

An Abduction Syndrome In Haitian Folklore

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Very little needs to be said about this article, a kind of missing link between traditional beliefs and modern ufolore. Evidence perhaps that traditional lore can modernise without a science fiction phase, in which the traditional motifs are set in a modernist framework in a strictly fictional context.

P.R. 1999

I have earlier suggested that popular accounts of white slave traffic be examined for similarities to modern UFO abduction stories. (1) As yet, no research has been done on this topic. However, in anthropologist Alfred Metraux's Voodoo in Haiti (2) I have uncovered some interesting information on borderline abduction beliefs.

At an undisclosed period, probably in the 1940s, a panic gripped the Haitian peasantry concerning a motor car which was said to abduct people. In the capital Port-au-Prince the car was known as the auto-tigre (tiger-car); in Marbial, where Metraux conducted his fieldwork, it was the motor-zobop, a vehicle supposedly driven by the zobop, members of a secret society of sorcerers having many of the characteristics of traditional witches. This car had bluish beams for its headlights.

One person who experienced such an abduction was the herb doctor Divoine Joseph. He went out on a Sunday night, despite such ill-omens as bad luck in the day's cock-fight, and stubbing his left foot on a stone. As he approached a patient's home he felt a sudden anxiety, but it was not until he was on his way to a crossroads for part of the ceremony he was conducting when:

Not far from La Gosseline I was blinded by a white light. This time fear made me lose consciousness. When I came to my senses I was in a car surrounded by hideous masked people. In my horror I cried out... my captors offered me money if I would keep my mouth shut and never tell what had happened to me. The car stopped and I was made to get out. I woke up in my bed; I asked my woman whether she had found any money on me. She said You behaved like a raving lunatic, you threatened everyone with a banana-sucker, but you hadn't a penny on you. In the evening I had terrible hallucinations and wandered in my mind... I repeated ceaselessly they have got me. I was cured thanks to the attention of a hangan [voodoo priest].

When Metraux spoke to Divoine the man still showed extreme agitation, gesticulating and repeatedly beating his breast; laughing and frowning for no reason, and pouring out his words. He believed that his escape was due to the fact that being a voodoo himself indicated that he was under the special protection of a loa, or voodoo spirit.

A voodoo priest himself was also captured by the motor-zobop, whose occupants had already put him in a coffin before he became possessed by his guardian loa, the god Brise, and thus had his release secured. (3)

The perceptive reader will have noticed the close parallels with modern UFO stories: the light, the paralysis, the absurd behaviour of the abductors, the setting down in a remote place, and the psychological after-effects. The similarities to beliefs in fairy abductions are: the taboos, the ominous run of bad luck, the dangerous nature of crossroads. The rumours of gangsters driving around in fantastic motor cars would seem to connect with European panics about the white slave traffic .

What we are witnessing here is a process of the secularisation of traditional beliefs in a period of social change, in which the motor car had assumed many of the attributes of the diabolic machine which would later be ascribed to the UFO.

In case anyone wished to try to dismiss this as merely the sort of backward belief that could arise in a poverty-ridden, superstitious backwater like Haiti, I should point out that in the 1930s there were several social panics concerning phantom vehicles in Britain!(4,5)

Other similarities may be discerned between Haitian traditional beliefs and modern UFO lore. The notorious loup-garou (werewolf cum vampire) travels across the sky leaving luminous trails that bear some resemblance to comets and are known as werewolf clusters. The days favoured by the loup-garou for these night excursions are the 7th, 13th and 17th of each month (UFO statisticians please note!).(6)

The epiphanies of voodoo lore have more than a passing resemblance to UFO contact stories. When the priestess Lorgina and her husband were out fishing her boat was hailed by another boat, the captain of which was a handsome mulatto with green eyes. Whilst husband and crew were terror stricken, Lorgina recognised the figure as the god Agire. The god wished them well with the journey before vanishing.(7)

Haitian beliefs are means of coping with the social and physical environment, and are transformed by changes within that environment. We might well expect to see similar transformations take place in Western UFO beliefs.

References

1. Rogerson, Peter. Contribution to Ten Years On , MUFOB New Series, 10
2. Metraux, Alfred. Voodoo in Haiti, Deutsch, 1959
3. Ibid., 297-8
4. Bardens, Dennis. Ghosts and Hauntings, Zeus, 1965

5. O'Donnell, Elliott. Haunted Britain, Consul, 1963

6. Metraux, op. cit., 302

7. Ibid., 142

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