

BELIEFS ABOUT OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCES AMONG THE ELEMA, GULF KAMEA AND RIGO PEOPLES OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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ABSTRACT

School students and working people from the Gulf and Central Provinces of Papua New Guinea were asked orally about their own people's beliefs concerning out-of-the-body experiences (OOBEs). Each of the three ethnic groups held some body of such beliefs, though their extent and depth of detail varied. In most respects the beliefs accorded with written occidental and oriental beliefs. This supports the view that the OOBE occurs in most cultures of the world and that some of its chief characteristics manifest cross-culturally.

INTRODUCTION

In a cross-cultural study, Shiels (1978) used the Human Relations Area Files to demonstrate that about 95 per cent of the world's cultures for which relevant information was available, hold a body of beliefs about OOBEs.

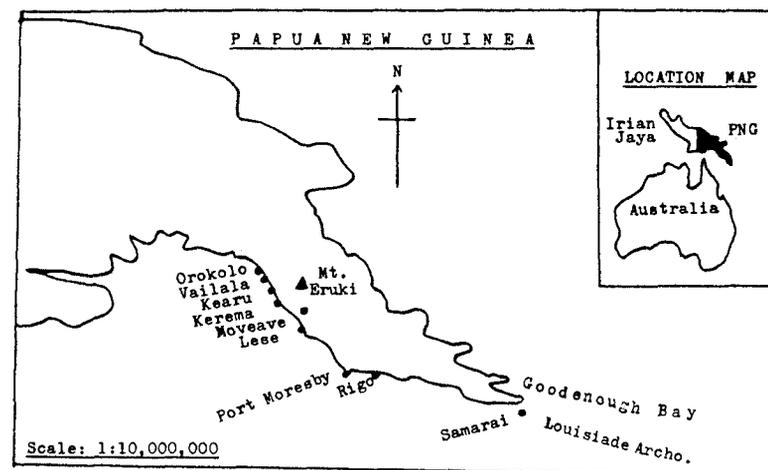
Although New Guinean cultures (i.e. mainland Papua New Guinean and Irian Javan ones) are immensely varied, only one mainland Melanesian group, the Papuakuans, was cited in the study. Of their beliefs, card 345 HRAF # OJ-29 states that:

During the day hours the soul and its body coincide but during the night the soul—which has its own and higher faculties of perception—leaves the body and travels freely.

The body is in danger as a result of separation only if projection is extended, in which case the body will die.

Over the past two years I have worked as a volunteer teacher and for part of that time as the deputy headmaster of an experimental secondary school near Kerema, in the little-developed Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea. This has brought me into very close contact with three Melanesian cultural groups—the coastal Elema people of the Gulf Province, the Kamea people living around Mt. Eruki in the Gulf, and the Rigo people of Central Province whose villages lie some 300 kilometres south-east of Kerema. Each group differs from the rest

in matters of custom, traditional religion, language and physical appearance. The purpose of this paper is to record their OOBE beliefs and to compare these with existing data, drawn mostly from oriental and occidental sources, with which most parapsychologists will be familiar.



METHOD OF GATHERING INFORMATION

In the evenings when schoolboys (aged 11-18) or workers employed to build new classrooms were sitting together telling stories, I would sit down with them and after a while ask the questions, "Do your people believe it is possible for a person's spirit to leave his body for a short time while he is alive?" and, "What happens to a person's spirit when his body dies?" Although some theologians and ascologists¹ would distinguish between the words "spirit" and "soul", I use "spirit" here as a synonym for "soul" since most Melanesians employ the word "spirit" simply to denote the spiritual form, or non-material essence, of a human or other being.

With the Elema and the Rigo information was immediately forthcoming which enabled me to avoid asking leading questions. The Kamea were not so forthcoming, for reasons to be discussed later.

After my posing the questions, the groups, which consisted of

¹ As we lack terms for the study of ASCs (altered states of consciousness) and the people who study them, I have suggested *ascology* and *ascologist* respectively (*Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 50, 782).

between four and 30 people, discussed the matter in their own languages. The eldest then acted as spokesman to reply in English. The Rigo and Kamea groups were clearly unanimous in what they wanted the spokesman to say; not so with the Elema. Some of these held beliefs which others—even coming from the same villages—did not, or had not even heard of. In these instances the spokesman either explained the different ideas, or gave me the majority opinion. Sometimes the lack of agreement was explained by the fact that the belief in question had been widespread in the past but was now dying out—as the result of the combined effect of education and of the Christian missions.

BELIEFS OF THE ELEMA

The Elema form the largest ethnic group in the school. A total of 42 were in the three groups I questioned, with students from the Kearu, Vailala and Orokolo areas of Kerema West, down as far as the Moveave/Lese area of Kerema East (see map). Between Kerema East and West there was little difference in the nature of beliefs held, but they seemed notably stronger among those from the Orokolo region. This may be because until recently mission and educational influences have been less strong there.

It is widely held that OOBES occur at the moment of death, whereafter the spirit will stay close to the village for about a week, or until the main funeral rituals are over. Then it leaves for the spirit world, which many believe to be a foreign country to the west (cf. Williams, 1940, 1976). It is also widely believed that sorcerers can induce OOBES in themselves. While in this state the sorcerer can travel anywhere, communicate with spirits, and work magic (“puripuri”). When the spirit is absent the sorcerer’s physical body may be cataleptic, and some people believe that if it is touched he will die. Nobody in the groups questioned admitted to knowing how a sorcerer would induce a temporary OOBE in himself, but some said the process is thought to start by his lying down as if to fall asleep.

It is difficult for a foreigner to speak with a sorcerer about such matters, since his identity is usually kept a village or clan secret, lest rival sorcerers try to kill him. However, one of my students, Kopy Heroe of the Ekemeavo clan, told me that his grandfather, Hearo, is a sorcerer, and could be persuaded to discuss his practices with me.

I had several fascinating discussions with Hearo², in which he told

² All the Melanesian names cited in this paper are pronounced phonetically. With names containing an *ea*, the two vowels are pronounced independently. Thus, *Hearo*, is pronounced, *He-a-ro*; *Ekemeavo*, *Ekem-ee-a-vo*.

me about methods of divination, cannibalistic rituals employed to gain power, curing or killing with magic, and about times long ago (such as when the “Vailala Madness” supposedly enabled the “head-he-go-round men” to “see into Heaven” (cf. Williams, 1976)). But he made no claim to be an OOBE adept. He said that whenever one falls asleep, the spirit leaves the body and walks around in its vicinity until daybreak. Yet, whether or not the sleeper is a sorcerer, he never becomes conscious of being out of the body. Dreams do not result from such wanderings but are given by spirit ancestors.

I was disappointed by this response from the only sorcerer with whom I have been able to speak. It is interesting, though, that Hearo comes from the Kearu area, and school students from this district were the least knowledgeable about OOBES among the Elema. Other sorcerers may possibly be more talented than Hearo in this regard, as one does hear of a very small number of sorcerers said to specialize in OOBE. But Hearo is clearly a case in point where the reality of what a sorcerer is capable of, is not matched by what people believe and fear he can do.

Many of the Elema believe that non-sorcerers too may have temporary OOBES while the physical body is alive. The boys said that old people in particular believe that OOBES can occur in sudden fright, and severe illness, deep sleep and dreaming. There was much disagreement over these last two. Some thought OOBES occurred *only* in deep sleep and politely laughed at others who said that dreams are the result of the spirit wandering; a few thought that OOBES could occur in deep sleep *and* in dreaming, and a small number said that they had never heard of the phenomenon occurring in either way.

About a third believed in sudden fright as a cause. One explained this as follows: “If you are walking through the bush and suddenly somebody steps out from behind a tree and puts a hand on you, your body will jump. The spirit also jumps, but it jumps higher than the body and so for a short time the two separate.”

The majority were unaware of any beliefs that the spirit leaves the body in serious illness. The Orokolo boys, however, said that the spirit may leave the body in search of drinking water if a person is so ill that he cannot walk to water and has nobody attending him. Some of the Lese people too believe that the spirit leaves the body in illness, but only if consciousness has been lost or temporary heart failure has occurred (“if his heart stops for a little time—maybe a few hours [*sic*]”).

None of the students I asked considered having an OOBE to be dangerous. However, an older person—one of our teachers from Lese—told me that his people believe that a sleeping person should not be woken up quickly. If he is out of the body, then he may die. This

could be why students have asked me and the other expatriate teachers to avoid stepping over their sleeping bodies while checking the dormitories at night. They believe they might sicken if we do, although none that I have asked could explain why.

BELIEFS OF THE GULF KAMEA

Formerly known and dreaded by the coastal people as the "Kukukuku", the Kamea are a charming, short, stocky mountain people who live in the least developed part of the Gulf, as well as across the border into Morobe Province. Their way of life, based on subsistence agriculture and hunting, has remained much the same for several thousand years. Tribal fighting, which once resulted in terrible slaughters and caused much fear and insecurity, is now virtually extinct. Only over the past 10 to 20 years have Catholic missions (bringing schools and hospitals) and a government station been established.

I have asked priests working among the Kamea what they have been able to find out about the people's traditional metaphysics, but apparently they are very secretive about it, "almost as if they've either got a lot to hide or there's just nothing there". This applies specifically to those Kamea in the Mt. Eruki area who have previously been isolated by communication difficulties and tribal fighting. Other Kamea may have quite different beliefs.

Initially I could question a group of only four Kamea since very few of them are educated to the extent of speaking English and attending our secondary school down on the coast. I could get no response to the questions no matter how I tried phrasing them. They seemed anxious to help but unable to answer even such simple questions as, "What happens to the spirit after death?" Eventually, after much discussion in their own language and with an obvious air of embarrassment, they told me that their people believe that when a person's body dies his spirit dies too. Death is the end of all existence for him.

Paradoxically they still hold a strong belief in magic and the spirit world. This, they said, bears no relation to the ordinary world, and the spirits in it are not the spirits of dead people: the origin and nature of the spirits is a mystery. Ordinary people are unable to have OOBEs under any circumstances, but those trained in sorcery can use magic to induce temporary ones in themselves. Sorcerers in this state can travel to any place in the world, use their invisibility to steal things, and communicate with spirits. Should he so wish, the sorcerer can

make his spirit assume a form, and usually that of an animal will be chosen.³

After further questioning, they told me that they have no traditional belief in either gods or spirit ancestors. Their only metaphysic, which enjoys no more status than a legend, is that the world is sustained by and incorporated into a gigantic snake. The snake is guarded and looked after by sorcerers, and can be harmed only by other sorcerers. Were it to be killed, that would bring the end of the world and perpetual darkness.

An opportunity to find out more about the Kamea arose during our last three months of working in Papua New Guinea. We moved up to the mountains to live among the Kamea on an outstation, where my wife was needed to help in an understaffed hospital, and I carried out the electrical installation and site-wiring for a small hydro-electricity scheme.

Despite working closely with the people, I learnt most from the expatriate priests who had lived there for many years. It would appear correct that most present-day Kameas have very few indigenous metaphysical beliefs. Even stories such as that of the snake protected by sorcerers are very localized. A body of special and important traditions does exist, but seem to be carefully guarded, and handed down only by a father, on his deathbed, to his eldest son. Another factor which may contribute to the lack of a popular metaphysical system and folklore is the people's very short life expectancy. This greatly reduces the number of old people who might normally fulfil a story-telling role.

BELIEFS OF THE RIGO

Working on the school site in 1978 was a group of young men from the Rigo district of Central Province. They belonged to the Gabbonne villages where, I am told, traditional beliefs are taking longer to die out than in more developed Rigo areas. Having got to know them very well after sharing their accommodation for six weeks, I asked a group of five about their OOBE beliefs. With virtually no further questions required they proceeded to describe one of the most comprehensive bodies of OOBE beliefs I have heard of outside occidental and oriental cultures.

The Rigo distinguish between two different types of OOBE: the *dreaming and sleeping type*, and the *magic type*. They believe that everyone leaves the body in sleep and that dreaming pertains to the spirit's

³ I am unable to say whether such beliefs could have been inspired or influenced through contact with coastal people.

wanderings. Such OOBes, however, are said to be "unreal" in comparison with "real" magic-induced ones. The only other times when people can have an OOB without sorcery are if they receive a sudden fright, and at death.

The day before somebody dies all the spirits in the nearby spirit village will come to the real village to greet the deceased as the spirit is released from the dying body. These spirits may be perceived by dogs, cats, babies, and sorcerers who have prepared themselves by roasting a special long variety of banana to ashes in the fire, then eating it complete with the skin. Within a day of dying the spirit of the deceased will cause an omen to appear showing who used sorcery to cause the death. This omen consists of some unusual form of animal behaviour to which a symbolic meaning is attached. Knowing that the person responsible will be punished by more sorcery, the discarnate spirit then leaves to enjoy its afterlife in the spirit village.⁴

Magic OOBes are induced only by certain women who are usually also sorceresses. As young girls their elders take them into the bush to be trained in the techniques of induction. These consist of using magic incantations and either swallowing or having under one's pillow a charm made from the roots and leaves of magic plants. The OOB will then ensue during sleep.⁵

OOBs are normally induced in order to travel to another place and bring back food or information. Before starting the OOB, the sorceress announces her intention to others nearby so that she can sleep in a hut undisturbed. This is important because if anyone touches her physical body while the spirit is out she will immediately die.

During separation the physical body and the spirit remain attached by a "magic cotton". It acts "like a fishing line", in that it is usually taut but will extend indefinitely to allow the spirit to travel freely. If it is broken while the spirit is far away, the physical body will die. In order to re-enter the physical body the sorceress herself must break the magic cotton when standing beside her body. This cotton is vulnerable, and the greatest danger of induced OOBs is that evil

⁴ In many Melanesian cultures it is believed that *all* death and sickness are caused by sorcery. This holds even in cases which we should consider to be purely accidental. "Payback" is sought by inflicting sorcery on the accused, fighting, or demanding material compensation. In Gulf Province, the fear which sorcery generates is one of the biggest factors causing young people to leave their villages for a more secure life in the cities.

⁵ Although "magic mushrooms" containing psychedelic substances are fairly common in Papua New Guinea, none of the people I spoke to were aware of their sorcerers using fungi. My friend, Hearo, affirmed that "hiva" (mushrooms) played no role in his magic. However, I would not be at all surprised if certain sorcerers do use plants which contain ASC-inducing psychedelic substances.

spirits might try to cut it to kill the physical body. In the event of an attack the sorceress must use all her strength to fight off the assailants.

While disembodied the spirit can appear in any of three ways: as a facsimile of the physical body; in the form of a bird or flying fox (fruit bat) if further magic is used; or as a light. The size of the light varies from "small" to "football sized". In motion it twinkles like many stars compacted together and is shaped like a shooting star with a tail. It can radiate several different colours—yellow, red and blue usually being most prominent. The faster it moves the more brightly it shines.

The Rigo say that many of their beliefs and practices concerning OOBs have come to them from the "Samarai" people—this being the popular collective name for the inhabitants of Milne Bay Province (i.e. the south-east tip of New Guinea and island groups such as the d'Entrecasteaux, the Trobriands and the Louisiades). David, a carpenter, backed this up by telling me about an experience undergone by his brother who has a Samarai girlfriend. The girlfriend told David's brother about her mother's OOB capabilities, but he was sceptical. It was therefore arranged for the brother to sleep with the girl's mother so that during sleep the woman could help him into the magic OOB state and he could experience its reality for himself. The brother agreed to this experiment. While he slept, he became conscious of himself standing beside the woman, and having an OOB. She asked him where he would like to travel to, and he said his village in Rigo. Together they travelled through the air to Rigo some 250 miles away, and while there the woman took a bunch of bananas from David's father's garden and carried them back to Milne Bay with her. On returning to his physical body the brother had difficulty in getting back inside. The cotton which is normally taut had somehow got tangled up, so it had to be unravelled before it could be broken to gain re-entry.

The next morning when his father went to the garden he thought that the bananas had been stolen, until he later received an explanatory letter from his son.

Although I should want exceedingly concrete evidence before believing that a bunch of bananas had been transported in this manner, I find it interesting that a number of Papua New Guineans have told me similar stories about the Samarai sorceresses.

Milne Bay Province is clearly an area from which a lot of OOB folklore has emanated. This aspect of the Samarai people's sorcery is greatly feared even from as far away as the Gulf Province: I was once sitting in my room working while about 20 students were doing night study in a classroom downstairs. Suddenly they all ran outside—the girls screaming. A young flying fox had flown into the classroom causing them to fear it might be a Samarai sorceress.

DISCUSSION

In Tables 1–5 the following symbols are used to summarize the main characteristics of OOBE beliefs in the three cultural groups just discussed:

- XXX Belief said to be held by a majority of the people.
- X Belief said to be held by a minority.
- No such belief known to exist.
- ? People questioned were uncertain about this aspect of belief, or information not elicited.

Included in the tables for comparison is an assessment of how widespread is belief in the various OOBE features among proponents of classical “astral projection” theory (henceforth CAP) in our own culture: a body of theory which, we should bear in mind, owes much to oriental metaphysics as well as to the supposed experiences of the “projectors” themselves. This assessment is based on the classical OOBE literature—Crookall, Muldoon and Carrington, Yram, Fox, Monroe, *et al.*—and since such a quantitative assessment is difficult to make it is intended only as a rough guide. The symbol XXX indicates a strong and widespread belief among “projectionists”; X is used where belief is not so heavily emphasized in the literature, or involves details little discussed; and the symbols — and ? are used as above.

Table 1. Conditions under which OOBEs are believed to occur

	<i>Deep sleep</i>	<i>Dreaming</i>	<i>Fear</i>	<i>Sickness</i>	<i>Death</i>	<i>Sorcery self-induced</i>
Rigo	XXX	XXX	XXX	—	XXX	XXX
Elema	X	X	X	X	XXX	XXX
Kamea	—	—	—	—	—	XXX
Classical “astral projection” theory	XXX	XXX	X	XXX	XXX	XXX

Except for the Kamea, the Melanesian beliefs studied correspond closely with CAP theory. The Kamea I talked to believe that sorcerers are the only people who can experience an OOBE, which is why they held no beliefs concerning other categories.

The only matter in which the Melanesians as a whole believe less strongly than CAP proponents is that of whether OOBEs occur in serious illness. In the West CAP theory has received a boost in this respect with the publication of reports of people having OOBEs and related ASCs while advanced resuscitation equipment nurses them back from death’s doorstep (Moody *et al.*, 1976). Here in rural Papua New Guinea, however, the chances of people living to describe near-death experiences are much slimmer. I suggest that this is probably the reason why neither the Rigo nor the Kamea believe OOBEs occur in serious illness, and only a small minority of the Elema do.

Table 2. Reasons for OOBE induction

	<i>Travelling to other places on earth</i>	<i>Communicating with spirits</i>	<i>Transporting goods—including theft</i>	<i>Working magic</i>
Rigo (sorceresses)	XXX	XXX	XXX	X
Elema (sorcerers)	XXX	XXX	X	X
Kamea (sorcerers)	XXX	XXX (non-human)	XXX	?
Classical “astral projection” theory (a la Crookall <i>et al.</i>)	XXX	XXX	—	?

Again there is a close correspondence between the Melanesian and CAP beliefs; with the major exception that all the Melanesian groups examined here believed it possible for sorcerers (esses) to transport physical objects while OOBE. I know of no reputable CAP source claiming that OOB psychokinesis can be applied to robbing a trade store or transporting a bunch of bananas from one place to another. Although I have yet to hear a first-hand account of a sorcerer demonstrating psychokinesis, belief in their ability to do so is common in

Papua New Guinea, so it is not surprising that the power is attributed to them even when out of the body. Personally I think that most, if not all, instances of sorcerers allegedly demonstrating PK are conjuring tricks. One of the commonest is for the sorcerer to "cure" somebody by pressing his hands on to the sufferer's body, then removing them, covered in blood, and holding a bone, stone or other "obstruction" said to have been inside causing the illness! Little wonder if after witnessing such "miracles", unsophisticated people can believe that the sorcerer has acquired material goods by paranormal means, when in truth they have probably been gained in a much more mundane way.

Table 3. Characteristics and appearance of the "double" or "astral body"

	<i>Facsimile of physical body</i>	<i>Invisible</i>	<i>Animal form</i>	<i>Ball of light</i>	<i>"Silver cord"</i>
Rigo	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Elema	?	XXX	X	—	—
Kamea	?	XXX	XXX	—	—
<i>Classical "astral projection" theory</i>	XXX	XXX	X	X	XXX

All the groups agreed that the double is usually invisible to ordinary people who lack the special perceptive powers of a sorcerer. However, with the use of appropriate magic, the double may present itself in visible form—usually that of an animal. There was some confusion with the Elema on this point because like many other Melanesian cultures, they believe that sorcerers can change their physical body into animal form for disguise. Many of the students were unsure whether the double could also be changed in this manner, which is why I have given it only the X rating of a minority belief.

There was uncertainty among the Elema and Kamea as to whether or not the double could appear as a facsimile of the physical body. Most of them felt that if it wasn't totally invisible, the form of an animal would be taken.

Rigo beliefs about the characteristics and appearance of the double closely resemble CAP theory. They hold that the double can take on a

wide range of forms, including that of a ball of light. Reports of people having OOBES finding themselves to be a ball of light are not uncommon in the West (Green *et al.*, 1968), and my own experimental work with inducing OOBES suggests that subjects in higher states of consciousness are more inclined to find themselves taking on a ball or pinpoint form than any other (McIntosh, 1978; 1980). The shooting star shape of the ball of light when in motion accords with the CAP notion that, "a forward-moving 'double' may leave a trail of 'light'" (Crookall, 1964, p. 65). Its composition being reported by the Rigo to be of many colours could fit in with the CAP idea of a coloured "spiritual aura".

In pointing out these similarities I do not wish to imply belief in the truth of either CAP or Melanesian beliefs.

In his study of a selection of 67 of the world's cultures, Sheils (op. cit.) found only one, the Kol of India, who believed that the double and the physical body are linked together by a "cord" during separation. He concludes his paper by emphasizing this as being one of the very few areas in which the ethnographic evidence and CAP theory fail to corroborate each other. The Rigo, however, have been shown to provide an ethnographic case corroborating CAP theory on the "silver cord". Their "magic cotton" connects the double to the physical body; it can, like a fishing line be extended as the double moves farther away from the physical body; and if it is broken the owner dies. Rigo beliefs about the cord do differ from CAP theory in one way, however: they hold that in order to re-enter the physical body the person herself has to break the cord. My friends who told me this did not know why the breakage was necessary.

It would be interesting to find out more about the cord from a Rigo, or perhaps a Samarai, OBE adept. Further details of its function, composition and appearance could do much to corroborate CAP ideas, but as the Rigo beliefs known to me stand there is little which could not conceivably have been inspired by the idea of a foetus being

Table 4. Types of danger risked when having an OOBES

	<i>Death: sudden awakening</i>	<i>Death: Malevolent spirits cut cord</i>	<i>Illness: prolonged OOBES</i>
Rigo	XXX	XXX	—
Elema	X	—	—
Kamea	?	—	—
<i>Classical "AP" theory</i>	X	X	XXX

attached to its mother by the umbilical cord. In fact, granted this potential source of inspiration, I am surprised Sheils did not find that more cultures held at least an elementary form of belief in a cord.

In CAP theory the dangers most widely associated with OOBES are:

(a) Repercussion: a term used particularly by Muldoon to indicate what happens when the double ostensibly snaps back into the physical body too suddenly—usually because this has been woken up. Repercussion can cause shock and possibly sickness or even heart failure.

(b) Hindrance: an attack on the double by malevolent spirits or forces, causing distress or an unsuccessful experience.

(c) Prolonged projection: causing headache, illness or, conceivably, death.

As noted, the Rigo think it essential that before inducing an OOBES the sorceress should ensure that she will not be disturbed. A minority of the Elema also believe that the physical body should not be touched while the double is out. Both these groups believe that if it is touched the projectionist will die. The Kamea held no opinion on the matter. Citing death as a danger of contact with the physical body is probably an exaggeration, and I suggest that this danger is akin to the CAP concept of repercussion.

The Rigo believe a major source of danger is an attack by malevolent spirits fighting the double to cut the magic cotton. In CAP theory also attack by malevolent spirits is considered to be a danger (Fox, Munroe, Muldoon, Yram, *et al.*), but not usually a mortal one.

Surprisingly, none of the three Melanesian groups mentioned prolonged projection as a danger, yet CAP proponents and other cultures

in Sheil's sample emphasize it. Again, it would be interesting to be able to ask a Melanesian OOBES adept in person about this to find out from first hand.

Catalepsy, particularly rigidity of the physical body, is by no means the rule when somebody is having an OOBES: there are cases on record of people finding themselves out of the body while walking along the street or driving a car (Green *et al.* 1968). CAP proponents, though, quite often describe feeling the physical body go rigid at the time of separation, and finding it still rigid on returning. In my own research I found that catalepsy nearly always occurred when a subject was ostensibly out of the body (McIntosh, *op. cit.*).

The Kamea knew nothing about this but some of the Elema said that when a sorcerer has an OOBES his body becomes rigid.

The Rigo once again were of particular interest here. As we have seen they distinguish between the ordinary kind of OOBES which occurs when sleeping or dreaming, and the fully fledged "magic" type. With ordinary OOBES the physical body is relaxed, but in magic ones it becomes rigid. It seems that the Rigo position on catalepsy is similar to, but more clear-cut, than that of CAP.

THE "FLYING WITCHES" OF MILNE BAY PROVINCE

After I had submitted the original manuscript of this paper, the Society for Psychical Research very kindly awarded me a grant towards travel expenses in order to find out more about the OOBES beliefs of the Samarai people. This enabled me to look up anthropological references in the university libraries at Port Moresby and Lae, as well as making a boat journey down to Milne Bay Province to question some of the people there. Being short of time I paid particular attention to high school students, since having a good command of English they are easy to approach.

I wanted to see if OOBES beliefs, said to originate among the Samarai people, were as strong as other ethnic groups believed. I was well rewarded. Not only do the Samarais still maintain a rich folklore, and considerable fear, of the so-called "flying witches", but a certain amount of work on this has been carried out by anthropologists in the field some decades ago (Malinowski, 1922; also, Fortune, 1932; Jenness and Ballantyne, 1920).

Bronislaw Malinowski devotes Chapter Ten of his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* to native beliefs about flying witches, especially where shipwreck is concerned, noting that if a man is shipwrecked, or lost at

Table 5.

	<i>Physical catalepsy during OOBES</i>
Rigo (magic OOBES)	XXX
Rigo (sleep/dream OOBES)	—
Elema	X
Kamea	?
Classical "AP" theory	XXX

sea, he is believed to face no danger unless flying witches learn of his location by psychic means, and come to feed on his corpse. One sorcerer is quoted as describing the threat in this way:

The yoyova (witch) casts off her body (inini wowola—which really means “peels off her skin”); she lies down and sleeps, we hear her snoring. Her covering (kapwalela that is, her outward body, her skin) remains in the house, and she herself flies (titolela biyova). Her skirt remains in the house, she flies naked. When she meets men, she eats us. In the morning, she puts on her body, and lies down in her hut . . . (Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 251).

Protection from the witches can be obtained by reciting a spell over ginger root. This befogs them with a magic mist known as the “Kayga’u”:

I will befog Muyuwa! (repeated)

I will befog Misima! (repeated)⁶

The mist springs up; the mist makes them tremble. I befog the front, I shut off the rear; I befog the rear, I shut off the front. I fill with mist, mist springs up; I fill with mist, the mist which makes them tremble . . . (Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 249).

Although the schoolboys I spoke to admitted that they feared night attacks from flying witches, I think many of their stories (such as ones of ghost ships crewed by witches) should be taken no more seriously than our ghost stories back home. What does warrant serious attention are the frequent reports of flying witches knowing when one of their kinsfolk living far away has died. In typical cases, the witch sensing that something is wrong, induces an OOBÉ to fly to where the person is. The problem with cases of this nature is that it is usually impossible to check them sufficiently to ensure that a paranormal explanation is justified.

I had a first-hand account of an ostensible encounter with a witch told me by Daniel, a trades union official from the Trobriand Islands. He did not believe in the alleged abilities of flying witches until one day at school he unjustly beat up a friend in an argument over a cricket bat.

The friend’s grandmother was what Daniel described as a “champion flying witch”. That night he had a terrible “nightmare” that the witch was flying around his bed and trying to swallow him up with an enormous mouth. He could not move but was able to scream and wake up his friends, who came and calmed him down.

Later on, still awake and with his eyes open, he saw a fiery square shape moving towards him. He knew this to be the witch again. After hovering around for some time she disappeared, leaving him terrified.

⁶ These are names of islands in the Province.

The grandmother lived on another island about half a day’s journey away, and there was no direct means of communication with the school. However, two days later the old woman arrived by boat, summoned Daniel and said she had come and frightened him in the night as a warning not to hit her grandson again. Another time the punishment would be much worse.

Before sailing back home she made the two boys resume their former friendship by sitting down together and enjoying some food which she had brought.

Though this anecdote might have a number of normal explanations it does demonstrate the importance of OOBÉ beliefs even among the educated, and shows how such beliefs are perpetuated.

The people I met, and all the relevant anthropological works I could find, were concerned with either the Milne Bay Province islands, or the Goodenough Bay region of the north coast. For a better comparison with the Rigo beliefs I should have liked to visit the south coast of the mainland, but this was not possible as there were no roads. Nevertheless, I think most of the Samarai beliefs about OOBÉs resemble the Rigo ones, with two exceptions: beliefs about OOBÉs during sickness, and beliefs about the silver cord or magic cotton.

Whereas the Rigo held no beliefs about OOBÉs during serious illness, people of the Goodenough Bay region think that in such cases the spirit may leave the body, and that a sorcerer should be called to use magic to draw it back in again.

Although I found in this area no strong evidence of belief in a cord such as the Rigo have, there is a notion that witches travel along creepers when flying which perhaps resembles it. School students told me about this, and Malinowski also describes two variations:

When she goes out . . . , the yoyova leaves her body behind. Then she climbs a tree, and reciting some magic, she ties a creeper to it. Then, she flies off, along this creeper, which snaps behind her. This is the moment when we see the fire flying through the sky. Whenever the natives see a falling star, they know it is a mulukwausi (i.e. OOB double) on her flight. Another version is that, when a mulukwausi recites a certain spell, a tree which stands somewhere near her destination bends down towards the other tree on which she is perched. She jumps from one top to the other, and it is then that we see the fire. (Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 241).

Although it is mostly women who can induce OOBÉs, some men are also believed to have this ability. Usually—though not always—the woman is a sorceress, and the training starts from babyhood. Secret magical spells are recited over the child by its adept mother, and rituals are carried out which people believe involve such

ordeals as sleeping out in the cold, being thrown through the air but caught again ("to make the spirit feel light"), cannibalistic practices, and being smoked, by a fire burning leaves with magical properties. Although such beliefs are still widely held by the Samarai people, I think it wise to heed Malinowski, who, after giving a particularly lurid account of them, comments that: "These statements I could never verify by direct observations, and they may be only the result of very strong belief projecting its own realities" (op. cit. p. 240).

Once a person has been trained, OOBs can supposedly be induced at will. The routine procedure is the same as that described by the Rigo—reciting the appropriate spells, then sleeping alone in a hut with a pillow-full of special leaves. Another way is described by Jenness and Ballantyne (1920). It involves making the body "hot" by rubbing it with the warmed leaves of a tutumuna tree, and then lying down, as if to fall asleep, in a place where there will be no disturbances. Like other Melanesians, the Samarai believe that the person will die if the physical body is touched during an OOB.

CONCLUSION

In each of the three Melanesian cultural groups with which I have had close contact, there exists a body of beliefs about OOBs. These differ considerably in extent and depth of detail, but are broadly in agreement, both with one another, and with CAP theory. A subsequent back-up study showed that the same holds good of the people of Milne Bay Province, who maintain a particularly strong belief in the efficacy of their OOB "flying witches."

These findings add support to other evidence (Sheils, op. cit.) suggesting that the OOB and many of its chief characteristics occur in most of the world's cultures, and not just in our own.

How far cross-cultural similarities can help in determining whether or not some aspect of the human psyche actually leaves the physical body in an OOB is hard to judge. If very close and detailed correspondences could be shown to exist on matters such as the silver cord and the appearance of the double, CAP theory might well be justified. Though such correspondences exist in the instance of Rigo beliefs, they are less marked in other cultures.

Overall I do not think they are enough to make CAP theory the only explanation. More support for it might be found if individual OOB adepts could be questioned about their experiences, but so far I have only been able to find out about general beliefs. That such general beliefs are prone to the incorporation of fantasy elements, is clearly demonstrated by the absurdity of beliefs about matters like

OOB cannibalism and PK. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for Europeans to find an OOB adept willing to discuss such experiences: but even if the barrier of secrecy were broken down, we should probably still be left with the same problems as those faced when analysing OOB data from our own culture.

To sum up, the broad universality of OOB beliefs is exciting and must certainly influence our views on the nature of OOBs. Yet, this in itself is insufficient to prove that the CAP interpretation of the phenomenon is correct. Much research needs to be done into the OOB and altered states of consciousness in general before we can reach a better understanding. This must be conducted not only in the field or the laboratory, but also through philosophical enquiry. The latter is particularly important, since the way in which we look at the OOB is inevitably influenced by our metaphysical assumptions, which are not necessarily correct.

I should like to thank my Melanesian friends who have made this study of their beliefs possible, by being so open and helpful. This is not always easy, for in an age when their world is changing so rapidly, shame is sometimes felt about existing traditional beliefs. I hope that studies like this will help to show that they are by no means alone in the world, at least where most of their beliefs about OOBs are concerned.

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THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIETY: BRIGHTON, 1980

by JOHN COMLEY, CHRIS DAVIDSON and RENÉE HAYNES

This year's Conference was held in the lighthearted splendour of Brighton Pavilion. So much material was presented that, alas, it cannot be discussed in full detail. The audience obviously found it very illuminating, and question time yielded lively—and sometimes acrid—comment.

The first session began a little sadly with the news that Dr. Susan Blackmore was unwell, and could not present her paper. Dr. Brian Millar read it for her. She had tried, under ganzfeld conditions, to assess the various differences in ESP scoring achieved respectively by members of a small experimental group who had been trained to relax and to produce visual imagery, and the members of a control group, who had not. Both groups scored at chance level. Dr. Millar's own paper described his work in co-operation with Dr. Martin Johnson in the study of ESP in ganzfeld conditions. Their experimental design, like Dr. Blackmore's, yielded no evidence of ESP. Dr. Carl Sargent then described his work carried out in the same general circumstances. Together with Trevor Harley, John Lane, Gerry Matthews and Keith Radcliffe, he had tried to find out whether the length of sessions affected the efficiency of the ganzfeld method in enhancing psi, and what part was played by the difference between experienced and inexperienced subjects. Mary Rose Barrington ended the morning with a report on a remote viewing (or "travelling clairvoyance") experiment carried out by herself, Peter Hallson, Betty Markwick, Hugh Pincott and John Stiles. This failed to yield concrete evidence of the paranormal.

Carl Sargent began the afternoon by outlining a design produced by Trevor Harley and himself for a "Psi-predictive Questionnaire", a mass-test intended to pick out human subjects useful for experimental work. This questionnaire, based on factors shown by previous studies to be associated with extra-sensory ability, was succinct enough to be administered to large groups. Kathleen Wilson followed, with a lively paper on the use of computer based "game-like tests" to elicit psi: she discussed two series of such tests developed by the Edinburgh University Parapsychology Laboratory, and suggested further possibilities.

The last two papers dealt with field studies. Julian Isaacs gave an absorbing account of a poltergeist case, whose focus was an adolescent boy (able to carry out paranormal metal bending). He observed that the spontaneous sporadic outbreaks of activity seemed to coincide with periods of family tension. Chris Davidson outlined a series of apparently paranormal events reported by a night nursing shift at an SE Thames regional hospital, which had been investigated by John Comley and himself. There was later a reception at the Old Ship Hotel, for participants, new members and Council members.

Tuesday began with Professor Archie Roy's study of time and consciousness, as illuminated by the precognitive talents of Gerard Croiset and other paragnosts. The second paper, by Joseph Friedman, described his long established "dreamers group" whose members met weekly. He maintained that their proceedings yielded evidence of genuine dream sharing. Dr. Keith Hearne, who followed him, dealt with "lucid" dreams (in which the dreamer knows he is dreaming), set out various technical methods by which the occurrence of such dreams could be signalled to the world outside, and discussed prospects of further research.

John Comley, reporting an experiment designed to replicate some of David Ellis' work on the investigation of Raudive voices, noted that the only person who had succeeded in making out what said by a voice muffled by "white noise" was like Dr. Raudive himself, a multi-lingual psychologist experienced in communication theory. Manfred Cassirer provided an exhaustive historical account of "Direct Voice" phenomena. Professor Bersani, of Bologna University outlined experimental work in the electronic voice field; speech simulating equipment was used here to provide random sounds. These were sometimes interpreted as "speech" by the experimental subjects who listened to them: a datum to be contrasted with John Comley's.

Susan Blackmore, now recovered, presented the first afternoon paper. She discussed the difficulties of associating memory too simplistically with ESP. Although it was possible to assume that certain paranormal faculties can be related to "normal" memory, the