

Aliens and Indians: A Comparison of Abduction and Captivity Narratives

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Stories of captivity among North American Indians dating from the 17th century in many ways parallel the more recent narratives of alien abduction. Telling a story inevitably involves elements of selection, and in both Indian captivity narratives and alien abduction narratives the elements included are often analogous. They share a number of common structures, conventions, themes, and images. I will begin by outlining the origin and some of the salient features of Indian captivity and the alien abduction phenomenon. Next, some explicit comparisons will be drawn between the narratives of Indian captivity and alien abduction. Finally, some interpretations of these similarities are suggested.

Background

The historian Richard Slotkin claims that the captivity narrative provided America with its first coherent mythical literature (95). The earliest publication of an Indian captivity story in the form of a popular book came in 1682. This account, titled *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, detailed the capture and life of Mrs Mary Rowlandson among Indians. Rowlandson was kidnapped from Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1675 during King Philip's War. Over thirty editions of Rowlandson's story were published by 1937 (Kestler xxv). By 1800 some 700 different captivity narratives were published in the United States, and they remained a staple of popular literature into the 19th century (Schafer 49). Although captivity narratives have been most evident in the United States, they appear to be a common feature of many frontier communities. The stories surrounding Eliza Fraser, captured in Australia by Aborigines after a shipwreck, echo in many ways the Indian captivities of America. The tales of beachcombers on Pacific Islands

frequently fit into this genre as well. For example Herman Melville's novel *Typee*, set in the Marquesas Islands, uses many of the same plot devices only replacing the Indians with Polynesians.

Capture was a widely used tactic of Amerindian warfare. In Native American culture, captives might be used to compensate for the loss of relatives, replenish the population, serve a form of psychological warfare, or be used to obtain ransom (Namias 4). While the earliest Indian captivity stories were genuine first-person accounts, they were later manipulated by others for their own motives (Slotkin 95). Puritan ministers used the stories to warn of the wages of sin. Frequently captivity stories functioned as a form of anti-Indian propaganda, especially in times of conflict or as a rationale for acquiring Indian land.

While based on reported experience, captivity stories easily crossed the line into the fictional and fantastic. From about 1750 many captivity narratives became more obviously fictional accounts (Slotkin 247), and provided the basis for many folk tales and legends. For instance *A Surprising Account of the Captivity and Escape of Phillip McDonald and Alexander McLeod*, published in 1786, tells the story of two Revolutionary War soldiers from Virginia. Their tales include being captured by a 'monstrous creature' who takes them to a utopian civilization which abhors violence (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 209). From the mid-18th century there was less emphasis on the piety of the captive, and more on the cruelty and tortures they were subjected to (Kestler xxvi). The so-called "Manheim anthology" issued in 1793 became the first compilation of captivity horror stories published purely for commercial gain (Berkhofer 85). Ann Eliza Bleecher is credited with writing the first captivity novel, *The History of Maria Kittle*, in 1797. Fictional captivity stories reached their literary high point in the 19th century with the *Leatherstocking Tales* of James Fenimore Cooper (Levernier and Cohen xxxviii, 230).

Although the alien abduction phenomenon is relatively recent, it arguably has earlier antecedents. For centuries some individuals have claimed to have contact with celestial beings or beings from another dimension. Stories of people kidnapped by fairies offer some striking parallels with alien abduction. At least from the 1950s a number of people publicly claimed to have been contacted by visitors from outer space. George Adamski, for instance, notoriously claimed to be contacted by

beings from Venus who took him on trips to the far side of the moon in their space craft. But whereas such “contactees” acted on their own volition, victims of alien abduction are taken at random and against their will (Randles 15). The first widely publicized case of alien abduction stemmed from the experience of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961. An interracial couple, the Hills reported some “missing time” while driving one night on a remote road in the state of New Hampshire. Under hypnosis they later recalled being taken aboard a space craft where they were subjected to medical-type examinations by alien beings.

Some researchers attribute the details of alien abduction to the influence of the mass media. Descriptions of aliens’ appearance have been directly linked to the 1975 television film *The UFO Incident* based on Betty and Barney Hill’s abduction experience (Shermer 93). In different accounts the aliens assume a range of sizes and colors, but most often they appear as small grey creatures with huge black eyes as in the Hills’ story. Showalter (191) claims that Bud Hopkins’ book *Missing Time*, published in 1981, provided a template for other abduction experiences. From the late 1980s alien abduction received worldwide publicity with the publication of Whitley Strieber’s best-selling book *Communion*, published in 1987. Abductees sometimes concede their “memories” of abduction are triggered by books, film, or television representations of alien encounters (See for example Mack, 145, 166, 242; Evans and Stacy, 283; Hopkins, 4). The abduction phenomenon has been concentrated in Western countries, with the United States the focal point of alien abduction reports.

In many respects, stories of Indian captivity and those of alien abduction evoke similar images and narrative patterns. On both counts the stories are by nature sensational and melodramatic. Both types of narrative have attracted a mass readership. Early newspapers readily printed stories of Indian captivity, and captivity stories provided much of the subject matter for the pulp fiction of the day. Readers were horrified and titillated by stories of savagery. The subtitle of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative promised readers “The Cruel and Inhumane Usage she underwent amongst the Heathens” (Kestler 69). In an analogous way, alien abduction has become a favorite topic of modern tabloids and lurid paperbacks, as well as television and feature film.

Crossing Frontiers

The central metaphor of both Indian captivity and alien abduction narratives concerns crossing frontiers and the forced experience of another culture. Stories of captivity and abduction relate close encounters across cultural lines. In this process of “transculturalization,” individuals are detached from their home society and situated in a new web of social relationships (See Campbell 6). Whereas the captives of Indians were literally placed beyond the reach of family and friends, the aftermath of alien abduction is often psychological isolation (Mack 397). According to writer Budd Hopkins (50) alien abductees experience “an inevitable sense of isolation from those who have not had to suffer through this truly unearthly experience.”

The trauma of crossing frontiers is often magnified by its sudden and unexpected beginnings. In both the case of Indian captivity and alien abduction, the narrative usually involves a single individual, often snatched from a familial setting (Namias 172). Not infrequently their experience begins in some remote and isolated spot. Whitley Strieber in *Communion* (19) has his first conscious abduction experience at an isolated cabin in upstate New York. Many abductees claim to have been beamed up to space crafts from their bedrooms or while driving at night on desolate roads. In a not dissimilar way, the Indian captivity often begins with persons suddenly kidnapped in the dead of night. The captivity of Hannah Duston, for example, described by Henry David Thoreau in 1849, begins when she is “compelled to rise from childbed, and half-dressed, with one foot bare ... commence an uncertain march, in still inclement weather, through the snow and the wilderness” (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 157-8). Similarly the story of Susannah Willard Johnson, taken by Indians in Connecticut in 1754, tells us “in an instant a crowd of savages, fixed horribly for war, rushed furiously in” to snatch her from the family cabin (Quoted in Kestler, 166). The capture of Frances and Almira Hall follows a “sudden and unexpected” attack in which the victims are unalarmed until the Indians enter their home (Kestler 207). The narrative of Fanny Kelly, taken from a wagon train in 1864, describes how the surrounding hills were suddenly covered with Sioux: “This terrible and unexpected apparition came upon us with such startling swiftness that we had not time to think” (Quoted in Kestler 418).

The captivity/abduction usually begins with feelings of helplessness and throughout their experience the captive tends to remain passive. Typically the victim of alien abduction becomes immobilized and experiences a form of paralysis. Feelings of helplessness are a common motif. In his book *Communion* (106) Whitley Strieber describes himself “as helpless as a baby, crying like a baby, as frightened as a baby.” The captives of Indians described similar feelings of helplessness, sometimes using very similar language to alien abductees. Mary Schwandt, taken in Minnesota by Sioux during an 1862 uprising, states “I became as one paralyzed and I could hardly speak” (Quoted in Kestler 397).

Physical Imagery

Part of the ordeal is a journey into the unknown. In Mary Rowlandson’s story, after being taken by Indians, she states: “I must turn my back upon the town and travel with them into the vast and desolate wilderness, I know not whither” (Quoted in Kestler 24). There may be a sense of wonder at the magnitude or novelty in discovering the existence of a dimension beyond normal comprehension. When Mary Rowlandson arrives at an Indian camp, she reports “I thought we had come to a great Indian town.... The Indians were as thick as the trees. It seemed as if there had been a thousand hatchets going at once. If one looked before me, nothing but Indians, and behind me, nothing but Indians, and so on either hand” (Quoted in Kestler 33). Describing her arrival at an Indian camp in an 1870s narrative, Laura Hautville states: “The next moment a spot of ground free of trees, and occupied by two hundred lodges, came into view. It was a singular sight, and I am not equal to the task of describing it” (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 194). In the narrative of Sarah Ann Horn, taken by Comanches in 1836, the size of the Indian camp “defies all description” (Quoted in Kestler 248). We can compare this to the recollection of an abductee called “Catherine” who describes being taken to a huge ship with a room “the size of an airplane hangar” with hundreds of examining tables (Quoted in Mack 162). Another abductee described a UFO light “as big as a baseball diamond” and which lit up an entire woods (Quoted in Hopkins 146). Some abductees have reported cavernous rooms which contain

hundreds or thousands of tanks with hybrid fetuses (Jacobs 133).

For the most part the environment of the space craft where abductees are taken remains indistinct. Whitley Strieber in his book *Communion* (26) describes being taken to a circular chamber where the predominant colors are “muted” tan and gray. There is often the imagery of bright lights. The interior of the space craft may include some computer consoles, but is generally characterized by a blank whiteness (Hopkins 70). Some informants, though, describe different scenarios. One man refers to aliens carrying out procedures while he is on a table in a subterranean room carved from rock (Mack 180). A New Mexico woman claimed she and her son were abducted by aliens and taken to an underground cavern she believed was near Roswell (Evans and Stacy 156). In an analogous way, the landscape of the Indian captivity narrative is mainly described in abstractions. It becomes simply the “wilderness,” “a dungeon,” or “a hell” (Slotkin 149).

Mortification

As an initiation into their new world, in both Indian captivities and alien abduction narratives, captured persons are frequently stripped of their clothing. Metaphorically they are divested of the outward trappings of their own culture as they cross into a new dimension. In the *Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs Mason*, published as a broadside in the 1830s, the narrator tells readers, “I fell in with a number of Squaws who immediately fell upon me in the most desperate manner, beating me and depriving me of my clothing” (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 97). The story of John Colter, published by Washington Irving in the 1830s, begins with Colter “stripped naked” by his Blackfoot captors (Levernier and Cohen 137). The captivity of Sarah Ann Horn, captured by Comanches, describes her children as stripped of their clothing and left “naked as they were born” (Quoted in Kestler 248).

They are also rendered totally vulnerable. In the typical abduction scenario, the abductee feels paralysed and is often laid out naked on an examination table. The captives of Indians also frequently find themselves prostrate and at the mercy of their captors. The story of Juan Ortiz, captured in Florida, states he was bound to four poles over a fire (Levernier and

Cohen 6). In *An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs Mary Smith* published in 1818, the treatment of Mrs Smith's husband by Indians is graphically described. His tortures begin when, "They stripped and prostrated the wretched victim on his naked back" (Levernier and Cohen 68). James De Shields' account of Cynthia Ann Parker's captivity states that when the Comanches took prisoners, "they tied their hands behind them with raw-hide thongs so tightly as to cut the flesh, tied their feet close together, and threw them upon their faces" (Quoted in Kestler 274). In the narrative of Jesuit priest Francis Joseph Bressani, taken prisoner by Iroquois in Canada, he describes being stripped of his clothing. Bressani states in his account, "By night I lay stretched on the ground, naked and bound, according to their custom, to several stakes, by the feet, hands and neck" (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 28).

Part of the ordeal of Indian captivity was often physical punishment. Many captives were initiated by running a gauntlet of blows from their captors (Axtell 71). Francis Joseph Bressani hints at the debasing and invasive torments he was subjected to, "in such places, and of such a description, that it is not lawful to describe them, nor could they be read without blushing" (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 28). One is reminded of the probes and other invasive instruments described in more graphic detail by alien abductees. One Indian made a knife incision on Bressani's hand, while others clubbed him. According to Bressani's story, the young Indians "beat me, pricked me, plucked out my hair, my beard...some goaded me with pointed sticks, some burnt me with firebrands, or red-hot stones, while others used burning ashes or hot coals" (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 27). In both Indian captivity and alien abduction accounts there is a sense of losing not only control but any dignity. The account of Mrs Hannah Swarton's captivity by Indians in Maine, published in 1697, was aptly titled *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Levernier and Cohen 31).

Ambivalence

Despite such litanies of abuse, Indian captivities and alien abduction stories often manifest a profound ambivalence, both toward the experience itself and one's captors. From the beginning, there were images of "good" and "bad" Indians.

In her New England narrative, Mary Rowlandson described her captors as “wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in one word) diabolical Creatures” (Quoted in Berkhofer 84). Nevertheless, while early Indian captivity narratives tended to depict Indians as devils and demons, some portrayed them in affirmative terms (Levernier and Cohen xiv). From the middle of the 18th century, Indians were frequently represented in a more sympathetic light. The captive became more accepting of their fate, and captivity became a form of initiation into the Indian world (Slotkin 247, 450). The narrative of Sarah Wakefield, held during the Dakota War of 1862, defended the integrity of the Indians who held her captive (Namias 258). Some narratives went to extremes in describing the idyllic life-style of Native Americans and condemning their ill-treatment by white society. The narratives of Mary Jemison, who lived among the Senecas of western New York state, depict her establishing a new cross-cultural family among the Indians (Namias 149, 172). *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner*, published in 1830, recounted the life of a boy originally kidnapped at age nine who came to prefer life among Indians. Such narratives are comparatively rare, however, either through the captives’ illiteracy or a lack of desire to address a European audience (Levernier and Cohen 97).

The narratives thus reflect a wide range of responses to Indian captivity. Some captives resisted assimilation into Indian life and might take the first opportunity to seek revenge against their captors. Others came to relish their life with Indians and expressed no interest in returning to white society. A similar ambivalence is apparent in many alien abduction narratives. According to Jacobs (76) the emotional state of abductees during their contact with aliens range from enjoyment to humiliation. Whitley Strieber (102) describes his feelings toward the “visitors” as “fear, awe, even a sort of love.” Some abductees profess to feel nothing but loathing for the aliens they encounter, whereas others express “feelings of warmth and closeness” (Hopkins 152). One female abductee reported that when she touched the head of an alien, she “immediately felt love, warmth and affection emanating from him” (Jacobs 33). Alien abductees not uncommonly profess a profound love toward their captors (See for example Mack 245, 290). Frequently they report multiple abduction experiences in which long-term relationships with individual aliens are formed. They

may assign these individuals names, and come to regard them as friends or even lovers (See for example Jacobs 177-78).

Sex and Difference

Narratives of captivity and abduction are often sexually charged, at least implicitly if not overtly. Stories of female captives held by Indians inevitably conjured up sexual implications. The titles of captivity narratives alone are sometimes sufficient to suggest sexual undertones. Based on an incident during the so-called Black Hawk War of 1831-32 in Illinois, came *Narrative of the Capture and Providential Escape of Misses Frances and Almira Hall, Two Respectable Young Women (Sisters) of the Ages of 16 and 18* (Levernier and Cohen 76; Kestler 205). In Indian captivity stories it is the white woman who most often finds herself at the mercy of “savages.” Her sexual vulnerability at one level reflects anxieties about the limits of European male power on the frontier and the fear that white women might be seduced to the Indian side (Namias 272). Indeed the capture of white women by Indians remains central to many modern Western books and films (Cawelti 75). Frequently there is an emphasis on the sexual customs of the Indians, contrasting the strict mores of Christianity (Slotkin 123). Some captivity accounts quite explicitly serve as a vehicle for sexual titillation or wish-fulfilment. The lurid illustrations of dime novels often emphasized their sexual subtext (Namias 102). The availability of sexual partners provided part of the presumed attraction of Indian life. In *Thomas Gist's Indian Captivity*, Gist is told by his adopted Indian aunt that, “if I wanted a wife, she would get a pretty young girl for me” (Quoted in Axtell 78). In *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as 'Deadwood Dick'*, the protagonist claims he was to marry the chief's nubile daughter and that “all the squaws of this tribe were good looking” (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 203).

In some cases the captives form long-lasting liaisons with Indians. Marriage to an Indian represented one extreme of acculturation. Cynthia Ann Parker, taken by Comanches, lived with Indians for twenty-four years. During that time she became the wife of one of the war chiefs, Peta Nocona, and bore two daughters and a son by him (Kestler 267-68). Again, captivity narratives often capitalized on a popular fascination with

cross-cultural romantic relationships and forbidden intimacies. A dime novel published in 1872 on the captivity of Mary Barber, for example, is subtitled *By Miss Barber the wife of Squatting Bear* (Namias 44). The subtitle of a fictional account about a white hunter published in the mid-19th century explained the protagonist was *Taken When Young by the Indians and Bound by the Strong Chains of a Squaw* (Namias 103). In the story of Mary Jemison's captivity, what begins as a forced marriage to an Indian develops into genuine affection. "The idea of spending my days with him at first seemed perfectly irreconcilable to my feelings; but his good nature, generosity, tenderness, and friendship toward me, soon gained my affection; and strange as it may seem, I loved him" (Quoted in Namias 98).

Alien abduction accounts often include explicit sexual references, which would not have been permissible in the context of colonial American literature. Some of the sexual scenarios reported to Jacobs (76-80) by alien abductees include oral sex, forced sex with first cousins and "Mindscan" induced orgasm. Most frequently, the experience of alien abduction is associated with sexual and reproductive "experiments." Typically, abductees are forced to lie naked on an examining table, where they are subjected to close visual scrutiny and the use of penetrative instruments. They may be examined by a giant eye. Reproductive procedures are frequently carried out. Male abductees report having sperm samples taken. Women report episodes of having eggs fertilized or harvested, human-alien hybrid embryos implanted in their wombs and fetal extraction.

Some abductees give explicit accounts of sexual intercourse with alien beings. Although the aliens are typically described as androgynous, in some descriptions they assume human sexual characteristics. One male abductee, for example, describes an alien as having "exquisite breasts" jutting from her metallic-like tunic (Mack 60). A female abductee describes an alien captor as having the "light contour of a penis" (Mack 210). Writer David Jacobs claims that aliens can provoke intense sexual arousal in men and women by using "Mindscan procedures" (Jacobs 19).

Even the language used in Indian captivity narratives is sometimes remarkably similar to later accounts of alien abduction. The captivity narrative of Francis Parkman, published in 1870, refers to the children of Indians and whites as "hybrid offspring" (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 145). It

is a phrase frequently used in alien abduction literature. Some abductees claim that they are shown the hybrid offspring of humans and aliens. In the words of one abductee, the alien breeding program results in “races, beings or whatever, coming together to make another creation” (Quoted in Mack 131). These cases of sexual merging with the “other” are often interpreted in a positive way. In both captivity and alien abduction narratives, love often transcends race and cultural difference.

Spiritual Transformation

The ordeal of captivity/abduction is not only cast in the visceral terms of mortification and sexuality—it is also represented as a profound spiritual journey. Many Indian captivity stories are essentially depicted as trials of the spirit. The narratives assume a religious framework, particularly in those cases where the captives are Puritans, Quakers, or Jesuits. For Puritans, falling captive to Indians essentially meant falling into the power of Satan. Their capture was interpreted as a punishment for sin, while their survival reflected the grace of God (Levernier and Cohen xvii-xviii; Kestler xxiv). Mary Rowlandson, a minister’s wife, attributed her escape from Indians to “the strange providence of God” (Quoted in Berkhofer 84). Jesuits interpreted the captivity experience in terms of obtaining forgiveness for their sins and furthering the work of God. The Jesuit priest Francis Joseph Bressani, who described his abuse at the hands of the Indians in such detail, states he found consolation in that “God granted me the grace of suffering some little pain in this world, instead of the incomparably far greater torments, which I should have had to suffer for my sins in the next world” (Quoted in Levernier and Cohen 26).

Alien abductees frequently profess a profound personal transformation as well. John Mack, a Harvard psychiatrist who has worked with abductees, refers to “the intense personal growth and philosophical and spiritual opening” which accompanies alien encounters (Mack 138). In the case of “Sheila” for example, her abduction experiences led her “to recognize the negative consequences for herself as an individual, and for the ecological balance of the planet, that our struggle for dominance and control have brought about” (Mack 90). An

abductee called “Susan” professes that, “Since my experience, I rejoice in being who I am, with no expectations of how I should be, and complete acceptance of who I am” (Quoted in Jacobs 213). Other abductees report a range of life-style changes from taking up vegetarianism and giving up smoking to discovering healing powers (Evans and Stacy 264; Jacobs 214).

The Return and Warning

In both the Indian captivity narrative and alien abduction story there is generally an attempt to make sense of the experience and come to terms with it. Often the captive or abductee is profoundly changed by their ordeal, experiencing a shift in personal identity. At one extreme they may come to completely identify with another culture. Frequently those returning to white society from a prolonged period of Indian captivity feel alienated. In the popular mind they were “half-Indianized” and sometimes committed to an Indian spouse (Slotkin 98, 129). Alien abductees as well often articulate their separateness from the society they live in. One woman from Minnesota describing her post-abduction trauma states that abductees feel “the pain of being different, as though we were only “passing” as normal” (Quoted in Hopkins 198). According to psychiatrist John Mack, “abductees feel that they are somehow different or “other”, that they do not belong to this society” (44). Some describe themselves as “translators” between the two worlds of humans and aliens. They may even profess having acquired a dual human and alien identity (See for example Mack 108, 217, 228, 261).

The experience of Indian captivity frequently suggests the metaphor of re-birth. In the Daniel Boone myths, for example, Boone emerges from his captivity experience with new qualities of leadership (Slotkin 303). There may be more practical lessons learned from captivity as well. Mary Rowlandson professed that her captivity put in perspective the ordinary trials of life. “It was but the other day that if I had the world, I would have given it for my freedom...I have learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles” (Quoted in Kestler 67). Alien abductees commonly claim to have acquired some new knowledge or insight as a result of their experience. For example, they many times evince a new concern for the earth’s ecology.

Often an important element of the return to one's original culture is issuing a warning to others. Indian captivities at times served as warning against the wages of sin. The Puritan ministers, Increase Mather and his more famous son Cotton Mather, used the captivity experience as a warning to their flocks that they must look after the state of their souls. Otherwise, God might use the Indians to punish the wicked (Berkhofer 84; Levernier and Cohen xix). Later the warnings became of a more secular nature. James Axtell (86) indicates that numerous captives evinced a degree of "conversion zeal" in promoting the Indian lifestyle.

Alien abductees as well often feel compelled to issue warnings. Some believe that the alien presence is bent on the conquest of Earth. They contend alien breeding programs will result in an infiltration of human society by alien hybrids. More commonly, though, abductees issue warnings about humans' capacity for destruction and the Earth's future (See for example Randles 147). A common claim is that aliens communicate concerns about interpersonal and state violence, the use of nuclear weapons to settle disputes and the human propensity for ecological destruction. Many report being shown scenes of mass destruction or environmental catastrophe via telepathy or sophisticated media presentations by their alien abductors (See for example Jacobs 230). As a result, abductees often articulate a heightened environmental consciousness, and proselytise about the dangers of a future nuclear war or environmental disaster.

Interpretations

It seems that both captivity narratives and abduction stories often reflect deeper anxieties and desires. Slotkin (98, 100, 179) explains the early Indian captivity narratives as affording a symbolic drama expressing Puritan anxieties about their place in a new land. Individual captivity represented in a heightened form the dilemma of the community. The white female captive in particular often symbolized the conflict between wilderness and civilization. June Namias (272) suggests the central role of vulnerable women and children in so many captivity narratives expressed anxieties about frontier migration, settlement, and the confrontation with Indians. Levernier and Cohen (xxx) also interpret the Indian captivity as a metaphor which embraced the

tensions and ambivalence of settlers on the border of civilization and wilderness. At least in part, abduction narratives may be interpreted as reflecting deeper anxieties as well. Significantly, the first reports of modern UFOs followed demonstrations of the destructive potential of atomic energy and the growing tensions of the Cold War. Many abductees express concerns about the Earth's future and humanity's ability to overcome ethnic and cultural boundaries (Mack 213).

June Namias (10-11) argues that Indian captivity stories were used to reflect on cultural and gender identity, particularly in periods of uncertainty and change. Alien abduction, too, may be interpreted partly in terms of identity. Psychiatrist John E. Mack introduces his book on alien abduction with the observation that the abduction phenomenon forces us "to re-examine our perception of human identity—to look at who we are from a cosmic perspective" (x). In one form or another, Earth's salvation is also frequently linked by abductees to the question of identity. For example, one of Mack's informants claims, "If human beings were empathetic and learn to identify with that which is not themselves, then they will be less predatory and destructive" (Quoted in Mack 368). According to Mack (408), "Each abductee experiences in some sense an expansion of his or her sense of self, of identity in the world."

While in popular culture alien abduction tends to be explained in terms of people taken by visitors from outer space, alternative explanations for the phenomenon are numerous. Some researchers suggest that the phenomenon arises from altered states of consciousness fed by the representations of science fiction (Shermer 95). Others have argued that abduction narratives serve to mask cases of sexual abuse or multiple personality disorders. More subtly, Elaine Showalter (193, 199) suggests women may use alien abduction as an explanation for their own sexual feelings, "in a culture which still makes it difficult for women to accept their sexuality."

As Showalter (6) points out, one of the strongest arguments put forward for the reality of alien abduction is the narrative similarities of accounts. UFO writer Budd Hopkins (5, 44) insists abduction accounts must be taken seriously because of the consistent patterns reported in separate cases. David Jacobs, in his book *Alien Encounters*, argues that accounts of abduction exhibit "a chronology, structure, logic—the events made sense...and they displayed an extraordinary internal consistency"

(Quoted in Showalter 6). John Mack points to a similar conclusion. While acknowledging “individual differences”, he asserts “what I have found to be so extraordinary from the beginning of my study has been the readily identifiable patterns that emerge when the case narratives are examined carefully” (Mack 389).

In some respects stories of alien abduction resemble the ascension myths of many cultures in which humans ascend to the heavens. Jacques Vallee and Carole Silver compare the UFO phenomenon to the folklore associated with fairies in Celtic tradition. Whitley Strieber (110), for one, acknowledges the similarities between his own experiences and fairy lore. Like beings from flying saucers, fairies were attributed with powers of transporting people, causing lapses of time and intervening in human affairs. In James Hogg’s famous fairy abduction poem “Kilmeny,” for instance, the protagonist returns from the fairy realm to let mortals know they are watched over by kindred spirits (Silver 16). Budd Hopkins (194) makes much of the fact that the stories of abductees do not fit “the black and white certainties of popular fantasy and imagination.” But in fact there is considerable ambiguity in the history of fairy abduction narratives, while the fairies themselves continually metamorphose in form and purpose.

In the case of the alien abduction phenomenon, the key element may be not so much visitors from another dimension, but the pattern of captivity and transculturalization. The abduction phenomenon takes on new meaning when interpreted in the broader context of captivity narratives which exhibit a similar logic and consistency. Mack describes abduction narratives as having “no obvious symbolic pattern” (2). Yet this seems contradicted when abduction accounts are considered in the wider context of captivity narratives. Indeed, part of Mack’s own criteria for the cases included in his study *Abduction* is that their stories “permit a coherent narrative” (80).

Whether alien abduction is grounded in “reality” as some writers insist, or the product of fantasy, confabulation, and false memory as others argue, narrative accounts of alien abduction draw on deeper literary traditions. As already noted, the folklore surrounding fairies in Celtic tradition anticipate many of the features of alien abduction narratives. At least in the American context, however, it is possible that frontier captivity

narratives provide a more characteristic template for alien abduction stories. By the 20th century beliefs in fairies and other elfin creatures were eroded in large part by the elevation of science in popular consciousness (Silver 185). On the other hand, the mythical power once held by the Western frontier has been arguably transferred to the “final frontier” of outer space (See Cawelti 11-12). Significantly, writers on alien abduction frequently take up the metaphor of the frontier. David Jacobs (29) describes abductees as “scouts” who bring back vital information. Both Mack (421) and Hopkins (202) refer to alien abductees as “pioneers”. The abductee assumes a special status at society’s cultural margins. It is perhaps significant that the modern abduction phenomenon is usually traced from the experience of an interracial couple, Barney and Betty Hill. In the early 1960s their marriage, between an African-American man and white woman, already challenged conventional cultural norms. Their story of alien abduction and reproductive experimentation, in a sense, elevated their transculturalization from a personal to a cosmic level. Viewed in this context, accounts of alien abduction may be taken as symptomatic of the tensions of identity and consciousness, which at least some individuals experience in the late twentieth century “space age.”

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