Motivation and Justification from Dreams: Muslim Decision-Making Strategies in Punjab, Pakistan

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Dreams may serve to justify or motivate decisions. This paper examines two dream incidents in Pakistan which have implications for the study of decision making processes. In the first incident, the centrality of the dream is questionable in the decision making process, while the second incident suggests that dreams may be more than justificatory props that enable people to do what they had already decided. If dreams play a motivational role in the decision making process then models of decision making may benefit from explicit recognition of the role unconscious, uncontrolled experiences though the narrative may be conscious and controlled.

Keywords: Dreams; Decision Making; Punjab; Rationality

Introduction: Thinking and Decision Making

How we think impacts not only on the kinds of decision we can make, but also on how we make them. D'Andrade's (1995) useful review of cognitive anthropology (including reference to broader cognitive sciences where appropriate) provides a foundation for understanding how the human mind is able to manipulate symbols, identify patterns and impose order and meaning in social and communicative ways. There are disagreements about the extent to which individuals carry Aristotelean taxonomies of natural kinds that can be measured against instances of observed phenomena to generate fitness-to-type measures. Berlin (1992) has argued that this is the case based on research among Tzeltal speakers. Ellen (1986), on the other hand, has argued that it is unnecessary (and possibly indefensible) to posit that individuals store knowledge in such a way

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and instead, we must understand human thinking as the result of applying generative principles of relationships (as opposed to prototypes, however flexible they may be). This addresses issues at the heart of cognitive anthropology about how knowledge categories are produced. Much of this work has been debated with specific reference to ethnobiological classifications (for a brief summary of the signficance of ethnobiology in the formation of such debates, see Ellen 2006). There are, of course, a number of finer points of argument, but one of the more significant and contentious themes is the extent to which knowledge categories are "hardwired" within the architecture of the human brain (Berlin 1992; Berlin and Kay 1999 [1969]) complete with universal rankings, or whether such categories (as demonstrated via ethnobiological taxonomies) are the result of parallel development in the context of similar ecological stimuli (Ellen 1986). The implications of these ways of conceiving of human knowledge production speak directly to processes of human thought. Such debates are necessary and relevant, but fortunately, the truth of such approaches is slightly tangential to the goals of this paper. Regardless of whether thinking happens schematically, as a result of architecturally hardwired taxonomic logics or in some other way altogether, people use thinking as a tool to make many kinds of decisions.[1] Consequently, it is necessary to extract or impose the mechanisms by which decisions may be made. Economists (and economic anthropologists) have engaged in such analyses extensively and have employed a range of theoretical tools to assess decisions against both universalistic and relativistic criteria. Part of the assessment includes explicit use of the term rational. Such a term raises the spectre of different ideologies. Formalist economics have adopted a notion of rationality imbued with assumptions about utility value that purport to be cross-culturally applicable. Substantivist economics has been more inclined to accept that the criteria for assessing what constitutes rational behaviour must include some context-specific understanding of the motives of the agents involved.

In this paper I suggest that Lukes's problematization of the concept "rational" is apt for moving beyond sterile debates about whether or not a population engages in rational or irrational decision making. Invoking Lukes's notion of context-dependent criteria for connected to a cross-culturally applicable criteria for the rationality, I argue that dreams play an important role in decision making. I suggest that they assume such a role in all populations, but that in some populations they may be invoked as legitimate and respected justification for decisions. In other populations (for example, academic departments in British universities), dreams may serve motivational functions, but would not normally be treated as respected justifying factors when making decisions.

The first part of the paper summarizes the problems of rationality, communication and the notion of shared cognitive environments. I suggest that in order for dreams to serve as either motivational or justificatory, they must be translated into narratives. Such narratives invoke shared cognitive environments and a more complete analysis of dreams than offered here, would require a more comprehensive inclusion of thinking processes. For my purposes, however, it is enough to suggest that communication and shared cognitive environments are necessary preconditions for dreams to play any social role in decisions or actions. The second part of the paper provides two case

studies from an agricultural village in northern Punjab, Pakistan that illustrate a number of key features of Muslim understandings of dreams. These cases suggest, first, that dreams may be used as justification for behaviour; second, that such justification can be received as persuasive and legitimizing evidence by other Muslims; third, that dreams not only serve justificatory functions, but also act to motivate individuals to modify decisions.

Finally, I suggest that if dreams act to motivate decisions and actions, then modelling such phenomena must incorporate a more explicit inclusion of what amounts to an external stochastic environmental factor which must then be culturally and psychologically mediated by the individual; for while I am rooted in my own cultural biases and do indeed consider dreams as the product of internal brain chemistry rather than evidence of visitation by external sources, there remains the fact that people cannot control all aspects of their dreams, with the result that dreams introduce a potential element of unpredictability into an individual's decisions. The extent to which a population may formally discount dreams in decision-making processes could render such modelling more problematic as the dream influence may be unknown or misrepresented, nevertheless it may still be useful to account for the potential emotive motivational impact that dreams may have on decisions that go unacknowledged even, at times, by the decision makers themselves.

Understanding Decisions Cross-Culturally

Rationality

Assessing rational decisions, behaviours and understandings of the world across cultures has been at the heart of anthropological debates since the earliest days. Clearly, cultural relativism is fundamental to such debates within anthropology. Calls for the demise of relativism notwithstanding, it remains one of the bedrock principles of the discipline that in order to understand other people's behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, discourses and so forth, one must attempt to make sense of the sociocultural context in which those things exist *from their own points of reference*. This is not simply a question of the troubling behaviours to which one might object, such as honour killings or female genital mutilation, but far less problematic terms and ideas may be grossly misrepresented through sloppy imposition of external social and cultural categories.

Nowhere is this need for understanding social worlds more critical and more obvious than in matters related to decision making. Formalist economic anthropologists have dealt with the seeming irrationality of people in other cultures through a variety of means. Lukes's (1970) subdivision of the term rationality provides a way of progressing in understanding other cultures' decisions. The problem, as Lukes defines it, is partly a matter of the variation in the way the term rational and its cognates are used. Briefly, he suggests that beliefs (and I shall extend this to include actions), may be considered irrational if they are illogical, inconsistent, self-contradictory, relying on invalid inferences, partially or wholly false, nonsensical or ad hoc (Lukes 1970: 207). Lukes also provides an alternative sense for the concept of rational which has been

perhaps more commonly taken by economists, namely, that an action is maximally rational when it is the most efficient means to the agent's ends or goals (1970: 208). Therein lay the problem with attempting to determine other people's choices. What may appear more efficient in one context may be deemed unacceptable in another. Reliance on supernaturally derived information to assist in decision making may, in fact, be more efficient than conducting the necessary empirical studies to produce the data required to make a more ostensibly rational decision (i.e. one that is not predicated on potentially invalid inferences). Consequently, Lukes adopts a rational (1) and a rational (2) terminology. Rational (1), he argues, is cross-culturally applicable and can be assessed against an empirical reality common to all cultures, while rational (2) indicates those beliefs which have significance only to those people who hold those beliefs. Lukes suggests that it is necessary for any culture to employ both types of rationality. Without rational (1), there can be no cross-cultural translation of beliefs and decisions because one must hold the beliefs in order to grasp the significance, while without rational (2), there would arguably be no such phenomenon as "cross" culture at all. Hollis (1970) in the same edited volume as Lukes, flags up not only the pragmatic desirability for both types of rationality, but also the logical necessity. The capacity to generate accurate predictions would seem to be a requirement for the long-term survival of any human population and that requires that beliefs, at some level, must indeed account for the empirical context that exists independently of the culturally specific symbolic or ritual belief systems.

Communication and Shared Cognitive Environments

Clearly, dreams communicate something to the individual who dreams them. Equally clearly, this must then be communicated through cultural systems of categories and symbols if the meaning of the dream is to make any sense at all. When a dream is recounted to another person, perhaps another set of cultural symbol systems is invoked to facilitate the communication of some aspect of the dream. Information can only be transmitted if there is a common channel of communication between the transmitter and the sender (for a good recent summary of the importance of information theory to cultural analysis, see Leaf 2004). Therefore, I remain as sceptical as ever about studying actual dreams, and by and large, anthropologists who focus on dreams have largely shared this scepticism (Crapanzano 2001; Edgar 2004; Tedlock 1991); that is to say, that while the individual experience of a dream may remain elusive, its subsequent shared narratives do not. I am interested in the ways in which what is inside someone's head can be successfully translated into a message that someone else may interpret and understand, and equally importantly, the extent to which dreams affect the actions and beliefs of those who experience them. Consequently, dreams are of interest for a variety of reasons, but here I focus on their capacity to impact on an individual's choices and then the extent to which the dream itself may used as a legitimized form of evidence to persuade others that a particular set of decisions are sound. If Serbian nationalists, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden can rally men to violence on the strength of dreams (Edgar 2002), then it is hasty and reckless to ignore the invocation of dreams.

If decisions are examined with reference to the types of rationality suggested by Lukes's types 1 and 2, then it follows that the bases upon which decisions are made should be communicable and to some extent shared with other people. Following Leaf (2005) and Klüver and Stoica (2005), I suggest that there are practical benefits to dispensing with definitions of culture altogether in favour of employing more rigorous theories of communication to understand the same sets of phenomena, and nowhere does such an approach seem more pertinent than in the domain of decision making. Decisions taken following incommunicable and idiosyncratic bases are, by their very nature, incomprehensible either to the outside anthropologist, or to other individuals within the culture group (however one delimits such a category). This is not a priori to relegate all such decisions as irrational, in that it may be the case that there are communicable and shared bases, but they are opaque or masked by apparent illogicality or inconsistency. People can and do deceive others about their true goals, which can result in their decisions looking nonsensical. For example, someone attempting to escape military service through severe self-harm may be acting entirely rational if his or her goal is known, but that may well be a denied goal, which then renders the self-harm actions more difficult to understand. Such an approach does, however, indicate that decision-making processes must be understood in relation to the total context of symbolic and ritual beliefs as well as the empirical reality of the environmental context. This is a rather cursory way of suggesting that there are indeed irrational or nonsensical decisions taken in the world, but that one cannot know whether a given decision is nonsensical (or irrational) without accounting for the bases upon which such decisions are taken. Decisions making in all societies and culture groups, therefore, should be examined both relativistically from the terms of meaning employed indigenously,[2] as well as objectively accounting for observable outcomes.

Rather obstinately, I take it axiomatically that any decision taken should be treated as if it is based on rational beliefs and known information. It does not follow that such decisions (or beliefs) are based on propositions that the observer holds to be true, nor that they are necessarily efficient choices to achieve the decision makers' goals. Further, it is often the case that I do not understand other people's decisions, but that does not make them irrational or unsound—only inexplicable. In the event that no one apart from the decision maker can understand the choices taken, then it is a matter for the members of that population to assess the value of such decisions and the state of mind of the decision maker. The value judgement may well be that the individual is classified as insane, or it may that such a person is judged to have supernatural powers (similar to the structural logic proposed by Douglas when dealing with matter out of place (1966). Such a judgement can necessarily only be made by reference to context-specific meaningful ritual and symbolic systems.

The case studies discussed in this paper identify a set of beliefs about dreams that are influential in decision making in a number of social contexts in Muslim societies (see Edgar 2006; 2007). To make sense of the impact of dreams on decisions, it is useful to employ Lukes's two cases of rationality. Dream experiences occur in every human population. Any decision partly or wholly taken as the consequence of information contained in a dream, by its very nature, must fall into Lukes's rational (2) category in

that its veracity and reliability are both unverifiable and irrefutable. People do not, however, typically subdivide their decisions into those based on rational (1) and rational (2) categories, but rather, invoke a variety of disparate information types to aid in decision making. This is even more so when the consequences of a decision may have long-term implications but there is insufficient information to know what those implications might be. Therefore, while we must consider that dream-influenced decisions rightly demonstrate aspects of rationality (2), we must equally accept that in some contexts, the information provided by a dream is both true and verifiable using rational (2) empirical methods.

Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate the extent to which Pakistani Muslims may be powerfully motivated by dream narratives and dream experiences. In both cases it was clear that the Pakistani informants assumed that dream narratives about God, the prophet Mohammed and the Qur'an should be trusted as a faithful account of the dream experience. As must be abundantly clear in a western European context, such assumptions are far from universal and speak both to the effectiveness of dream narratives among Pakistani Muslims as well as their very great potential for exploitation by those people who are not averse to lying about even the most sacred subjects.

Case Study 1: Feeding people

During extended field research in an agricultural village in Attock District, Punjab, near Taxila and Wah, I had the occasion to observe and participate in a series of common public feasting events known locally as *deg*. Deg is the name for the cauldron in which rice is cooked in Punjab. The number of these large cauldrons prepared at a particular deg is used as the indicator of how big or impressive the event is. So if a family hosts a small deg they might prepare only two cauldrons (normally one with savoury flavoured rice and one with sweet-flavoured rice). A medium-sized deg might have six to ten cauldrons of rice prepared and last half a day. The deg in question here involved twenty-five cauldrons worth of rice being prepared at the base of the mountain next to the village. The cooks were hired in especially for their high-quality reputations and cooked from sunrise until sunset. During that time several hundred people at any one time were gathered in the area eating as much rice as they could manage. Children collected rice to take back to the ladies in their homes. Although village women did work outside, during events such as a large deg with a great many unknown men in the area, they appeared to be more inclined to restrict their movements. Anyone in the area was invited to participate in the deg by eating as much rice as they could, so all truck drivers on the way to or from the nearby cement factory stopped and ate. The workers in the nearby poultry farm took their lunch breaks at the deg and helped themselves to as much food as they could eat at a single sitting. I returned throughout the day and ate all three meals from the deg—a behaviour pattern

that I was told was not only common, but was, indeed, expected. The host of this extraordinary event spent the entire day eating sparsely some distance away from both the cooks and the main crowds. He met with guests who came to pay their respects to him and he surveyed the progress of the cooking. His younger brothers acted as co-hosts at this event and also appeared to capitalize on the networking potential offered by the event.

I have previously analysed these events in terms of their role in political rivalries between landlords (Lyon 2004a; 2004b). The political significance of such public feeding is highly significant and should be understood in conjunction with the focus on the dream-narrative aspect presented here; however, for the sake of brevity I shall dispense with a detailed summary of *deg* as opportunities for expressions of political rivalry and concentrate on what I have subsequently understood to be a critical inspirational dream that underpins the largest deg in the village's history. On the day of this large deg, one of the burning gossip items doing the rounds was the cause for such an auda-cious deg. Villagers were genuinely impressed and somewhat perplexed by the land-lord's decision to host such a massive deg which lasted from sunrise till sunset. As his close friend, people assumed that I knew the reason and so I ended up addressing the question repeatedly throughout the day. At the time, I asked the landlord why he chose to do something on such a grand scale and he gave me what I thought was a playful but deceptive explanation. He told me that Allah had come to him in a dream and told him to feed his village. Quite frankly, I dismissed the explanation out of hand. It clearly made no sense and was a very flimsy rationale upon which to take such a costly and time-consuming decision. Nearly ten years on, I have come to the conclusion that while my analysis of the political significance of such feasting rituals was both useful and productive, it neglected something rather interesting about a critical element in the underlying inspiration for the decision.

In hindsight, I believe that the landlord must have been as puzzled by my blatant dismissal of his dream narrative as I was by his attempt to explain an obviously politi-cally motivated event by way of what seemed to me to be an entirely unverifiable instance of fantasy. My own agnosticism dismissed the possibility of an actual god (by whatever name) entering a person's dream and directing them to act in a particular way. However, to assume that my friend would lie about such a dream was, I now real-ize, doing him a great disservice. I am certain that many Pakistani Muslims are capable of lying about epiphanal religious experiences and some may openly and boldly claim to have spoken to Allah or another metaphysical being very cynically and with no inter-nal conviction that such a conversation took place. It was unkind of me to think such a thing of my friend and I have, many years after the fact, apologized to him for this lack of confidence in his integrity; nevertheless, I stand by my scepticism and insist that it is both healthy and necessary. Some people lie and we cannot always know who those people might be. Yet, there is something very powerful about dreams that involve the Allah, the Qur'an and the Prophet Mohammed. I have come to the conclusion that while there must be many people willing to lie about such dreams, they are a minority and what seems to be far more common is a widespread fear that such lies will invoke the anger of Allah and must be atoned for sooner or later. Indeed, I met a man who was

convinced that Allah would not allow anyone to lie about such matters. Should a man lie about such dreams, then ill health and poor luck shall certainly befall him and possibly his family.

Consequently, I have reassessed the significance of that landlord's dream in light of the work of Edgar (2004; 2006; 2007) which motivated me to ask more questions about dreams more recently with old friends in Pakistan. It is likely that he did not lie about his dream experience and while the narrative he told me may have been embellished and reconstructed into a more coherent script, it was not done so with the intention of twisting or altering the message from God. In fact, subsequent conversations with the landlord in 2007 lead me to believe that he must have been intensely pleased to have been, in his view, visited by God in a dream, so much so, that I see no inconsistency in suggesting that the public feasting would not have taken place as it did in the absence of the dream. To be sure, the landlord had hosted numerous such deg in the past and would certainly have hosted some deg at some point that year, but the dream seems to have been pivotal in the specific shape and direction of that event. In this instance, the dreams, I suggest, served more than a simple justificatory function (though even if this were the case, it would be important), but the dream served a motivational function as well. Ewing (1990) has examined the same issue also in the context of Pakistan. She argues that dreams have the capacity to transform representations of the self of the dreamer. By looking at the roles that dreams play in the initiation process into a Sufi order, she suggests that it is the simultaneous invocation of cultural templates that, while also addressing the idiosyncratic concerns of the individual dreams, form the basis for not only new self representations, but also new social relations. The extent to which a dream may effect such transformations is, of course, not entirely dependent on the dream, as Ewing notes; such transformations depend on the ability of the dreamer to realize the changes.

Case Study 2: Dreaming of the Qur'an

The second case study was, like the first, serendipitous. I had no research agenda to concentrate on dreams, nor was I particularly concerned with matters which are by their very nature hard to observe and hard to produce data around. While it is true that I might feasibly set about collecting dream narratives, for a variety of reasons (including a desire to avoid anything that might creep into spiritual domains), I did not. The case has been selected because in a way it serves a form of control in what is, at best, a weak natural experiment. Despite the weakness, this case, like the first, is highly suggestive of the extent to which Pakistanis are inclined to accept certain kinds of dream narrative at face value. They will, of course, understand that dreams might be modified in the narration and the re-narration, but that underpinning such modifications there seems to be a disarming confidence that dream experiences and narratives about All, the Qur'an and the Prophet Mohammed are only possible with the approval of God. This case involves a dream I had which I told to a friend. The friend was a young landlord in his early twenties. He, like the landlord in the previous case study (his cousin), was a good friend during my extended stay in the village and has remained a good

friend to this day. He is noticeably less devoutly religious than his cousin and is openly disdainful of Wahabism that holds some sway in the region.

In my dream, I was drinking tea in the local tea-shop called the "hotel" by villagers. The hotel is small and has only three walls. Customers sit in charpais[3] and smoke hookahs or water pipes (called locally, chillum) and drink the milky tea freshly prepared while they wait. In my dream I was sitting on a charpai drinking tea when suddenly I fell into a trance and a white glow emanated from around my body. In the trance I began to recite the Qur'an in Arabic. I remained in the trance until I completed the Qur'an and then woke up from my trance with no knowledge of what I had done and no sudden ability to speak Arabic. I interpreted this, rightly in my view, as a response to continual attempts to persuade me to become a Muslim. I can say in all honesty that not one week went by over the total of three years that I lived in Pakistan when someone did not attempt to convert me to Islam. Mostly such conversion attempts are done with good humour and are kind. Occasionally the conversion attempts are aggressive and uncomfortable. The steady diet of people attempting to persuade you that the Qur'an is the true Book of God and that Hazrat (prophet) Mohammed was the last prophet of the one true God is not what attracted me to Pakistan and remains one of my least favourite aspects of spending time in Pakistan. It is, however, an ubiquitous part of life there and if one does not develop coping strategies for politely resisting conversion, then life may not be as good as it could be. The night I had the dream came after a particularly intense week of conversion attempts. It was the week of the prophet Mohammed's birthday and I had stayed up through most of the night at the top of the nearby mountain at the shrine of Baba Shaikh Daud listening to a circle of men praying and reciting the Qur'an from start to finish. While listening, I lay back and watched the stars and saw perhaps the most spectacular green comet I have ever seen in my life. Assuming that others had seen it, I said something along the lines of "Wow, that was pretty". No one else had apparently seen the comet and so I had to explain what I had seen. This was taken by some members of the circle to be a direct sign from God that I should convert to Islam on the spot. I declined but it was one of the higher pressure conversion attempts I have experienced. The following day two young men were teaching me how to say the kalmat—the declaration that all Muslims must pronounce as one of the five pillars of Islam. I was not converting but wanted to break down the words and try to memorize it. They took me syllable by syllable through the kalmat until I could say it smoothly from memory. They then clapped in glee and announced that I was officially a Muslim and they gave me an Islamic name (Saddiq). To this day, there are people in the village who refer to me as Saddiq Khan and believe that I have converted to Islam in my heart but out of respect for my mother, I have not made it public to the world. It was following these two events which were interspersed with countless other less memorable conversion attempts that I had the dream of reciting the Qur'an.

I did not see the dream as a mystery that needed explaining, but rather, as an entertaining dream that my friends might enjoy. I assumed erroneously that they too would assume that my dream was part of the psychological process of working through the tensions of living in slightly unusual conditions. Therefore, I shared my dream with the

young landlord who, as I said, was not overtly religious and was, in my experience, remarkably tolerant and relaxed about religion. I recited the dream to him only slightly embarrassed. I do not normally tell my dreams to people, but this one happened to be rather vivid and seemed to speak to my situation explicitly. My friend became noticeably nervous and spoke very quietly. He whispered to me that I must not tell anyone else the dream. He explained to me that I could not have had that dream if it had not come from God. God would not have allowed me to dream the whole of the Qur'an in Arabic like that unless he wanted me to become a Muslim. I reminded my friend that I do not speak Arabic and have not memorized the Qur'an, so it was not possible that I had genuinely dreamt the whole of the Qur'an in Arabic—I thought that is what I did, but it must have been gibberish since I did not have the requisite knowledge to have such a dream. He dismissed my naivety out of hand. If God wanted me to dream about reciting the Qur'an in Arabic, then there could be no naysaying such a capacity. My friend understood that I had no intention of converting and so instead urged me, for my own sake, to remain quiet on the matter. No doubt, he worries for my soul in the long run, but perhaps he believes that ultimately, God will not give up on me and I will some day become a real Muslim.

I chose to follow my friend's advice and must admit that I mostly put the dream out of my mind, apart from noting the dream and my friend's reaction to the dream narrative in my fieldnotes. What strikes me so clearly now a decade later is that my friend did not seem to consider that I might invent a dream narrative to stimulate a particular conversation. I freely admit that I am not above such harmless (in my view) deceptions, but it did not occur to me to do so at the time, and now that I understand how seriously the people around me took such dreams, I would hesitate very long before knowingly inventing such dreams.

Part of my reluctance to incorporate this incident within earlier research has surely been the consequence of what Ewing (1994) suggests is one of the last taboos in anthropology. The horror of "going native", she argues, is the result of hegemonic ideas about the assumption that one's own experiences, as an anthropologist, can inform one's research about other populations and cultural practices. The issue remains contentious and I have no comfortable answers on such matters for myself, but suffice to say that I do not treat *my* dream as ethnographic evidence of dream experience akin to that of my friends and informants, but rather the *reaction* to my dream as a *bona fide* ethnographic example.

Assumptions of Validity and Meaningfulness

If we assume that dreams are meaningful only to the person experiencing them and dismiss an absolute frame of reference from which might imbue dreams with universal validity, then we risk misinterpreting part of the decision-making process for many Pakistani Muslims. Conversely, if we assume that Pakistani Muslims always believe their own and others' dreams, we risk a great deal more. People manipulate social and cultural systems for numerous reasons and decision making is complex and at times seemingly contradictory. Somewhere in the midst of the quagmire of dream

interpretation among Muslims and, particularly, Pakistani Muslims, it behoves us to take seriously the concepts and attitudes that our informants take seriously. Evans-Pritchard studied witchcraft among the Azande because that seemed to be a priority for his informants (1937), but when he worked with the Nuer he shifted his focus to cattle and segmentary lineages (1940, though of course he continued to investigate religious issues in part because of personal interests; see Evans-Pritchard 1956). My own body of research has largely been driven by the preoccupations of my informants. I lived with a landlord family who spent a considerable amount of time in land disputes and local political networking, so those became my preoccupations as well. Dreams were not openly discussed very often around me and so I neglected them. It is clear that this was an unfortunate oversight. There can be no doubt that dream incubation (*Ishtikara*) plays a significant role in certain kinds of decision-making processes. Similarly, there seems little doubt that dreams of specific religious themes are less likely to be the subject of intentional deception (though again, one must be cautious in denying deception in others). What remains unknown is the extent to which uncontrolled dream experiences play a role in key life decisions. Dream experiences offer one of the few examples of extra-cultural sensation that must be re-framed upon waking or it remains effectively unknowable. It is the transformation of this potentially random factor to alter decisions which is both fascinating and instructive. Anthropologists have long known that people make ostensibly "bad" decisions that would appear to be detrimental to the decision maker. It is likely that repeated bad decisions which interfere with a decision maker's capacity to survive must be subject to something akin to natural selection and so will disappear. A great many bad decisions, however, are isolated events that have no such dire consequences. In effect, we need more comprehensive theoretical frameworks from which we might disaggregate the complex sets of attitudes, histories, behaviours, beliefs and cultural systems which feed into decisions to try to make sense of the apparently irrational and unpredictable decisions taken by the people with whom we work.

To be sure, the point is not to posit that Pakistanis are prone to believing the incredible and western Europeans are not, but rather, to explore the role of the incredible, irrational (for lack of a better word) forces that impact on our decision making. In all places, presumably individuals will be more or less affected by the emotional content of dream experiences and those will influence certain types of decision. As a young man I dreamt that a friend had insulted me and I was very cross with him the following day—despite the fact that he had not insulted me outside of the dream. It was irrational and I hope that such events are rare, but there is no denying that people have emotional reactions to dreams and in transforming those into narratives, they can take on a level of coherence which might affect behaviours, including decision making. In the two cases I have presented here, it is useful to go beyond the idiosyncratic effects of dreams and examine the extent to which there is a culturally identifiable dream repertoire which interacts with dreams both experientially and discursively. Whatever one dreams while asleep must then be constructed into some form of narrative. Such narratives do not merely recount the experienced dream, but also construct it, even if only partially. To the extent that people attempt to recount their dreams accurately and

sincerely, it is possible to identify cultural rhetorics at play and potentially more radical elements that force the narratives to take different shapes. These radical elements, I suggest, may help to explain some of the decisions taken by people that strike others as odd or unusual. In a culture which dismisses dreams as the by-products of chemical flows in the brain that generate more or less random images, then one would expect the dream not to play an explicit role in decision making; however, in cultures where certain dream images and events are thought to originate from outside the individual, then one would expect such dreams to play a more prominent and acknowledged role in decision making; a role that would not only influence the decision taker, but would be a respected and understood strategy in the process by others (elsewhere in this issue, see, for example, Balzani for a discussion of Ahmadiya dreams; Edgar and Henig on the role of dream incubation in decision making; the premonitory powers of dreams as discussed by Louw; or, for a general discussion of the decision-making implications of dreams beyond Muslim contexts, see Heijnen and Edgar).

Conclusion: The Justificatory and Motivational Power of Dreams

The decisions that people make are affected by cultural systems, specific contextual information about the range of possible options, physiological capacity, social status and beliefs about the all of those things. The apparent rationality or irrationality of the bases for decisions is critical in assessing a decision; such an assessment is problematic if attempted cross culturally. Although I am not an expert on contemporary Britain, it seems to me as a resident that attempting to justify a decision on the basis of a dream would invite scorn in many circles; that is to say, dreams as justification, which I have already suggested must be treated as rational (2), in Britain lack the shared cognitive environment in which such evidence may be accepted as reliable. There is therefore an absence of collective public treatment of the dream as a place where "real" information can be obtained. While I lack the necessary empirical data to confirm this, my assumption is that dreams may nevertheless serve a motivational function in contemporary Britain. In other words, people may take decisions based in part on emotional responses shaped and influenced by dream experiences. To admit to such motivation would be tantamount to declaring oneself an irrational decision maker, however, so I suggest that there is a fundamental difference in the ways in which people must address the role of dreams in decision making, at least publicly. In contrast, rural Punjabis seem to be more inclined to accept certain kinds of dream as legitimate grounds upon which to base a decision. Edgar's body of work on the subject would suggest that such phenomena are not confined to rural Punjab, Pakistan and that dreams may play important motivational and justificatory functions more generally among Muslim populations (see also Balzani; Louw; Edgar and Henig this issue). Clearly, dream interpretation publications enjoy widespread popularity across the Muslim world, but that is not, in and of itself, evidence that dreams are taken seriously. Daily horoscopes are a feature of countless newspapers in North America and Europe, but that does not render them trustworthy in the eyes of most people;[4] so we must be cautious about assuming that Muslims treat such publications as more than entertainment. There are,

however, enough ethnographic accounts of the seriousness with which many Muslims regard what are classified as true dreams (again, see Balzani; Louw this issue, as well as Edgar 2006; 2007), that it is safe to conclude that dreams are not merely entertainment for many (and possibly most) Muslims.

Notes

[1]   Though clearly not all—if one treats certain bodily functions as decisions, then one could argue that little higher cognitive functioning is necessary to arrive at appropriate decisions.

[2]   As with a great many terms used in this paper, I shall dispense with a systematic discussion of the ambiguities and contradictions introduced with the concept of indigenousness. Suffice to say that I do not restrict such a term to subsistence rainforest dwellers or small-scale isolated communities, but rather, imply something broader that encompasses any relatively coherent, identifiable local population that self-identifies as having some communitarian cultural systems in common.

[3]   Charpai perhaps needs no translation for a British audience, but for the sake of clarity, a charpai is the four legged cot, sofa or bed that serves so many functions across South Asia.

[4]   Even those who subscribe to astrology and accord it a certain degree of external, universal validity, are often disdainful of the daily horoscope found in newspapers.

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