

Baobab Play

FILM NOTES

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BAOBAB PLAY

Photographed and directed by John K. Marshall
Edited by Frank Galvin
Production Assistants: Timothy Asch, Marilyn Wood
Produced by Documentary Educational Resources, Inc., 24 Dane Street,
Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Filmed on a 1957/58 expedition to the Kalahari Desert, led by
Laurence K. Marshall and sponsored by the Peabody Museum of
Harvard and the Smithsonian Institution.

Film Notes by Seth Reichlin*

* * *

Baobab trees¹ are the largest landmarks in the Nyae Nyae area².
Up to 50 feet in diameter³ and 200 feet high⁴, in flat country
they can be seen for almost 20 miles. They are leafless in
winter, but bear dense dark-green foliage during the summer
rainy season⁵. Baobabs are rather rare in Nyae Nyae, and their
shade is welcome. Baobab Play was filmed during the summer
months of 1958, in a tree near a waterhole at Tsumkwe, South
West Africa⁶.

The boys playing in the tree were between ten and fifteen
years old, and the boys standing at the base of the tree near
the end of the film⁷ were about seventeen. !Kung children of
widely different ages often play together, largely because
they have no alternative: !Kung bands are small⁸, so there is
little chance that a child will have many age mates in his band
to play with⁹.

*My thanks are due to John Marshall, Frank Galvin, Lorna Marshall,
and Timothy Asch, who provided information and insights about
this film. I am indebted to Curriculum Development Associates
of Washington for a grant to produce these Film Notes.

1. Adansonia digitata L.

2. See Figure 1

3. Story 1958:35

4. Thomas 1959:4

5. Story 1958:35. For an excellent account of the natural history
of the baobab tree and its animal inhabitants, see the 53-minute
film by A and J Root (n.d.)

6. See Figure 1

7. Foot 241 to 249 from the first frame

with an image.

8. 21.3 people, on the average (L. Marshall

1960:328)

9. See Konner (in press)

The baobab game took place over an entire afternoon, from about 1:30 to about 5:00 p.m. This illustrates an important point about the economy of the !Kung: gathering and hunting are often productive enough so that the contribution of children and teenagers to subsistence is not essential. According to Richard Lee, "it is not unusual to find healthy active teenagers **visiting from camp to camp while their older relatives provide food for them**¹". Lee did fieldwork among a !Kung group living **in a territory with more abundant resources, but his description applies fairly well to the !Kung group which appears in Baobab Play**.²

The !Kung are an equable and peaceful people, who abhor physical and verbal violence³, They do not respect the warrior⁴, and fights between bands are unheard of⁵, Similarly, the games !Kung children play are not aggressive or competitive. Children **strive to excel, but they are not encouraged to "beat" other children in the process**⁶. Besides, for competition to be meaningful, the players in a game must be more or less evenly matched. As we see in Baobab Play, !Kung children play in widely mixed groups, so that real competition is almost impossible for them⁷.

1. Lee 1968:36

2. Lee's fieldwork was done around Done, Botswana, about 60 miles east of Tsumkwe (see Figure 1).

3. L. Marshall 1961; see The Meat Fight (J. Marshall 1974) for an example of how !Kung adults talk about their standards of good conduct.

4. J. Marshall 1973

5. L. Harshall 1960:336

6. Harpending 1972:90

7. See Harpending 1972:90-93 for a fuller discussion of this point.

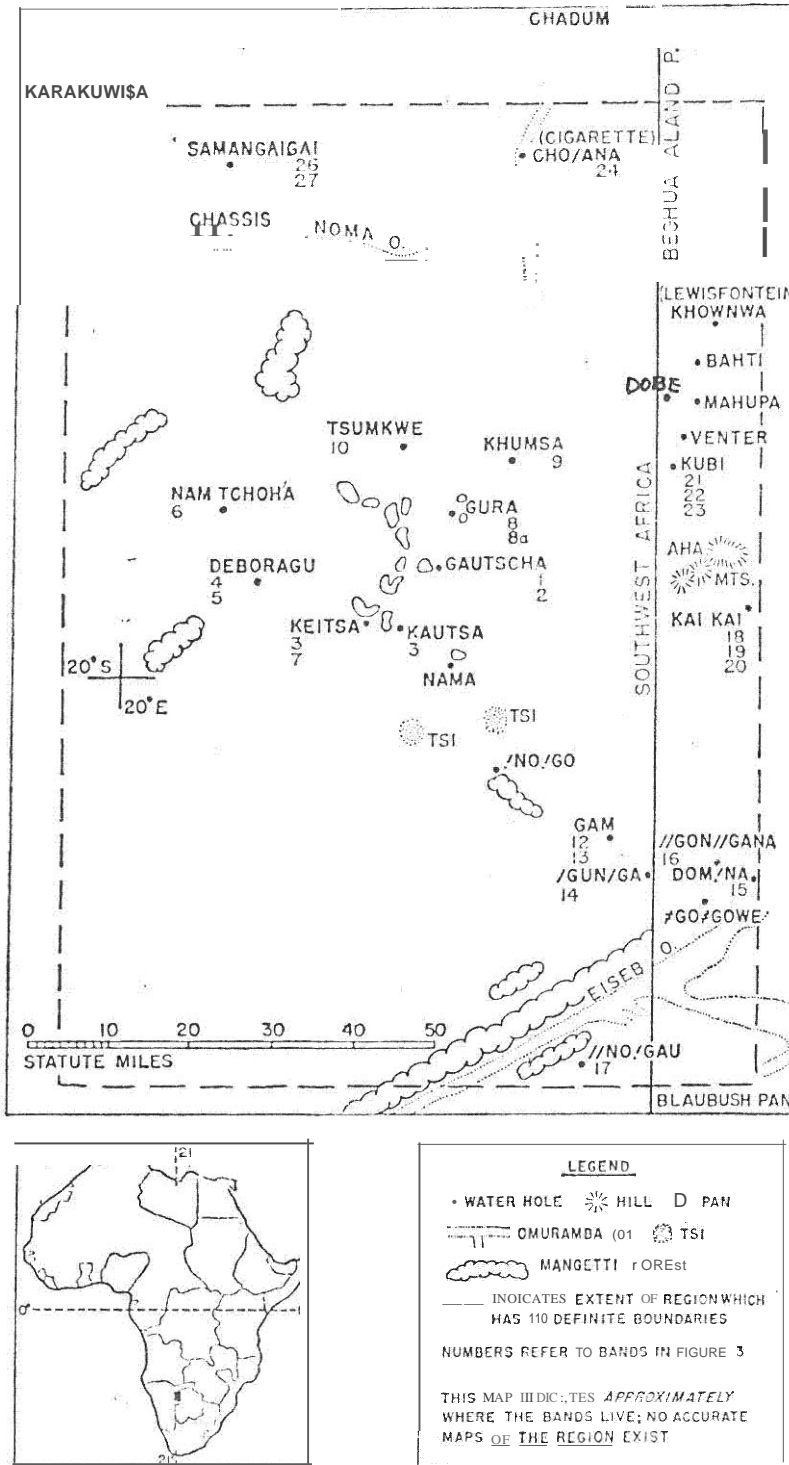


Figure 1: Map of the Nyae Nyae region. From L. Harshall 1960:326; used with the kind permission of the author.

Pronunciation Guide:

Word:	<u>Closest English equivalent:</u>
baobab	BAY-oh-bal.>
Nyae Nyae	NI NI
Tsumkwe	TSOOM-kway
!Kung	KOONG
Dobe	DOH-bay

Related Films:

CHILDREN THROW TOY ASSEGAIS (John Marshall 1974; 4 minutes)
A group of young boys throw toy spears into a tree, the object being to stick a spear into the bark. Available from Documentary Educational Resources (see page 1 for address).

TUG OF WAR (John Marshall 1974; 6 minutes). Twelve or more boys, in two teams, wrestle over a length of rubber hose. Available from Documentary Educational Resources.

THE LION GAME (John Marshall 1973; 3.5 minutes) A young man plays a lion and is "hunted" and "killed" by a group of boys. Available from Documentary Educational Resources.

PLAYING WITH SCORPIONS (John Marshall 1973; 4 minutes)
A group of boys play with scorpions, which cannot sting without striking. Available from Documentary Educational Resources.

BITTER MELONS (John Marshall 1972; 30 minutes). one section of this film, /Gwi Bushman children play traditio", songs and games, and participate in a dance with the men. Available from Documentary Educational Resources.

!KO-BUSCHMANNER: FEDERSTABSPIEL DER MANNER (Whirligig game of the !Ko Bushman men) (D Heunemann and JJ! Heinz 1970; 5 minutes). A group of men toss a weighted feather into the air with a stick, a game which is also played by !Kung boys. Available from the Pennsylvania State University, Audio-Visual Services, University Park, PA 16802 (UE-1826).

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1973 Playing with Scorpions. Film, Documentary Educational **Resources**.

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