9. THE FUNCTIONING OF THE FAMILY SYSTEM

9.1. *General*

In the following pages we shall describe the functioning in actual reality of the West Indian family system in Paramaribo, as this determines to a large extent the behaviour of the lower-class Creoles from all age-groups with regard to such matters as childbirth, child-rearing, dealings with members of the opposite sex, old age and attitude towards death. For the discussion of the functioning of the family system in this connection a description of the life-cycle seems the most appropriate approach.

9.2. *The Desire for Children*

Lower-class Creole women are aware that they will in all likelihood not be supported by either a legal or a common law husband in later age. The instability of man-woman relationships, the unfavourable employment situation and the uneven sex ratio are all of them factors which render a woman's chances of having a legal or common law husband to look after her to the end of life low. As there are no government benefits for the aged (no such thing as old-age pensions are known in Surinam, and there is poor-relief only for the really destitute) people tend generally speaking to be wholly dependent on the generosity of their children when they grow older. Hence children (or foster-children) are on the whole regarded as people's sole security for old age.

In this connection the following notes on women's attitudes as regards the ideal size of families are of interest. I have collected the data on this as well as on behaviour with respect to contraception, which will be discussed further down, through interviews with lower-class Creole women at the Public Health Office (*Bureau voor Openbare Gezondheid,* from here on abbreviated as B.O.G.). For a description of the method followed here the reader is referred to section 3.2.3., while the interview form used is reproduced in appendix 4.

The B.O.G. sample comprised 180 women from nine different age-groups. Twenty women from each group were interviewed. The age-

groups selected were: 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, and 56 and over. Of the women interviewed 141 were natives of Paramaribo, 38 were born elsewhere in Surinam, and one in Curaçao. They described their occupations as follows:

Table 43. *Occupations of Women from the B.O.G. Sample*

Housewife	62
Charwoman	38
Laundress	11
Market Vendor	3
Milliner	11
Housekeeper	2
Agricultural Worker	1
Saleswoman	1
Assistant Teacher	5
Female Clerk	3
Laboratory Assistant	1
School Girl	5
No Occupation	37
Total	180

Of the women interviewed 48 were married, 40 were living in concubinage and 24 had a sexual relationship with a man who was neither a legal nor a common law marriage partner. The remaining 68 women, including widows of both legal and common law husbands, stated themselves to have no sexual relationships with men at the time.

The religious distribution of the respondents was as follows:

Table 44. *Religious Distribution of the Women of the B.O.G. Sample*

Moravian	90	50 %
Roman Catholic	63	35 %
Reformed Dutch	13	7 %
Lutheran	9	5 %
Other Religions	5	3 %
Total	180	100 %

Furthermore, 147 (82 %) of the women were discovered to have children. They had their first child at the following ages:

Table 45. *Age at Birth of First Child of Women of the B.O.G. Sample*

Age in Years	Number of Women
14—15	5
16—20	83
21—25	29
26—30	18
31—35	11
36—38	1
Total	147

So 67 % of the women interviewed were seen to have had at least one child before their 22nd year. The following answers were given to the question of "How many children should a woman have in her lifetime?":

Table 46. *Desired Number of Children of the Women of the B.O.G. Sample*

Number of Women	Desired Number of Children
—	0
—	1
7	2
15	3
58	4
46	5
20	6
5	7
4	8
9	9
16	No opinion
180	

The implication of this is that the average number of children desired is 4.8. Of the sixteen women who stated no opinion, 7 (including 5 of 56 and over) were in favour of letting the number of children depend on "the will of God" and one on "the dictates of nature", while two wished to let this depend on their financial circumstances. The remaining six women who stated no opinion gave no reason for withholding their answer.

The average number of children desired did not appear to vary greatly per age-group.

Table 47. *Average Number of Children Desired by the Women of the B.O.G. Sample*

Age-group		Average Number of Children Desired
16—20	(n = 20)	4.6
21—25	(n = 20)	4.7
26—30	(n = 20)	4.7
31—35	(n = 20)	5.3
36—40	(n = 18)	4.4
41—45	(n = 18)	5.2
46—50	(n = 19)	5.0
51—55	(n = 17)	4.9
56 en ouder	(n = 12)	4.4
Total	(n = 164)	4.8

Nor did the average number of children desired differ significantly according to whether a woman was legally married, was living in concubinage or was having some other kind of sexual relationship with a man at the time of investigation.

Table 48. *Average Number of Children Desired by Women of the B.O.G. Sample According to Marital Status*

	Number	Average Number of Children Desired
Legally Married Women	44	4.6
Women Living in Concubinage	37	4.9
Women with Men Friends	24	4.8
Women without Men Friends	59	4.8
Total (180—16 who stated no opinion)	164	4.8

Nor was there any substantial difference observable with respect to this number between the two principal religious groups, coming to 4.9 in the case of Moravian women and 4.7 for Roman Catholic women.

Although we should definitely handle the validity of the answers to the question about the number of children desired with caution, the above data do seem to warrant the conclusion, as far as I am able to judge, that there is relative homogeneity on the point of the desired

number of children among lower-class Creole women, irrespective of age, marital status or religion. Parenthood is held in high esteem. Besides their normal value as children — because, among other reasons, they are company for the women in question and are objects of affection with whom the latter have strong emotional ties — they also represent economic value, as they offer their mothers a kind of insurance against old age. Added to this there is the popular belief that the woman who is childless is unhealthy. People generally believe that every woman is predestined to bear the number of children God has fated her to bear. If a woman interferes with this, such as by using contraceptives, God will surely punish her with disease, especially "cancer". For some women the number of "knots" in their first-born's navelstring is an indicator of their reproductive "destiny". This popular belief was also observed by Judith Blake (1961, p. 194) in Jamaica. Apart from the belief that it is unhealthy for a woman to remain childless, many lower-class Creole men and women are inclined to feel that sexual abstinence is unhealthy and may cause insanity. Having children is regarded as a logical consequence of living a "natural life". Although this view would seem to preclude the possibility of children being undesired, this is nevertheless not always so. According to the table below the sample included 43 women who would have liked fewer children than they actually possessed.

Table 49. *Table Showing the Number of Women of the B.O.G. Sample who would have liked More or Fewer Children than they Actually Possessed or were Satisfied with the Number they had*

Number of Women	Present Number of Children	Average Number of Children Desired	Would like more than the present Number of Children	Is satisfied with the present Number	Would like fewer than the present Number
31	0	4.6	31	—	—
14	1	4.5	14	—	—
23	2	4.3	21	2	—
18	3	5.4	15	3	—
16	4	4.5	5	10	1
14	5	5.2	4	6	4
15	6	5.5	2	5	8
13	7	4.9	1	1	11
3	8	5.3	1	—	2
17	9	4.6	—	—	17
164		4.8	94	27	43

I would have expected these to be chiefly women without legal or common law husbands, which circumstance would seem to make a large family an economic burden. This did not in fact appear to be the case, as table 50 shows.

Table 50. *Marital Status of Women of the B.O.G. Sample who would like Fewer Children than they Actually Possess*

Age	Legally Married (n = 44)	Living in Concubinage (n = 37)	Woman with Man Friend (n = 24)	Woman without Man Friend (n = 59)	Total (n = 164)
16—20	—	—	—	—	—
21—25	—	1	—	1	2
26—30	2	2	—	—	4
31—35	1	—	—	2	3
36—40	3	—	1	3	7
41—45	6	1	—	—	7
46—50	5	—	—	2	7
51—55	1	3	—	5	9
56 +	2	—	—	2	4
Total	20	7	1	15	43

We are struck by the large number of married women who would have liked to have had fewer children than they actually possessed. The difference among them between the desired and the actual situation is probably due to the fact that: (1) unions between legally married people are generally speaking of longer duration than those between common law marriage partners, as we saw above, so that on the whole more children tend to be born of this type of union than of concubinages; and (2) married couples belong by and large to a higher level of lower-class society, many members of which cherish ambitions of rising to a higher social position. There is a general impression that many married couples realize too late that a large family constitutes a handicap in their struggle for social advancement. It is in connection with this second point that the reactions to pregnancies of unmarried daughters still living in differ between the higher and the lower lower classes. In the higher strata of lower-class society (as in the Creole middle class) this kind of event results in a loss of prestige. As soon as the girl is discovered to be pregnant she may be chastised or even turned out of the house. In these cases she will usually seek refuge with a befriended woman,

either a neighbour or an aunt, who a few days later will go and talk to the girl's mother. The mother will then usually persuade her husband to admit their daughter to the household again and to raise her child for her. The fate of these unmarried mothers who have been pardoned is not as a rule an enviable one. Their fathers will usually adopt a hostile attitude towards them, while in some cases they are treated as domestic servants and charged with the most menial of household tasks. This happens much less in the lower strata. Here there is usually no fuss if unmarried daughters still living in become pregnant. Nor is there question of any considerable loss of prestige here. The fact that a woman who is capable of bearing children does so is accepted as something quite matter-of-course here. For girls from the lower lower classes the birth of a child constitutes the *rite de passage* marking her transition from childhood to adulthood. Accordingly we sometimes find girls who have not yet entered motherhood treated as persons of much inferior standing by their girlfriends. One of the questions a childless young woman is commonly asked is: "Who will look after you when you are old?" The tendency to prove themselves as women induces many young women to have sexual relations with men who are in many cases financially incapable or who have no intention of entering into marriage or concubinage with them. As a result there are large numbers of girls who bear children while they themselves still belong to their natal household. For boys, too, the rule holds good that they have not proven themselves as men until they have fathered a child.

Categories 43 and 45 of table I, appendix 3, show the various types of household to include 234 children (126 sons and 108 daughters) of resident daughters. Of these 234 children 78 % appear to be illegitimate. The ties between these children and their mothers are usually very loose. Such children are in most cases reared by the parents, and in many cases the mother only, of the girl. These children will often address their grandmother as "Ma", while calling their real mother by her Christian name.

The 40-years-old widow K. V., who is head of her household, is living together with her daughter R. A. (19) with her two children (of 4 and 2) and her own two sons (7 and 3) in a small dwelling in an outer suburb of Paramaribo. One afternoon four years ago, when the head of the household was away from home, a man from the neighbourhood came and dropped in for a visit, and begot a child with the then 15-year-old R. A. After that she had another child by a Dutch soldier stationed in Surinam. Neither of these fathers does anything for the support of

their children, gives their mother any money for them or visits them. R. A. goes to work as a housemaid and this way brings money into the household. The head looks after both her own two children and those of R. A., who call her "Ma". They call their natural mother by her Christian name and regard her as an elder sister. The head views R. A.'s having these children as part of the natural course of things. She has never reproached her daughter with her escapades, and never makes any attempt to stop her from seeing other men. She believes that every woman is predestined to bear the number of children God has decided to grant her. She considers it a sin to interfere in this course of events, as one must resign oneself to it.

If women with such "premarital" children later on enter into marriage or concubinage they will sometimes refrain from taking these children with them into their new household. Though this is sometimes because the husband refuses to adopt these children, it is mostly a result of the grandmother's refusing to part with these grandchildren, which she has come to regard entirely as her property. Categories 44 and 46, table I, appendix 3, reveal that the sample includes 44 "children of non-resident daughters". Of these, 32 are included in households of type G — female head without legal or common law husband. Of these 44 children, 36 appeared to be of illegitimate birth.

The informant C. P. (28), who is living in concubinage and has two children by her common law husband, told me she had a "premarital" child who is living with her mother. Her mother refuses to give the child up to her because she thinks C. P. gives it too many "thrashings" and would leave it in a crèche all day, as the informant has a part-time job as housemaid. When she goes to work she drops her two children in at the crèche. C. P. 's premarital child comes to stay the weekend with her once a fortnight.

It is an evitable consequence of the system that many premarital children change households during childhood. If their grandmother, with whom they are living, dies their real mother is then compelled to take them into her household, which often arouses much opposition from her partner. One solution that offers itself in these cases is to have the child adopted as foster-child by some other person, mostly a female relative. This latter is done often and without much ado by women who feel they haven't enough children of their own. They usually bring these (foster-)children up as their own. One of the more objectionable features of this practice is that foster-children tend sometimes to be used as unpaid domestic servants. Especially in the old days it was common

for people to adopt a child, mostly from a plantation, into their household so as to have the benefit of its services. As boys are generally less useful for housework these were mostly girls (cf. *Encyclopaedie,* 1914-'17, p. 436). This system of adopting foster-children is sometimes condemned as a form of "slavery in disguise".

9.3. *Birth Control*

Although it may be posited as a general rule that the lower-class Creole woman wants children and in most cases eagerly looks forward to their arrival, there are nonetheless also women who try to prevent or terminate pregnancies. These are often women who realize that, as their family disposes over insufficient income, it would be economically irresponsible to have more children. Or they may be girls from the upper lower classes who want no children for the time-being because they wish to finish their education first, because they have a job or because they are afraid of reducing their chances on the marriage market by having children.

In spite of the high growth rate in Surinam (almost 4 %, see section 2.5.) no systematic government effort has so far been made to promote family planning. This may have something to do with the interests of the different political parties, mostly formed along ethnic lines, being served best by increasing the number of their voters. It is more particularly the Creoles who are afraid of being numerically eclipsed by the Hindustanis, as we saw above.

An interest is being shown at present by the churches, especially the Moravian Church, in the study of social problems in connection with the family of their (chiefly Creole) members, with the possibilities of responsible family planning also coming under consideration.

There was also a special work group, composed of private citizens, set up to study this problem in 1965. But this interest on the part of the churches and private initiative has not so far led to a systematic, in-depth study being made of the problems in connection with family planning. I would suggest that if this problem should ever be studied at greater depth at some future time, the fact that it will be far from easy to convince lower-class Creole women that smaller families are economically more feasible unless adequate old age benefits are introduced should definitely be taken fully into account. Some women go as far in their anticipation of such a provision for their old age as to refuse to accept any payments for their children's upbringing from the latter's fathers

from fear lest this will put the children under an obligation to look after their father as well when he grows old.

As is the case in virtually every culture, the Creole subculture of Surinam has also possessed of old its own methods of preventing or terminating unwanted pregnancies. Kuhn (1828, pp. 30 ff.) reports in his work on the conditions among plantation slaves in Surinam that female slaves were acquainted with methods of procuring abortion. As for the popular methods of inducing abortion and preventing conception in practice at the present day, I was given information on these by a number of men and women.

A woman wishing to terminate a pregnancy will try to do so in the first place by taking one of a variety of draughts and potions. The drinking of boiled stout mixed with Epsom salts is well-known in this connection. This is taken together with the pulp of certain unripe fruits, such as pineapples, avocados, bananas or pumpkins. Women sometimes also experiment with the concentrated extract of the leaves of the *Azadirächta índica* tree, which though native to Asia is planted widely in the compounds of Hindustanis (cf. Ostendorf, 1962, p. 137). Other well-known methods include the drinking of lemon juice mixed with extra strong coffee, or vinegar with orange juice. The juice extracted from the seeds and leaves of the *Chenopódium ambrosioídes* is also sometimes used; this is also taken as a medicine against worms, according to Ostendorf (1962, p. 25). I was further told of the practice of taking quinine and phenol. Karbaat (1964, p. 112) mentions the use of Apiol, a herb that is sold in the market. These concoctions, or variations thereof, are either prepared by the women themselves or administered to them by men or women making their living by this. The latter may also provoke abortions by mechanical means. The method of Javanese women, who possess the art of inducing abortion through massage, is well-known in this connection. There are also rumours about doctors, midwives and nurses in Paramaribo who are prepared to procure abortions against payment. It was hardly feasible for me to gather statistics concerning these phenomena within the scope of my research. A number of doctors assured me that illegal abortion is on the increase, however. They are being consulted more and more by women who have sustained serious injury as a result of the practices of illegal abortionists or their own attempts to induce abortion.

Apart from popular medicines for provoking abortions, Creole women have been familiar of old with a number of supposed contraceptive medicines. The best-known of these is the abovementioned extract from

the leaves of the *Azadirachta indica*. This should be swallowed either just before or just after copulation. According to one informant this made conception impossible as it "turned the blood bitter". Another well-known method is that of douching the vagina with the juice of the leaves of the aloe after coition. Other women wishing to prevent pregnancy may consult Javanese *dukuns* — i.e., men or women practising popular medicine. Many *dukuns* possess the art of causing prolapsus of the uterus by external massage, which makes conception practically impossible. This method has been imported by Javanese immigrants. It is not free from danger, as it commonly causes menstrual disorders, coupled with severe back-aches. Annemarie de Waal Malefijt (1963, pp. 127 and 128), who mentions the method in her book on the Javanese in Surinam, states that according to doctors in Paramaribo it usually causes permanent sterility. The *dukuns* claim to be able to cause the uterus to revert to its normal position through further massage, however, thus making it possible for the patient to have children again if she wishes. Only one informant from the B.O.G. sample stated herself to have undergone this form of treatment. However, 59 of the women interviewed (i.e., 33 %) were aware of its existence.

Although many lower-class Creoles still take recourse to popular medicine from lack of money or ignorance, there is also a marked tendency especially among the younger generation to show greater faith in modern medicine, also with respect to the use of contraceptives. Information on the availability of such devices is still scanty, however. There is a more or less illegal traffic in such popular contraceptives as condoms, foam tablets and jellies, but many women (and men) do not know their way to the shopkeepers trading in these, or are embarrassed about approaching them. In addition the prices of these articles are too high for many people to use them regularly. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for members of the medical profession to be uncooperative when approached by lower-class Creole women wishing to adopt family planning. One woman from the B.O.G. sample, a mother of seven, told me that when she once asked a Creole doctor for contraceptives he had refused to help her. He justified his refusal to her by asking whether she wanted Surinam to be taken over by the coolies (Hindustanis). There are on the other hand also doctors who are willing to lend their cooperation, mainly through the sterilization on a fairly wide scale of women who wish no more children.

In order to check on how conversant lower-class Creole women are with the various methods of preventing conception I asked women from

the B.O.G. sample to state with which of the contraceptives devices and methods listed below they were familiar. Of the 180 respondents, 157 stated themselves to be acquainted with one or more of the methods listed in the following table.

Table 51. *Conversancy of Women of the B.O.G. Sample with Contraceptive Devices and Techniques*

	Age			
	16—30 (n = 54)	31—45 (n = 54)	45 + (n = 49)	Total (n = 157)
The Rhythm Method	12	22	3	37
Coitus Interruptis	14	17	1	32
Douching	9	18	4	31
Condom	48	36	28	112
Pessary	11	23	5	39
Foam Tablets	30	29	8	67
The Contraceptive Pill	31	30	23	84
Female Sterilization *	38	37	38	113
Male Sterilization	5	4	—	9
Contraceptive Jellies	23	20	5	48
Other Methods	1	—	—	1

* As distinguished from the abovementioned Javanese method of female sterilization by massage.

Upon further questioning only 37 of the women stated themselves to be using or to have ever used in the past one or more of these methods. Their distribution according to age was as follows:

Table 52. *Table Showing the Number of Women of the B.O.G. Sample who had at Some Time used Contraceptive Devices and Techniques and those who had no Past or Present Experience with these, set out According to Age*

Age	Has Experience with Contraceptives	Has no Experience with Contraceptives	Total
16—30	16	44	60
31—45	18	42	60
45 +	3	57	60
Total	37	143	180

These 37 women who had used contraceptives were seen to have adopted the following methods on one or more occasions.

Table 53. *Table Setting out According to Age the Women from the B.O.G. Sample who had used one or more Contraceptive Devices or Techniques*

	Age			
	16—30 (n = 16)	31—45 (n = 18)	45 + (n = 3)	Total (n = 37)
Rhythm Method	—	4	—	4
Coitus Interruptis	—	2	—	2
Douching	—	1	—	1
Condom	7	1	2	10
Pessary	—	2	—	2
Foam Tablets	1	1	—	2
The Pill	8	5	—	13
Contraceptive Jellies	1	—	—	1
Female Sterilization	—	7	—	7

Condoms and the pill appear to be the most widely used devices among women from the 16-30 age-group. The pill constitutes a method that is popular in the middle and upper classes, but is now also gaining ground among the lower classes, mostly as a result of women employing domestic servants advising their female servants to start taking it. Some of them even pay the costs involved "if they have a reliable maid". The price of the pill is in most cases too high for women from the lower classes.

The number of women between the ages of 31 and 45 who have had themselves sterilized is relatively high (7 of the 60, i.e., 11.7 %). As elsewhere in developing countries, the surgical method of sterilization is the most widely used in Surinam. But, as a spokesman for the Public Health Service informed me, the operation is usually performed for medical rather than social reasons, such as in cases where a woman's health would make it dangerous for her to have more children.

As only 37 of the 180 women stated themselves to be adopters, we might well ask what is preventing the many others from using contraceptive devices or techniques. The following reasons were stated by the group of non-users (see table 54).

The view that one shouldn't use contraceptives because it is bad for one's health and/or because God forbids it was the most frequently stated.

As we are able to infer from the table, it is chiefly elderly women who have religious objections to the use of contraceptives. This in turn influences the behaviour of younger women, as older women are virtually the only persons they can turn to for advice on such matters. Because

Table 54. *Reasons against Using Contraceptive Devices or Techniques stated by Women of the B.O.G. Sample, listed According to Age*

	Age			
	16—30 (n = 44)	31—45 (n = 42)	45 + (n = 57)	Total (n = 143)
Wanted children	6	12	7	25
Husband was against it	—	2	2	4
Bad for health	10	6	6	22
Religious grounds	4	5	26	35
Religious grounds and bad for health	2	1	7	10
Too much fuss	1	—	—	1
Too expensive	1	—	—	1
Don't know how to go about getting contraceptives	1	5	1	7
Other reasons	2	2	3	7
Not interested	17	9	5	31

they are badly informed it is not very likely that there will be any dramatic increase in the use of contraceptives as long as there is no official body to supply adequate free counselling, as long as the West Indian family system, according to which children constitute a form of insurance for old age, remains in force, and/or as long as the government fails to provide old-age benefits in Surinam.

I have given no attention in this tentative exploration among lower-class Creole women as regards their attitudes to contraceptives and the idea of family planning to the extremely important role of men in taking decisions in this connection. If a further study is ever made of this subject, this aspect should most certainly be given full attention (cf. Blake, 1961).

9.4. *Traditional Practices in Connection with Pregnancy and Childbirth*

It is extraordinarily difficult to indicate any fixed pattern with respect to practices observed in connection with pregnancy and childbirth. The group under study is an urban one, which generally implies the existence of a wider range of alternatives than in rural areas. Added to this, the group in question is resident in a plural society the different ethnic groups of which are prone to mutual cultural influencing, thus increasing the number of alternatives, including those with respect to childbirth

and pregnancy, still further. In many of these customs traces of African and European popular beliefs, or a mixture of both, are discernible. A number of data concerning these customs will be furnished in the pages below. I should stress at the outset, however, that they are no longer observed by all lower-class Creoles.

In general pregnant women are treated with great consideration by their environment here. Every effort is made to ensure that mothers-to-be are as comfortable as possible. This stems from fear lest the unborn child be adversely affected by quarrels, reproaches and excessive physical exertion. The pregnant woman is also given whatever foods she fancies, where possible. This is done partly in connection with the prevalent belief that, in order to protect the unborn child, the mother must observe the father's taboos with regard to food as well as her own. There are still many lower-class Creoles who believe that it is possible to prevent certain skin diseases, including leprosy, by abstaining from eating certain foods which are taboo to them. These taboos vary from person to person. The forbidden foods are referred to as a person's *trefu* (cf. Simons, 1959, p. 53). This *trefu* is inherited exclusively from one's paternal kin, although it may sometimes occur for a person's *trefu* to be revealed in a dream to some relative or friend, mostly a woman, at his birth. It is further possible for a person to be forced to abstain from eating certain foods as a result of wearing particular amulets, and thus acquire a *trefu* during his lifetime. Herskovits and Herskovits (1936, p. 37) observed that if a woman has a child with persistent skin disorders in spite of its observing its father's *trefu,* this is taken as a sure sign that the woman has had the child by a man other than her acknowledged husband. Such a woman is doing her child a grave harm by not enquiring about its father's *trefu,* as it will then have to grow up in ignorance of the food taboos of its real father (cf. Lampe, 1928, pp. 545 ff.).

In order to protect the foetus against black magic (*wisi*), some women may consult an *obiahman* (medicineman), who will supply them, against payment, with some charm or other (*tapu*) with which to effect this. This *tapu,* usually a bottle filled with some liquid, is placed by the woman above the entrance to the house (cf. Herskovits and Herskovits, 1936, p. 35). Belief in this practice is rapidly disappearing, as far as I am able to judge. I came across only a few instances of pregnant women who had "placed a charm" in the course of my field work.

Extra expenses have to be made in order to give the new arrival a suitable welcome. Where money reserves are scarce this often entails

having to raise a loan with relatives or friends or at the pawnbroker's. Because of these financial sacrifices which have to be made, the birth of a child is not always an event looked forward to with unmixed joy. Common law (and sometimes also legal) husbands may sometimes abscond on hearing that their partner is pregnant or at the approach of the birth. The poorest may as a result give their infants away to people desiring to adopt a "foster-child". This is done especially frequently by female heads of households without a legal or common law husband, who are therefore their household's breadwinner. It will often be impossible for them to exercise this latter function if they have another infant to take care of. So they may give away their infants to other people to prevent their other children being reduced to utter poverty.

Paramaribo counts a large number of well trained midwives and women with experience in attending women in childbirth. Many women prefer to go to hospital for the birth of their first baby. It has long been the custom for women not to have their children at home — this being a corollary also of the overcrowded conditions in most homes. Benoit observed as early as the beginning of the 19th century: "... on a établi à Paramaribo des maisons tenues par des sages femmes et où les négresses esclaves qui sont enceintes, vont faire leurs couches aux frais de leurs maîtres" (Benoit, 1839, p. 54). A woman will only have her first child at home if there is absolutely no money at all for a hospital delivery.

The mother-to-be will get in touch with a midwife or the consultation bureau at a fairly advanced stage of her pregnancy, usually after the sixth or seventh month. In the old days, and sometimes even today, some elderly woman, usually a female relative with experience in such matters, was placed in charge of affairs at childbirth. These women upheld all kinds of customs and practices in connection with birth and pregnancy. That they have not disappeared altogether is illustrated by the observance of the customs described below in connection with many — though definitely no longer all — pregnancies and births. Midwives trained according to modern methods are helping to suppress many of these customs, but their influence is not always strong enough to effect their complete elimination.

As probably everywhere in the world, the mother-to-be in Surinam is bombarded with all kinds of advice and admonitions. Thus a great many people believe that sexual intercourse during pregnancy is conducive to an easy birth and will make the new-born infant stronger and

healthier than if the mother has been abstinent. Some women even continue to have sexual intercourse right up to the moment just before the birth in order to induce labour. Similar behaviour was observed by Kerr (1963, p. 29) among the Negro population of Jamaica. In order to accelerate parturition, women may also drink herb extracts, swallow traditional brews or take steam-baths by sitting atop a tub of steaming water mixed with herbs.

There exists a belief as regards the child's appearance that if it is conceived before its mother's menses it will be dark-skinned at birth. If it is conceived after menstruation, "when all is clean", it will have a light skin at birth and keep this all its life. Women who have had a series of miscarriages or stillbirths may "sell" their unborn infants for a token sum to a man who is not the father in order to avoid a recurrence. The objective of this is to avert *wisi* or the malevolence of some wrathful Yorka, for instance. Although such a child will become the rightful "property" of the buyer after birth, it will usually remain with its mother. The owner of the child — mostly some good friend — will spoil it in childhood, such as by giving it occasional presents. Male children born after being thus "purchased" formerly had their earlobes pierced like female children. This symbolized the fact that they had actually died, but had "come back". On the plantations such men in former times used to wear earrings.

It is interesting to note what Herskovits observes with regard to a group of Negroes in the U.S. in this connection, viz.: "A technique of tricking the malevolent spirits, described as occurring among these Georgia Negroes, is equally African: 'If you wish to raise your newborn child, sell it to someone for 10 or 25 cents and your child will live' " (Herskovits, 1964, p. 189).

Expectant mothers having their babies at home duly make the necessary preparations. They make up a lying-in bed out of old rags or newspapers, as some choose to lie on the floor during the birth so as to save what is in many cases the only bed in the house. This custom is not approved of by all midwives, but sometimes there is no other alternative because of the total absence of a bed. The other children are sent to stay with friends or relatives before the birth is due. If the woman in question has a husband he is usually present at the birth, as is her mother or some other female relative.

Some women in labour will scream at the top of their voice, as this is believed to reduce the pain. This belief is slowly disappearing at present, and there are women who are ashamed to make so much noise. After

parturition the child is wrapped in a cloth, whereupon the mother is attended to first. The umbilical cord and placenta are rolled up in a newspaper and later buried near the house in a special pit, usually behind the privy. It is believed that if this is not done the child may become feeble-minded. The new mother, or the female relatives present, subject the navelstring to a close scrutiny, as the number of "knots" in it is supposed to foretell the number of other children to which the woman will give birth, as was mentioned above. There is also a belief that the deeper the pit in which the navelstring and placenta are buried, the longer it will be before the woman has another child. So as to make sure she will have more children a woman may in some cases desire the navelstring to be buried on top of the placenta, with a coin placed on top of it or some salt scattered over it. The burial usually takes place with the assistance of the midwife. These customs in connection with the afterbirth are still so much alive as to cause some women who have had hospital deliveries to ask to be given the navelstring and placenta to take home in order to be buried there. If a child is born with its navelstring twisted around its neck or if a newborn infant's placenta leaves its mother's body immediately after the birth, a sapling may be planted on top of its buried afterbirth by way of commemoration of such an unusual event. The end of the umbilical cord that remains attached to the infant's body for a few days after birth before dropping off also possesses a specific function. Some mothers dry it in the sun and then keep it rolled up in a piece of cloth. Six to eight months later it is burnt on top of a tin and the remaining ashes are mixed in minute quantities through the child's food. Popular belief has it that this prevents infantile convulsions.

Herskovits (1964, p. 189) observes that "The care used in disposing of the placenta and the treatment of the navelcord are also largely African". He further reports that, "Certain Negro attitudes reported from the United States toward abnormal births are highly specific in their African reference. Twins, the child after twins, children born with teeth or with a caul or other peculiarities are, among African folk, regarded as special types of personalities whose spiritual potency calls for special treatment." In Paramaribo, too, these beliefs prevailed. Twins are believed to be clairvoyant. According to the popular belief they dream more frequently than ordinary people.

One informant, a man in his sixties who claimed to be endowed with second sight, told me he was born immediately after three sets of twins. He was therefore a *dosu,* i.e., a person born after twins, who is also

supposed to possess clairvoyant powers, though to a lesser degree than actual twins (cf. Bastien, 1961, p. 495). As his mother's youngest child or *tapu bere,* moreover, he was thoroughly spoilt during childhood, as is customary here, and this had according to him strengthened his powers still further.

New mothers take daily herb baths for about six weeks after their confinement. The herb used is called *jara-kopi,* or sometimes *faja pau* (*Siparuna guianénsis*). It is supposed to make the vagina "like that of a young girl". Modern mothers, or women without relatives in the country, whence this herb has to be imported, use Dettol for these baths.

So as to be able to breast-feed their children properly many women drink an extract of *Fini bita (Phyllánthus amárus)* leaves for some length of time; this plant is sold in the market. It is supposed to promote the baby's growth, especially because it reputedly ensures that it has regular motions. Women sometimes also drink stout to boost their milk supply. Sometimes female relatives or friends will massage the new mother inorder to get her abdominal muscles back in shape.

9.5. *Childhood*

On its first day of life the infant is given molasses and water to drink. This old-fashioned practice is at present replaced largely by that of giving the baby water with sugar and milk, on the advice of the collective midwives. If the mother is able to breast-feed the infant it will usually be put to the breast quite soon. The admonitions of midwives to feed children according to a fixed time schedule are usually ignored, and most mothers feed their infants as soon as they begin to cry. Midwives try to persuade mothers to stop breast-feeding their infants after 8-9 months, but many women try to extend this period in the belief that they are preventing pregnancy this way. Sometimes a child is not weaned until its second year. But the majority of women reject this as a "Javanese" practice. Children are not put onto solids until their fourth month, when they are fed on porridge consisting of shredded cassava cakes, or patent baby foods if there is enough money. As soon as a mother wishes to start weaning her infant she will rub her breasts with bitter aloe or the hot "Madame Jeanette" species of cayenne pepper. A child is supposed to be completely weaned after one or two attempts to feed from its mother's breasts after they have been rubbed with this. This rather abrupt method of weaning is connected with the custom that forbade nursing mothers to have sexual intercourse in former times.

At the present day this is usually resumed "as soon as possible", according to one female informant.

As soon as the new mother rises from childbed she will carry the baby around the house to show it where it has come to live. To ward off the evil eye (*ogri ai*) she will rub the child behind the ears with blue dye by way of counter-charm. She may also attach a safety pin with a blue bead to its clothing for this purpose. Whenever a mother has cause to suspect that the evil eye has fallen on the child despite these precautions she will bathe it in water mixed with blue dye or lick the child's face clean, spitting out the substance she has licked up far away from her.

Baby girls have their earlobes pierced with a red-hot needle at 10 days. A red thread is passed through the hole to keep it from closing. This is done in order to enable them to wear earrings when they are older.

Most children are christened in one of the Christian churches. The godparent who sponsors the child at baptism — usually a woman — is under an obligation to bring up the child if anything should happen to its parents. In town this vow is no longer taken as seriously as it was in former days. Not all children have as close relationships with their godparents as was the case formerly, when it was customary for god-children to visit their godparents often.

In order to cut down on the family washing, lower-class Creole mothers often dress their younger children in clothes that cover only the upper part of their bodies in and around the house. Little boys commonly run around stark naked. Children are subjected to quite rigourous toilet-training, attended with many spankings. The child is taught to urinate on the ground outside the house in the daytime; and it is brought to the privy in the yard or put on a pot to defecate. In the more prosperous households, where there is usually an indoor toilet, children are not as a rule trained to urinate or defecate outside.

A child that is late with its toilet-training is ridiculed and derided by its brothers, sisters and playmates. A form of punishment used to correct this in the 19th and even at the beginning of the 20th century is described as follows by Lammens (1816-'22, p. 102): "If a little boy or girl is caught soiling its bed it has a *kurekure,* a long tapering basket with long feathers stuck in it, placed on its head. In addition a number of live toads are tied around the culprit's body and a pot to its back. It is then conducted along several streets amid constant banging on the latter and the jeering of its playmates." Such spectacles are supposed to have occurred right up to the 1930's.

Child-beating is resorted to a great deal, not only during the toilet-

training of infants but also during the rest of the children's upbringing, this disciplinary method in some cases being pursued until the age of seventeen. Corporal punishment, or threats thereof, constitute the most common form of disciplining youngsters. People responsible for bringing up children are often heard uttering threats of thrashings or whippings. And these do not always remain mere threats, for fathers and mothers are often seen to inflict painful punishments by striking children with the hand or with any suitable object that happens to be ready at hand, such as a clothes-hanger, brush, belt or stick, when angry. No part of a child's body is safe from blows, although these are mostly aimed primarily at the legs and buttocks. In some of the yards it is not uncommon even for older children (especially boys) to be suspended naked by the arms from the branch of a tree and given a thrashing with a stick, as was done during slavery.

Corporal punishments are not confined solely to beatings. A girl of 17 told me that the serious burns she had on her legs had been caused by her mother's throwing hot oil from a frying-pan at her in the middle of a violent quarrel.

Instances of such extreme forms of punishment, which are not very far short of bodily assault and cruelty, seem to be fairly frequent. I was told that some mothers burn their children with hot clothes irons "to make them feel". One boy who had been caught pilfering had a cross-wise incision made in his fingers. The pedagogical logic behind this was that the scars would remind him of the sinfulness of stealing for the rest of his life.

Although most fathers and elder brothers do not seem to be inclined to spare the rod, it is chiefly mothers who mete out punishments. Most beatings are inflicted by female heads of households without legal or common law husbands. These women, who usually have to go out to work in the mornings, are as a rule tired and irritable on coming home. As a result the strain of running the household and having to put up with naughtiness from the children will simply become too great. These mothers will work off their feelings of vexation on the children by punishing the latter often and severely, even for the slightest offences. The notion that regular beatings are essential for a child's normal development is widespread. When I asked one woman why she beat her 10-year-old son with a leather strap every day (the boy's legs displaying infected weals) she replied that he always refused to do his homework and wanted to do nothing but play outside all the time. A daily beating was necessary for him, although it seemed to have little effect, according

to her. A young woman who once lashed out to slap a toddler stated the opinion that "beating is good, since then you don't have to forbid the youngster anything".

Lower-class Creole women tend to feel that the right to beat their children is reserved strictly to themselves and their husbands (or eldest sons and mothers). If a mother catches any stranger beating her child she will react most aggressively. This provided a frequent source of conflict wit teachers. Although corporal punishment in schools has been prohibited for some time, many teachers still consider it the most effective form of chastisement and hence have continued to use it.

Boys and girls usually play together until the age of puberty. Boys who go around with girls too much are called "sissies" by their friends. Hence there is some division according to sex observable in groups of playing children, though this is rather vague and arbitrary.

Parents seldom give their children an adequate sex education. Boys are told not to masturbate because it purportedly causes insanity or because, according to the prevailing belief, it can cause *ejaculatio praecox* in later life. But boys are ridiculed sooner than punished if caught masturbating, in which case the emphasis is put on their acting "like a little boy". Girls are seldom informed about menstruation beforehand. A number of female primary school teachers informed me that it is not uncommon for girls to undergo their first period as a deeply shocking experience because of fears that they may bleed to death. The only information a mother is likely to impart to her daughter after this event is that she is thenceforth to shun all physical contact with boys. But she will seldom go into greater detail and inform the child of the secrets of procreation. Lower-class Creole women tend to feel extremely embarrassed at discussing such matters with their children. An important factor in this — apart from certain Christian religious notions — is fear lest the child may stop respecting its mother. In contrast, grown-ups tend to discuss the most intimate aspects of the man-woman relationship with surprising frankness and facetiousness as a subject of amusement among themselves, in the presence of members of both sexes.

Hence boys and girls have to rely for the greater part on what they can find out from their friends or are able to infer from certain goings-on at home as far as their sex education is concerned. So the ideas they form in this respect are often entirely false.

Despite the inadequate information and the embarrassment at discussing sex with children, a girl's first period is even so not allowed to pass

altogether unnoticed. Many girls receive presents of such things as a tiny gold ring or pendant or earrings to mark the occasion. This is supposedly good for a girl's soul or (A)kra, which is believed to demand some such offering.

There are a great many magical beliefs associated with menstruation. A woman is avoided as much as possible by her environment during her menses — it is especially the men who try to avoid all contact with her at this time. No lower-class Creole male will have sexual intercourse with a woman having her period. This is carried to such lengths as to cause many men to refuse to let a woman cook for them during this time, because they believe she will contaminate the food. They will do anything — have their meals at a Chinese restaurant, cook their own meals or eat bread — to avoid this. There are also many women who refuse to eat food prepared by a menstruating woman. Women who make a living by selling food, such as biscuit vendors, for example, are mostly women in their menopause. This way their customers may be sure that the food they buy has not been prepared by a woman in her menses. Among the Bush Negroes, too, it is forbidden for a menstruating woman to cook her husband's meals (cf. Van Wetering, 1966, p. 53). Among the Saramaccans women having their period are placed in a hut by themselves (*Datta wosu*). As was observed earlier, menstrual blood may be used for certain magic purposes. A woman wishing to engage a man's affections, for instance, will mix some of this blood into his food or drink. Blood is believed to contain considerable "vital essence", as it is called, while this is believed to be present in even stronger concentration in menstrual blood. Quite possibly there are traces of Jewish belief, in addition to African elements, in the prevailing taboos with regard to menstruation. After all, many of the former plantation owners were members of this faith. As Leviticus 15, verse 19, ordains, a menstruating woman "shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even."

As regards a young person's first sexual experiences we would make the following observations. Boys are on the whole allowed greater freedom than girls. They usually gang up with boys from the same neighbourhood or the same school. These gangs play an important role during a boy's early life as well as the rest of his adult life. With the members of this gang the boy, and later on the grown-up man, goes to the cinema, soccer matches, parties and so on. These gangs are as a rule very heterogeneous on the point of age. The younger boys try to imitate their older friends, usually the leaders of the gang, in every way. These

gangs usually have fixed meeting-places, such as outside the house of one of the members, or in one of the local Chinese stores, where there are often a few benches offering patrons seating while enjoying a drink or a snack. It is in these stores that the boy has his first taste of alcohol and cigarettes. Here he sits listening with rapt attention to the tales told by the older boys about their — real or imaginary — sexual experiences. He begins to realize that if he wishes to count for someting with his friends he, too, must be able to tell stories of his "experiences". The latter circumstance may prompt some boys to go to one of the prostitutes whose addresses are known in the gang. While in other cases a boy may start an affair with an older woman — usually someone who has been abandoned by her husband — who will "initiate" him. First sexual experiences with girls of the same age are much rarer.

The latter is true also with respect to girls. Although parents and elder brothers will try to protect their daughters or sisters against the advances of men, they are not always equally successful. Girls are kept at home as much as possible so that all their actions may come under strict surveillance. They are usually allowed to go out only if accompanied by a specific girlfriend. There is no rigid chaperonage system as in the Latin countries among the lower-class Creoles. Because of the absence of a father who might help keep an eye on them, it is easy enough for many young girls to escape the watchful eye of their mothers. This is further encouraged by mothers being regularly away from home to earn the family's livelihood, so that a girl is often alone in the house or is able to go out without her mother's knowledge.

Most young girls have their first sexual experience with older men who are already married or living in concubinage. The following reasons seem to suggest themselves for this:

(1) Older men are on the whole better off financially than younger men, who in many cases earn lower wages or are out of work altogether. Furthermore, as less money is normally spent on daughters than on sons, as was observed above, an affair with an older "patron" is likely to be more attractive, since he will be able to give a girl the necessary money to buy the clothes and shoes she so eagerly desires. He is further able to take her to places where she most likes to be seen. The older man's spending pattern far exceeds the financial capacities of the younger man.

(2) An older married man, or man with a common law wife, may reasonably be expected not to make their affair too public. This

consideration carries special weight with girls who have improved their social position, such as office girls, for instance, since young men are well-known to brag about their conquests to their friends.

(3) Older men are more likely to promise a girl to give her the necessary money for an abortion "if anything goes wrong", while younger men are mostly unable to afford this.

(4) Young girls are in addition often defenseless against the advances of older men for psychological reasons. Because she is brought up to the idea that she is inferior to men, a girl will often find it difficult to resist a man, who is likely to be quite domineering and may furthermore in many cases be her boss.

The loss of virginity does not cause as sharp a drop in a girl's market value as in many Latin American countries. Although it was formerly the custom (and may still sometimes be today) to display the blood-stained bedsheet after the wedding night, there is no strongly developed virginity complex here. Admittedly the girl who is still a virgin has better prospects of making a legal rather than a common law marriage than her "fallen" sister, but there is no hard and fast rule regarding this. It is not uncommon for men marrying a woman with a child of a previous union to adopt the latter into his household. Men marrying women who already possess such children do not suffer any appreciable loss of prestige.

9.5.1. *Social Relations During Childhood*

9.5.1.1. *With the Parents*

The mother or the woman who fills her role (mostly mother's mother) is the more important parent for the lower-class Creole child. It generally has a weak tie with its father, who is either absent altogether or is often away for work or pleasure.

If the mother has to go out to work the child will be committed to the care of a female relative or neighbour. As a very young child at school it will often be brought up by a female teacher. Hence it is not surprising that the lower-class Creole man or woman should be more dependent emotionally on women than on men for the rest of his or her life, since it is mostly women who give children security and guidance and who dominate them. Married men or man living with a common law wife often still visit their mothers daily, in which case the latter will prepare their sons' favourite dishes for them. Many men marry only

after their mother has died, as was observed earlier. Women experiencing difficulties in their love life or going through some other crisis go to their mothers for help and advice. The maternal figure is looked upon as someone on whom one can always rely, as the constant factor, whereas the child is uncertain about the place the father figure occupies in his life, although it does know that it must treat the latter with due respect where present.

9.5.1.2. *With Brothers and Sisters*

Girls are charged with the responsibility of looking after their younger brothers and sisters during their mother's absences from a fairly early age. The tie with the elder sister is often exceptionally strong, the more so since the latter generally takes over the running of the household from the mother if she turns invalid or dies. There is a general tendency to spoil the youngest child of the household thoroughly, especially if it is a boy. As has been stated earlier, boys are on the whole favoured over girls, which gives rise to frequent tension in the brother-sister relationship. The eldest brother, who often fills the part of the father, is the man of the house who raises the other children together with their mother. Much attention is given to, and money spent on, the education of the eldest child, especially if this is a son. In return he is expected to support his mother (and where present, father), brothers and sisters financially if he finds a good job later on in life. Mothers also expect this of daughters, usually the eldest, though little money is generally spent on the education of girls. The level of ambition of mothers with respect to their sons is often unrealistically high, tending chiefly in the direction of the learned professions. As was said above, the youngest children are thoroughly spoilt — also by their brothers and sisters — though this may come to an abrupt end at the birth of a new brother or sister. As a result of the fact that boys are economically and emotionally favoured over girls, a certain rivalry remains between brothers and sisters for the rest of their lives.

9.5.1.3. *With Other Persons*

Many lower-class Creole children are entrusted to the care of grandmothers, aunts, neighbours, and at present also nurses at crèches, among others, from babyhood as a consequence of the absence of a father — and hence by necessity the daily absence of their mother. Crèches are

meeting an extremely strong need for the working mother. Before their introduction, young children sometimes had to be locked into the house if their mother had to go out to work and was unable to find someone to mind them. Foundlings were formerly quite common. At the time of research there were two crèches operating in Paramaribo (Foundation Crèche on Gemenelandsweg, and Queen Juliana Crèche in Gravenstraat). The former of these had been in operation for about fifteen years. The lady in charge told me that her crèche was looking after about 240 children between the ages of 3 months (minimum) and 6½ years (maximum). This Foundation Crèche is a semi-government child-minding centre run on subsidies from the Social Services Department. Of the children admitted to this crèche around 80 % are lower-class Creole. Admission is not unrestricted, as both crèches are filled to capacity. The opening-hours are adjusted to the working-hours of the mothers, extending from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. The fees payable are calculated on the basis of the mother's income. The children are given food and clothing at the crèche. The idea of having one's children looked after by strangers at a crèche is not foreign to the pattern of life of the lower-class Creole. Thus the Creole youngster has interaction with persons not belonging to his household from early infancy. It is partly as a consequence of this that the Creole from this class is fairly unhibited in his contacts with strangers, being used from early childhood to having people other than his mother (mostly women) look after him. Especially in the yards, where people are in the habit of walking in and out of each other's houses, one frequently comes across children in households where they do not belong but where they are nevertheless "at home". For the lower-class Creole woman it is the most natural thing in the world to look after the children of other women. Sometimes the tie with such children will grow so strong as to cause the woman in question to adopt such a child and raise it as her foster-child. On asking one woman with two children and one foster-child how she had come to adopt the latter she told me that before she got the child to live with her she used to look after it regularly whenever her brother went out with the child's mother, who according to her was a whore and neglected the child, for several days at a time. The child became so attached to her that the mother allowed her to keep it after discussing the matter with her. It should be noted that the informant's brother (who had meanwhile broken off relations with the woman in question) was not the father of the child.

9.6. *Adulthood*

9.6.1. *Man-Woman Relationships*

The principal reason for the termination of a union between a man and a woman listed in section 8.2.2.2. was the inability or refusal of the husband to give his wife a reasonable housekeeping allowance. For a proper insight into man-woman relationships in the West Indian family system a more detailed discussion of the connection between a man's income and his relations with women seems called for.

A man earning a low income or none at all will find it impossible to dominate his wife and maintain his position as head of the household. Women only have "respect" for men who make enough money to support the household. For as long as a man is able to fulfil this obligation (and it should be borne in mind here that this may be the case with many lower-class Creole men, especially skilled labourers, for many years of legal or common law marriage) he will be treated with the utmost respect, consideration and submission in the household by his wife and children. He then has a patriarchal role. As soon as he begins to fail in his role as breadwinner, however, his wife will show him increasingly less respect and her loyalty to him will gradually disappear. She will in the end generally tell the man to leave the house or will herself move out with the children. Where possible she will try to find a better breadwinner. It is rare for a man to continue living in the household after the woman has taken over from him as head. There was only one instance of a female head of a household with a (invalid) husband in our sample (type E of table B, appendix 3). In the case of the 14 female heads of households with common law husbands (type F, cf. table B, appendix 3) these common law husbands were discovered to have moved in with the female head after the latter's breaking off an earlier relationship with a legal or common law husband, rather than had the headship "seized" from them by the woman in question.

For the lower-class Creole male who is aware that his failure as his family's breadwinner implies the loss of the respect of his wife and children there presents itself a way of abandoning the field in time without loss of dignity to himself. Besides the "French leave" tactic there is also that of starting an affair with another, preferably younger, woman so as to provide his wife with an excuse for giving him notice to leave the household.

In that case he will not lose his friends' respect for being "a man

turned out of his home by his wife". His masculine pride then remains intact, especially if the woman with whom he has the new affair has a child by him. As was observed earlier, young women usually have their first child by an older man, the West Indian family cycle beginning with this phase (see sections 9.5.1. and 8.3.2.1.).

Because of the shortage of "unattached" males with a reasonable income, many women who have lost their husbands through death, "infidelity" or desertion are seen to be unsuccessful in finding a new partner to support them. Their experiences with the opposite sex have moreover in many cases proved so disappointing as to incline them to have recourse solely to members of their own sex. This has led to a high incidence of Lesbianism.

9.6.2. *Homosexual Relations between Women*

Intimately connected with the West Indian family system, whereby women's reliance on men as permanent breadwinners is often undermined, is the high prevalence of Lesbianism among lower-class Creole women.

Whereas the lower-class Creole tends to strongly condemn and ridicule homosexuality in men, he is relatively tolerant towards homosexual relations between women. There are comparatively few signs of homosexuality among men, and most lower-class Creoles believe that it hardly occurs among them. Many of my informants expressed the opinion that this phenomenon is rather widespread among their Hindustani and Javanese compatriots, however, as well as among the Creole population of Curaçao — these categories, excepting that of the Javanese, being the ones to which people are most inclined to be antagonistic in Surinam.

Lower-class Creole society makes little secret of the widespread occurrence of Lesbianism, on the other hand. The Lesbian female (*mati* or *kompe*) is an extremely common phenomenon. Every person knows of at least one couple of Lesbian women living together, and is likely to proffer the view that Lesbianism is on the increase, in particular also among younger women at present. People are inclined to be so open about this as to render it quite normal for women to send radio stations requests for records for their "*mati*".

Lesbianism has been a familiar phenomenon in the lower-class Creole subculture for quite a long time. There are reports of its occurrence in the writings of some relatively early observers of the society of Surinam. So Baron A. J. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, for instance, refers in

a report of a committee instituted by Government Resolution of 1910 to "Sexual relations between women (the so-called *matie* game), which immoral behaviour has increased markedly over the past decade, so I am told, and has, alas, already infiltrated deeply into the public morals. Not only are young girls and single women of different classes — the poorest of whom often go and live together in pairs so as to reduce the costs of rent and food for each — prone to it, but women cohabiting with men and even mere school-girls are becoming involved in it as well, after the example of their elders." (*Ambacht,* 1912, pp. 98, 99). Almost a quarter of a century later Melville J. and Francis S. Herskovits described the customs in connection with birthday parties given by Lesbian women for their *mati* that were popular at the time (Herskovits and Herskovits, 1936, p. 32). Van Lier (1971, p. 289) has also pointed to the existence of Lesbian practices among lower-class Creole women.

In the course of my fieldwork I came into contact with a number of *matis* after being introduced by one of my female informants at a party given by a women's club. Elderly *matis* may in some cases form social clubs, mostly for dancing, which meet regularly. Such clubs may on occasion arrange parties. The occasion for such parties is usually provided by the birthday of one of the members. Relatives and friends of both sexes are usually invited to these gatherings, and there is little to distinguish them from the usual dances which one may attend in Paramaribo. There is dancing to the music provided by a band or record-player and amplifier and there is the normal share of eating, drinking and merrymaking. The only difference is that here one may observe a somewhat larger number of women dancing in slightly closer embrace than at regular parties, it being not unusual for women to dance together at "normal" parties, too, if there are not enough men present. The club members are anything but promiscuous — on the contrary, the women are reportedly extremely jealous of their partners. The party I attended was given by twelve women friends. There was nothing secretive or mysterious about it, being held in a house the French doors of which were flung wide open onto the street. Inside there was dancing to the music of a hired band. Neighbours without invitations came to watch the dancing from the street without making any comments or showing any signs of disapproval. There is nothing unusual about such interest being shown in a party by on-lookers in the street, although the *mati* party drew slightly more attention from the people in the street than an "ordinary" party would, because there is still something slightly curious about such an event to the public at large. Three of the members of the

club had dressed in men's clothes especially for the occasion, while the others wore *koto yaki.*

Lesbianism is not a condition for admission to the membership of such a club. Women may join these clubs for the companionship they offer and to benefit from the mutual moral support and financial assistance the members give one another. Elderly women without husbands are often dependent on these clubs for their social contacts, although sometimes also women who are still married may become members. But by and large the members of the clubs are women in their menopause who in many cases have a heterosexual career behind them but now no longer have a male partner.

The existing uneven sex ratio in the higher age-groups is only partly responsible for older women entertaining sexual relations with members of their own sex. Unpleasant experiences with members of the opposite sex are also an important factor in this.

A number of utterances of *matis* which I recorded seem to point in this direction, viz.: "Men only want young girls these days", "My husband left me years ago and is living with someone else now", "After my fourth child I wanted to have nothing more to do with fellows", "G. A. is a member because her husband is impotent and his jealously is stopping her from going around with other men; but he does not object to this".

Sometimes these clubs include one or two men among their members. This is because it is not uncommon in some neighbourhoods for the members of such a club to be molested by a group of local inhabitants after a meeting. These latter may shout obscenities at them, and so on. It is the task of the male members of the club to prevent such incidents, by force if necessary. They are in most cases rather brawny or even tough characters whose physical strength inspires awe. According to some informants they fulfil this function on account of the financial reward offered them for their services by the women — one informant said something about money and free sexual access to the club members.

Although most Creoles are inclined to be tolerant about the existence of *matis*, there are evidently also a number among them — mainly women — who object most strongly to Lesbian women. Their objections, which they sometimes vent in aggressive behaviour, are illustrated by the following statements.

A common law widow of 47 with 6 children stated the opinion that the *matis* should be exterminated, as there were too many of them around. She has accordingly strictly forbidden her children to have

anything to do with two *matis* living together in the same yard as she. She is afraid lest the women try to win over her young daughters to the *mati* game. She is anxious to prevent this, as she believes that the *mati* game can cause cancer and tuberculosis. A married woman of 35 tended to think that only vulgar persons engaged in this. According to her there are many prostitutes among them. "You have to pester them to get rid of them if they come and live near you", she contended. One 54-year-old woman explained to me why the *mati* game causes illness. Intercourse with a man causes the body "to discharge all its fluids", thereby keeping a person healthy. But because this does not happen in the *mati* game, all kinds of diseases may develop, especially cancer. A common law wife of 38 told me she had threatened her 17-year-old daughter with branding her private parts with a hot iron if she ever found out she was involved in *mati* nonsense.

Matis often set up house together. One of the partners, mostly the more dominant one, will provide the household's livelihood, while the other stays at home to do the housework and look after the children or grandchildren where present. One also often finds two partners living in separate households and visiting each other daily. Some are in the habit of dressing exactly alike. Though formerly non-Lesbian women friends also used to do this, the fear of being taken for a *mati* is at present putting an end to the practice.

There is usually an economic reason for *matis* living together. Two girlfriends who find themselves in a difficult economic position may join their respective households together so as to economize on such items as house rent and rates, for instance. One also comes across women without any income and without hope of ever finding (another) husband to look after them being compelled to find some girlfriend as a last resort and getting the latter to take them into their home and support them in return for sexual favours.

Besides the unequal sex ratio as a factor, this behaviour is at present also being encouraged by the difficulty experienced especially by women with vertical social mobility in finding a male partner of equal social status. This may lead them to give preference under the circumstances to a Lesbian relationship rather than a series of casual affairs with men, which may furthermore result in unwanted pregnancies. Thus Lesbianism is reportedly quite common among hospital nurses, policewomen and girls who are following or have completed some form of secondary education, for instance. So one female informant told me that one of her friends, who was a teacher, had confided to her that she preferred

the *mati* game to intercourse with a man, "who will only give you a baby and go". Hence there seems to me to be a definite correlation between the instability of unions between men and women and the frequent occurrence of homosexuality among women.

9.6.3. *Contacts with Other Persons*

The lower-class Creole tends to have a great variety of social relations with persons outside his household. Especially the inhabitants of some of the older neighbourhoods all seem to know one another, and, as we have already said above, regularly walk in and out of each other's houses. The relations a woman may have with her next-door neighbours are often very close. Men maintain close relations with their regular friends, some of whom may even be childhood friends. Men who are often out of a job will in many cases take refuge with these friends, who form the only group in which they may still enjoy some prestige, by being an authority on soccer, or being a great drinker or seducer of women, for instance. Such groups of men are found everywhere, usually endlessly talking politics or soccer, in cafés, Chinese shops or on the doorstep of the house of one of the group of friends. Apart from such unorganized contacts quite a large number of lower-class Creoles are members of organized clubs and societies, ranging from sports clubs to political party associations and secret fraternities. As regards these latter, there is the International Secret Order of the Foresters and that of Mechanics, of which 28 and 13 household heads of my sample, mainly from the higher income groups, were members respectively. The Foresters and Mechanics (originally English societies; the Mechanics separated from the Freemasons in 1757, becoming predominantly a society for the ordinary man) fulfil an important social function, lending their members assistance in the event of illness or death. They furthermore assist the widows and orphans of their members. Members of the Mechanics — which is accessible only to men — help each other to find jobs. Both brotherhoods possess secret rites. The Mechanics refuse to admit anyone living in concubinage as member; some men may enter into legal marriage with their concubines especially to qualify for membership. The membership fees of both orders are relatively high. As a result it is mostly lower-class Creoles from the higher income brackets who are members.

The sample was discovered to include 36 women (21 female heads of households and 15 female members of households) who were members of so-called prayer groups (*begi*). Three male heads of households were also discovered to be members of such groups. The members of these

groups hold prayer meetings at the home of one of them in the afternoons or evenings. At these meetings there are communal prayers and religious singing. Some of the members, mostly men, may give sermons — which may be very long-drawn — in the course of the hymn-singing. The *begis*, which are not affiliated with any particular Church, are viewed with due distrust by the clergy, as these admit the followers of every Christian denomination as members, and as the proceeds from collections held at the meetings are often spent on some lavish feast rather than being handed over to the Church (information given by J. Voorhoeve). In the 19th century participation in these *begis* was forbidden to Roman Catholics on pain of excommunication because the Church authorities believed they displayed a number of pagan traits. At present most members of these societies are elderly women. Members of these groups, too, may assist each other financially. Such assistance may be especially welcome to old people, as most people in this phase of their life cycle live in dire straits.

9.7. *Old Age*

The most difficult phase of the life of the lower-class Creole often sets in when he or she grows old. Economically speaking a great many old people are exceedingly badly off. Unless a man or woman has been successful in building up some reserves for approaching old age — in the form of some property, such as a house, or some superannuation arrangement — he or she will be completely dependent on the children, the poor relief fund, or total strangers. So it is not uncommon for elderly women to move in with their children and fulfil a function in connection with the upbringing of their grandchildren (cf. table I, appendix 3, categories 56 and 58). We see old men doing this less often (cf. table I, appendix 3, categories 55 and 57). Hence many old men and women who have no relatives to take them in are found to be living alone (cf. table M, appendix 3). They often live in dire poverty. Because of the social isolation in which many are living, the death of quite a few of them may not be discovered until days afterwards.

This brings us to the subject of the customs observed in connection with death and burial which is of such prime importance to the lower-class Creoles.

9.8. *Death*

The lower-class Creole spends the utmost care on the preparation of the dead for burial and on the funeral itself. At the death of a member of the household, his or her relatives face the task of arranging a

"decent" funeral and organizing a wake and special memorial gatherings, all of which entail considerable expense. As we have already discussed above (section 7.3.4.4.) many people insure themselves against these costs by joining medical and burial societies. The sums refunded by these cover only part of the expenses that have to be incurred for the proper care of the dead, however. As for weddings, the expenses for funerals are extremely high. They are often unforeseen, moreover, so that people may get into heavy debt for this. As we saw above, the degree of lavishness and extravagance of a wedding feast may enhance or diminish the prestige of families. The same is true also for funerals, and the environment is bound to cry shame upon people who have failed to pay their dead the proper last honours.

The existence of elaborate rites in connection with the burial of the dead is a cultural trait that is found in most Negro cultures in the New World. So Métraux (1957, pp. 100-102, 1959, pp. 243-256) and Courlander (1960, pp. 30-40) have described the rites in connection with death in Haiti. With respect to the United States, Frazier (1965, pp. 375-376) pointed out the existence of burial societies particularly among rural Negroes. The latter author places strong emphasis on the importance attached by them to a "decent funeral", saying, "However destitute of worldly goods the rural Negro has been, he has often borne his lot patiently as long as he was consoled by the prospect that he would be 'put away right', i.e., given a decent burial".

Herskovits pointed out that the emphasis Negroes in the New World put on proper burial should be regarded as a survival of African cultural elements, in which ancestor worship plays an important role. He says: "The elaborateness of funeral rites in the area is cast in terms of the role of the ancestors in the lives of their descendants, and because it is important to have the assurance of the ancestral good will, the dead are honored with extended and costly rituals. In all this region, in fact, the funeral is the true climax of life, and no belief drives deeper into the traditions of West African thought. For the problem of New World survivals this is of paramount importance, for whatever else has been lost of aboriginal custom, the attitudes toward the dead as manifested in meticulous rituals cast in the mold of West African patterns have survived." (Herskovits, 1964, p. 63). He further defines the importance of this as follows: "For the dead are everywhere regarded as close to the forces that govern the universe, and are believed to influence the well-being of their descendants who properly serve them" (Herskovits, 1964, p. 197).

As we shall see below, this concept has become mixed up with Christian views on life after death.

The elaborate, costly ritual is not, therefore, provided solely from prestige considerations, but rather testifies to the existence of a characteristic complex of ideas concerning survival after death (cf. section 7.3.4.4.).

No thorough investigation was conducted by us into the influences of the African religion on the family life. We purposely refrained from going into this subject at any great depth, as in many lower-class Creole families the significance of African processes is either a negligible quantity or it is latent.

So many people are seen to be averse to what they term "paganistic" matters, though some of these "agnostics" — and not all of them persons from the lower classes only — may be discovered in major crises to revert to the African religion. Hence the customs in connection with death described below are not observable in a uniform degree in all lower-class Creole families.

9.8.1. *Description of the Customs observed in Connection with Death*

When a person dies his mortal remains must be interred between 18 and 36 hours after his death, according to the law of Surinam. Hence a great many things have to be attended to within a period of 36 hours in order to be able to give the deceased a fitting burial.

In the first place the deceased person's relatives and friends must be notified of his death by the members of his household, neighbours or friends. It is customary to have the death of a relative announced by radio. The regular programme will then be interrupted, funeral music played and an announcement to the following effect made by the announcer: "The relatives of ... announce with deep regret the passing away of their ... (specification of the relationship of those making the announcement to the deceased and name of the deceased)". The age at which he or she died and the time of death are also stated. The announcement is concluded with more funeral music, after an expression of the wish that the deceased may rest in peace. As the majority of the lower-class Creoles have their wireless sets turned on most of the day an obituary via this medium constitutes the most effective way of communicating the news to a wide public, so that many people may then be able to attend the funeral and/or the wake, if held.

The deceased's relatives get in touch with his parish minister or priest,

if the latter was not present at the death-bed. Then they approach the burial society of which the deceased was a member with a death certificate issued by a medical practitioner or a statement signed by a cleric. The best-known burial societies are affiliated with the different religious denominations. The principal ones are the Moravian "*Jubileumfonds*", the Roman Catholic "*Verbond*", the Reformed Dutch "*Stuiversvereniging*" and the Lutheran "*Vrede en Arbeid*". The *Stuiversvereniging* and *Vrede en Arbeid* are the only ones which admit non-members of the affiliated religious denomination to their membership. The death also has to be registered at the Registrar's Office by the deceased's relatives.

Most burial societies extend facilities for borrowing the necessary equipment for a wake to the relatives of deceased members. This includes palls, candelabras, candles and a bier on which to place the corpse. The so-called "corpse-washers" are called in to lay out the body. These persons are mostly members of the same church as the deceased. They devote themselves to laying out and dressing bodies for burial as an "act of charity". These persons are said to do this work for the glory of God, and are consequently rewarded with good health. They are organized into a brotherhood of "corpse-washers" which possesses its own code of honour. The members of these brother (or sister-)hoods are admitted under oath. The brotherhoods are affiliated with both the Churches and particular burial societies.

These corpse-washers possess a number of secrets concerning principally techniques in connection with the preparation and embalmment of corpses, which they refuse to divulge to the uninitiated. This kind of work is done by both men and women. Usually a member of the same sex as the deceased is charged with the task of laying out the body. One of the taboos they must observe strictly is that prohibiting them from performing this task if they have had sexual intercourse in the past 24 hours. Although the corpse-washers are treated as respectable members of their religious communities by their fellow-members of society, they are responsible for the preservation of a number of practices, through the advice they pass on to the relatives of deceased persons, of which the church authorities disapprove and which they label as "paganistic". This is especially true of the corpse-washers of the popular churches, namely the Moravian and Roman Catholic Churches, as they try to put themselves across to outsiders as repositories of specific esoteric knowledge and supernatural powers. One such corpse-washer of the Moravian Church claimed he "knew" when someone whose body he had to lay out had died, for example, as he could hear the "spirit" of

the deceased "knocking" at his door. His colleagues who usually accompany him in his work also received such signs. After being thus warned they assemble at a pre-arranged point from which they proceed to the house of death together. Other corpse-washers said they were simply notified by the deceased person's relatives of the latter's death. Corpse-washers never work alone — there should be at least two present at the preparation of a body for burial, though it is not uncommon for seven or eight to work together.

When they arrive at the house of death the corpse-washers are left alone with the body and the hired funeral equipment in a separate room. None of the relatives is allowed to be present at the laying out and the washers make sure that no-one is able to spy on them while they are at work.

It is their task to make the body as presentable as possible, and to preserve it from decay long enough to delay the process of decomposition until after the funeral. This no easy task in a humid, tropical climate. They go about this by pouring half a litre of formalin into the dead person's mouth, washing the body with formalin and wrapping it in a sheet moistened with the same chemical, which process is referred to as "embalming". The orifices are plugged with tobacco moistened in rum or cotton wool soaked in formalin. The mouth is tied shut with the so-called chin-cloth.

Some old people may state the wish before they die to be laid out according to the old-fashioned method, involving the use of the juice of the "*zure oranje*" (sour orange, *Citrus aurantium*). This was mixed with *dram* (a kind of rum), tobacco, salt and camphor. A lot of *dram* was needed for these "orange jobs", much of which the corpse-washers consumed rather than using it all on the body, to help them to build up a resistance to the odour of the corpse and thus remain "healthy". It is because of this that they are regarded by many as tipplers.

As I observed in the course of my field-work, many of these corpse-washers appeared to be slightly intoxicated after finishing their work. All of the males as well as a few of the female washers interviewed by me constantly asked for alcoholic drinks during the interview (which request I readily complied with as they claimed this helped them to think more clearly!).

At present, since the virtually exclusive use of formalin for this work, the deceased person's relatives usually give the corpse-washers a bottle of brandy or wine to take in with them during their work of preparing the body. It is also customary to serve them sandwiches or breadrolls.

The relatives may later give them presents in reward for their services.

The corpse-washers sing religious songs during the preparation of the corpse. They lay it out in a kind of trough placed on a stand, in which old rags are placed to catch any of the moisture spilt. Meanwhile the relatives give the house a thorough cleaning — if this has not already been done before — and prepare it for the reception of the guests expected to take part in the wake. Mirrors [1] and pictures are covered with a sheet or hung back to front. Chairs and couches for seating the guests are borrowed or hired. Everyone dresses in white, which is the colour of deep morning here. Most Creole men who are at all able to afford one possess a white suit. Women, especially the older ones, tie a white kerchief around their head and throw a white shawl around their shoulders. They also wear white dresses. This deep mourning they wear until the day of the memorial gathering held on the eighth day after the death (*aite de*). The colour of light mourning is mauve. People who have climbed socially now also may wear black for mourning.

Food and drink have to be prepared for the expected guests. In addition to coffee, tea and cocoa, alcoholic beverages are served. The drinks are served with rusks, wheat roasted in burnt sugar and roasted peanuts. Well-to-do people serve their guests a complete meal, usually consisting of boiled bananas with meat and rice.

When the corpse-washers have finished their work they leave the room with the wet rags from the bier. Everyone rises respectfully to their feet when they pass and then all go in to inspect the result of their work. The body is usually placed on ice-blocks covered with black draping. Beside the bier are placed candelabras with candles. One of the corpse-washers remains in the house to look after the body and assist the relatives with advice. He also takes action if decomposition sets in too soon. If the body begins to "sweat", for instance, he will pour a strong brine solution into its mouth.

The relatives assemble around the bier to await the guests between seven and eight o'clock in the evening. The guests — most of them also dressed in white — go around expressing their condolences to the deceased's close relatives assembled around the bier. This is often accompanied with loud weeping and wailing. Everyone has the right to

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[1] De Rek (1967, pp. 374-375) observes in his cultural history of the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th centuries that in the house in which a death had occurred "The mirror was reversed, as a person's reflection was his soul, and the soul of the dead person might be tempted to carry off the souls of the living".

visit a house of death, called "*dede oso*", including strangers. It is a known fact that there are a number of poor people who make the rounds of all *dede oso* and collect all the food and drink served around here. They even take bottles with them in which to collect the cocoa served to take home. They are popularly designated "*dede oso alatta*", or "mourning-house rats".

At eight o'clock a prayer is said and hymns are sung. This prayer and hymn session lasts until about ten o'clock, when the official part of the ceremony ends. The late arrivals among the guests then have an opportunity to offer their condolences to the relatives seated around the bier.

Snacks and drinks are not served until after ten — before that time only glasses of water are passed around. More hymns and chorales are sung. Usually only the men sing, led by a cantor who knows the words well and runs them quickly through before each verse for the others to repeat. The guests help themselves to generous servings of the food and drink. Some may drink more strong drink than they can hold. There is no smoking inside, as this is supposedly uncomfortable for the deceased's spirit. Despite this slight inconvenience, the atmosphere here becomes quite excited and boisterous, though everyone feigns grief. Usually there is too little room to seat all the guests inside, so that they often have to be seated on chairs and benches outside the house. I observed a number of the female guests stretched out fast asleep on such benches late at night during one such *dede oso*.

A wake normally lasts until five o'clock in the morning. Though some of the guests may leave earlier, most of them remain present throughout the entire wake out of courtesy. According to popular belief a deceased's spirit abandons the body at five in the morning. There is some final hymn singing, after which the guests take leave of the relatives, and the latter are left alone.

In the course of the day the corpse-washers come once more to place the boy in the coffin 3-4 hours before the funeral is scheduled. They unwind the corpse from its shroud, wash it once more and dress it in its good clothes and lay it in the coffin, placed on two chairs or a stand. They remove the chin-cloth from the body, as otherwise its spirit will be unable to speak, and the relatives take care to see the cloth does not fall into the hands of people who might commit evil with it — in order to prevent black magic.[2]

[2] Cf. W. F. van Lier (1940, pp. 276-291) for a detailed description of Bush Negro customs in connection with death and burial.

When the washers have done they call in the relatives to say goodbye to the dead person. It is most important that this is done in order to prevent the deceased's spirit from returning. Hence it is imperative that one take proper leave out of respect for the spirit. Usually the first question asked the relatives by guests at a funeral or other outsiders is whether this has in fact been done with due propriety. It is one of the corpse-washers' chief functions to counsel the relatives correctly in this matter. So it is customary for the latter to step three times across the coffin in this connection. The coffin is placed on the floor especially for this purpose. Small children are lifted across. Alternatively, the deceased's relatives may place their hands on his or her forehead and utter the words "rest in peace". Wives comb their husband's hair for the last time on this occasion. The dead person is given certain of his personal belongings to which he was especially attached in his lifetime to take with him in his coffin, such as his spectacles, tobacco jar or comb. Wives are usually advised by the washers or some of their women friends to place one of their possessions in the coffin as well, so that their husband's spirit will not be tempted to visit them. For this purpose they will place a wad of cotton wool in their mouth or armpit, thereupon to put it in the coffin. According to the popular belief the spirit of the deceased man will now no longer try to visit his wife, as her odour is with him. Some women even place a sanitary napkin they wear during menstruation in the coffin as a precaution against this. To safeguard the children of the deceased against visitations from his spirit, the height of the children under four (some informants said seven) is measured from top to toe with a piece of string. This string is then rolled up and placed in the coffin. But the most effective safeguard is provided by tying a blue ribbon around the children's arms as well.

Both wives and husbands of deceased persons may take due precautions to ensure that the spirit of their deceased partner does not come and visit them in order to have sexual intercourse with them at night. The consequences of this are believed to be especially unpleasant for widows, as it supposedly causes their abdomen to swell enormously. In order to avoid this some women may tie a dark-blue cotton cloth before their private parts before going to sleep every night for six weeks. In this cloth pins are stuck with their sharp points turned away from the body. This is believed to make it impossible for the spirit to carry out its intentions. Men may sometimes wear jockstraps at nights to discourage the spirits of their wives in a similar way.

The coffin is usually closed one hour before the funeral. Before the

lid is screwed on, a handkerchief is spread over the dead person's face. As soon as the hearse (horse-drawn or motorized) and the bearers arrive all the chairs in the house are moved against the walls. The bearers sing hymns as they lift the coffin with some ceremonial display. They carry the coffin once around the room while making shuffling dance-steps. It is customary for the women to burst out in loud wailing and lamenting as the coffin is borne out of the house. Some may even have a fit. In lower- as well as middle-class families it is not uncommon for the wife, mother or daughters of a deceased person to have a hysterical fit, which has an almost institutionalized character and is popularly referred to as "convulsions". In former days the bearers used to carry the coffin all the way to the cemetery, making shuffling steps at all the street-corners on the way. But at present the coffin is conveyed in a coach or motorcar which the guests follow on foot. Close relatives and, where present, distinguished guests, follow immediately behind the hearse. If the deceased was a man, the women will follow after that, and then the men, while the reverse order is observed if the deceased was a woman.

The ceremonies at the graveyard are dependent on the deceased's religious affiliation. There is usually a speech by a priest or minister. A collection is taken, the proceeds of which are spent, if the family is Roman Catholic, on special Masses for the soul of the dead person. The burial society usually provides guarantees to pay for one or two Low Masses. For members of the Moravian community a special memorial service is usually held in church, that is to say, if the relatives have not already arranged a special *aite de* gathering. The Church is strongly opposed to the latter practice as it purportedly also possesses definite paganistic traits.

On their return home from the graveyard the relatives are still not left alone, as friends and other relatives drop in once more to offer their condolences. The week following the funeral is filled with visits from people prevented from attending the wake and funeral.

9.8.2. *The Memorial Gathering on the Eighth Day*

A special memorial gathering is arranged in honour of the dead person on the eighth day after his death.[3] His relatives again have to hold open house to all who wish to come and commemorate the deceased person.

[3] For a description of the eighth-day meeting in Curaçao see E. E. Abraham-van der Mark (1969, p. 180).

As on the occasion of the *dede oso,* the relatives are again constrained to go to great expense. There is even more eating and drinking at these *aite de* gatherings than at the *dede oso.* They also begin in the evening and continue all through the night. The deceased is remembered in a short prayer, while this, too, is accompanied by the singing of hymns and chorales. The guests tell each other *Anansi-tori* or animal fables of which the spider Anansi is mostly the hero. In former days there were professional story-tellers who were specially commissioned to divert mourners assembled at the house of deceased persons by narrating these stories (*Encyclopaedie* 1914-'17, p. 44). At the *aite de* celebration an oblation is poured for the spirit of the deceased outside his house. Some food from the meal is also put out for it at the rear of the house. One rather skeptical informant told me that this is usually eaten by dogs.

The *aite de* gatherings sometimes degenerate into purely festive affairs or "true orgies", as one Moravian clergyman qualified them. It is for this reason that the Moravian Church has tried to ban them and has begun by way of reaction to institute special memorial services for deceased members on condition that the relatives of the deceased forgo all *aite de* celebrations.

Where a deceased person was an active member of some club or society, such as a prayer group or dancing club, the members of these may also organize special memorial meetings for their late member. This is usually done before the gathering on the eighth day.

If the relatives of a deceased person wish to uphold all the traditions they will organize another meeting similar to that just described six weeks after the death. This will then be repeated once more one year after the death.

Not an equal amount of trouble is taken over every dead person. The death of a child, for instance, receives much less attention. According to Herskovits and Herskovits (1936, p. 38), for women who have died in childbirth only a perfunctory wake is held, which is attended only by close relatives or a few older persons, or none is held at all. I was unable to verify whether this is still the custom. The indigent are also buried with little ceremony. The Social Welfare Department provides a plain coffin without a "dome" for such persons, as well as a plain hearse with an ununiformed driver and bearers for its conveyance.

Persons who have advanced socially and who have some of them left the Moravian Church to become Reformed Dutch or Lutheran, follow the customs described above to a much lesser extent. Although they may hold a wake for friends, this is kept very austere. There is usually

no singing at these, nor are alcoholic beverages served. The guests leave the house of mourning before midnight. The Churches, which are opposed to wakes and memorial gatherings, have welcomed the construction of a mortuary, which was inaugurated in January 1965. The authorities believe that this will produce a reduction in the number of wakes, since it will be possible for the bodies of deceased persons to be kept here.

All these customs centering around death are illustrative of the arguments set forth by Malinowski (1948, p. 47) in the chapter entitled "Death and Reintegration of the Group" of his work *Magic, Science and Religion*. He points out that in all funeral rites there is side by side with the desire to preserve the ties with the deceased person a parallel tendency to break these. This is also borne out by my observations. On the one hand people seek to break off all relations with the deceased by taking "proper" leave of them and taking all kinds of precautions to ensure that those surviving will not be in any way troubled by their spirits, while on the other they tend to try by means of *Wintiprees* or through the intermediary of an *obiaman* to get in touch with the spirits of the ancestors to help set matters right especially in major crises. Malinowski pointed out in the work cited above that the community becomes disintegrated by the death of one of its members. The principal function of the funeral ritual, in his opinion, is to effect the reintegration of the group. This is doubtless also true with regard to the mortuary rituals of the lower-class Creoles of Surinam. A person's death implies a loss not only to his relatives but also to the community as a whole. The latter will become reintegrated by the holding of wakes and memorial gatherings to which everyone, even people who are total strangers to the surviving relatives, is welcome. The presence of a large number of people at these occasions is a source of comfort and consolation to the relatives, who are thus made aware that they are an integral part of a society which sympathizes with them (cf. Henriques, 1953, p. 185).