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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |   **Neurland Characteristics and Camp Life**  Nuerland has no favourable qualities, unless its severity be counted as such, for its endless marshes and wide savannah plains have an austere, monotonous charm. It is throughout hard on man and beast, being for most of the year either parched or a swamp.   In an average year the rains commence in April and they end by November. As soon as the rain stops the Neurland is under the influence of drought. Scarcity of rain is probably more serious than low river water, but both may cause inconvenience to Nuer to the point of famine, because sufficient water may not be held up in the clay beds to enable the grasses to recover from firing.  During drought Neur moves to Camps and during flood they remain in their Villages which are at elevated places.    **The main characteristics of Nuerland are**:  (i) It is dead fiat.  (2) It has clay soils.  (3) It is very thinly and sporadically  wooded.  (4) It is covered with high grasses in the rains.  (5) It is subject to heavy rainfall.  (6) It is traversed by large rivers  which flood annually.  (7) When the rains cease and the rivers  fall it is subject to severe drought.    These characteristics interact with one another and compose an environmental system which directly conditions Nuer life and influences their social structure. It is because of these environmental changes like flooding and drought ,the Neur have a mixed economy . They depend upon their cattle for milk and meat including horticulture, but they also indulge in fishing and hunting in drought conditions   Village sites are selected on the only spots affording such protection to man and beast : patches of slightly higher ground. When the rains have ceased water supplies near villages are soon exhausted, because, naturally, the highest and driest sites have been selected for building, and it becomes necessary to move to pools, lakes, lagoons, marshes, and rivers. Owing to the vast rivers that traverse Nuerland and the thorough irrigation they give to the country through a network of channels there is seldom difficulty about finding surface water, though people may have to go far to obtain it.    During drought which starts from November onwards, water becomes scarcer and grazing poorer Nuer fall back on permanent water where they make large camps and the cattle can graze on marsh plants that abound in numberless depressions and make good milk. In May, when the new rains set in, they are able to return to their villages. The few cattle Nuer possess, the vast spaces they can exploit, and their nomadic existence ensure that there is nowhere serious overgrazing.    **CAMP LIFE OF NEUR**  Variation of water-supplies and vegetation thus forces Nuer to move and determines the direction of their movements.  A cattle camp, which people of a village form in the drought and in which members of neighbouring villages participate, is known as **wee**. While this word has the meaning of '**camp**' in contrast with **eieng, 'village'**, both words are used in the same general sense of local community.  As water becomes scarcer and grazing poorer Nuer fall back on permanent water where they make large camps and the cattle can graze on marsh plants that abound in numberless depressions and make good milk. In May, when the new rains set in, they are able to return to their villages.  In late November or early December the youths and some of the girls take the cattle from the villages to camps, generally some miles away, leaving the older people to harvest the second millet crop and repair huts and byres. Usually a few lactating cows are left behind to provide milk for the small children. These **early camps {wec jiom**) are made near pools in a place where the grasses have previously been fired.  As pools dry up, pasturage is exhausted, or fishing becomes poor, the youths make new camps, where they are joined by the married people, and they may move camp several times before settling in their **final camping grounds** [**wee mai**) at the side of lakes or rivers in January and February. The early camps are small, being manned by a few kinsmen, but they tend to get larger as the season advances and water becomes scarcer, and the final camps may contain several hundred persons.  **April –May Rains Start (Neur Come Back to Their Villages from Camps)**  When the rains commence in May the older people return to the villages to prepare the ground for sowing and they are joined there in June by the youths and girls, who bring the cattle with them.  When the younger people return the whole camp is broken up on the same day, and the cattle are driven to their village with as few halts as possible. The move from villages to camps, on the contrary, is less concerted and abrupt. The younger members of two or three families form a small camp, after the firing of the grasses in November, when and where they please.  Several days later they may be joined by other people from the same village, or these may form a separate camp. There is still water and some grazing on the village sites and there is still work to be accomplished in gardens and homesteads. Thus, while camps change into villages overnight, villages change into camps more slowly. By the height of the drought every one is in camp and the villages are silent and deserted.    The year thus consists of a period in villages and a period in camps, and the camp period is divided into the early part of the dry season when the younger people move from small camp to small camp and the latter part of the dry season when every one is concentrated in large camps round permanent water which they do not leave till they return to their villages.  Nuer are forced into villages for protection against floods and mosquitoes and to engage in horticulture, and are forced out of villages into camps by drought and barrenness of vegetation and to engage in fishing. I describe these villages and camps very shortly.  **FOOD CONSUMPTION IN CAMPS**  Millet is consumed as porridge and beer in large quantities in the months between the first harvest and departure for dry- season camps. If the harvest has been good people like to eat  their daily porridge in camps, and when the camp grain-supply runs short women journey to the villages to replenish it. When camps break up and people return to their villages millet consumption increases, beer being again brewed.  **Social Composition of Camps and activities**  Social composition of a camp varies at different times of the drought from the people of a hamlet to the people of a village, or of neighbouring villages, and that men sometimes camp with kinsmen living, in camps other than those of their own villages. Consequently, while local communities of the rains tend to be also local communities in the drought their composition may be somewhat different. We again emphasize that not only are the people of a camp living in a more compact group than the people of a village, but also that in camp life there is more frequent contact between its members and greater co-ordination of their activities. The cattle are herded together, milked at the same time, and so on. In a village each house- hold herds its own cattle, if they are herded, and performs its domestic and kraal tasks independently and at different times. In the drought there is increasing concentration and greater uniformity in response to the greater severity of the season.  Moreover, people of one section have to cross the territories of other sections to reach their camps, which may be situated near the villages of yet another section. Families and joint families often camp with kinsmen and affines who belong to other villages than their own. |