Chapter III

Kinship, Marriage, and Conjugal Life

1. Kinship

The kinship system of the Yéi-nan is patrilineal. Marriage is virilocal and dominated by the rules of sister exchange and moiety exogamy. Marriage by payment of a brideprice was unknown.

Kinship terms are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yeboi</td>
<td>father, male parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>mother, female parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natau</td>
<td>son, male child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eiy</td>
<td>daughter, female child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nagei</td>
<td>brother, male sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nagár</td>
<td>sister, female sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eige por</td>
<td>eldest brother, oldest sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bei</td>
<td>middle sister, youngest sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elul por</td>
<td>son's wife, daughter of son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menötjer por</td>
<td>daughter of son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>néam</td>
<td>father's father, mother's mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>néam-néam</td>
<td>father's mother, mother's father</td>
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<tr>
<td>morei</td>
<td>father's elder sister, mother's elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modar-por</td>
<td>father's mother, mother's father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nakom</td>
<td>mother's sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nower</td>
<td>father's brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>magér</td>
<td>mother's brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>nát</td>
<td>exchange sister</td>
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Alternative terms for father and mother are auw and nai respectively.

Tsampor, ursár, and mandalbai added to the terms nagei (br) and nagár (si) designate the eldest, the middle and the youngest of three brothers or sisters.

Editor's comment. The list of kinship terms is defective and inaccurate. The terms for son's wife and daughter's husband, for mobrda and for exchange brother are lacking. That the term for grandparents and grandchildren is reciprocal I had to find out from the comparative wordlist in Geurtjens' Woordenboek of the Marind language (pp. 406-7). No mention has been made of terms of address and their use. Presumably auw (fa) and nai (mo) are such terms, but I have no certainty on this point. Really unfortunate is the absence of information on the classificatory use of kinship terms. There is one exception to this: the term néam. Its use vis-à-vis parents-in-law might have been instructive if we had known the terms used for son- and daughter-in-law, which,
as was noted above, have been omitted. We also look in vain for information on the effects of exchange marriage on the kinship terms used by the children of such marriages for their mother's exchange brother and father's exchange sister. Are they really the same as those used for a mobr or fasi who is not at the same time fasihu or mobrwi?

How little the author has really gone into the ins and outs of the kinship system is demonstrated by his repeated assertion (though not included in the present edition of his papers) that among the Yéi the mother's brother has no specific functions at all, a statement which is definitely contradicted by his own data on initiation and canoe feasts. Actually, the assertion is simply another of the exaggerations to which he fell prone whenever he wished to contrast the customs of the Yéi with those of the Marind. Among the latter a mother's brother normally lives in the same village as his sister's children, where he acts as their mentor and as the boy's pederast. His functions are far more comprehensive than among the Yéi, but this does not mean that he exercised no functions at all with regard to his sister's children among the latter. As he lives in a different, more or less distant settlement here, the performance of such functions is necessarily restricted to special occasions.

2. Marriage

Marriage is patrilocal, and must be contracted by sister exchange with a young man of an arow (and settlement) of the opposite moiety. Consequently, the bride always comes from quite far away. The rules of the marriage trade are exacting, and often the parents concerned will take the necessary steps when the prospective spouses still are children, even small children.

The ideal situation is that a boy has a sister of his own who can be given away in exchange. If he has no real sister an adoptive sister may do. If there is neither, a young man (or his parents) must try to find a girl of his own settlement whose parents are willing to give her to him as his exchange sister. [Verschueren says here that she must be of the same jéi, but his comment that "people of another settlement, even if they are of the same arow, are not sufficiently interested in the marriage of a boy of another, related jéi" makes it clear that he had in mind settlement.] Other means for contracting a regular marriage were practically non-existent. A girl from another but related jéi [settlement!] could only be acquired as an exchange partner in the exceptional case that this other jéi still had to pay compensation for a murder committed in previous years. This happened once in Bupul, where Lucia Wale of the Inage-jéi was handed over as an exchange sister to the Kojaro-jéi because long ago, in Powoître, a man of the Kojaro had been murdered by an Inage man.

It was not possible among the Yéi to obtain a marriage partner by promising that a daughter born of the marriage would, in time, be ceded to the bride-givers to compensate for their present loss, a solution not uncommon among the Marind. For a sisterless young man the only way out was that of elopement with a widow who had
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not been taken in second marriage by her late husband's brother. On such occasions the pair usually enjoyed the secret aid of other women. Elopement with a girl hardly ever occurred. It constituted a casus belli which necessarily resulted in at least one murder in revenge.

Consequently, parents of an unequal number of sons and daughters normally tried to achieve a balance either by adopting a boy or a girl as a prospective exchange partner for a daughter or son, or by giving a supernumerary son or daughter to a couple in search of one. This was not always easy because the Yéi are fond of children and like to have a large family. Childless couples invariably try to acquire children by adoption. They may even ask for one, though (except between brothers) it is bad form to do so. In case of childlessness it is more proper to wait until some other couple takes pity. [Of course, this is quite a different case from that of the adoption of a child as an exchange brother or sister. From what has been said on this point, it must be concluded that active attempts at acquiring a child for this reason can only have been considered improper if the request were addressed to parents who were relative strangers.] Friendship, too, can be a reason for giving a child away, even if the friends belong to different settlements. However, a child can never be given to a family of the other moiety, because this would result in a boy marrying his own sister. [Note that here the term sister is used in a wide, classificatory sense!]

A more violent means of acquiring a child is by capturing one on a war raid. Such a child is adopted into the warrior's own jéi. In more recent years a new method of acquiring children has evolved, namely that of buying them from foreign tribes for imported goods which are so valuable to these tribes that they are willing to sacrifice a child for them. The custom has sprung up since the arrival of the whites. For the Yéi the only suitable partner in this trade is the Boadzi.

Editor's comment. Verschueren makes no comment about what happened upon the adoption of a boy as an exchange partner. Obviously, he stayed in the settlement of his adoptive parents after his marriage.

Marriage is, in principle, monogamous. The celebration of a marriage ceremony is restricted to a man's first marriage and, though polygyny occurs, only the first wife is considered to be her husband's proper wife. For polygyny various arguments are put forward, viz., in order of their social importance:

1. Sterility of the wife. As children are the real aim of a marriage, sterility is a normal, and also the most frequent, reason for taking a second wife.
2. Headmanship. People say that often it is not so much a case of the headman himself desiring a second partner, as of eagerness on the part of many women to share in the power and influence which go with headmanship and a polygynous marriage generally.
3. Levirate. A widow used to be inherited by her late husband's brother. Yet, he might refrain from taking her in marriage if he was too much in love with his own wife, or - as was more fre-
quently the case – if the latter too "effectively" resisted an extension of their household.

4. A polygynous family is more productive, has more gardens, better food and, consequently, more prestige.

5. The taboos on sexual intercourse preceding and following his wife's delivery might sometimes persuade a husband that, sexually, one wife did not suffice.

The procedure followed in concluding a second marriage is simple. [Verschueren here ignores the circumstance that the man has to cede a "sister" anyhow.] The woman prepares sago for her prospective husband, which, at her request, her brother hands over to him, saying: "My sister sends you this sago". If the man accepts the sago, the woman immediately collects her belongings and follows her new husband to his house. Even if the second wife is a young, unmarried girl, this is all that takes place in the way of ceremony.

A first marriage must be celebrated by the two contracting parties; it is a simple celebration, admittedly, but all the same an official ceremony. Once agreement has been reached by the parents of the prospective spouses, the two fathers with their brothers and such local prominent people as happen to be present sit down together in the bride's father's settlement to drink kava, the kava being presented by the boy's father. It is a trivial ceremony, serving no other purpose than to confirm that the bride has been promised. If the girl is adolescent, her prospective mother-in-law will fasten a thin string round her wrist as a public sign that the girl is betrothed.

The marriage feast is celebrated in the settlement of the boy. The exact date of the ceremony has been announced by a tui, a section of a dry sago-leaf rib into which as many little sticks have been thrust as there are nights left to sleep. In the meantime the boy's family sets out to pound sago and to collect game, fish, garden produce, kava, betel, and so on. On the appointed day, the bride is escorted to the boy's settlement. They do not enter it. The men sit down in a group beside the trail, at a distance of some 50 metres from the settlement. The women and the bride sit a little farther off.

In the settlement the women have cleaned the wake (the women's part of the house) and strewn the ground with croton twigs, flowers and fragrant leaves. They now strew the path leading from the wake to the place where the men are awaiting their guests. Then the young men, the bridegroom's age-mates, leave the soama (the men's part) with the bridegroom, and escort him to the spot where the kinsmen of the bride are waiting. The moment of their arrival is the moment for putting the finishing touches to the bridegroom's apparel, as well as to that of the bride. The latter is done by the women who have brought her and who now escort her to the spot where her kinsmen and her bridegroom are waiting. On her arrival the bridegroom arises. A friend hands him a bow and an arrow. The bow is carried, as usual, with the bowstring turned up. The girl seizes the rear end of the bow, and then everyone, the groom in front with the bride closely behind him, departs for the decorated wake of the bridegroom's kin.
Here the women of the house sit in a wide semi-circle, with the bridegroom's mother in front. When the groom has arrived in front of her, he bends his knees, turns around, and returns to his friends, who are waiting in front of the wake and now accompany him to the soama. In the meantime the bride has seated herself on the lap of, first of all, her mother-in-law, and then, one by one, the laps of all the other women sitting in attendance. Then the women arise, and they all give the bride a new sinak (apron) which she puts on the one over the other.

That night the men and women stay each in their own part of the house. In the soama coconut bowls are placed in a row, and the youngsters are invited to fill them with kava for the guests (cf. Chapter I, Section 3). Every time a guest has emptied his bowl he beats the open end on the ground in front of his hosts, "to let the kava catch". Now food is brought from the wake. The father (and in the wake the mother) of the bridegroom are the last to be served. The night is passed quietly. There is no dancing. [There cannot be any, either, as the kava, always consumed undiluted, does not act as a stimulant but as an opiate.]

The next morning the bride's family says goodbye and departs for home. The young women of the settlement, however, assemble and set out for the sago-grounds with the newly wed woman in their midst to make a new plantation. This ceremony is called negöl wagedo topo, "the playful cleaning of a garden". It is, indeed, quite an occasion and is celebrated with great hilarity. Not one man, not even the new husband, follows the women, who return only toward nightfall.

Editor's comment. One of the teachers' papers reports that in Donggeab the women's celebration in the sago grove was followed by other festivities, including an official meeting between the bride and bridegroom and a visit to the settlement of the bride's parents. As far as the main points are concerned, however, the report does not deviate greatly from Verschueren's description. It stresses the passive role of the bride, and even extends this to the groom, who is said to be as much taken by surprise by his marriage as his consort.

However that may be, in his description of the marriage procedure Verschueren was preoccupied with other problems. He wrote his papers on the Yéi-nan as a member of a team investigating the causes of depopulation among the Marind. It is only natural that in this context he wanted to contrast the sexual habits of the Yéi with those of the sex-obsessed Marind. As he had a bent for forceful expression, the contrast became all too easily a black-white one, dominated by the notion that the Yéi were better than the Marind. We are told repeatedly that the Yéi treated their womenfolk well. It is possible, even probable, that they were less given to chastising their wives than the Marind, but the position occupied by their women was decidedly lower than among the Marind. This becomes clear once we put the facts reported by Verschueren in the context of their social setting. This context differs widely from that prevailing among the Marind.

The latter lived in predominantly endogamous villages in which
the youngsters of both sexes had ample opportunity to meet their future marriage partners, their parents' preference for premarital chastity for the girls and efforts to keep the two sexes separated notwithstanding. Among the Yéi there was no such kind of village. Every settlement was strictly exogamous, and potential marriage partners always lived far away in another arow. One look at the map suffices to realize that these distances were, normally, considerable. This setting favoured a strict control of the sexual behaviour of girls. In the chapter on initiation, data will be put forward which demonstrate how effective the separation between boys and girls in fact was. This is corroborated by the fact, stated explicitly by Verschueren, that in the past girls never became pregnant before marriage. His informants emphatically insisted that such a thing was actually impossible, since the social control was too rigorous to provide an opportunity for this.³

In contrast with the Marind, Yéi-nan girls had no say in the choice of their marriage partner. From the facts as presented by Verschueren we have to conclude that a girl was always taken to some far-off, to her foreign, settlement to live with a man whom she had never met and where she enjoyed no other protection than that afforded by the community of women there, who were all in the same position as she. This picture is far too gloomy. Later (at the end of Chapter VIII) I will have cause to point out that normally a girl married into a community traditionally related to her own by connubial relations of long standing. Thus she must have found herself reunited in her husband's community with classificatory sisters and mothers originating from her own settlement. And she must have seen the men of her husband's group on the occasion of intercommunal festivities. Perhaps she had even had contacts with some of them (cf. Section 3 below).

Even so the marriage ceremonies as described above are enlightening. Marriage was a feast of the women, not of the men. The latter drank kava and fell asleep. But the women did not drink kava, and (though nothing is said about this) it is almost certain that they went on gossiping among themselves until the small hours. They first welcomed their new companion, and the next morning the young women would have a merry feast with the newcomer in what is specifically a women's domain, the sago grove. It constituted an expression of togetherness which, among fellow-sufferers, is not surprising. It is also an indication that the rigid separation of the sexes in their living quarters entailed so many close mutual contacts among the women as to give rise to a real women's community, a rare phenomenon as such. Another sign of the existence of a real community of this kind is the assistance given by the women to a widow wishing to elope.

This may testify that, in spite of their low legal status, they did not suffer inconsiderate or rude treatment by their spouses, who at home could not even reach their wives. Apparently a woman's life was bearable. An indication to that effect may be provided by the fact that divorce was decidedly rare. Another piece of evidence for this may be that the trend among Yéi males to imitate the Marind has not induced them to adopt the form of
sexual promiscuity known as *otiv bombari*, that is, the copulating in rapid succession of some six to twelve men with one woman. Once, on being told that the Marind sometimes perform *otiv bombari* as a means of warding off illness, the Yéi commented: "You can only become sicker that way".

With regard to sexual promiscuity Verschueren informs us that it was practised in two different forms. One was wife exchange by mutual agreement. Unfortunately we are not told whether the women also agreed. The other was that of generalized sexual promiscuity on the eve of a headhunt. Then, "the married men, by mutual agreement, had sexual intercourse with their [probably "each other's"] wives, after which both the men and women washed their genitals in a palm-leaf bowl, the contents of which were later that night sprinkled over the sleeping men by the *gab-elul*, or war-leader".

After this digression, let us return to Verschueren's text. It proceeds with, consecutively, the legal aspects of marriage, the limited extent of the practice of abortion, and birth and child-care. These subjects are presented here under the heading "Conjugal life".

3. Conjugal life

The Yéi did not treat their wives badly. The one task which the women had to perform unaided was that of sago pounding. For all their other tasks they might rely on their husbands for assistance. The latter, for their part, had a number of jobs in which they could not expect to be helped by their wives such as the manufacture of tools and the construction of a canoe.

In marriage, both spouses retain their personal belongings. The yields of a garden which they have made together are their common property, but anything acquired by either of them personally is his or her own. On her marriage, a wife comes to share her husband's rights of use to the land and fishing grounds of his group. She will never try to make sago in the plantations of her own parents, as this would be grossly offensive to her husband.

*Editor's comment*. Of course it would. These gardens are so far distant that the act would imply her having run back to her parents. Verschueren's remark is a typical example of his inclination to present Yéi-nan matrimonial relations in a somewhat rosy light.

Yet, the wife does not acquire any personal right to her husband's gardens. If he dies, she may continue to exercise these rights if she has children. If she has none, and if she is not claimed as a wife by her late husband's brother, she has to return to her own family. Landed property and claims to fishing-grounds are inherited in the male line and by males only. A woman's rights inside the territory of the group to which she has been born terminate with her marriage. [Undoubtedly they will be revived if, for whatever reason, she returns to her own descent group.]

Personal belongings such as tools and ornaments are often given
away well before death. If this has not happened, a man's more valuable belongings, such as an axe, pass to his eldest son. However, the widow usually also receives a proper share.

Notwithstanding the fact that their husbands are fond of children and strongly desire them, the wives of the Yéi-nan sometimes made use of contraceptives. Most of these were of a harmless, purely magical, nature. The most familiar method is that of disposing of the placenta in an abnormal way, such as by burying it under a bamboo stool or in a termite nest, or by wrapping it up in a coconut shell which is thrown into an eddy in the river. Everywhere in these parts the placenta is associated with strong magical powers, and by handling it thus the women hope to ward off or prevent a renewed pregnancy.

Editor's comment. The performance of this act, which naturally follows closely upon the woman's delivery, presupposes the complicity of at least one other woman. It thus constitutes another indication of the solidarity of the female sex.

There were also methods of terminating a pregnancy, some magical, others physical. The magical means included the use of certain leaves, herbs and plants which, by their form or manner of growth, suggest an association with the acts of shrivelling up, shattering, throwing away or tying up. They are all ineffectual. Really efficacious, but often disastrous, are the physical methods, such as tying off or massaging the abdomen, jumping down from a high place and landing on the heels, or lying down on a stone (either previously heated or not) or a coconut. All these methods are well-known but very rarely practised; the women realize altogether too well that the risks are considerable.

As soon as a woman is visibly pregnant, sexual intercourse is temporarily stopped. In every other respect she follows the usual course of her daily routine. Until the day of her delivery she is not subject to any specific taboos or rites.

Delivery does not take place in the wake but in the nearby bush, where the prospective mother, usually assisted by her mother-in-law, has constructed a simple shed well in advance. Shortly before the labour pains set in, a few older women accompany her to the hut. During the actual delivery little help is given, but the cutting off of the umbilical cord immediately after the birth is performed by one of the senior women. In the case of a boy this must be done by cutting in an upward and of a girl in a downward direction. The cord has prior to this been tied off with tree-bark fibre. It is cut off to a length of only two [?] centimetres. The mother used to stay in the hut for a few days, but she would be back again in the wake before the umbilical cord fell off. After the cord had dropped off, the mother would wear it in her ear.

The baby is washed immediately after birth. Renewed bathing is not allowed for some time. After the delivery the mother and father are subject to a protracted taboo on meat and fish. However, sago-worms, mice, rats, and so forth are allowed.

If a birth did not pass off normally, a ritual had to be perform-
ed. A woman who fails to give birth is supposed to have been struck by the yevale (spirit) Baderam. Some older women seat themselves around the woman in labour, who must now tell them the names of all the men and boys other than her husband with whom she has had sexual intercourse, either since the days of her youth or since her last confinement. [These questions throw considerable doubt on the claims about premarital chastity; see page 30.] Then one of the older women takes a croton twig and asks the patient whether these are really all, whether she has not forgotten or withheld any name. She then brushes the twig over the patient's body from head to feet, muttering: "Uke, tjuke gei tir, uke tjuke wale tir, uke tjuke matatnéam tir, uke tjuke ka ketsyon tir, uke tjuke u tir, uke tjuke tōttu tir", i.e., "Tear out the talons of the harrier, the talons of the ndamau, the talons of the male bird of paradise, of the black evening-bird, of the morning-bird". The formula refers to the talons of the harrier (gei tir) and of other birds which women as well as men used to wear through the perforations in the wings of their nose. In explanation of the formula informants said that Baderam has grasped the woman's neck and is now entreated to let go of her, whatever the talons (tir) by which she has grasped her. Comparing this ceremony with that of nakyasub (see Chapter VI), ceremonies which are also associated with Baderam, the supposition that Baderam is the cause of pregnancy forces itself upon us (cf. the myth). What results from it in this case is a child, in that of nakyasub, a sinak (woman's apron).

Four or fives days after her delivery the young mother blackens her body (not that of the baby) with charcoal and returns to her old place in the wake. So far the father has not seen the baby, and he does not try to look at it even now. He painstakenly keeps aloof, officially because he is ashamed. In reality he keeps aloof, as all the men do, because they might harm the baby. A yevale might be hiding among them and hurt the child. It is for this same reason that, if a member of another group enters the soama, a bamboo torch is beaten on the ground in front of the visitor's feet, in order to chase away the yevale of any other, hostile jēi which might be accompanying him.

Once the infant is able to sit, it is given a name. The name-giver is the father, and the name bestowed on the child is usually that of the father's father or mother, or of one of the father's siblings. Later the father may exchange the name with another one, usually because the child is suffering from an illness ascribed to a yevale. It is hoped that the child will thus escape the yevale's influence. At a more mature age children may adopt a self-chosen name. Name-giving is not associated with changes in age-grade. Head-names, taken from victims beheaded on a war raid, are not prevalent among the Yéi, though the southern villages, in imitation of the Marind, sometimes make an exception.

Twins are not killed, not even one of such twins. Apparently, a twin-birth is not considered magically dangerous. Usually, the parents keep one child for themselves and give the other away in adoption to some other couple.

The bogu, the taboo on meat [and fish?] to which the parents have submitted at the child's birth, is observed, not, as among the
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Marind, until the reappearance of the menses, but - reportedly - often until the child is able to walk or even to talk. Much depends upon the child. It must be able to participate in the consumption of the meat by the parents on the occasion of their discarding the taboo. Accustoming the child to solid food is a long-drawn process. At the age of four or five months this begins with mature bananas, later followed by roasted bananas. Little by little the child is familiarized with yams, taro, and finally sago, in that sequence. This does not mean that the process of suckling comes to an end. Weaning does not take place until the next pregnancy, and if this is not forthcoming, suckling may continue for several years.

Editor's comment. The teachers' papers provide a slightly different picture. They tell us that a father joins his wife immediately after her delivery, and stays with her in the hut until the time he is able to escort her and the baby back to their home. They also state that the food taboos imposed on both parents are very strict until the time the umbilical cord has dropped off, and even include a prohibition on drinking water. Once the above event has taken place the taboos become milder. They are of considerably shorter duration than Verschueren suggests. Probably these differences reflect changes from old-time customs (which enjoyed Verschueren's special interest) to the more modern practice of 1934, the year in which the teachers wrote their papers.

In this context also figure 2 of plate I is of interest. The artist, the Mission teacher Renwarnin, tells us that the two objects are a coconut half and a carved wooden object suspended near an infant's cradle to protect it against spirits and gevale (he uses the term dema), who take fright when they see these objects. Obviously, the carved wooden object is a kupör, or bull-roarer, here represented in the form of a spatula.

When the parents feel that their child is old enough to eat meat, the father takes his bow and arrows and goes into the forest to shoot a bird, a scrub-hen or a Goura pigeon. The first shot must not miss its mark, lest the child become troublesome and fretful. If the first bird shot is a beroga [scrub-hen?], the man will not kill it on the spot but will bring it alive to his wife for her to twist the bird's neck. The beroga is a noisy fellow and might turn the child into a cry-baby and a whiner. Together with their child, the husband and wife now eat meat again for the first time. The taboo is, indeed, protracted and demanding, though it is not as rigorously observed as is often suggested. The parents are allowed to participate in the eating of meat or game killed by someone else if they happen to be present when the meat is roasted.

The discarding of the taboo is not accompanied by any form of ceremony. The husband and wife unobtrusively return to the normal routine of their married life. The father is now allowed to take the child in his arms, something hitherto forbidden to him. Informants pointed out that formerly unmarried people were not allowed to embrace a child, because this would have adverse sexual effects.

During their first years children, boys as well as girls, stay with their mother. In the house they are allowed to go wherever
they wish. The invisible division of the house into a men's and a women's quarter has no consequences for them before puberty. During the day they accompany their mothers and grandmothers to the gardens and swamps, unless they are left behind under the care of some old woman. In the house there is no real family life. This has its proper setting in the gardens or sago groves.

Women and girls were not allowed to leave the house alone, but had to be accompanied by a mother-in-law or another woman. A husband who wished to go with his wife to their garden usually informed her of his intentions through his mother; this was the most practical way, because older men and women occupy the central part of the house. Food, too, was usually transmitted through the medium of an older woman.

Events which, among the Marind-anim, provided an occasion for a small family celebration - the piercing of the earlobes or the nasal septum, for instance - used to take place without any celebration at all, unless they coincided with some other festive occasion. Ordinarily, such operations were performed at a very early age.

*Editor's comment.* Mr. Renwarin, the mission teacher of Kekayu (Polka), tells us that there it was customary to celebrate the piercing of the earlobes with a feast organized by the combined parents of all the children, boys and girls, between 7 and 10 years of age. Guests were invited from everywhere in the surrounding areas. The night following their arrival was passed in singing (and dancing) *bendol*. At daybreak the children were assembled near a big pile of garden produce (*inter alia* yams, taro and kava) topped with two bagsful of sago. They were seated on top of the heap one after the other to have their earlobes pierced by their respective mothers' brothers. Finally, the garden produce was distributed among the guests.

Verschueren must have known about this kind of celebration but probably omitted to make mention of it because, to him, it was not originally Yéi but just another imitation of the Marind. The procedure as described by Renwarin does, in fact, point in that direction.