RESEARCH NOTE

HAUSA DREAMS

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Introduction

Dreams and Deeds is the title of Robert A. LeVine's classic study of achievement motivation among Nigerians in the early 1960s (LeVine 1966). Employing a method which relies in part on the narration and analysis of dreams (night-time, recurring, and day-), LeVine finds that "deep-seated" behavioural dispositions help account for the ethnically linked differences concerning the drive for achievement (LeVine 1966:62). More specifically, whereas southern Nigerians rank high in terms of "achievement motivation, concern with self-improvement, non-authoritarian ideology (i.e., obedience and social compliance values), a favourable attitude toward technological innovation, and rapid advancement in Western education and the Western type of occupational hierarchy" (with the Ibos marginally more advanced in these dimensions than the Yorubas), the Hausa of northern Nigeria rank relatively low (LeVine 1966).

In a later reflection on his previous study, LeVine is at pains to acknowledge the historical dimension to his sociocultural analysis of Nigerian society (LeVine 1971:210-212). There is nothing permanent or natural about the ethnic differences noted earlier; rather, they represent different phases in a "sequence of socioeconomic adjustment."

LeVine's initial work, enhanced by his succeeding theoretical fine-tuning, remains a stimulating and pioneering example of the use of dream material to explore the multiethnic dimension of Nigerian society. It is nevertheless important to note that, as in the case of so many experiments in social psychology in the United States, the sample consisted of a rather peculiar category of the population: students.[1] More precisely, the Nigerian dreams under analysis were those of anglophone male secondary school students of the top grades. Even in the late 1980s, those Nigerians educated and literate in English con-

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stituted a privileged minority of Nigerian society; in the early 1960s, they certainly were budding members of the elite. A less rarefied, more representative sample of Nigerians and their dreams might shed further light on the inner workings of the Nigerians mind and provide an added foundation for inter-ethnic sociocultural comparison.[2] The purpose of this paper is to take a modest step in this direction.

Background

In the summer of 1986, the presenter returned to two neighbouring Hausa villages separated by the Niger-Nigeria border where he had previously conducted nearly one year of fieldwork exploring self-identity and national consciousness (Miles 1986). As in most villages throughout Africa, the major economic activity is agriculture. Common to settled habitations of the Sahelian belt spanning the continent, villagers engage in "dry" (i.e., rainfed) farming with a single annual growing season. In any given year, the sufficiency of rains is problematic.

Although both villages have primary schools and have had adult literacy programs, few inhabitants are literate or fluent in their country's national language. Adults are the least likely to speak or read English or French. As throughout most of Northern Nigeria and south-central Niger, the villagers speak Hausa and practice Islam.

Compilation of dreams was not the primary focus of the return visit but constituted rather an exploratory venture: more extensive follow-up research is required. The dream categories and analytical findings are presented below as neither comprehensive nor definitive, but rather as preliminary and indicative.

Dream Collection

Dreaming is a rather private affair, not only as an experiential phenomenon, but also as a subject of social discourse. Eliciting dreams among adults is problematic; even among friends, some dreams are deemed best kept to oneself. Dream recall is even more chancy. Even those who might otherwise oblige in responding in random sample surveying may not have any remembered dreams to offer at interview time. However unsatisfactory, one is left with self-selection and, naturally, the willingness of respondents to share their nocturnal memories.

In the anthropological situation, the dream collector must achieve a rather high degree of empathy and trust before people will share their dreams. "Systematic" dream collection is therefore all the more problematic. In Western cultural contexts, the initiative for dream-sharing is commonly associated with the dreamer who may pay a psychological specialist to listen to, and eventually interpret, his or her dreams. For the anthropological dream

collector, the converse "paying for dreams" is fraught with obvious dangers relating to incentive and reliability. It is here that the advantages of dealing with a more controlled population—such as children—become logistically attractive. While the dreams of youth are worthy of analysis, those of adults, though more difficult to access in a systematic fashion, are no less important.

In the present case, I simply let it be known that I was interested in villagers' dreams and made myself available to volunteer tellers. Local custom and religion (which even on the village level may take the form of purdah) inhibited women from volunteering; from the (male) researcher's side, it would have been impolitic to approach women and query them on any of their nighttime experiences. Ultimately most dreams were offered, as may be expected, from my closest friends and neighbours in the village. Still, a number of villagers whom I scarcely knew did seek me out to volunteer their dreams. These dreams did not seem to differ from those of closer confidants in their depth or intensity.

Dream Categories

The number of dreams collected in this exploratory search was limited: thirty-five. Even with this modest sample, however, five discrete themes emerged (although some dreams clearly cross-cut more than one theme). These were: (1) dreams about farming; (2) dreams about money; (3) anxiety dreams; (4) dreams about pilgrimage (i.e., Mecca), and (5) dreams about the fieldworker himself. Examples from each of these dream types will be offered, followed by a brief comment.

Dreams about Farming

> "I am at home, sitting. Alhaji Y. goes off to my farm and says, 'Your farm is doing fine. The millet is doing well. But continue working on it.' "
>
> –M., Farmer and teaman

> "Two days prior I go to my farm and see that there is millet and sorghum and peanuts—a lot of it. I feel very good."
>
> –Alhaji S., carpenter and youth club secretary

> "I am cutting hay during the rain. I tie up and bring it into the house."
>
> –S., farmer

> "I am in my farm weeding. But it is *very* difficult to cut the hay—I practically can't."
>
> –H., chief's son

Comment

A caution relating to the seasonal bias of this inquiry should be acknowledged. As Chambers (1983) astutely points out, the findings of rural researchers are often skewed by the temporal constraints associated with their field-

work: "And northern academics too are seasonal in their global view. For they are found in third world nations mainly during long vacations" (Chambers 1983:20-21).

The summer months of July and August, when these rural Hausa dreams were collected, corresponded with the Sahelian rainy season. Agricultural activity is at its most intense at this time and villagers are naturally preoccupied with their farming. Given the precarious nature of dry (i.e., rain-fed) agriculture in this drought-prone region, where survival is largely a function of yearly harvest yield, perhaps a more appropriate adjective than "preoccupied" to describe the farmers' state of mind would be "anxious." The frequency of dreams dealing with farming and/or food in this sample may therefore be attributed, at least in part, to the season during which the dreams were compiled.

Dreams about Money

"I have no money—not even a nickel."

"A. comes back from Mecca. The next day I ask where he is. I'm told, 'The very day he returned, he didn't stay in the village. He's gone off to the bush to collect hay.'

"I remark, 'Someone goes to Mecca, to get money. He returns and that same day he goes collecting hay to sell? This year, in Mecca, there's no money.' "

"I am digging in the ground and find money. Lots of money. Both hands are full of money—but when I wake up, there is no money."

– Alhaji S., carpenter and youth club secretary

Comment

For most villagers, material poverty is an inescapable and preoccupying reality. Though wealth is not measured solely in terms of money—livestock and farming land are valued above all—money does symbolize wealth and escape from the constant daily struggle to survive. Equally important, money is a prerequisite for performing the highest social duties: marriage (for which a man needs to provide dowry) and pilgrimage to Mecca (for which one requires airfare).[3] Note below how money figures in anxiety dreams and dreams about pilgrimage.

While it is difficult, particularly in the cross-cultural context, to prove any universalistic function to dreaming, amongst impoverished Hausa villagers dreams about money provide an overt example of the dream as a mechanism for fantasized wish fulfilment.[4] Such dreams also argue for the necessity of providing the background economic information of dream informants and including members of underprivileged classes in psychological studies of a population.

Anxiety Dreams

"I am travelling in the bush. Soldiers come to arrest me. Each of them has a gun. But I fight with them. I grab one of their guns and they are frightened and run away."

"I am in a motor car and travelling. In fact, I am the driver. The car falls into a ditch but I am thrown up into the air, while the car remains in the ditch."

"I am entering an airplane to go to Mecca. But soldiers grab and arrest me in order to bring me home. I break away and run, and climb a mountain."
– Alhaji S., carpenter and youth club secretary

"Two snakes are striking like lightning and chasing me. I run away but they follow me, right into the village. I climb to the top of a house. But they climb up, too. I jump to the ground—and so do they. Then the people kill them. (When I came to town the next day and asked people the meaning to the dream, they said it meant that I would have two children.)"
– A.B., primary school teacher

"S.S., Alhaji I and Alhaji S. and myself all go to the market [at a nearby village]. I bring them with my bull and cart.

"When it's time to go, I discover they've taken off on their own, leaving me behind. It is six o'clock. I am angry that my brothers have gone and left me there.

"So I return by myself. When I get home, I see them and they say, 'F., where is the bull and the cart?' [I exclaim a prayer of protection.]

"So I run back to [the village]. I am half way there (nearby the Fulanis whose picture you took) when I awake." – F., farmer

"I am in the bush and two hyenas are chasing me. I climb a tree and when I am at the top, I see that at the base of the tree there is a well. But the tree breaks and I fall into the well.

"There is a branch at the bottom of the well on which I sit. I yell to be rescued. For two days people are looking for me, but without success.

"Finally, a member of the search party says, 'I hear cries of a man in a well. Let's go and see if it's our friend. . . . [They throw down a rope and I climb up.]

"When I climb out, I suggest we all go somewhere so I can get some air. But they all run off into town, leaving me alone in the bush.

"I look around me and at the base of a tree I see a sack. It's full of money. I take the money and come home. I find a bag and pour all the money into it.

"Then I bring a dowry to a divorced woman and an engagement is made. We take 2000 naira and give it to her parents. Then she told me to bring 400 naira to buy her things—clothes, perfume, etc.

"We conduct the wedding and are sleeping together. But I don't know that there is a snake in the sack of money. The snake sneaks out of the bag and bites my bride. She dies. ('That's it, dawn broke and I woke up. Now look at me—no wife, no money, no snake. I looked for the money but didn't find it. The dream is a lie.')" – A.S., farmer

"People cry out, 'Somebody's coming!' I see the man, but he's like a hyena. When he approaches, he grabs me by the throat. I take a knife from my pillow and stab him above the eye. Then another man, like a chameleon, jumps me from behind. He bites me in my side but when I lift my shirt to see the wound, I don't see anything.

"Then the hyena-man gathers lots of money. I tell him, 'Let me have the money and I'll do some trading with it.' But for the next seven days, I don't earn any money—not even a cent." –R.D., grain porter

"I am in an institute of higher learning, waiting for the elevator to bring me to the lecture hall. But when the elevators come, there's no room. I wait again. Finally it comes again and I get in. But there is a blackout and I am trapped in the elevator." –L., secondary school teacher

Comment

Of all the dream categories isolated, the anxiety dreams are the most personalistic. More than the other dream types, for which some common cultural and social interpretations may be proffered, a greater understanding of the personal background and psyche of the dreamer is necessary to extrapolate meaning. This cannot be provided here. What does call out for comment, nevertheless, is the use of archetypical symbols through which conflict and anxiety are expressed.

Animals figure prominently in these Hausa anxiety dreams. The snake is startling in its classical Freudian guise, particularly in its role as killer of woman and portender (*per* local interpretation) of male procreation. In actuality, snakes are not as common in the Hausa countryside as might be supposed: their appearance as dream material is therefore all the more striking. Neither does the hyena roam freely in the bush; it is not a real threat to villagers and its evocation is clearly symbolic of sublimated danger or terror.

Another dream device familiar to classical dream analysis is the fall and/or ascent: into a well, upon a house, in an airplane, out from a ditch, in a tree, up a mountain, in an elevator. Even if the specific meaning of vertical imagery may be open to interpretation, its frequency here provides evidence for symbolic universality.

Dreams about Pilgrimage

"Alhaji A. and his wife Hajja U. are returning from Mecca. I get up and run. I express delight and pleasure—pleasure that they've come.

"They say, 'Let's go to [a neighbouring village] to get our belongings.' so I get a donkey and we go to [the village] to get their belongings. (Then I heard the cry, awakening me, 'It's time to pray! It's time to pray!')" (F., farmer)

"I go to the airport to accompany someone going to Mecca. The airport is almost filled up but there is still one place left. The airplane agent says to me, 'Since there is one more seat, just get in and go.'

"I get in the plane and fly to Jiddah. As I leave the plane, an official asks, 'Where are your papers?' I say 'I have none. Allah alone has brought me.' Then this man, an Arab, says 'All right, go on.'

"Then I pass on to the gates of the city. An Arab comes to me and says, 'Get in this car, I'll take you to Mecca.' So he brings me to Mecca and leaves me off at a rest house.

"At the rest house there are people from [our village] who had gone to Mecca but didn't know I was coming. When they all see me they are astonished. One Alhaji—whom I really don't know—asks me, 'How is it that you have gotten to Mecca, you who have no money?' I tell him, 'Allah has brought me, even though I haven't a cent.' A woman from [our village] asks me the same question. . . .

"Then someone brings me a nice gown, someone else brings me a hat, and someone else brings me prayer beads." —T., town crier

Comment

The centrality of religion in rural Hausa life cannot be overemphasized. All aspire to the honorific title of the pilgrim: *alhaji* (for a man) or *alhajiya* (for a woman).

Pilgrimage represents a crowning achievement in the adult's religious and social life. It is a rite of passage, the token of both material and spiritual achievement. With the advent of air travel and government facilitation of the *hajj*, the accomplishment of the pilgrimage has become an increasingly common aspiration. Such a goal is most poignant among poor villagers least likely to realize this dream in their lifetimes. Dreaming about Mecca reflects spiritual preoccupation among a segment of the population otherwise enmeshed in the struggle for physical survival.

Dreams about the Fieldworker

"You have given me two head of cattle. I am grazing them in the bush but then they run away. I catch them, but with great difficulty.

"Then I return to your house and discover that your horse is gone. I am concerned that you will be angry. I go looking for the horse and find it near my home. I wonder if you wish to go riding it just then, so I prepare to bring it back." —M., fieldworker's groom

"I accompany you to Kano. When we arrive at the airport, you tell me, 'Stay here.' You run into a friend of yours—another white man. You introduce us.

"You say, 'Stay here with my friend. I'm going to New York and then returning.'

"I ask, 'If you go to New York, won't you stay a long time?'

"You answer, 'I won't stay a long time. Two days, and I'll be back.'

"You take off. (But before you came back, I woke up.)" —M., teaman

"I receive a letter from my uncle, summoning me. But it is the day of your departure. (I feel very badly about having to choose.) So I write back, explaining that I can't come because I have to accompany you. Uncle replies, saying that it's alright." –F., fieldworker's domestic helper

"You are preparing to return to America. You tell me to prepare myself, because you are going to take me with you. I say that I agree, but that no one at home knows it.

"The next day, we prepare to go. We get into [the van that brought you here]. I go to my father and say, 'Father, I'm going to America with Mallam Bill.' He says, "All right. Have a safe journey and return safely.' "

–S., fieldworker's research assistant[5]

Comment

S. LeVine (1981) has penetratingly tackled the delicate issue of informants' dreams about the researcher in the anthropological setting. Sensitive to inherent imbalance in the research relationship (particularly those of power and dependency), she observes that "the empathy with which researchers receive their [informants'] revelations may . . . induce fantasies of being miraculously rescued or transformed" (LeVine 1981:277). While LeVine is seemingly referring to psychological rescue or transformation, the dreams narrated above indicate a strong tendency to view the researcher as a vehicle for actual escape or flight.

Is there any better challenge to the methodological myth of anthropological neutrality than the appearance of the researcher's own persona in informants' dreams? The fieldworker cannot help but represent, to some degree, the outside world;[6] what is revealing is the degree to which informants express a wish to venture to that foreign world (though the phenomenon of spontaneous, distant wandering is a familiar part of the Hausa ethos) (Olofson 1976).

Linked to the psychologically expressed desire to travel away with the researcher is the ambivalence of separation. Accompanying the traveler means leaving behind hearth and home. It is a difficult choice to make, as the conflict in the above dreams makes clear. The analogy that S. LeVine (1981:292) draws between the informant-researcher dynamic in "exotic settings" and patient-therapist transference "in our own society" is an apt one. One can go a step further and compare the departure of the fieldworker—given the success of his or her acceptance within the community—to the common conflict arising within the termination of psychotherapy in the Western, clinical, equivalent situation. Where social science research includes as part of its techniques the collection of dreams (whether as primary or secondary focus of fieldwork), the otherwise latent relationship that has evolved between "observer" and "observed" may be brought to the fore.

Hausa Interpretation of Dreams

Dream interpretation is the province of the Islamic priest (mallam) who may possess varying degrees of training and expertise in dream interpretation. The status of dreaming in rural Hausaland is itself fraught with ambivalence. According to one village mallam, dreams are a matter of "craziness" or "worthlessness," the antithesis of "sense" or "intelligence."[7] Another mallam distinguishes between dreams which are lies and those which are truth. (Great mallams and women ["of those who fear Allah"] have true dreams.) At the same time there is a general system of coding, operating on the principle of opposites, which renders specific dream events meaningful. Though dismissed on the one hand as valueless (for unreal), dreams are also taken quite seriously as manifestations of prophecy.

What causes dreams, according to the mallams? The answers range from the prosaic to the sublime. Working hard, especially under great toil, induces one to sleep a lot and hence dream a lot. According to another mallam, dreams are caused by the wandering of the soul which leaves the body while the person sleeps. The soul meets other wandering souls and also the dead. This same mallam, in conformity with even mainstream Western psychology, stated, "What you think about, what's on your mind, that's what you'll dream."

All dream interpreters utilize the paradigm of prophetic opposites. Laughing in one's sleep is a sign of sadness (or sadness to come). Crying in one's sleep, on the other hand, is a good sign. Dream water is actually filth: the man who dreams he is drenched in water has done something evil in the eyes of Allah.

Colours are of significance. White and yellow are desirable, signifying goodness, wealth, grace (*alheri*). Black and red are bad signs, for they represent misfortune or death. Objects associated with these colours have like interpretations. Fire, because of its red colour, is a portent of something bad. By extension a car, to any other motorized vehicle, is also bad (because of its "fire/energy" or *wuta*). Dreaming of a bicycle, in contrast, is good, for a bicycle does not utilize mechanical energy.

Certain dreamed referents possess their own symbolism. Camels represent angels. Water combined with hay (water alone, we have seen, represents dirt) is a positive dream sign.

Comment

The emphasis on coding symbols and perceived divining function of the dream in Hausaland parallels what Kilborne (1981) has found in another Islamic context, Moroccan dream interpretation, attributing it to varying motivations among dream interpreters. In both Hausaland and Morocco there has been significant melding of traditional customs with Islamic norms;

dream interpretation also appears to reflect this amalgamation of folk and Islamic perspectives. Islam, being a literate tradition, continues to penetrate rural Hausaland, and therefore greater uniformity in pan-Islamic dream interpretation may be expected. To signify the relativity of this process, whereas Hausa village mallams now know of Islamic dream books, they are not yet in common circulation or usage.

Future Directions and Implications

This initial exploration into the dreams of rural Hausa villagers raises two sets of interrelated questions. One set deals with potential differences among different Hausa subcategories. How do the dreams of Hausa women differ from those of Hausa men? Are the dreams of the rural Hausa different from those of urban dwellers? Do the superimposed political cultures of Nigeria and Niger affect the psyche, and hence dreaming, of Hausa from these two different nations?

Another direction for future research is to investigate the dreams of other ethnic Nigerian groups with a comparable economic profile. Do rural Igbo villagers, for instance, substantially differ from their Hausa counterparts in terms of their deepest psychological concerns? Or do they rather share similar existential concerns? If, as may be hypothesized, preoccupation with developmental needs (e.g., successful farming, adequate income) unites members of different ethnic groups in Nigeria, such findings may be used to counter the otherwise divisive process of ethnic politicization. In an atmosphere where, as is currently the case, religion is being raised as a wedge between different Nigerian populations (Clark 1988), perhaps psychology may provide a unifying, if conventional, thread.

On a less grandiose scale, dream collection may at least be a useful tool for fostering the empathy between researcher and informants which is an indispensable element to successful fieldwork. The researcher's attempt to collect dreams, and the villagers' willingness to narrate them, facilitated communication about topics otherwise ignored and with informants not normally encountered. Dream collection may thus serve as a useful adjunct to fieldwork not ostensibly psychological in focus or orientation.

Notes

1. Of course, the "student as guinea pig" phenomenon is not restricted to psychological studies in the West. Uzoka's recent investigation into "attribution of causation to dreams in a Nigerian population" is limited to university psychology students and majors. No data which would enable inter-ethnic comparison of results are provided (Uzoka 1988:60-63).
2. In a later study (Shweder and LeVine 1975) again utilizing dream material from Nigeria, LeVine did use a more plebeian sample: 60 boys and girls, ranging from five to thirteen years of age, who were interviewed in Hausa. The purpose of this study was not to compare dreaming patterns among different ethnic groups, or even conduct a content analysis as such, but

rather to test the universality, and hence validity, of Kohlberg's "doctrine of invariant sequence" in cognitive development.

3. As the last dream of this variety indicates, Mecca represents not only religious fulfillment (pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of the faith) but the opportunity to gain wealth as well. For a fuller account of how Hausa villagers view Mecca as a source of material enrichment, see Miles 1986b.
4. That psychic fixation with money may be attributed to real material poverty is not even considered in the most eclectic and erudite treatment of this linkage (Borneman, 1976).
5. This dream was recounted twice, first when it was recalled and then later in the day when it was to be transcribed. Interestingly, when S. recounted it the second time, he completely forgot saying goodbye to his father. In its first telling, this had come across as the most dramatic segment of the dream.
6. This is so even when the fieldworker is from the society he or she is studying. For example Srinivas, though himself a Brahmin Kannada speaker from Mysore, was viewed as a "respected outsider" by the villagers of Rampura (Srinivas 1976).
7. In Hausaland, *majanuni* and *iska* as opposed to *hankali*.

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