



AIBR

**Revista de Antropología
Iberoamericana**

www.aibr.org

Volume 10

Number 3

September - December 2015

Pp. 331 - 352

Madrid: Antropólogos
Iberoamericanos en Red.
ISSN: 1695-9752
E-ISSN: 1578-9705

Dreams as ethnographic tools

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Submitted: 07/23/2015

Accepted: 10/18/2015

DOI: 10.11156/aibr.100303e

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ABSTRACT

This article defends the idea that dreams experienced by ethnographers and their interlocutors can be used as a tool to access knowledge and ideas about the reality studied. To prove this, the author offers a number of specific ethnographic cases in which dreams are involved in the processes of communication, learning and understanding the questions raised by each anthropological approach. At the same time facts of the author's own research among Muina and Muinana indigenous peoples from the Colombian Amazon are presented. The author's own dreams and some indigenous' dreams opened discussion routes and uncovered concepts and discourses which were helpful in understanding reality and action upon it. Finally, the author discusses how some life experiences in the research process, like dreams in this case, constitute a relevant contribution to the debates on contemporary challenges of the ethnographic work.

KEY WORDS

Ethnography, dreams, method, anthropological research.

LOS SUEÑOS COMO INSTRUMENTOS ETNOGRÁFICOS**RESUMEN**

Este artículo defiende la idea de que los sueños experimentados por el etnógrafo y sus interlocutores pueden ser incorporados como herramienta de acceso a conocimientos sobre la realidad estudiada. Para demostrarlo, el autor ofrece una serie de casos etnográficos concretos en los que los sueños participan en los procesos de comunicación, aprendizaje y comprensión de los interrogantes formulados en cada abordaje antropológico. A su vez, se exponen hechos de la investigación del propio autor entre los indígenas *muina* (*uitoto*) y *muinane* de la Amazonia colombiana, en los que algunos sueños propios y de algunos indígenas abrieron rutas de discusión que pusieron al descubierto conceptos y discursos que auxiliaron la comprensión de la realidad y las actuaciones sobre ella. Finalmente, el autor discute cómo algunas experiencias vitales vividas en el proceso de investigación, como los sueños en este caso, constituyen una pertinente contribución a los debates sobre los desafíos contemporáneos del quehacer etnográfico.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Etnografía, sueños, método, investigación antropológica.

Acknowledgements

I thank Pedro Fermín Maguire for the correction of the abstract and the anonymous evaluators from the *Journal of Iberoamerican Anthropology* for their revision and, especially, for the suggestion for the article of Marko Živković (2006).

Introduction

They say that dreams are only real while they last, can you say the same of life?
(*Waking Life*, film of Richard Linklater, 2001).

Jorge Luis Borges, in the prologue to *Libro de Sueños* (1976), says that in the story of Joseph Addison, *Espectador* (1712), you observe that when we dream, the human soul strives to liberate itself from the body and becomes at that time the theatre, the actors and the audience. Borges adds that even we turn ourselves into the same author of the story that is being seen. This metaphor, “*dangerously attractive*” for Borges, would lead us to the thesis that dreams “*constitute the oldest and not the least complex of literary genres*”. This thesis, in consequence, could be justified for the Argentinian author not only the composition of a general history of dreams, but of their influence on writing. Anthropology would add: also, their influence on the sacred, over the production of collective images, over the different human representations of the world and beyond the world, over fears and certainties, over mythology, over the acquisition of knowledge and the ways in which we gather together with others (Niño, 2007: 295; Perrin, 1990: 7). Dreams, those that are not seen with the eyes but rather with images produced through sensory activity, were initially conceived by European anthropology from the 19th century as whimsical upwelling of mental activity, vaporous images devoid of reality (Steward, 2004: 76). It is, thanks to previous discussions unleashed by postures from relativist anthropology and other Lévi-Strauss arguments, that dreams start to be conceived with the real social importance that they occupy in the cultural activities of many places. Even when anthropology has stopped addressing dreams as if they were inscrutable illusions, assuming them as human experiences laden with material and concrete symbolic effects, still conserves some traces of strangeness, a sort of surreal exoticism, as if it were confronted with facts and history that by having a place in the innermost synopsis were being treated with phenomena that seem closer to the intimacy of the esoteric than that of science. Dreams are like

languages in the fact that we are all gifted with the human ability to produce them, and they give name and live in different forms of reality, diversify the ways of reading and living in the world, communicate cultural experiences composed of unimaginable symbolic content. Dreams, to make it clear, are not unknowable phenomena, they are vital experiences utilized by every culture under their own practices and concepts. As Wittgenstein asked, “*Why should the dream be more mysterious than a table? Why cannot they both be equally enigmatic?*” (Adorno, 2008). In this perspective, even though anthropology has addressed dreams as an object of reflection, it even seems reticent to incorporate dreams as one more tool of experimentation and inquisition. Or to say, dreams, aside from being an anthropologic field of study, can also represent, thanks to the inescapable capacity of the ethnographer to dream, resources of the ethnographic work that allow access to some answers related to the research questions. Some recent studies begin to show some changes in this direction. In this article, therefore, I intend to defend the idea that observation of dreams and their communication — of the investigator as well those with whom he or she works — constitute an important instrument of inquiry in the ethnographic practice. Some anthropologic studies, like that of Niño (2007) between the Ette or Chimila of Northern Colombia, or rather, that of Hollan (2004) between the dreamers of Indonesia, New Guinea and the United States, maintain that dreams can be a privileged medium for the acquisition of knowledge (Niño, 2007: 313); or also a path for self-knowledge of personal experiences with others in common realities (Hollan, 2004: 176). If anthropology admits the existence of forms of knowledge related to observation of dreams, why cannot the same ethnographers and the people implicated in their work pay attention to dreams as routes of inquiry and reflection on the facts of experienced reality in their wakefulness? If the dream of the “others” becomes the subject of anthropologic interest, why does not the dream of “one’s self” as the investigator, in its turn, a field of methodological exploration? If as Perrin (1990: 16) maintains, the dream has a stimulating function of the creative properties of mythical thinking, would it not have stimulating properties of anthropological or social thinking?

In the ethnographic exercise, we tend to put into place a series of post-Malinowskian techniques (participant observation, interviews, long-term field work) and a series of devices that aid our inquiry of reality (cameras, recorders, computers, field diaries). If dreams, in turn, are such a sensorial experience, cast ideas, messages and questions relative to our questions and analytic worries, there is no reason to disapprove their use, or rather, there exist valid reasons to contemplate their possible use in

ethnographic practices. The position of Marko Živković, for example, sustains this idea considering the dream as a super-figure among the tropes, a “machine for thinking” about society (Živković, 2006: 146). Paraphrasing the same Živković, dreams function as ontological machines capable of representing different world paradigms, *epistemes* (Živković, 2006: 162). I do not want to defend a new manual of investigation techniques, as if I intended to incorporate “the use of dreams in ethnography” as a new technique in the forms and models of institutional projects. The discussion transcends the operational sphere of the investigative conventions of universities. On the contrary, I intend to present the intellectual seriousness that merits a series of lived experiences by the ethnographers in their own work and that directly involve the observation of their own dreams. It is worth clarifying that not all ethnographers experience dream-like activity related to their own investigative practice; perhaps other people have lived other sensorial experiences aside from dreams that have illuminated some of their intellectual questions (sorcery, entheogen consumption, fasting, ritual trances, relations with orishas, palm reading, divinatory oracles, premonitory herbs, protective amulets, or simply nothing). In any case, not all the content of dreams has to do with the concerns or questions of the investigation.

In this perspective, then, if paying attention to dreams and sharing them manages to open paths for comprehension and inquiry into reality, these can be a central tool in our ethnographic toolbox. It is a debate that has to do with our sensitive experiences, with our ways of inhabiting and sharing different social realities as anthropologists; it is not a discussion about submitting these dreams seemingly as institutional evaluators, or for arbitration by academic authorities to certify them. To sustain this plan, I will present a series of evidences: initially I will show some ideas about how anthropology has come close to studying dreams over history, pointing out the strong influence that it received from Freudian theory about dreams. This will allow me to clarify the scene for debate in which new and varied proposals on the study and use of dreams in some recent approaches come in. After, I will present three specific ethnographic cases about how dreams are employed as instruments of access and acquisition of knowledge, in the manner of answers and concrete experiences in the performance of ethnographic practice. First, I will illustrate the case of Denise Nuttall (2007), an ethnomusicologist who studies the *Tabla*, a percussion instrument in northern India. Later I will talk about the classic work of Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams* (1986), an audacious ethnography about the *Beaver* people from subarctic Canada. After I will talk about the work of Barbara Tedlock (2007), in which she uncovers how

her own dreams participated in the cultivation of consciousness and self-observation as a traditional doctor among the indigenous Ojibway of North America. Finally, I will present my own experiences in the field among the indigenous Muina (Uitoto) and Muinane of the Colombian Amazon, showing that the observation of a series of dreams and the following dialogues about them with my interlocutors and about their own dreams activated a series of fields of reflection and discussion about the central theme of the study: the cultural responses that the indigenous use to defend their autonomy before the presence of the protagonists of the Colombian war in their territory. Through this ethnographical input, I will finish offering a discussion about the validity of thinking about dreams as vital experiences in the process of the production of anthropological knowledge.

Ethnographic Nightmares and Freud

Some of the European representatives in the social sciences from the 19th century, like John Lubbock and Herbert Spencer, conceived distinct cultural realities, not only because of the irremediable prison of their own historical moment as white European men, but through a view cornered by racism, evolutionist intransigence and colonialism. Proof of this was the intellectual treatment given to dreams, as the people who observed and took their dreams seriously were considered inferior. Attention to dreams was viewed as a religious deformation that indicated the incapacity of the non-Europeans to differentiate reality from fantasy (Steward, 2004: 76), or rather how Spencer himself insisted, one of the attributes — under the European view — of “civilization” was the ability to differentiate delirium, imagination and dreams from what is *real* (Steward, 2004: 76). From there the only accredited European deliriums were inquisitorial, since those that observed their dreams and shared them with others easily could be accused of sorcery, demonic ecstasy or diabolic possession (Steward, 2004: 176). Luckily Borges and Akira Kurosawa were born another time — thrown by history to their rightful time — since being present some centuries before also would have ended with them being scorched by the pyre of prejudice. Under this lens, that Eurocentric anthropology traversed many centuries looking for traits and cultural components that would maintain its obsessive distance between the “civilized” and “savage”; between the “animists” and “logical-Christian-rationales”, between cosmologic dreams and mechanical positivism and, seemingly, between societies that pay attention to dreams and publically narrate them, therefore labeled as back-wards and ignorant, and those

“advanced” and “modern” societies, that tend to conceive dreams as individual evanescence of the cranial cavity, a neuropsychological subject, or rather, as was amply defended by Freud, a path for the comprehension of how the dreamers unconscious works, always seen as isolated and individual (Wax, 2004: 91). This history attests, in other words, that dreams, their content and the ways of understanding them, likewise constitute cultural constructions (Galinier et al., 2010: 819). The previous debates, sparked from the relativist arguments of Franz Boas, opened an interesting path of ethnographic studies in which they approached dreams as a field inserted in the significance and structure of every culture. In this historic shuffling of anthropologic studies about dreams in different cultural realities, there were discrepancies and different focuses, even though maybe one of the sharpest debates maintained itself between those who validated the acceptance of the Freudian psychoanalytic premises about dreams and those who wielded a fierce refusal.

Even though many anthropologists considered Freud’s psychoanalysis incompatible with cultural relativism (Steward, 2004: 79), the field of study opened by Sigmund Freud was so resounding that its dazzle was able to cloud the lenses with those whose anthropology tried to understand dreamlike activity in different social realities (Perrin, 1990: 13). Dreams were thought to be under the premise that mental activity unleashed while we sleep is no more than the disguised realization of a repressed desire (Cheniaux, 2006: 170). If dreams, seemed to be created under the Oedipal reflection of Freud, are because the liberation of some *forbidden desire* (an especially confusing notion) that has been initiated (Perrin, 1990: 15). Would we become, therefore, dreamlike subversives under the effects of the dream we are instigated by luxury and sin? Going to bed became perhaps the most like transitioning to adventures that infringe upon the daily moral. This influence from Freud was so powerful that even Malinowski, our unforgettable “*anthrocestor*” (Goulet and Granville Miller, 2007: 322), in the Trobriand islands, even when he discussed the cultural variability of the Oedipus Complex (Steward, 2004: 79), obsessively focused on the function of dreams in establishing a loving relationship between youth that would authorize extramarital sexual relationships, resting importance on the function of dreams to carry out fishing expeditions and ceremonial business of Kula, or rather, to correctly celebrate the annual rights of worship for the deceased (Charuty, 1996).

These “dreams” obfuscated from ethnography with Freud managed to relieve themselves when they planted their fundamental premises, not only on part of the same anthropology, but also for psychology and prior neuroscientific studies. It was therefore recognized that much of this bi-

zarre and confusing content in dreams is not the result of repression, but rather elements that were originality extra linguistic, that cannot be expressed in words, or rather, showing that dreams do not only reflect or are instigated by desires, also exposes the extensive mental activity as a whole, which supposedly does not only discharge of psychic energy, but also the solution of problems (intellectual and emotional), creative stimuli, self-knowledge, adaption, learning, stress neutralization, and refining the memory, among others (Cheniaux, 2006: 171). Not everything in our dreams is instigated by desires, even when these and their derived emotions, in so much raw material from dreamlike contents, seem to govern our daily lives.

It's curious that in the intellectual frameworks of (western) bourgeois society, a reductionist and individualist view of dreams still prevails. Dreams end up being studied by biomedical professionals that perceive them to be a result of a psychophysiological process (like digestion) specific to the dreamer, a separate being, isolated, that does not seem to make social use of their dreamlike experiences (Wax, 2004: 85). This vision differs from other postures, like those of Murray Wax (2004), who defends the idea that dreams can also participate in collective equilibriums, as it seems to happen between some hunter-gatherer societies, like the Kawahiva from the Brazilian Amazon and the Chipewyan from the Mackenzie River Delta in the northern region of Canada. In these societies, according to Wax (2004), dreams activate an (intersubjective) channel through which people can become conscious of others' feelings. Sharing dreams, talking about them, paying attention to them, allows people to know about others and in this way to orient our own thoughts and common actions (Wax, 2004: 86). Dreaming and sharing dreams is essential for many societies, even in Ancient Greece, dreams were considered as aesthetic productions related to poetry, music, dance (Wax, 2004: 91), and as anthropology seems to verify it, creative stimuli from mythological content, paths of self-knowledge, learning and understanding a shared social reality.

From other perspectives, these plans have advanced from one hand new anthropological approaches about dreams that emphasize in their methodological potential as tools of the acquisition of knowledge. To observe dreams, by consequence, many times they do not have to do with occult meanings, detecting prophetic messages, liberated desires, or eve with moral warnings about our behavior in society, but rather with the processes through which we sustain subject-culture relations. From this method, I will present three concrete cases of anthropological studies of dreams from recent years that constitute approaches in favor of my central

argument: to observe dreams and share them with the people we work with can comprise vital tools for the ethnographic practice.

Dreams and the Ethnographic Practice

It proves coherent to think that the prime material that feeds dreams derives from experiences in society, whatever the cultural meanings that mediate the relations with others. What this means is that dreams are forged from daily experiences, marked by fears, desires, fiction, domination, illusions of prestige, death, triumph, solidarity, intellectual preoccupations, aesthetic experiences with music and the arts, what we feel in the presence of the sacred, in the face of justice, in light of what makes us smile and what brings us to tears; in conclusion, whatever sensorial experiences of social life, irremediable with the others, is an endless fountain of dreamlike activity. From there it is valid to think that the contents of the dreams participate in the processes of representation of reality, production of images and feelings through which we inhabit and experience the world. The former is closely linked with the knowledge derived from ethnographic activities; so, these not only suppose dialogues and experiences with others, they also invoke the construction of relationships, political ties, emotional and vital bonds with the subjects with whom they face and approach a problem, conflict or series of questions. Logically, it follows to think, in other words, that in the mind of the investigator and in that of the interlocutors, dreams relate themselves with the experiences of the work carried out. To support this plan, I will talk about three illustrative cases of how dreams intervene in the processes of construction of knowledge and comprehension of the experiences in the inhabited world.

Before continuing, I wish to indicate that the following examples, being experiences of the indigenous peoples in America and those migrants to the United States, do not intend to strengthen the idea that only dreams in “exotic places” or in “peripheral margins” — depending on where the reader is situated — are, unequivocally, objects of desire anthropologically and matters of interest for the arguments defended here. I agree with Živković when he criticizes the ingenious ethnologic essentialism of believing that the dreams of the “savages” are more coherent, powerful or revealing of cultural knowledge than our confused dreams in our dazed metropolis (Živković, 2006: 160). The study of dreams in the field of the production of meaning does not need to embark on *Robinsonian* adventures to consume itself; the Živković demonstrates it in the study of dreams as illustrators of the common figurative processes in Milosevic’s Serbia; dreams serve as a trope to allow the contents of the

mind or the subjective national agitations in industrialized, metropolitan, and European or Serbian contexts to be illustrated. The following examples were chosen because they are some of the few available alternatives for the proposed methodological discussion, and not because of a belief that dreams in the middle of a vibrant and bureaucratized metropolis cannot encourage social thought.

a. Playing the *Tabla* and Dreaming

Denise Nuttall, in her article *Embodiment, Dreaming, and Experience as a Basis for Understanding the Other* (2007), exposes a series of fascinating ethnographic experiences which she herself recognizes as amazing. In her work as an ethnomusicologist she takes on the challenge of learning to play the *tabla*, a percussion instrument that integrates the musical traditions of northern India, to the extent of forming part of a group of *tabla* students under the orientation of a teacher or *guru*. In the musical and cultural learning process, she recognizes and lives different forms of acquisition of knowledge and the teaching that contrast with the conventional artistic education of the formal schools in the United States and Europe. In her turn, and more than just attending classes, she determines a path to access the abilities and artistic formation that invokes corporal activity as a whole, including the same activity of the dreams which she manages to live encounters with the guru, his techniques, the execution of his art, the compositions, and the most complex rhythms (Nuttall, 2007: 330). In the way that Nuttall, by observing her dreams and sharing them with other students and her own teacher, achieves not only to deepen the human ties with the group with which she learned to play the *tabla*, but also opens an interesting field of learning that involves musical technique and all of the cultural and artistic fundamentals that gives her support in learning the instrument. This series of ethnographic experiences gives form to new views of the relationship between the *tabla* and its cultural environment, which, according to Nuttall, she would not have been able to achieve comprehension with a simple participant observation reluctant to actively get involved with other forms of knowing, seeing, feeling and being.

What is interesting about Nuttall's ethnographic experience is that the body, as a medium that provides us with sensorial activity to perceive and know reality, turns herself inward in the space of field work (2007: 34). Ethnography involves sharing the essential common experiences, constructing human ties while assuming ethnic, political and spiritual stances with the people with whom she works. It is under this practical assumption that Nuttall manages to pay attention to her dreams in the middle of

her fieldwork. By sharing her dreams with her fellow *tabla* students and her teacher, she succeeds in accessing a stimulating path of learning about musical executions and the forms of knowledge deeply rooted in Indian origins (Nuttall, 2007: 346). To experience the spiritual side that learning the *tabla* involves does not mean that Denise Nuttall has become the best player of the *tabla*, or the worst anthropologies, as she confirms; this is hardly important, the fundamental seems to be that by incorporating dreams in the learning process, she manages to deepen the crucial human connections, with which she shares experiences, shares the lived world, she examines it and she studies it.

b. Maps and Dreams

The territories of Subarctic Canada populated by forests, swamps, and frozen rivers in which the rainbow trout lives, and itinerant bears walk, are travelled and lived in by the indigenous Inuit and Beaver, expert trappers and audacious hunters that seem to eat caribou hamburgers and dress in elk furs. But it is also a world of small growing cities, petroleum platforms, seismic explorers, biofuel speculators, sport hunters and voracious ranchers. In this world of antagonistic forces Hugh Brody entered to map out and think with the local inhabitants by means of whatever cultural instruments were made in those territories. The result is not a simple technical report of a commission of limits, it's an ethnography that talks about how maps of indigenous territories cover life in dreams. Brody accompanies people of the Beaver tribe on their hunting and fishing routes, and on the way participates in dialogues on the concrete dimensions of their territories, perceiving that only he who has dreamed the routes of the animals, who understands their behavior in detail, can trace in their mind the hunting trails, recognize the characteristics of the space, its waterfalls, its mountains, its lakes, in such a way that he manages to establish places of reference and orientate himself on the expeditions (Marín and Becerra, 1997: 74). The meaning of the Beaver territory actualizes itself in dreams, specifically when a person dreams of precise places, with hunting routes, he can meaningfully read the map of the territory. In his work *Maps and Dreams*, Brody fully illustrates the role dreams play in the construction of territorial knowledge:

Oh yes, Indians made maps. You might say that such maps are crazy. But maybe the Indians would say that is what your maps are: the same thing. Different maps from different people. Different *ways*. Old-timers made maps

of trails, ornamented them with lots of fancy. [...] You may laugh at these maps of the trails to heaven, but they were done by good men who had the heaven dream, who wanted to tell the truth. They worked hard for their truth. [...] How can anyone who has not dreamed the whole route locate himself on such a map? (Brody, 1986: 47).

Not all members of the Beaver tribe dream of “celestial paths”, as they themselves call it, only a few specific leaders. However, according to Brody, it is interesting to see that the maps derived from dreams are indiscernible from the maps used by the same hunters in the territory, precisely because the maps revive the dreams of the ancestors, who occupied, constructed and represented the territory (Brody, 1986: 47). In the same manner, concerning a disputed territory in the middle of extractive forces of resources and commercial exploitation, the indigenous legitimacy of the Beaver territory would not be accreditable by governments if the historical territory was justified by maps created from dreams, in contrast with geopolitical and commercial maps elaborated by official technocracy. So, Brody, in face of the threat of oil companies, justified the historical occupation of the Beaver territory with studies of archeological excavations, accounts of ancient explorers that travelled the region and other oral reports, so allowing to supplement and enrich the maps derived from dreams in order to confirm specific ecosystems, hunting trails, food sources, memorable events, life experiences and the presence of thousands of Beaver people in their own “dreamed territory”. From there the question “*How could someone that does not dream find themselves on those maps?*” gains new relevance. The fact that the dreams of the Beaver people participate in the disputes for legitimacy and construction of territory does not stop being passionate. This puts into discovery not only the tensions between different modes of spatial representation, between a predominantly technical conception of space (the map) and a predominantly local conception of time (the dream) (Huggan, 1991: 58); but rather reveals in turn how the circumstantial content of the dreams — linked to moments and concrete historical events — can provide conceptual tools for justifying the knowledge of a territory, its comprehension and defense.

c. The Power of Dreams

Barbara Tedlock, in *The Poetics and Spirituality of Dreaming: A Native American Enactive Theory* (2004), narrates her own story of how she learned to dream according to the Ojibway or Chippewa tradition. From her own personal experiences of recurrently dreaming of a turtle, she discusses the experience with her grandmother and identifies this creature

as a healing presence in her life. After suffering polio at the age of eight, against medical advice, she was brought home and treated by means of phytotherapeutic practices of her grandmother, which allowed her to make an almost complete recovery. Years later, Barbara, studying anthropology in Berkeley, had various dreams in which her grandmother predicted her death; it was time for the grandmother to depart and for Barbara to learn to confront infirmity independently. After these important events, and from her own ethnographic training, Barbara approaches dreams and invaluable fonts of information, as an empathetic understanding of experiential (spiritual) phenomena endured during her own life (2004: 183).

These insights acquire meaning in their social scenario when they are discussed and shared. The interactive process of dreaming, which allows for greater understanding of the events of real life, Tedlock calls an *enactive theory of dreaming* (2004: 183). Precisely because we can only know what others have dreamed through their own narratives, in the common dialogue experience, or rather through the dreams related in poems, songs, amulets, pictures or other visual images. For the Ojibway or Chippewa dreams provide a field in which humans can know and sustain encounters with both the known and spiritual world without distinction, as if they were merged realities (Tedlock, 2004: 188). To observe dreams and share them with others opens avenues for the collective conscious, for self-observation and the impulse of autonomy.

One of the invaluable theoretic contributions derived from the ethnographic narration of Tedlock is to introduce to the ethnographic exercise the debate of the *enactive theory of dreaming*. Enaction refers to knowledge acquired in the development of an action or experience. Riding a bike and dancing are enactive knowledge because they are only learned by doing those actions. In this way, the careful observation of dreams constitutes forms of knowledge in immediate action, enactive knowledge, because they offer information, ideas and insights about the experiences in the shared reality, in a manner that would not have empirical evidence for an external observer. Thinking that knowledge of reality can also be obtained through dreams and their conscious observation acquires validity; that is to say, the ethnographic exercise implicates the different sensorial aspects of human activity, and among all the sensory activity dreams are found.

Dreams of war

Thomas Griffiths (1998), from his field work among the Muina in the Colombian Amazon, elaborates a beautiful reference to some recurring

Muina dreams in which they establish relationships between fruits and animals. When a Muina person dreams, for example, of eating *guamas* (ice-cream beans, *jitáino* in *muina*; *Inga sp*) it is because they will eat or have an encounter with a coati (*Kuitda* in *muina*; *Potos flavus*); or rather when they dream of eating peanuts (*mattákaji* in *muina*; *Arachis hypogaea*) or the fruit of the moriche palm (*Kineki* in *muina*; *Mauritia flexuosa*) it is because they will eat or have an encounter with a spotted *paca* (*Ime* in *muina*; *Agouti paca*). These dreaming relationships between fruits and fauna are associated with the precaution of a good diet, the formation of healthy bodies, the construction of an ethical life and a sociability under the precepts of human morals. From here the consumption of fruit and some animals that eat fruit implies precaution, prevention and diets, since some malign powers that can disrupt the practices of cultural life can filter themselves through the consumption of an animal, thereby introducing diseases and defined reactions of hearing, rage, envy and violence. In other terms, it runs the risk of exposing oneself to a chance of animalization (Griffiths, 1998). In the same way the cycles of fructification of the plants occurs, since the fruits can contain toxins or venomous substances or be contaminated by hairs, saliva, odors or substances of bird, worms, reptiles, insects, fish or terrestrial mammals. In response to this, the celebration of the fruit ritual of the *muina*, the *yuaki murui-muina*, a ceremonial ritual in which food from the harvest is purified, which transforms the impure that gravitates in the animal world to pure experiences and solidarity free from threats for human bodies, acquires great importance.

During my field work in 2013 and even outside of the Muina territory, I had some dreams of eating the fruit of the mocambo or jaguar tree (*Theobroma bicolor*), known as *mitéma*, a sweet Amazonian cacao; on telling this to some indigenous people they assured me that I would probably eat spotted *paca* in the next few days (*Ime* in *muina*; *Agouti paca*). At this moment I did not issue any credibility to the indications of the dream, since in the Amazon forest whenever you count on a good hunter its probable to eat *paca* meat some day during the week. Some time later, on a Thursday in July in the Muinane settlement of Villa Azul, on waking up, I was asked what I have dreamt about; I said that some families of the settlement had found us together in the *maloca*, or long house. “*Huy!*” — exclaimed Mario Paaki, a young Muinane leader — “*that means that today we will have a heavy shower*”. I thought that maybe Mario already knew the weather forecast in advance with a simple look at the position of the clouds; besides July is a month known for torrential rains, and, as was effectively announced, that afternoon an inexhaustible Amazonian

deluge fell for almost the whole day over the settlement. The truth is, I did not believe much in the dreamed warnings interpreted by the indigenous companions, I had the suspicion that it was one of their usual jokes on foreign visitors. However, one day, while sitting under the *mambeadero*¹ along with Mario Paaki, his uncle Ángel Muinane and Eduardo Paki, his father, a traditional doctor and leader of the Maloca, I remembered a dream from the night before about the arrival of many people to settlement, as if it were about the arrival of the guests to a ritual dance. Eduardo affirmed that this dream meant that “*the animals from the mountain are close, it could be that a herd of pigs is eating their way through our fields*”. Mario as well as Ángel agreed unanimously exclaiming “*Hum!*”. A day later, one of Ángel Muinane’s brothers arrived running to the settlement announcing between cries and panic that a great herd of *capibara* (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*) was devastating the neighboring fields. The interpretation of Eduardo about the dream seems to come true with credible proof; my doubts started to fade, admittedly they were animals from the mountain, just *capibara*, instead of pigs. This type of *perspectivist dream* (see Viveiros de Castro, 1996), in which the animals are seen as people, provided with a spirit and morals, allowed for a series of dialogues with some Muina and Muinane in which the metaphorical association that is made of the armed groups as “animals from the mountain” (*Jatiki imaki* in *muina*) is clarified. The armed groups are conceived as creatures with animal traits (using camouflage, walking on the mountain, being potentially ferocious, disposing of some power such as weapons, having their own smell and their own moral concepts that mediate their relationships with others), which implies contending in the face of the armed party defined treatments for prevention, protection, and mutual care. This translates in a series of daily procedures in order to elude and resist the armed presence, a concrete form of addressing and confronting war in daily life.

From that moment I started to pay closer attention to my dreams and to the dreams shared by the indigenous speakers. What most caught my attention was when we were discussing sharing dreams that were no longer about themes linked to the relationship between fruits and animals as Griffiths (1998) clearly presented, now dreams were visited by armed people, men in camouflage, in boats, the presences of war planes and combat. This made me think of the discussion started by Marc Augé in *La guerra de los sueños. Ejercicios de etnoficción* (1998), in which the multiplicity of images, messages and events, produced by different pow-

1. *Mambeadero*: place where *mambe* (toasted and mashed coca leaves (*Erythroxylum coca*) mixed with the ash of leaves of the trumpet tree (*Cecropia sp.*)).

ers, participate in the construction of the subjective contents, modeling our fears, expectations, illusions and dreams, flushing out a political intervention about our forms of perceiving, imagining and representing reality. *La guerra de los sueños* alludes to the forms of colonization of our capacity of representing the world, by narrating it through concepts, by experiencing it through the same images that we have of ourselves, with which we substantiate our identity and construct the otherness. From here the political dispute clinched in the contemporary between the forms of dreaming that speak to us of ourselves, our collective challenges and cultural links, and the forms of dreaming interrupted with images, messages, events and symbols that intend to occupy our cerebral activity and the content of our dreams. As Živković (2006: 163) also said: “*dreams are the fundamental area where the battles of the imaginary world have been liberated*”. Among the Muina from the middle of the Caquetá river, this war of dreams manifests itself in the emotional tensions produced by the actual dreams of war. In many dialogues with Muina men and women questions about what is happening to them came up, why are they dreaming about armies and combat, how can they interpret these images. At first glance, it seems hardly logical to think that the arrival of war to indigenous territory was the dark reality that field the dreams. But this does not allow us to understand how to interpret the possible answers that the inhabitants could give to this reality: Could we find ideas and actions that would respond to the pressures of similar historical situations by dialoguing about these dreams from the cultural frameworks?

One night, at a meeting in the *mambeadero* of Lucio Maidainama, along with other Muina companions, the topic of discussion was the discomfort generated by the presence of an army base in indigenous territory. Lucio shared a dream that he had and that allowed us to understand the real dimensions of the intrusion and the cultural impact of an armed force being present in the middle of local life. Lucio said, in a cautious manner and whispering that, in his dream, armed men from the army appeared, took him by force and cruelly raped him. According to the dialogue that ensued, we understand that the presence of an armed group, potentially violent, that could rape a villager, was an explicit allusion to the territory. The human body is a metaphor for the constructed territory, the territory as a vital entity, therefore the rape experienced by Lucio in the dream represented an alarming increase in the risks to the indigenous people constructing their own territory. Furthermore, in the dialogue the rapist was a called *rubi* (*rubiniai*) — jaguar, fierce people of the mountain — precisely a predatory creature that uses camouflage and

mimics the spots of a jaguar. The soldiers were also referred to as *úrubui* — dogs from the mountain — people that aggressively raid and then leave, making direct reference to a bestial and savage conception that was putting the humanization of the territory at risk, and therefore, increasing the dangers of condemning the Muina to a process of violent and irreparable animalization, as has already succeeded in past history with the slaver regimen and rubber exploitation. This could be understood through the narration of the dreams and their conscious observation in public places like the *mambeadero* and some *chagras*. In turn, this allowed me to perceive that in response to an armed presence, many men and women placed their confidence in the protection provided by cultural practices, the realization of ritual dances, the maintenance of the *chagras* and the use of sacred plants such as coca and tobacco paste, all of these practices directed to securing the human quality of the bodies, and by implication, preserving the cultural attributes of the inhabited territory, which represented a rejection and evasion of the intervention of military forces in their life and history.

The observation and conversation about dreams became, in an ethnographic exercise, a tool of comprehension of the reality of war experienced by the Muina. Including afterwards, in discussing dreams, we discover a route, from local concepts, to think of the armed conflict through the course of history. One of the examples from this was a conversation about an agitated dream experienced by José Chío, leader of the Nonuya from the Peña Roja settlement and wandering neighbor of the Muinane *maloca* of Eduardo Paki in Villa Azul.

One day, Chío appeared in pursuit of Eduardo in Villa Azul: “*I came to talk to you about some things*” — said Chío on finding Eduardo repairing an old scythe. They went to the *maloca*, sat down and shared their *mambe* and tobacco paste. “*I have had some heavy dreams*” — said Chío — “*Oh yeah? About what?*” — asked Eduardo. “*A few nights ago*” — Chío said — “*I dreamed that planes arrived to bomb our territory, that soldiers in their motorboats came ashore while shooting, throwing grenades, they destroyed all of the houses in Puerto Santander, they burned everything, it was very ugly, the sky turned red*”. Eduardo listened to him attentively. Later he responded: “*this dream means that the season of pests and disease, stomach aches, boils of the skin, it’s the time for corporal and spiritual cleaning to face this, later it will pass*”. “*I thought the same thing, it is what the ecological calendar calls for*” — said Chío. Later they considered other topics such as the logistics of the school in the Villa Azul settlement. Chío left and Aidé, Eduardo’s wife, Ángel, and me all stayed in Eduardo’s *maloca* with him. The actions of war that appear in dream-

like images seem to alert the cyclical arrival of illnesses and disease. I asked Eduardo if the arrival of disease is always announced through dreams of war: Did the ancestors dream of soldiers also, armed men and war in allusion with the cyclical arrival of disease? “*What happened*” — Eduardo told me — “*is that war has always been, in the past there were wars also, later the rubber and the arrival of armed men. And for us war, armed people are a disease, they are recurrences on the territory, they are illnesses that arrive to the territory, relapses, that is why we must be prepared to prevent and to cure*”.

After some further discussion about dreaming of war, the idea was revealed that for the Muina and Muinane, in contrast to the temporal classifications that usually realize academic historiography, history is conceived as an uninterrupted process in which violent events, confrontations and armed people appear and disappear. Or rather, at intervals of time disease and illness appear, *relapse*, resembling the cycles of fruition, animal reproduction and anticipated illness in the ecological calendar. The difference is that in human history diseases — war and violence — seem to originate without predictions from the weather, although always from the same geographic places, the heads and mouths of the rivers that flow to large cities. The memory of the history of conflicts is projected in the continued travel of inherited and culturally appropriated events. Specifically, in this way of understanding history, these methods of cultural and political action are also perceived and identified with those that have confronted the violent events, these *diseases*, that seem to capriciously repeat themselves in time.

Just as in the course of recorded time different forms of collective suffering have existed that interlace, different violence that appear and disappear, that accumulate in history, in the regional geography of inhabited spaces, in the bodies and in the subjectivities (Castillejo, 2015: 30), apart from these sufferings that are historically charges, the people living these experiences also extract knowledge from them that forge them as active political subjects, acquiring concrete forms of reacting, knowledge and ways of acting among which they are able to return to confront the violent forces and events that the course of history transports. Eduardo said that in face of such events “we should be prepared in order to prevent and to cure” for a reason. The way to address or confront these “diseases” or “relapses”, is just to put in place the practice of cultural actions, that by implication, by being invoked in order to deal with the armed conflict, become inevitably political, autonomous replies directed towards the preservation of physical integrity of the self and that of relatives.

Ethnographic Travel and Dreams

Marc Augé affirms that the dreamer is like a traveler who is asked to tell his adventures (1998: 85). The matter is that the whole world knows from which places the narrator comes from, which dreamlike territories charged with unpredictable encounters, events that sometimes contradict the laws of physics and imaged sometimes encoded, others explicit, that unleash worrisome questions. In the latter it closely resembles the work of the ethnographic field, a trip from which upon returning asks us to report back and from which many times we only have questions even more complex than the ones that we had on the day of departure. Maybe the field work is a double displacement, that Geertzian “being there”, that being with “others” in a shared spatiotemporal dimension, cohabitating, dialoguing, that interior movement that not only has to do with personal transformations and vital learning of the ethnographer, but also with the always present possibility of dreaming of the “others”, of seeing in dreams the reality experiences with the others. And if the idea is permitted that in dreams you can acquire “*knowledge as legitimate and valuable as that which is obtained throughout observation*” (Cheniaux, 2006: 171; Niño, 2007: 295), dreams can constitute, therefore, an active instrument of the same ethnographic exercise. This involves asking ourselves for what we feel, think, and live through our bodies during this other half of our existence that we dedicate to sleeping. As Lichtenberg’s famous dictum goes: “*Our entire history is only the history of the waking men*” (Galinier et al., 2010: 821), therefore paying attention to those dreams related with our investigations, and to the dreams of our interlocuters, form part of a kind of night time ethnological practice (Galinier et al., 2010: 835), that can not only motivate profound discussions with the people with whom we work in that shared reality, but also a source of information and anthropological concerns in itself.

In many societies the dream finds itself instituted in such a manner that an experience, a strict individual appearance, is a form of communication not only with the “other world”, but also between human beings (Perrin, 1990: 11). In dreams, for example, as it happens between the Ette or Chimila of Colombia, you can have access to instructions on their chants, care for crops, or the treaties that they institute with the representatives from the national government (Niño, 2007: 311). These references bring to light that the concepts, the cultural practices and the dreams find themselves mutually implicated. The mind and the dreams are affected by the cultural experiences, and in turn, sharing and narrating the dreams contributes to feed the forms in which we feel and think about such ex-

periences (Hollan, 2004: 172). The ethnographic practice, in my point of view, does not escape this situation. Since dreams that are experiences, either by us the ethnographers or the interlocuters, relative to the studied problems, are offering us messages and ideas about our own experiences, about the relations with which we work, about the mutual behavior, about our moral and intellectual concerns and about the historical manifestations of reality with which we encounter.

Conclusions

Among the Inuit of the Arctic region, some elders explain the gravity of the current social situation, especially the high rate of suicide among the youth, in part as a result of the disappearance of the custom of sharing and narrating dreams (Bordin, 2009; Galinier et al., 2010: 835). In turn, among the Mexican Tzotziles, a person that does not dream, is said to be under the dominion of insanity or stupidity. Many of the collective tasks are influenced by some individual dream, a confirmation that in the life of the Tzotziles “*the day is the son of the night*” (Galinier et al., 2010: 285). Even as Oliver Sacks shows in his article *Neurological Dreams* (1996), some people through dreams can foreshadow or detect some symptoms or cerebral injuries before they manifest themselves, such as migraine pain or lethargic encephalitis, indicating the diagnostic value and the self-knowledge that dreams can have (Hollan, 2004: 178). As Hollan (2004) shows in his audacious article *The Anthropology of Dreaming: Selfscape Dreams*, the content of dreams can offer important paths about our experiences, our social relations, and the links between one’s self, the body and the world that we occupy (Hollan, 2004: 180). Throughout this article I have defended this idea, incorporating dreams as a tool for the access of knowledge and ideas about reality and can also be applied to ethnographic practice.

I am sure that many people, in their ethnographic work, in different places and times on this planet, have experienced some nonconventional event in respect to the usual techniques approved by the academic institutions that have permitted them to understand some aspect of reality, or rather access some type of knowledge that they would not have managed to attain another way. Here I have showed that dreams about events of reality, lived and studied, can provide routes for reflection and acquisition of ethnographic knowledge. These experiences can occur through other practices or experiences, whether they be witchcraft, visions induced from plant consumption, prolonged states of meditation, phytotherapeutic remedies, spells or incantations, prayers, pacts with spirit animals, among oth-

ers, are events that should not be marginalized as extraordinary experiences in the process of collecting data, or rather kept to confidential conversations and detached from the center of investigation; but they should be brought to the anthropological discussion table on the ethnographic task (Nuttall, 2007: 347). Ultimately, anthropology, after its historical shuffling by epistemological, ethical and political battles, to use the words of Viveiros de Castro, prides itself on being “*the science of ontological auto determination of the people of the world*” (Almeida, 2004: 74).

To grant sufficient importance to these experienced events in the methodological execution of our work, perhaps it is in tune with the idea of a feeling-thinking (*sentipensante*) subject² that Fals Borda discusses (Borda, 2009; Moncayo, 2009; 10), or rather, with the idea of Fabian (Nuttall, 2007: 347) that the real manner in which we manage to probe and feel reality is when we let ourselves be touched by experiences. The subtleties exposed here are an invitation to not deprive ourselves of observation and to pay attention to dreaming experiences that can be related with our ethnographic work and particular forms of accessing ethnographic knowledge and reflections from every point of view.

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2. *Sentipensante*, or feeling-thinking human or subject, that which “*combines reason and love, the body and the heart, in order to unleash himself from all the (bad) formations that tear at this harmony and can tell the truth*” (Moncayo 2009: 10).

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