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British Muslim Women: Dreaming Identities, Insights from Social Dreaming.

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The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon . . . or too late.

I do not come with timeless truths.

My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances.

Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said.

(Fanon, 1967, p. 1)

Introduction

This paper discusses insights into British Muslim women's consideration of their identities against a background of an increasing and generalised racism against Muslims in the UK (Hope not Hate, 2019; Home Office, 2018) , the struggles to comply with the UK Government response to the threat of 'Muslim' terrorism enshrined in the Prevent programme, and possible tensions within the Muslim community about what it means to be both British and Muslim for women of Islamic faith in the UK today. Our investigation is set against an overarching cultural and social backdrop of difficulty in grasping the exact meaning of 'identity' in a multi-cultural society such as the UK, which, as Sardar (2006) suggests, has "a problem with pluralistic identities [which is why] we are in the midst of a global epidemic of identity crisis' (p. 271). British Muslim women, who may come from a range of ethnicities, will have an intersectional experience of society and its oppressions, all affecting their sense of shared and individual identity: patriarchy, both within and outwith the various manifestations of Muslim communities to which they may belong; racism, especially in the particular case of racism directed at Muslims; a struggle against associations to terrorism; and demands to adhere to 'Britishness' and 'Muslimness' as a 'pluralistic identity'.

It is ironic that the conference event that partly inspired this paper was centred around the writings of Frantz Fanon, whose seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* takes on a particular meaning for Muslim women who choose to cover their faces, heads – or not – as part of their faith and identity. For our research, the question that is symbolically represented by the covering of the face – or not – is fundamental to the identity of the woman of Islamic faith, which of course can take on many levels of interpretation, but also, as Fanon points out, to the projections from many of the 'white faces' in the UK that might range from indifference to hate. For some European countries who have passed legislation in this respect, the niqab is little more than a 'mask' and the suspicion is that Muslim woman may have something to hide and, furthermore, this 'something' may be terror orientated. Maybe they are 'black skins and black masks'? Fanon is, of course, metaphorical in his 'mask', but in the case of the Muslim woman, the 'mask', if it is a 'mask', can be real. It is also true, that there may be a Fanon-like metaphorical 'mask' that covers the faces of those women who choose not to wear the niqab.

The subject matter is complex and volatile, and our research sample is tiny. We therefore make no claims at providing definitive evidence to illuminate these issues. We do, however, believe

that the findings that emerged in our exploration of these complexities are interesting and may stimulate further thoughts and considerations, leading to a fuller investigation in the future.

In the course of this paper, therefore, there will be an attempt to understand the shared psychosocial realities of a group of unconnected Muslim women in the North West of England. The lived experience of Muslim women will be discussed, including the circumstances they face within the Muslim community and sense of place and belonging in the wider UK society. The questions under discussion are extremely complex and this is why we chose to work with them through the method of social dreaming, which we now briefly explain below.

A note on methodology

Our approach to the research is framed in a psychosocial approach to fieldwork and data analysis (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Cummins and Williams, 2018). Psychosocial approaches to social questions enable the researcher to analyse the personal and social sphere in terms of psychoanalytically informed methods and interpretations, combined with an awareness of the social. Our specific method, the Social Dreaming Matrix, is fruit of the object relations branch of psychosocial studies, with its roots in the psychoanalytically informed thinkers, therapists and consultants that emerged from the Tavistock Clinic, or were informed by this epistemology in the 1980s. Social dreaming allows a group of people to gather together (called a 'matrix' of between 5-25, depending on resources), and share their night time dreams, and associations to those dreams, followed up by a 'post-matrix discussion' that draws together meanings that can be applied to theory and the practice of daily living (Lawrence 2005; Manley, 2018; Long and Manley, 2019.)

The method, which we have used before with mixed groups of British Muslims (Karolia and Manley, 2018), is useful in situations of such anxiety or complexity that standard discourse (such as a focus group) would struggle to provide an appropriate forum for the expression of ideas and feelings related to British Muslim women's identities. This is because social dreaming can allow unconscious or hidden thoughts and feelings to emerge in the form of dreams. The idea of taking meaning from dreams to understand difficult social problems is not new. Gosling and Case (2013) have shown how dreams were used by the Crow nation in North America to cope with the invasion of their lands in the 19th Century. In psychoanalysis, beginning with Freud, dreams are deemed to be the carriers of condensed messages that are synthesised in dream imagery (Freud, 1900). The discourse associated to dreams is often poetic in expression and can provide an alternative source of knowledge and information to participants and researchers in a Social Dreaming matrix. The hypothesis behind using such a method is that British Muslim women, in this case, would find it especially challenging to explicitly and intellectually discuss their identities, fraught, as these might be, with a seeming clash between what it means to be 'British' and/or 'Muslim. This, we theorised, might be the single most difficult issue that could bring together an imposed or expected paradox in the current climate, i.e., that it may be problematic to be simultaneously British and Muslim in the UK of today. In the case of a group of British Muslim women, we also allowed for the possibility that other important issues might be raised in the social dreaming event, most importantly the expectation of a discussion of gender related issues.

Men telling women and the problem of whiteness

It must be noted at this point that the fieldwork was carried out by the first author, a British, Asian, Muslim male. This carried the risk that there would be some discomfort from female participants and may have impacted on the data collected. This statement is at once both appropriate and inappropriate, with such a recognition possibly touching upon some truth in relationships between male and female Muslims on the one hand, but on the other hand potentially falling into the trap of caricature-making, myths and assumptions about male/female Muslim relationships and expectations. Furthermore, the second author of this paper, who collaborated in the data analysis, is a non-Muslim, white man. We are aware that neither of us are necessarily ideal participants, authorities or writers about the subject of British Muslim female identity. We offer this paper in all modesty and make no claims as to the certainty of our conclusions. We leave this to our readers. We only aspire to leave something of interest to stimulate further thinking in the field. In particular, since this paper is written in the context of the thoughts and work of Frantz Fanon, we wish to acknowledge that Fanon himself might well have considered our efforts in this paper to be an 'outrage', especially concerning the risk of attempting to impart knowledge of an identity that neither author occupies, though in this case that identity relates to gender. Speaking of identity in terms of white/black relationships in colonial Africa, Fanon points out how 'one is constantly aware that for the black man encountering a *toubab* [A term used to denote a person of white, European descent] with understanding offers a new hope of harmony' (Fanon, 1967, p. 54). We wonder whether this might also apply to women encountering a man with understanding. Fanon himself makes reference to his inability to speak of the experience of the black woman as he "knows nothing of her" (p.138). In fact, it seems that Fanon's discussion of identity leaves much to be desired in the case of gender identity. There has been some criticism of the subjective and dismissive view Fanon had of women in developing a narrative about black masculinity (Bergner, 1995; Spanakos, 1998) In the sense of gender identification, both of us as authors are outsiders. At best, we should offer the possibility that at least we have worked in awareness. It is relevant to this paper that Fanon, too, harboured a desire, to understand the knowledge that can be tapped from dreams. In his devastating critique of Mayotte Capécia in *Je Suis Martiniquaise* (discussed in Fanon, 1967, p. 41-62, (which may nevertheless be an example of Fanon's normative male gaze [Bergner, 1995]), Fanon bemoans the lack of dreams in Capécia's writing, which would have made it 'easier to reach her unconscious' (Fanon 1967 p. 46). In this paper we do resort to the dreams of British Muslim women to help us go beyond the difficulties of our research.

Throughout this discussion the term 'Muslim women' will be used, with the obvious limitation that it does not talk about the experience of all Muslim women or consider this grouping a homogenous group.

Note on ethics

The research was approved by the University of Central Lancashire's Ethics Committee, Unique Reference Number: PSYSOC 263. Information sheets, a complaints procedure and consent forms were used in the normal way to ensure transparency and the ability of participants to make informed choices about their participation and the use of their contributions as data for this article.

Background: British Muslim women in the UK today

Muslim women face significant discrimination in UK society. In 2016, following the Brexit referendum, hate crimes in the UK rose by 42% (Mortimer, 2016). Tell Mama (2018), a UK based organisation that provides support for people who suffer Islamophobic attacks, report that much of this rise is attributed to attacks on Muslim women, who were more likely to be victims of attacks, while perpetrators were more likely to be male. Data suggests that there were also marked increases of incidences in hate crimes against Muslims in the periods following Islamist inspired terrorist attacks (Home Office, 2018). Veiled Muslim women may be at particular risk of attacks, which is attributed to the visibility of their ‘Muslimness’ and there is no question that these attacks are also gendered (Macey, 2009; Tell Mama, 2018; Perry, 2014). This state of affairs can impact upon female Muslims’ sense of wellbeing and belonging in the society in which they live, where they are ‘othered’, sometimes because they choose to dress differently and by widespread representations and discourses that depict British Muslim Women as different. For some women this oppressive atmosphere may mean that they choose to isolate themselves in the home to stay safe from Islamophobic attacks (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2015). Muslim women are at risk of these crimes more than Muslim men, and the crimes are mostly committed by men. That increased risk leads to justified fear.

Political discourse about Muslims has often revolved around the supposed need for Muslims to integrate and more recently this has been artificially conflated with tackling extremism (Muslim Council of Britain, 2018). This discourse presumes that Muslims haven’t already integrated and often puts the onus on the Muslim community to actively do so, rather than considering any lack of integration of other communities, for example not considering issues such as ‘White Flight’ (Ferguson, 2018), the phenomenon of white residents leaving an area when people of colour move in. The policy primarily focusing on UK’s Muslim communities is the Prevent strategy (Home Office, 2011), part of the counter terrorism strategy, Contest (HM Government, 2018). One of the strategy’s stated aims is to increase integration. It is also punitive and asks for wider society and the Muslim community itself to report suspicions of Muslims. For example, signs of increasing religiosity can create suspicion, which for women can be particularly relevant as their increased religiosity can often be seen through changes in appearance and dress. The consistent negative portrayal of particularly female Muslim dress means that Muslim women constantly feel under pressure to assimilate to ‘western’ culture as a sign of ‘Britishness’ (Jawad & Benn, 2003). The discourse around the development of the Prevent strategy and the roles of Muslim women also uncovers prejudiced views concerning Muslim women. Rashid (2018) notes the role given to Muslim women in the Prevent strategy is one of enablers of potential terrorists, in this case presented as young Muslim men, of whom women are mothers, sisters and wives. It pitches the role of women as influencers or facilitators of young Muslim male terrorists and seeks to ‘empower’ them to be able to re-educate or intervene with their sons, brothers or husbands. The ideas are based on a perception of Muslim women being oppressed and needing saving (Rashid, 2018). This characterisation of Muslim women presents Muslim women as being weak and submissive. It also suggests Muslim women are a homogenous group, ignoring the fact that there is a variety of expressions of faith and that Muslim women are as diverse as any section of society (Bhimji, 2012). For example, many Muslim women choose not to wear a hijab (headscarf) and only a very small minority wear the niqab (face veil) (Ahmed, 2017).

This situation impacts female Muslims’ sense of wellbeing and belonging in society, where they are ‘othered’ as dressing differently and through widespread representations and discourses

that depict British Muslim Women as different. Hodge et al (2016) note that 'discrimination [of Muslims in the USA] functions as a risk factor for clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms' (p.51). This distress can impact on their sense of belonging in UK society. Spirituality can serve as protection against depression and mental health issues (Hodge et al, 2016) and this sometimes creates a catch 22 situation. If, when increasing their religiosity, Muslim women choose to be more identifiable as Muslims, the risk of their becoming victims of discrimination and prejudice, along with suspicion under the Prevent agenda, increases. There is evidence of instances of non-criminal discrimination such as staring or being ignored having further psychological impact on those who display their faith (Hargreaves, 2016).

Saeed (2007) argues that media representation of British Muslims focusses on 'deviance', 'un-Britishness' (p.443) and is generally overtly negative. Muslim women's primary representation in the mainstream media is through discussions about the veil and its suitability in modern, secular society. The main narratives espoused about the veil include the discussion of it as an oppressive dress code, maintaining the power dynamics in an oppressive, patriarchal faith. The fact that the vast majority of British Muslim women are able to freely choose to, or not to, wear the veil is lost (Bhimji, 2012). Another suggestion is that the veil, particularly the Niqab, is not compatible with western society, where the showing of the face is seen as important. The reasons for this are often cited as perceived cultural norms in British society and security fears, (although there are examples of face and head coverings in traditional Christian rituals and dress, such as face veils at weddings and the headdress of Catholic Nuns). Some European democracies have now outlawed the face veil from public spaces and this can create a sense that Muslim women are under attack in Europe (Ahmed, 2017; The Economist, 2019).

Muslim women also face oppression within the Muslim community. Bhimji (2012) notes that 'mosques continue to be dominated by traditional and orthodox male religious leaders' (pp. 87) and often exclude the voices of women, providing few services for women. At the same time, paradoxically, because of the issues already discussed, Muslim women often feel safer in areas where there are large numbers of Muslims (Zempi and Chakraborty, 2015). Maliha Aqueel (2018) writing in The Guardian, discusses the difficulties Muslim women may have in speaking about the challenges patriarchy in Muslim communities might present. Of particular note, even speaking about issues women face in the community may be seen by others as betraying Islam, by providing a negative representation of Islamic communities. Women are sometimes excluded from public roles in the Muslim community, and groups in the UK have been set up to increase equality of women's inclusion in access to and management of mosques. Scottish Mosques for All and the Muslim Women's Council are at the forefront of this effort to challenge patriarchal systems and institutions.

This overview identifies some of the challenges Muslim women face in 21st century Britain, from wider society and within the Muslim community itself. The research uses social dreaming to explore these challenges via the 'social unconscious' or more recently, the 'associative unconscious' (Manley, 2019, p. 26-39)

The Social Dreaming Matrix

The group was made up of five Muslim women adults, aged between 20-50. Two of the women were white, British and converts to Islam, while the other three were British born, South Asian heritage women. The group were recruited from across Lancashire, through emails to local

connections known to the first author. The matrix took place in a quiet room at the University of Central Lancashire, lasting for forty-five minutes. This was then followed by a twenty-minute post matrix discussion.

The participants were seated in the 'snowflake' formation (Manley et al, 2015, p. 195), which is typical of a social dreaming matrix and is intended to avert the gaze of the participants so that no participant is addressing a dream or comment directly to another individual. Rather the snowflake distribution of seating encourages the sensation that each individual is addressing the space of the 'matrix'. This encourages the sensation that each dream and comment offered is not belonging to an individual but rather to the space of the matrix. In turn, this emphasises the sense that there is no judgement being made about an individual's contribution, since this immediately belongs to the collective. Dreams and associations are offered as they arise and the matrix proceeds with the minimum guidance from the 'host', in this case the researcher. After the Social Dreaming session, the chairs are re-arranged into a 'horseshoe' formation around a flipchart and the participants are encouraged to discuss possible meanings arising from the dreams and associations of the matrix.

The session was audio recorded and fully transcribed. Together with the notes taken on the flipchart, the transcript was analysed by the authors in three pair sessions, where interpretations of the dream data and associations could be compared to the flip chart discussion notes and meanings could be extracted. The use of dual analysis sessions by the authors ensured, as far as this is possible in this kind of qualitative work, the avoidance of 'wild analysis' (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p18), that is to say interpretations were tested against the evidence of the data and to the questioning of the pair researcher until agreement was established.

Collage of dreams: Findings and Discussion

In the following section, when quoting from the social dreaming matrix transcript, the letter 'C' indicates a comment (which is often an association to a dream or an expression of feeling) and 'D' is a dream.

The matrix opens with three pointed comments, before the dreams are offered:

> C: I don't really remember my dreams; I always end up remembering the bad ones.
>
> C: I remember them and then I forget
>
> C: And you think, was it real?

These comments provide the context and framing for the dreams and associations that follow. The act of not remembering may suggest that something is being held back. This is immediately followed by an admission of remembering, but only remembering the bad, so that we are prepared to listen to bad dreams that have been hidden until this moment. The feeling of holding back or even repressing the dream content is mentioned a second time, this time after remembering. There is an immediate sense of recognition of 'something there' accompanied by a forgetfulness that prevents its expression. The dreams are forgotten or remembered and then forgotten again. When or if they are remembered, it is because they are 'bad'. The third comment speaks to a feeling that pervades the whole matrix, and that is the sense of confusion between what is real and what is unreal. In the matrix there were multiple references to the

reality of dreams or the unreality of life, in other words a reversal of the norm, as if the dreams are holding a reality, which nevertheless is difficult to express, in this case through not remembering. As the matrix proceeds, described below, it appears that these suggestions become connected to the sense of unreality of the situation of British Muslim identity, the dreamlike desire to reconcile two identities that have been portrayed through the media as irreconcilable.

The first dream presents a stark expression of fear for the future, of loss, mourning and the destruction of what the dreamer most loves. In this dream, the speaker reaches high ground, a 'mountain', only to encounter horror and death:

> D1: The last one I had was, I was on a mountain and it was horrible. And I saw my son there, lying there, dead. And it was like really, really, really negative. And then I just woke up.

This dream provides a simple, stark expression of the worst kind of emotional disaster for a mother – the death of a child. It is also the first mention of family, and the fear of family loss. This occurs again later in the matrix, in a dream in which a daughter is killed in an accident.

The next dream begins a sequence of more complex and nuanced dreams. The dreamer combines an image of somewhere local and quintessentially British – the local post office and shop – and a feeling of that British normality being somehow distant to her and with the strangeness of seeing two people in one body:

> D2: Once I was in the post office where I live and it's a like a local shop as well, but I was literally just stood in the post office. But the bit where I was at was different layout to where it's situated. Like the counter, because it had a door in front of me, and I was stood in the queue, and I could see what was going on around me. But I knew it was the shop but what was in front of me was completely different. And I'm just standing in the queue. The next thing there's a woman, who's like a mixture of two people I know as well, and she just stands in front of me[…]'

The dreamer is motionless in a queue, as if in limbo, going neither forward nor backward, which is a theme that reoccurs throughout the matrix. There is also an uncertainty about what she is queuing for and the familiarity of the shop is questioned or 'countered'. The dreamer appears to be queuing towards an unknown door in a place that should be familiar. A further association might be that the post office is associated with a place to send communications and receive messages, but this function seems to be dormant in the dreamer's post office. These dream images resonate throughout the matrix as images of belonging but not belonging and suggestions of the difficulty of communicating.

In another, later dream, the sense of the unknown also becomes the hidden menace of men in what feels like a military formation. In the following extract, the importance of gender is also emphasised since it is the daughters of the mother who are trying to offer protection from male aggression:

> D3: […]My daughters were telling me 'they' were coming to get me. I don't know who, but they were coming to get me and they [daughters] were trying to hide me in the house and lock me in the room to protect me. And, suddenly, all these full rows of men

> were coming towards the house and coming through and I'm stood there and I'm just constantly repeating [in Arabic] 'God is great, God is great, God is great,' and they're coming towards me and I can see them getting closer and closer and I'm really scared, but I don't move. I just keep saying 'God is great'. And then suddenly I just see the men have gone and my late husband is stood there. He died a few years ago. He took me and started taking me through the streets and he decided… the streets there's trouble going on. There's some fighting in the background within the area[…] and he's taking me through all these streets and we get to like a big changing room, like in a gym, and there's all these women there with all these different nationalities, and he takes me up to them because I'm saying 'I need a bath, I need a bath.' And as I go they're all there, going like, really nice. Like when you're going and you meet a group of women and they're like aww, and then one of them, I don't know any of them, they're all really beautiful, and they're coming with clothes for me because I'm going to have this bath, and then I wake up.

With the onset of fear comes the invocation to God, the same invocation used by Islamist terrorists today, which popular fiction and media in the west have attributed to terrorism. In this context, emphasising the difference between the world of the Muslim and the world created by the media, it is an invocation for safety, a safety from groups of men who seem to be reminiscent of military or terrorist type aggression. In other words, the invocation in the dream calls for help and safety, whereas, in many minds, in the 'real' world it may ring of terror and barbarity. In this simple dichotomy, we have the nutshell of a bigger problem.

As in the previous dream, the dreamer is unable to move and there seems to be no obviously good direction or line of travel open to her. An alternative to the aggressive males is evoked in the figure of the dreamer's late husband, who is nevertheless a patriarchal figure, who takes charge of the situation on behalf of the woman and leads her away from danger. The struggle of gender and what should be or could be both a safe place and a place of autonomy is emphasised in the contrast between these men and the place where the woman goes to in the end, a place of women, where 'sisterhood' is evoked in the fact that what binds the women together is gender rather than culture or any obvious religion.

These women are loving, beautiful and specifically 'of different nationalities.' They meet in a 'big changing room', where some 'change' might happen, or some new identity might emerge from the clothes that the women offer the dreamer. The dreamer insists on the need for a bath, speaking possibly to the importance of hygiene and cleanliness in the Islamic faith. It may also allude to the wish that 'change' might also include a cleansing that 'washes away' an old identity.

The struggle to identify reality and unreality continues in the next dream where the Jinns (spiritual beings who can be ambivalently malevolent or benevolent) seem to impinge on a reality and the dreamer is 'shouting, praying really loudly', while the Jinns are 'coming to get your mum' and possessing the dreamer's sister:

> D4: Now you've mentioned it I have lots of dreams where people are coming for my mum. And a lot of times it's Jinns. So, I'm shouting, praying really loudly, but they're saying we're coming to get your mum, and like in one my sister's possessed. It sounds funny, but, when you wake up, you're, like, sweating, because I just get that scared. I

> always remember the negative dreams; I don't know any positive. Maybe one. My best friends mum passed away about 6 months ago, and I had a dream about her telling me that she's fine and resting and there's all light and nice, so that's a positive one […]

Again, a worry of being under attack and of family members being at risk is presented. Later, the dreamer discusses another dream and the possibility of the dream becoming real is emphasised, with a fear that talking about it may make it real. The 'positive' dream is related in a way that it tells the dreamer something of the reality of the deceased mother's situation.

In the context of the theme of British/Muslim identity, and the violence apparently associated to Islam, death is confused with sleep and a bad dream. This theme strongly resonated with the matrix and was reiterated in a dream about death in a motorbike accident and the possibility of this becoming real. Again, we see invocations for protection:

> D5: I had a dream that my daughter, somebody was shouting that she'd had an accident on a motorbike, and everybody's saying I think she's dead, …That same day, you… the feeling stays with you and you say [in Arabic] 'I seek refuge in God from the rejected Satan' and spit, and I do that.

The dreamer goes on to discuss how they give to charity (in this instance, another religious deed) and avoid situations where the dream may come true.

In another dream, these themes are repeated, but this time in a scene reminiscent of a warzone taking place (reminding us of D3) in proximity of a childhood Funhouse in Blackpool. In this dream, the dreamer also makes a reflective comment that indicates the troubles of a Muslim woman in British society:

> D6: It was like I was stuck in somewhere, like these huge massive buildings. Some of it used to come from my childhood. There used to be in Blackpool a Funhouse because I remember the colour, so it's like I go to places that I know, if that makes sense and then whatever is happening is happening in that place. And then I opened windows and doors and there would be like this massive war going on outside… Like a big hole in a building or smoke coming in, or hear it, and helicopters… I don't know if it was because at the time I was feeling trapped in society and it was reflected in the dream

In the comment that follows this dream, an ambiguous connection is made between dream, prayer and waking life, with states of dreaming somehow merging or becoming a bridge between the 'unreality' of dreams and the 'reality' of waking life, and religion, in the form of prayers, becomes a bridge:

> C: Do you not sometimes think that sometimes you have a dream, and then you wake up for Fajr, [morning prayers] and then you have another dream and you think 'what? Did that really happen?' Because it carries on from the first dream.
>
> C: Sometimes you can get back into the dream.
>
> C: And I think to myself, 'I've prayed, how come I'm having the same dream.' And sometimes I feel like I've had six dreams in one, so my heads all mashed when I wake up.

The value and importance of religion and spirituality is emphasised here as a possible 'answer' to the riddle of reality/unreality. However, this is far from resolved. What is clear is that the

prayer is seen as another, a third state that can be identified along with the dream state and the waking state. Since this is a specifically Muslim practice, it could be argued that this is part of defining identity among British Muslims. Later in the matrix, there is a doubt that the prayers 'work':

> C: Sometimes I'd had a really bad dream, and I've got up and prayed and I've gone back and still had the bad dream. It's not really worked.
>
> C: That means you have to do it again.

The suggestion of praying and the response here shows the reliance on religious practice in being able to escape the bad dreams, and the only way to ensure relief is to become more religious. This was reiterated in the post-matrix discussion, where the participants discussed the challenges they faced in society and came to a consensus that the only way to overcome them was to turn to religion and improve religious practice to provide a better representation of Islam. The following dream reiterates the value of religion and the importance of the figures of the husband and the mother in the women's lives. At the same time, there is a presence of a sense of imprisonment:

> D7: I've had a dream like that, where there's loads of different scenes. The first scene I remember, it's just like an empty building like a massive building and it's got doors missing, but its dark inside but there's what I call like a 'recorder', an angel…as I go to it I see this woman and this child go through the door and I try to go through it, and the guy on the door he says no and he scans my arm, like a barcode. It's like digital. 25:2, like a clock… and then he jumps in like another room and then my husband is sat there with this woman and this child and then I'm going to go in another room and then my friend's sat there and it's like a prison cell and she's sitting there and there's this window with bars on. And then it goes into another scene and I'm laid on a grave, and it's my late husband's grave…and then I wake up. But then the day after I was reading the Quran, and it said 'you will be numbered with right numbering when it's your time to go' and I was like, wow that was really strange because then it brought my dream back.

The combination of dream and religious experience is evoked in this dream, with angels ('recorders') and the reading of the Quran that presents the story of the dream relating to the passage from life to death, and the sense of being 'numbered'. In this dream, as with the others, thought is given to gendered roles and inequalities. The woman she follows is a mother, the female friend being in prison and the husband's grave dominating the feelings, even though he has passed away.

The matrix continued with multiple references to the fragile barrier between dream and wake:

> D8: […] I couldn't see anything, but I was in a deep sleep, but I was conscious of me dreaming, because when I woke up my body just couldn't move. I literally felt myself wake up, you got the perception that your soul was waking up first and I woke up and I was paralysed on the bed […]

This dream/experience was followed by a sharing of waking dream moments and experiences of sleepwalking. This seemed to suggest a bridging of the real world and the dream world.

Further on, in another dream, the 'recorder' returns. The dream ends as follow:

> D9: I'm just totally in shock and the next minute this little man thing, but he's got like alien head shape and eyes and a mouth and everything, he comes in in like a doctor's coat, with all these nurses. The nurses are normal and I just look at her and they inject me and I go paralysed from the neck down. I slide down this back wall, all the walls in the house open up and they're just gone. So, all I see is the outside. And I see this old woman walking up this hill and I'm just staring at her and she looks like the Queen. From the back, you know, with the skirt on and all matching jacket, hat, skirt. Whether it was the Queen I don't know, but I was just sat there and I couldn't say anything or move or anything. You know I'm just wanting to scream and shout, but I can't, so I'm just sat there. I just relax and just waited and woke up.

There have been recurring instances of what can be called British institutions. The Post Office in D2, where a person was queuing but not sure what for, the British Army in another dream, in which the dreamer was trying to save a young man from joining, and here, most impressively, the Queen. As in the other 'British' images, this image of the Queen in ambivalent. It comes after a disturbing scene of paralysis (reminding us again of a state which might be somewhere between waking and sleeping), The Queen herself is caricatured but she has her back to the dreamer, and this makes it difficult to be absolutely sure that it is in fact the Queen. In terms of the woman's relationship with Britishness, there is a feeling of ambivalence. This is also accompanied by a sense of being in limbo, and unable to move, as in D2.

The two following dreams evoke the fear and anxiety associated with being chased or hunted by men

> D10[…] But then it was like I was in a big courtyard. I heard someone coming and there was like [these] circular bushes but they were all really compact together and I had the perception in me head of me turning around to get to these bushes and I'm laid like that, horizontal. Literally had to prise myself… And I can feel myself like a worm trying to get through this bush. So, I get through the bush to this wall. Nobody can see me, but I can see everything and there's these two guys in the opposite direction and all I hear is like 'I can't see, I can't see. I don't know where they are, I don't know where she is'. And it's like they didn't find me […]
>
> ***
>
> D11: […] In a dream I'm walking, […] it's dim lit but you can see in front of you and its sort of like a dark, greeny sort of surrounding. There's this gentleman with a beard, a bit like a sheikh [Islamic scholar] walking with me and talking. I don't recall what he's saying and I'm walking and he's saying here are these people and there's like all these men. Some have beards some don't, but they're all Muslims and I'm stood there, and I see something go past me and I realise I'm on the bottom of the ocean suddenly, even though I've been talking. I've just realised, oh my god, I'm on the bottom of the sea and I can't breathe. And I start panicking and thinking how am I breathing underwater so I start fighting for the top and as I'm going, swimming to the top and so all these others are coming after me and I just burst out of this river and someone's shouting, 'are we to get her' and their like 'don't worry, she'll be back.' And as I come up I just remember

> taking this massive breath of fresh air coming out of the water and I just look around me and there's this river, but either side there's trees and forests and this massive expanse of water. And all this water come off me, and after seeing that I woke up.

In this, one of the later dreams, many of the themes of previous dreams and associations are repeated but in an intensely synthesised manner that helps to bring the matrix to a close. The woman is supposedly walking side by side with a respected 'sheikh', but the lack of communication is expressed in her being unable to 'recall what he's saying'. From a single sheikh, the dreamer realised that she is suddenly surrounded by Muslim men and this image seems suffocating to her, as represented by the image of being unable to breath under water. She needs some air but is chased by the men. The minute she has broken to the surface and able to breathe, she is also able to hear the men shouting after her. Despite her relative freedom at this stage, there is an inevitability in the knowledge that 'she'll be back'. The alternatives to going back are unknown expanses of 'trees and forests'. This appears to present a stark image of the challenge of dealing with patriarchy in Muslim communities.

British Muslim women: identity and anxieties

The following themes and discussion points combine the feedback from the participants in the matrix and the dual data analysis sessions described above. Also as stated above, we find that these themes and their manners of expression constitute an interesting addition to current debates around British Muslim identity and especially the identities of British Muslim women. We do not claim objective proof that these are central to the debate, given the very small scale of our research. However, we do note their interest and would suggest their validity as pointers for future research.

British Institutions and citizenship

A number of symbolically significant British institutions are mentioned in the dreams, each of them seemingly unable to fully perform its function as a projection of the woman dreamer's identity. The Post Office is a place that symbolises communication and through it the binding of British territory. However, the British Muslim woman is unable to move. Either towards or away from the Post Office 'counter'. In another dream a woman discourages her son's friend from going into the Army, which is seen as a negative institution. In a third dream, the 'ultimate' symbol of the British State and one that clearly provides a sense of identity for the British citizen, the Queen is seen, walking away, with her back turned, and the dreamer is left unable to move or speak. The Britishness of these images and the way they relate to the dreamer indicates a profound ambivalence, neither a rejection nor an acceptance of Britishness from the perspective of a Muslim identity.

Patriarchy, gender and strange men

There are many dreams about being chased or under attack from men. In one, the dreamer is at her home, which is under siege from 'rows of men', evoking threat and aggressivity against the lone woman. It is unclear if the men are an army or terrorists, but the maleness is clear, as is the patriarchal threat. In another, the dreamer is speaking to a Sheikh and suddenly finds herself underwater, unable to breathe. In another dream, the dreamer is hiding in 'circular bushes' and being hunted by men. In these dreams, the only 'safe' men are those close to them; husbands and family members, but these are clearly revered in ways that seem to leave little room for the

woman to manoeuvre. Unknown men are seen as a threat in some instances, which can suggest a threat from wider society. Husbands, especially, can also be saviours, which may point to the expected gender norms of patriarchal expectations in British and Muslim societies. Muslim women can feel under attack from both men in wider society and the gender expectations of men inside Muslim communities. There is a widespread feeling of alienation from maleness in these dreams.

Prayer, religion and safe Spaces

Another major theme throughout the matrix is a reliance on prayer and religious practice for protection from negative experiences and to overcome worry. This was repeated in the post matrix discussion where dreamers discussed the issues and worries they face in society and the way to overcome them was to be better as practicing Muslims, and allow people to see a 'truer' face of Islam. However, there must also be the recognition that in a society that is suspicious of increasing religiosity, this can bring its own fears.

Children and the future

Children being at risk of death, or indeed dying or in need of saving occurs throughout the matrix. This presents a fear for future generations, possibly a belief that things are getting worse. Apart from the natural attachment to children, these dreams of fear of loss were accentuated, and in at least one dream – that of not joining the army, it would seem that armed conflict, whether Muslim or not, is uppermost in the women's minds. The fear for the family and the contrasting reliance on family for safety are connected. Central to these women's lives are the families that surround them.

Conclusion

There is a social and political need to better understand the challenges that Muslim women face in UK society, which includes othering, misrepresentation and discrimination. The method used in this research, however, uncovers a deeper emotional and psychological impact, that includes fear, anxiety, a struggle with identity, and being part of this society without quite belonging; waiting for others to accept you, but never moving forwards. There are feelings of suffocation within and outside of the Muslim community, and perceived gender roles and expectations play a significant role in trying to understand the lives of these women. Social Dreaming allows us, as researchers, to explore shared emotional truths that are important to the group, providing an overlay of their lived experience. This depicts a group who feel under pressure from a number of avenues and feel they have a responsibility to represent all of their identities and protect them. They question the reality around them and challenge it but feel unable to change it. They are on the run and hiding in their own homes, communities and in wider society. The questions that arise for wider society are many. What is the role of the government, public services and media in allowing or enabling this lack of harmony, and what can be done? How can Muslim women achieve an equal voice and agency in their own communities? How does a sense of belonging impact on preventing people from being enticed by extremists and fanatics? Above all, how can a Muslim woman in British society truly identify as being both British and Muslim and how do gender politics play out, help or hinder the women? In the case of gender dynamics, our research suggests that maleness, in a general sense, is threatening, whether Muslim or not. For the women involved in this research, the 'known' male, such as a beloved husband, is a source

of comfort and safety. Safety is also to be found in the faith and in the home and this deeper understanding of their unconscious constructs can help stakeholders consider how strategies and policies relating to this community might be rethought in order to support feelings of belonging, acceptance, safety and agency, rather than create the fear and sense of isolation that many writers associate with current UK Government strategy (Awan, 2012; O'Toole et al, 2016; Perra, 2018; Muslim Council of Britain, 2018)

Fanon, writing in the 1960s, was concerned with how a person of colour would culturally and unconsciously seek to be recognised as 'white' by white people and therefore wear a psychological 'mask' to hide their true 'black' identity. In the dreams of our sample, 'whiteness' is represented in the struggle with or against 'white' cultural tradition – from Post Office, to the Queen – and a palpable sense of limbo between 'blackness' and 'whiteness' thus represented emerges from the Social Dreaming Matrix. In the dream of the escape across the water, the woman appears to be free but ahead of her are empty horizons and behind her the voice of the men who are sure she will return. The sense of limbo therefore is also one of identity, and this identity is complex. We would suggest that the subject of gender and social identity for British Muslim women needs to be faced in all its complexity as revealed in the Social Dreaming work described in this article. We hope that while such a small research piece cannot provide too much in the way of answers, it can nevertheless provoke and stimulate further thoughts and developments that could lead the way to new and significant research in the field.

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