of this act really believed, and Mehta manages to grasp this very essence in her film. Partition was about a desire for identity—something that was itself constructed and forged, because it would be very wrong to believe that the people in pre-partitioned or even pre-modern India had no identity; that identity only came with modernity. No, identity was always there, only a different identity—an identity fixed on other notions and other understandings. What imperialism and European chauvinism really brought to the colonies was a vision of life modeled according to Europe, what it really gave to the masses was an inferiority complex, an unhappiness with oneself and a desire to be like them, like the white sahibs. The partition is a psychological consequence of colonialism, where in positioning oneself in relation to the Mother one can only think in Orwellian terms—all children are equal, but some are more equal than the others.

All the films of Deepa Mehta that deal with the idea of *Mother India* end in a similar fashion—we are forced to witness the betrayal and abandonment, *Mother India* is never killed, she never dies, she is forced to stay alive, to be raped and to give birth to children who then try to possess her and in the end rape her all over again. It is a vicious circle, a never ending desire and pain to be someone, to belong, to retain one's identity or to acquire a new one, a better one, a more suitable one. But everything ends in disaster, for identity plays around with the lives of men who try to take possession of it, moving them in circles—in never-ending circles—where only rape and constant mutilation, birth and rebirth are possible.

We are all post-colonials; it is not something we can choose not to be. We should not think that with the end of colonialism the world entered into another stage of development—it did not. Countries, nations and territories that were under foreign rule still suffer from the impossible condition of the desire-for-identity, and there is little hope for a change. Imperialism is not something that evaporated in the contemporary world. It wears different clothes and different masks while the essence remains unchanged. While being physical, imperialism is to a great extent a psychological category. A declaration of independence does not mean the end of it, unlike many hoped in 1947. Mehta is a pessimist, and she does not see a way out of

this condition for India. With the exit of the British, India received a new opportunity, but at the same time, on the unconscious level the white men never left, only their presence took new forms and impersonations. The prefix 'post' does not mean the end of something. And we, the spectators of the processes in South Asia, are forced to see Mother India being raped by her own children over and over again.

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ŠARŪNAS PAUNKSNIS (paunksnis@fulbrightmail.org), doctoral student, Department of Social and Political Theory, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Vytautas Magnus University

✉: Gedimino 44, Kaunas LT-44240, Lithuania