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Dreams for a Collective Crisis

Jordi Borràs García



Is there a worse nightmare than someone getting into your house and attacking you? Yes: someone from home attacking you. Something like this happened in Catalonia on October 1, 2017. Although, a few weeks earlier, Jihadist terrorism had killed 15 people here (and injured more than 100), after the events of 10/1 these bloody attacks became secondary.

On September 29th my wife woke up and told me: “I just dreamt we couldn’t take a plane to Barcelona because the Spanish Government had closed the airspace.” The midday news revealed that dream was precognitive: in order to avoid aerial images of the mobilization of the 10/1, the State had adopted this drastic measure. Though inconceivable beforehand, the mood of the previous days really foreshadowed the worst scenario, with thousands of policemen approaching Catalonia while being pulled by hordes shouting “Go get ‘em!”...as if they wished them to close the mouths by blows of the millions of Catalans who wanted to express our opinion in a ballot box. A true waking nightmare.



Just as after the Jihadist attacks, in my practice I began to assist many people who suffered insomnia and nightmares as a result, so I suspected the same would happen as a consequence of this tense situation. For this reason, and encouraged by the comments of several participants attending IASD’s Psiber-Dreaming Conference that was being held at that time, I decided to develop a survey to collect the dreams related to those dark days. Aware of the therapeutic effect of simply sharing unpleasant dreams, I wanted on the one hand to provide a place where people could do so; and, on the other, to see the role of dreams when the future of a human collective was at stake. I predicted I’d

find dreams that, besides dealing with the dreamer’s personal issues, would also be premonitory, others that would reflect the sociopolitical conflict and even some that could point to a possible resolution of it. My prediction seemed accurate.

I don’t intend here to draw conclusions about the conflict between Catalonia and Spain, too complex to even begin to talk about. Nor do I want to explain my personal position (I’ll just affirm unambiguously I’m for non-violence, freedom of expression and dialogue). The survey collected more than 80 dreams, 84% from women, the youngest dreamer being 29 and the oldest 66, from diverse professions (therapists, journalists, artists, social workers, teachers, scientific researchers) and, although the vast majority of people resided in Catalonia, they came from different origins (other parts of Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Germany, Holland, Colombia and Venezuela). Most of the dreams collected happened around 10/1.

In the days prior to the referendum, the Spanish police occupied Catalonia with the intention of locating the ballot boxes that were to be used to vote. My wife told me another dream in which the police entered our home and arrested us because they’d spied on our Whatsapp. It seemed an unthinkable situation, but that very day the news said the police had broken into a printing press because they’d misinterpreted some Whatsapp messages from its workers, who joked about the ballot boxes. That was enough for the police to search the place...and for many people to start communicating via Telegram.



Premonitory dreams can be understood as an evolutionary resource of the psyche that would help foresee possible threats and thus protect the life of the dreamer or his group. We received dreams, prior to the 10/1, which seemed to prepare for what was going to happen by combining images related to the sociopolitical situation with: tracks that crossed anticipating a collision of trains, crowds of people with a feeling of imminent danger, armed people entering polling stations, policemen arresting politicians. Most of the dreams we received were from the days immediately following the police charges that were recorded by journalists all over the world in photographs or documentaries (Just a few examples here: <https://bit.ly/2Po1kux> / <https://bit.ly/2z6mXKq> / <https://bit.ly/2T4kb0p>) Dreamers clearly reacted to the impact of the police trying violently to silence millions of people who wanted to deposit their opinions in a ballot box. This particular object -a symbol of democracy- appeared in several of the dreams we received but, sadly, other elements had a greater protagonism: roads cut with fences, kidnappers, torturers, mutilations, people seeking refuge from war, policemen bursting into houses or shooting in the streets. C., for instance, dreamt of a group of men committed to “killing dreams” with medieval weapons.

As I said, I assume that all these dreams are also related to personal issues. The sociopolitical conflict also put many dreamers in touch with their desire to set boundaries clearly or their longing for personal freedom. Some dreams, for example, speak of inhabiting a new home. The cat, by the way, an animal that’s frequently associated with limits and independence but also with Catalonia (CAT is the abbreviation), appears on several occasions. On the other hand, the bull (an animal that’s related to Spain by the tradition of torturing them in the bullrings) also appears, alternating with other horned animals, as the attackers.

Of course, some of the politicians involved appear as well, like the Catalan president Puigdemont... but also the dictator Francisco Franco. Dreams not only highlighted the conflict, but also seemed to point to the roots of it, as if they wanted us to become aware of a deeper level: dreams that seem to put us in contact with the Shadow, like that of a dreamer who, to his surprise, was himself beating up a group of people; others that emphasize the feeling of not being understood by Spanish relatives and friends; dreams that combine images of conflict with dirty spaces that need to be cleaned or fecal waters. As one woman wrote in a comment accompanying her dream: “we accumulate centuries-old transpersonal dirt, resentment, hatred, fear... which must be cleaned.” A dream of my wife seemed to point in this same direction: she was in a *masia* (old Catalan rural construction) and discovered that Spanish policemen entered through its tunnels. She proposed to the owner that she restore it, change the structure and put big windows so that a lot of light entered, for everything to be clearly seen. As she told me when she woke up, it suggested to her that this crisis shouldn’t be managed on the basis of the historically accumulated grudge.

The *masies* appear on several more occasions: a dreamer refers to an old one inhabited by a child with longstanding thirst who drank water in bad conditions. But how do we resolve a conflict latent for so many years that has come back to light? Although dreams are not a magic wand that can resolve a situation of enormous complexity like this one, I assumed that they’d show alternatives for action or would point to ways of resolution (as they do on a personal level) for this difficult collective dilemma. I asked a group of dreamers to incubate dreams with the purpose of seeking a solution. B., for example, dreamt that she was suggesting to a friend, who was worried about the conflict, that she participate in an ancestral healing workshop.

The desire to find solutions to the conflict is expressed in several dreams: political prisoners being freed, a fortune-teller saying Catalonia will become independent from Spain in a few years. Quite a few dreams seemed to be suggesting ways to get by, like one from E. who dreamt that women should place themselves in the front row of the conflict. In most dreams, female characters intervene to help (the aggressors are always male). Could this be suggesting the need to take a feminine perspective, more conciliatory and cooperative? The same person dreamt that in his



parents' house there were no olives (the olive tree being a symbol of peace, especially in the Mediterranean basin). The idea of healing wounds and regenerating something old appears in diverse ways. There are different dreams in which children seem to have a relevant role, as the bringers of solutions to varying problems. A dreamer tells how her daughter frees a snake that had been trapped for a long time in a box. Inside her eye, she can see an ancient Catalan flag. Suddenly, the girl takes a knife and cuts his neck. The woman, in shock, wonders if she's done it so that she doesn't suffer or so that she can be reborn.

Other dreams speak also of liberating people or animals, even mythological creatures such as dragons. J., a Dutchman living in Barcelona, dreams that a group of people make a *castell* (<https://bit.ly/2zW3Cv9>) to free a crowded plane which has been trapped in a large building after overcoming great obstacles. They end up achieving it with the collaboration of everyone. Other dreamers try to resolve the conflict creatively, using poetry to escape a kidnapping, singing with other demonstrators a sacred piece by Rheinberger. Music emerges in several dreams: "El cant dels ocells" by Pau Casals, "La Oda a la alegría" by Beethoven... in all cases inspiring courage and hope, and probably manifesting the desire to find a peaceful way to resolve the crisis. The last piece, by the way, is also the European anthem, which recalls the longing of many Catalans for the European Union to propose itself as a mediator between the parts... something that's not yet happened, at least explicitly.

Several dreams seem to point to the involvement of the international community as a necessary solution: for example, L. assured me that she was unaware that Jimmy Carter had mediated in international conflicts until she dreamt of asking him for help in the Catalan issue, and V. dreamt that she was in the dark, approached by old threatening ships ("reminiscent of Columbus' Carabels"), and knew that "foreign tourists will bring the light that allow us to advance". Personally, I've had several dreams clearly related to this crisis and in most of them I tried to understand the position of the other and sought dialogue (even with fascist characters). Dreamwork teaches us to relate to what we'd like to exclude or consider bad. Transcending resentment with sincere forgiveness, and trying to understand the fears and hopes of others seem necessary to deal with any conflict in a fruitful way.

As I write this, the situation is still uncertain, apparently far from being resolved to everyone's satisfaction. The way out could be in one of our dreams waiting for us to find it.

Jordi Borràs García is a psychologist. He divulges the importance of dreams from www.mondesomnis.com and in his regular collaborations and interviews in the media (radio, television, press...). He organizes dream workshops and circles, and has designed the first training in Spain for psychologists and therapists, dedicated integrally to dreamwork.