EVA’S MEN: GENDER AND POWER IN THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE,
1652–74

BY JULIA C. WELLS
Rhodes University

Quite possibly, Eva, born Krotoa, is the most written about African woman in South African historiography. Her name fills the journals of the Dutch East India Company almost from the very start of their little feeding-station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. She is known as a Khoena girl taken into Dutch commander Jan Van Riebeeck’s household from the age of about twelve, who later became a key interpreter for the Dutch, was baptised, married Danish surgeon, Pieter Van Meerhoff, but then died as a drunken prostitute after his death. Yet her persona remains an enigma. As Christina Landman put it, ‘Krotoa is a story-generator’.

To conservative historians, Eva’s life offers living proof that the Khoena were irredeemable savages. To black nationalist writers, such as Khoena historian, Yvette Abrahams, she personifies the widespread rape and abuse of black women by the invaders. Eva’s chief biographer, V. C. Malherbe, forms a more neutral judgment by describing Eva as primarily ‘a woman in between’. Landman views her as an early synthesizer of African and Christian religious traditions. Carli Coetzee demonstrates how recent Afrikaans-speaking artists, poets and actors have constructed an image of Eva as the mother of the Afrikaner nation, a tamed African who acquiesced

1 I choose to use the term ‘Khoena’ over the more familiar ‘Khoikhoi’ or ‘Khoisan’ as it is grammatically gender inclusive, simply denoting ‘people’, whereas Khoikhoi translates as ‘men of men’. Richard Elphick admits that the term ‘Khoikhoi’ is simply the choice of (male) scholars and has limited foundation in the records. Richard Elphick, Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa (2nd ed., Johannesburg, 1985), xxi, 46 n. The journals of the Dutch East India Company claim that the term ‘Khoena’ was the preferred one for groups of people living nearest to the Cape of Good Hope, while ‘Khoikhoi’ was rather jealously reserved for higher ranking kings. See Donald Moodie, The Record or a Series of Official Papers relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa (3 vols.) (Amsterdam and Cape Town, 1960), i, 110 (31 Oct. 1657), and 215 (21 Sept. 1666). I also choose to use the name ‘Eva’ over Krotoa since the only information available about her comes through the Dutch who used this name. It is an indication of the bias in the accounts in which she is always perceived in terms of her relationship to them and never simply as a Khoena woman. As such, it signifies the unfortunate loss of her Khoena identity in the historical accounts.


3 D. B. Bosman, ‘Uit die biografie van ’n Hottentotin in beskawing’, Huisgenoot, xxvii (3 July 1942), 7, and (10 July 1942), 6–7.


5 V. C. Malherbe, Krotoa, called Eva: A Woman Between (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, Communication no. 19, 1990).

to Europeanness. She is often portrayed as yearning to return to her African roots, but without success.

Virtually all of the representations of Eva construct her as a helpless victim of vicious culture clashes. Today’s racial consciousness, laced with assumptions of inevitable African/European hostility, is often read back into the historical record. Frustratingly large gaps in that record leave room for a wide range of interpretations, depending heavily on the subjectivities of the historian. Virtually all previous writers, however, have judged Eva primarily by the tragic circumstances of her death, while minimizing the considerable achievements of her earlier years.

None of the existing images does justice to the complexities of her life and times. Yet another story can be told, that of a woman who exercised an extraordinary level of control and influence over the key men in her life. Her story dramatizes the initial dependency of the Dutch newcomers on anyone who provided reasonably reliable information about the local inhabitants. In Eva’s case, this usefulness was compounded by her sexuality in an environment where women were scarce. She also exploited gender stereotypes which cast her as a ‘safe’ person to be entrusted with full access to the Van Riebeeck household. Her life also reflects both high levels of acceptance within Dutch society, as well as the frustrations and limitations a trans-cultural person faced.

Further, her story highlights the extraordinary influence and privilege that women could command in Khoena society. Mention of Khoena women joining their husbands in the trading enterprise dot the Dutch records. Eva’s life clearly exemplifies this dynamic, as she served respectively as a youthful goodwill apprentice, interpreter, trading agent, ambassador for a high-ranking chief and peace negotiator in time of war.

Her life also exposes the range of ambivalent Khoena feelings about the Dutch presence in their first decade at the Cape. During this period, the Khoena did not unilaterally view the Dutch as enemies or invaders. Some saw in them an opportunity for unparalleled personal gain as middlemen in the livestock trade; others saw them as potential allies against old enemies, while still others used them to secure valued trade commodities. Eva herself evolved considerably over time. At the peak of her career, she subscribed to the belief that the Dutch presence could be mutually beneficial to both sides. In many ways, Eva’s story exposes that brief historical moment when Dutch and Khoena peacefully co-existed and strove to live in harmony.


Although a number of versions of the Dutch East India Company journals have been published, this study relies primarily on three English translations. Most used is Donald Moodie’s The Record, which is limited to references to Dutch/African relations but also includes a variety of other Company documents. H. B. Thom published a comprehensive version of just the journal in 1952, entitled Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck (Cape Town and Amsterdam, 1952) but limited himself to Van Riebeeck’s era only. As he points out in his introduction, this work cannot be taken as Van Riebeeck’s personal memoir as it is written in several different hands, indicating that it was composed at times by dictation from Van Riebeeck and at times by others unknown. References to the journal have to be taken as material supervised by Van Riebeeck, though not necessarily his own words. For English translations of the period after Van Riebeeck, relevant volumes of H. C. V. Leibbrandt, Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope (Cape Town, 1891) are used.
The reasons for Eva’s presence with the Dutch from the earliest days of their settlement have a direct bearing on the nature of her subsequent status in both Dutch and Khoena societies. Although Abrahams assumes the Dutch took the child Krotoa by force, no hard evidence confirms this. The official journal is infuriatingly vague, revealing only that she joined the Dutch fairly soon after their arrival in April 1652, was given the name Eva, and had left them by January 1654. While Abrahams assumes that the silences imply a cover-up of a kidnapping, it is equally plausible that the omissions about how Eva entered service reflect the mundane nature of the situation.

Circumstantial evidence supports the possibility that Krotoa lived with her ‘uncle’ Autshumato (called Harry by the Dutch) at the time of the Dutch landing. The records confirm that she was separated from her sister in infancy, as well the fact that Eva showed consistent hostility to the Goringhaiqua clan and to her own mother, who lived with them. In contrast, her fate and fortunes were closely tied with those of Autshumato for whom she clearly expressed deep concern and compassion on several occasions.

The implications are quite important, as Autshumato’s Goringhaicona people were sedentary, non-pastoral hunter-gatherers who collected shellfish in the vicinity of Table Bay. For years before the Dutch came to settle, Autshumato served as a postal agent for passing ships from a number of countries, having been taken to Java by the English in 1631. He and his followers camped at Table Bay and greeted Van Riebeeck when he landed. They then lived adjacent to the Dutch tents during the construction of the first fort and became the first Africans proletarianized by the Dutch colonial presence. Thus, if Krotoa lived with Autshumato when the Dutch first arrived, her going into service with them might have been a relatively smooth transition, as many Goringhaicona readily did odd-jobs for the Dutch in return for food, tobacco or drink. Her mother’s people, the Goringhaiqua, by contrast, were pastoralists only rarely seen by the Dutch during their first year.

Possibly the Dutch needed more than casual help when, only a few months after arriving, the first baby was born to the chaplain/sick-healer, Willem Barentssen Wijlant, and his wife. Two days after the birth, both the new father and Mrs Van Riebeeck came down with a virulent disease which had been spreading rapidly through the settlement, leaving a few casualties. Extra assistance with the new baby could thus have become particularly urgent. The sick-comforter, Wijlant, routinely led short excursions out of the fort to try to barter with Khoena. Like Van Riebeeck, he was an evangelical Calvinist, eager to find converts among the local people. In view of his religious zeal, and possibly the need of his wife for assistance with the new baby, he might have initiated negotiations to obtain the services of a young Khoena girl. They probably turned to Autshumato first, since he already had a long history of working for Europeans. Perhaps he selected Krotoa because of her status as ward, separated from her biological parents.

9 Moodie, The Record, i, 44 (28 Jan. 1654), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
10 Thom, Van Riebeeck, i, 43 (6 June 1652); and Moodie, The Record, i, 110 (31 Oct. 1657), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
11 Thom, Van Riebeeck, i, 44 (8 June 1652).
Although Krotoa was certainly too young to have exercised much free will about where she lived and worked, her service in the commander’s household could have been viewed as an honour and a form of apprenticeship by the Khoena. Contemporary evidence from the journal describes a young African girl raised in the home of a non-related but prestigious chief and hence honoured as highly as if she were his daughter.\(^\text{12}\) The German officer, Ludwig Alberti, described similar customs among the amaXhosa, nearly a century and a half later.\(^\text{13}\) Clearly, the people among whom Krotoa lived differentiated between low and high ranking Dutch, greeting ships’ captains or the commander as long-lost friends, throwing their arms around their necks in warm embrace.\(^\text{14}\) From the Khoena point of view, the presence of a young girl in the home of a neighbouring ‘chief’ might be seen not only as an honour, but as a token of friendship and a useful way to gather intelligence.

The flimsiness of the initial Dutch encampment and their high dependency on good relations with their Khoena neighbours suggests a tenuous situation, unlikely to serve as a ‘prison’ in which a captive girl could have been kept against her will and the will of her kin, as Abrahams alleges. In fact Krotoa entered Dutch service twice in the first few years after their arrival. The first, as suggested, probably arose from her easy availability and the Dutch need. The second entry more clearly signified a gesture of friendliness and goodwill on the part of the Khoena, smoothing over a serious rift with the Dutch. It appears that Autshumato removed Eva from the Dutch in October 1653, when he stole all of the Company cattle, killing a Dutch herdboy in the process.\(^\text{15}\) A few months later, Wijlant spotted Eva, Autshumato’s wife and children and all the missing cattle among the followers of Gogosoa, chief of the near-by Goringhaiqua.\(^\text{16}\) Van Riebeeck reported that he restrained himself from using force to recover the stolen livestock, instead entering into negotiations. During this crisis, Gogosoa and his wife made repeated visits to the fort in the interests of restoring peace. Possibly at this time they also made a more formal arrangement for Krotoa to return to the fort, as a gesture of good intentions. The record does not say, but soon after, Krotoa did re-enter service to the Dutch, and relations between the Dutch and the Goringhaiqua improved considerably.

**EVA CHARMS VAN RIEBEECK**

Over the next few years, Eva developed a persona in the records, not simply as ‘Van Riebeeck’s favourite maid’,\(^\text{17}\) but as a highly valued interpreter. For

\(^\text{12}\) Chainhantima, a Chainouqua sub-chief, related that his wife had been given to the Chobona in childhood, was raised in the house of the chief, then given to him as a bride of extraordinary high status. Moodie, *The Record*, i, 111 (1 Nov. 1657), Van Riebeeck’s journal.

\(^\text{13}\) L. Alberti, *Ludwig Alberti’s Account of the Tribal Life and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807* (Cape Town, 1968; first published 1815 in German), 83.

\(^\text{14}\) Thom, *Van Riebeeck*, i, 30 (10 April 1652).


\(^\text{16}\) Thom, *Van Riebeeck*, i, 208 (28 Jan. 1654).

her, it was a period of relative isolation from her people and of significant acculturation among the Dutch. Living with the Van Riebeeck family, she took advantage of her position to learn Dutch fluently, 'almost as well as a Dutch girl'. Her induction into the Dutch language and way of life may also have been facilitated by Van Riebeeck's two nieces, of relatively comparable ages to Eva. One of these, Elizabeth Van Opdorp, years later took in Eva's children while she was incarcerated on Robben Island.

Eva's standing with the Dutch, however, went beyond her enthusiastic embrace of the Dutch language and culture. Despite clear efforts to present a picture of respectability and decorum regarding Eva, Van Riebeeck reveals a high level of personal concern for her. The journal conveys a muted sense of a father–daughter relationship, stresses Eva's closeness to Van Riebeeck's wife, Maria, and highlights efforts to convert Eva to Christianity. All these themes appear to justify the vast amounts of attention lavished on her. Van Riebeeck represented himself as cautious and critical of her motives at all times. However, her greatest offence was flattering the Dutch too much. This comes across as rather trivial compared to the behaviour of her fellow male interpreters who stole the Company livestock and led rebellions.

Although the evidence is entirely circumstantial, a case can be made that Van Riebeeck had an intimate relationship with Eva at some point. The most compelling evidence comes from the larger picture, taken as a totality. The trust and reliance that Van Riebeeck invested in Eva clearly transcended the boundaries of a conventional master–servant relationship. He invited her to important meetings, explained important decisions to her, consulted her privately about vital issues, gave her freedom to come and go and made her an active sales agent. Perhaps most revealing is the sharp contrast between Van Riebeeck's attitude toward Eva and that of his successor, Zacharius Wagenaar. The new commander treated Eva with outright churlishness and hostility, hardly appropriate behaviour towards one who had proved herself so invaluable. By comparison, Van Riebeeck had been gentle, considerate, tolerant, indulgent and trusting of Eva in a highly subjective way.

If Van Riebeeck was intimate with Eva, it is not surprising that it was carefully concealed in the Company journals. He clearly tried hard to represent her in a detached, professional manner. She appeared simply as being the right person conveniently on the spot whenever needed. But her words and views commanded extraordinary respect and authority, as revealed in comments such as 'this was also observed by Eva', 'Eva said the same', 'we must attend Eva's last parting advice' and 'this Eva had often told us'. Not only did she provide information, but also moral judgments

18 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 247 (5 May 1662), Memorandum left by Van Riebeeck for his successor, Zacharius Wagenaar.

19 Jan Reijnertz and Elizabeth van Opdorp were married on 23 Nov. 1653. At the time he was a junior merchant for the Company, but later became one of the first free burger farmers. Thom, *Van Riebeeck*, i, 188, 192 (8 and 23 Nov. 1653); Leibbrandt, *Précis*, 266–7 (8 Feb. 1669).


22 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 149 (9 Nov. 1658), Van Riebeeck's journal.

23 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 184 (16 July 1659), Van Riebeeck's journal.

on its validity. For example, she claimed the Goringhaiqua could not be trusted because their promises did not come from the heart.  

Further, the interest Van Riebeeck took in her clearly suggests affection. When she was away from the fort, he followed her movements carefully, apparently being supplied with a steady stream of intelligence by others. At times, references to her subjective feelings slipped in—she gave a ‘half-suppressed sigh’, felt ‘much dejected’, became depressed and was wilful, ‘we could not think of detaining her against her will; for nothing could be properly done with her’. The journal-writer often conveyed Eva’s words verbatim while generally summarizing other interpreters. In two places, Van Riebeeck admitted to confidential, if not secret, information about her that he did not record in the journal.  

Despite all efforts to sustain propriety, Van Riebeeck also comes across in the journal as a man who took great interest in indigenous women. As an employee of the Dutch East India Company, his first major Company assignment was to secure peace and congenial trade co-operation with the powerful Queen of Achin in Sumatra. After arriving at the Cape, he showed a keen fascination with the story of a chief’s wife, bedecked with gold and jewels, insisting that she be brought into the fort. He even offered to go out to meet her himself. Though the tale eventually collapsed as largely fictitious, what is significant is the Commander’s near-obsessive absorption in the story, giving it great prominence in the journal. It is also interesting to note Eva’s role in spinning the yarn while acting as interpreter, suggesting that she might have been deliberately playing upon his weaknesses which she knew first-hand.  

Van Riebeeck observed and noted indigenous women more than other diarists of his day. On another occasion, he referred to Namies, the daughter of Chief Oedasoa as ‘a fine well-shaped wench, not darker than a fair mestice; neither was she ugly’. Further, he consistently recorded the steady stream of Khoena women into the fort along with their husbands on trading expeditions and often commented on the Khoena custom of seizing women as booty during war.  

Not surprisingly, no hint of Dutch suspicion about their relationship comes through the journal. Van Riebeeck represented himself as a model husband, father and family man, who led an exemplary life. But from the Khoena, a somewhat different picture emerged. The journal noted that the Khoena predicated their treatment of Eva on their perception of her extraordinary relationship to Van Riebeeck. Indeed, their closeness ensured both her safety when she travelled outside the fort, and his, as long as she was at hand. At one point Van Riebeeck reported Eva as claiming that her enemies would have killed her had it not been for their fear of Van Riebeeck’s

25 Moodie, The Record, i, 135 (7 July 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
26 Moodie, The Record, i, 181 (8 July 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
27 Moodie, The Record, i, 150 (1 July 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
28 Moodie, The Record, i, 150 (1 July 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
29 Moodie, The Record, i, 177 (26 June 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
30 Moodie, The Record, i, 146 and 251 (29 Oct. 1658 and 5 May 1662), Van Riebeeck’s journal and Memorandum to Wagenaar.  
31 Thom, Van Riebeeck, i, xxi.  
32 Moodie, The Record, i, 110 (31 Oct. 1657), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  
33 Moodie, The Record, i, 221 (2 Nov. 1660), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
wrath. At times when she left the fort, he expressed fear for his own safety. This confirms the idea that the Khoena viewed her presence with the Dutch as a token of peace and goodwill. Conversely, her absence removed a special safeguard, leaving Van Riebeeck feeling particularly vulnerable.

Although the journal fails to confirm details of an intimate relationship between Eva and Van Riebeeck, it constructs a picture of complex dynamics which she exploited for her own interests. During the second half of the 1650s, Eva, though still only in her teens, actively and steadily placed herself in a central position within the Dutch establishment. She quickly learned just how much the Dutch valued ‘insider’ information about Khoena thinking, plans and movements. As newly-arriving colonizers, they were vulnerable, not only because of their numerical weaknesses, but because of their ignorance of the local people and customs. Invariably, they placed a high premium on acquiring information upon which their very survival hinged. Because of its character as a refreshment station for passing ships, the settlement depended heavily on cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Food supplies came almost entirely from livestock traded with the indigenous people for tobacco, copper, beads and drink. The more familiar colonial strategy of conquest and plunder always loomed in the background as perhaps an easier option. However, as Jay Naidoo has shown, despite Van Riebeeck’s persistent eagerness to use force, directives from Amsterdam ultimately restrained him.

The ruling Chamber of Seventeen thoroughly committed itself to getting as much as it needed out of the Cape at the lowest expense. This depended entirely on good relations with the Khoena.

EVA’S ALIENATION FROM THE KHOENA

Eva’s successful career as an interpreter rested not only on her good language skills and her closeness to the Commander, but also on her unique ability to acquire information about the Khoena of interest to the Dutch. Previous studies have tended to assume that she simply ‘knew’ about political developments in the hinterland because she was Khoena herself. But much of what she shared with the Dutch went beyond what could have been known or understood by the twelve-year-old girl who first entered their service.

It is far more likely that she sought out information networks, constantly acquiring fresh input. This flow of information no doubt went both ways, although only the Dutch record of what they received from her is evident. On numerous occasions, however, various Khoena leaders used her to convey their wishes and interests to the Dutch. In fact the first mention of Eva’s involvement in the political affairs of the Dutch appears in January 1656, when she informed Van Riebeeck of her uncle Autshumato’s intentions to move in closer to the fort. A negative reply must have been communicated, as Autshumato, still only suspected of stealing Dutch livestock in 1654, kept his distance for some time.

---

31 Moodie, *The Record*, 1, 146 (29 Oct. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
32 Moodie, *The Record*, 1, 210 (30 June 1660), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
34 Moodie, *The Record*, 1, 82 (12 Jan. 1656), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
After another year and a half, Eva clearly favoured Dutch interests when she took advantage of her role as interpreter for Chainhantima, a chief of the Chainouqua people, who lived to the east of the Cape and had never before encountered the Dutch. The information she provided confirmed for Van Riebeeck what he had always suspected—that Autshumato had been obstructing the Dutch from learning much about the interior for fear they would seize land and wealth by force and threaten his vital position as a middle-man in the livestock trade. Eva’s translations drove Autshumato (by now back in service as an interpreter) into such a rage that he spat on the floor and stomped in the spittle.38

Two important points surface at this time. One is Eva’s willingness to please the Dutch with fresh information at the expense of breaking rank with her own kinsman and other Khoena interpreters. The other is the beginning of her involvement in the Dutch quest for expanded contacts in the interior, a sphere of influence she later embraced wholeheartedly. Further, Van Riebeeck suspected that her interpretations went beyond simply conveying what informants said, extending to significant amounts of embellishment on her part.39 Her role as an interpreter was scarcely passive or simply functional. She projected herself in a highly interventionist way, whetting the Dutch appetite to expand.

Why was she so suddenly launched from dim obscurity into the heart of the most vital of Dutch interests? Possibly prior to this time, she had left the fort for the customary Khoena initiation of girls upon reaching puberty.40 Since girls had to go into seclusion immediately at the onset of menstruation, this is more likely to have taken place in 1657, when she would have been fourteen or fifteen, than in 1658, as suggested by Elphick and Malherbe.41 After working at the fort for four to five years, she would have gained fresh contact with Khoena people at a time when she knew Dutch interests very well. The occasion could have been used by her to gather new information. Also, when she returned to the fort, other Khoena would have treated her as an adult. Although this cannot be verified, it remains clear that from late 1657 she became deeply enmeshed in the Dutch pursuit of intelligence about near and distant Khoena.

Eva’s reputation as a Dutch collaborator is even more unmistakable during the course of a serious hostage crisis the following year. By mid-1658, the Dutch had started importing slaves, only to find that they quickly absconded into the interior. Van Riebeeck clearly found Eva far more sympathetic to his wish to have local Khoena participate in returning the run-aways than his chief male interpreter, a Goringhaiqua named Doman. After spending a year in Java, Doman returned highly suspicious of colonial intentions. The journal records how, in a private conversation between Van Riebeeck and Eva, she poured out her heart about the intense rivalry between herself and Doman. She accused him of telling the Khoena too much about the Dutch, Moodie, The Record, i, 114–15 (14 Nov. 1657), Van Riebeeck’s journal.

Moodie, The Record, i, 135 (7 July 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal; i, 203–4 (16 Mar. 1660), despatch from Van Riebeeck to Chamber of Seventeen; i, 247 (5 May 1662), Memorandum from Van Riebeeck to Wagenaar.


38 Elphick, Khokhkoi, 107; Malherbe, Krotoa, 23.
to which he replied: ‘I am Hottentooosman, and not Dutchman, but you, Eva, soubat (curry favour with) the Commander’. She further alleged that it was Doman’s people, the Goringhaiqua, who had the slaves and were likely to sell them into the interior in exchange for dagga.

The Dutch then gave Eva all the credit (or blame) for proposing they take two sons of the Goringhaiqua chief, Gogosoa, as hostages, until all the slaves were returned. Considering the level of restraint the Dutch had exercised to date against using force with their Khoena adversaries, this implied a significant revision of policy. Malherbe suspects that the Dutch set up Eva as a scapegoat, since the tactic of hostage-taking was in no way unfamiliar to them. In fact, the free burger (and husband of Elizabeth Van Opdorp) Jan Reijnertz, had held Gogosoa hostage just a month previously to secure the return of some stolen cattle. If hostage-taking was already a common strategy, it is more likely that Eva only suggested names of effective candidates. Whatever her level of complicity, Doman and his people presumed her guilty of openly assisting the Dutch. Fearing for her life, Van Riebeeck ordered her not to leave the fort.

However, tensions soon spiralled out of hand. The hostages languished in the fort for over a week, and only a few missing slaves reappeared. The hostages themselves argued that they should be joined by further hostages from all the local Khoena chiefdoms. So the Dutch took more, including Eva’s uncle, Autshumato, and seized all of his cattle. In the process, the Dutch killed one of his followers, the first Khoena death at their hands. Within two days, all parties concluded a peace treaty which freed the hostages and secured the return of the slaves. Significantly, it also contained clauses stating that the Goringhaiqua now gave up all claims to the Cape peninsula. So what had started out as a tussle over runaway slaves, ended up with a Khoena cession of land to the Dutch, the imprisonment of Autshumato, the confiscation of his cattle and a Khoena death – and both sides blamed Eva!

It was a messy affair, which reportedly left Eva ‘depressed’ and no doubt urgently raised the issue of where her loyalties lay. She promptly visited Autshumato, who had been sent to Robben Island as a prisoner for his role in stealing company livestock five years earlier. But nothing she said or did could undo his sorry fate. Van Riebeeck compared her to Esther, pleading for her uncle, Mordecai. Doman’s accusations of her traitorous behavior escalated, with the journal reporting him as saying: ‘’See! There comes the Hollander’s advocate again, she is coming to deceive her own countrymen with a parcel of lies, and to betray to the last’, and other expressions to make her odious’. If ever Eva needed friends and allies it was now, since her thorough identification with Dutch interests at this stage could have sealed her off from Khoena confidence altogether. Instead, the reverse happened as Eva embarked on a bold new strategy to shore up her position.

---

32 Moodie, The Record, i, 128 (21 June 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
33 Malherbe, Krotoa, 16.
34 Moodie, The Record, i, 125 (12 May 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
35 Moodie, The Record, i, 131 (1 July 1658), Van Riebeeck journal.
36 Moodie, The Record, i, 138 (30 July 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
37 Moodie, The Record, i, 141 (18 Sept. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
38 Moodie, The Record, i, 139 (26 Aug. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
Ironically, the depression in the livestock trade during the crisis created an opportunity for Eva to redeem herself. Few Khoena came near the fort for fear of being taken hostage. Within a few days of the treaty, Eva and Doman, now acting in concert, requested permission ‘to pay a visit to their friends’ in order ‘to make them known to us’. It was the first time that Eva acted as a trade agent in her own right, although the male interpreters frequently did so. Since one of the hostages had been a Cochoqua named Boubou, it is possible that Eva surmised that she could expect a warm reception from his people. After all, the great Cochoqua co-chief, Oedasoa, had gone to the trouble of taking Eva’s sister as a wife after kidnapping her from another chief.

Armed with brass, iron, beads, tobacco, bread and brandy for ‘her mother and friends’, Eva set out. Her immediate change of apparel from Dutch clothes into Khoena skins shocked the Dutch, who liked to view her as having become one of them. No doubt it signified her strong wish to identify more fully with her own people and to seek their acceptance. She received a mixed reception. The Goringhaiqua apparently perceived her as an irredeemable sell-out. Even her own mother refused to have anything to do with her. In contrast, Chief Oedasoa and her sister, ‘who had not seen her since infancy’, warmly welcomed her. This contact not only launched Eva on the most active stage of her career, but also turned the tide in northern trade for the Dutch. Her activities as intermediary between the Dutch and the Cochoqua proved pivotal.

First, she dispelled myths and rumours that had kept them apart. She adamantly insisted that Doman was a liar when he claimed that the Cochoqua wanted to kill all the Dutch. Her descriptions of Cochoqua wealth in livestock actively whetted the Dutch appetite for new trading partners free from troublesome middlemen. To Oedasoa, she painted a glowing picture of the Dutch as fair and reasonable people. She reportedly had taken every opportunity of informing Oedasoa minutely of the customs of our nation, in particular of our inclination for a friendly intercourse and traffic with them. She had also told how she was brought up in the house of the Commander’s wife, that she had learnt our language and in some measure, our religion.

Further, she convinced Oedasoa that trade with the Dutch could yield special benefits for him and his people. In other words, she convinced both sides to trust each other sufficiently to open direct negotiations. Once the door opened, Eva remained involved, making suggestions to the Dutch of new trade goods which they had not previously offered, including cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, mace, pepper and sugar. She also successfully persuaded them to send along a few good violinists and a Dutch clown to

---

49 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 142 (23 Sept. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
50 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 141 (18 Sept. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal. The Cochoqua were commonly referred to in the journal as ‘Saldhanars’, a name given generically to most Khoena from outside the immediate peninsular area prior to this time. In much of the journal it is therefore difficult to distinguish precisely who is who or how much contact they had.
entertain the chief!\textsuperscript{53} When the Dutch soldiers and traders returned to the fort after their first visit, they conveyed wondrous stories of a chief who could muster 1,000 armed men, had armories full of weapons and livestock as far as the eye could see.\textsuperscript{54} As they left the Cochoqua, the Dutch noted Eva’s place of prestige among them: ‘She was, like her sister and brother-in-law, according to their national custom, mounted upon an ox, like a great lady, instead of travelling on foot with the rest.’\textsuperscript{55}

At this stage, Eva gave the Khoena a serious try. Her sister had promised to find her a husband, a chief rich in cattle and sheep.\textsuperscript{56} So after the initial Dutch trade expedition, Eva remained behind while the Dutch returned to the fort. However, her reculturation was extremely shortlived. Exactly why she returned to the fort within six weeks is not very clear. She claimed she came back because Oedasoa had been seriously mauled by a lion. According to the journal, she blamed herself for having made ‘repeated requests’ to him to go on a hunting expedition to secure a wild horse and ivory for the Dutch.\textsuperscript{57} Did other Khoena blame her and make her feel unwelcome? This hardly fits into the larger context of increasingly friendly relations between the Cochoqua and the Dutch.

Perhaps more to the point, the journal also alleged that Oedasoa and Eva’s sister asked her to return to the fort to prepare for extensive further contacts. They anticipated an official visit in which Eva’s sister would call on Mrs Van Riebeeck and Oedasoa on Van Riebeeck, ‘for the sake of society, like sisters and brothers.’\textsuperscript{58} Also, they planned to leave behind at the fort some young children ‘that they might be taught from their youth upwards’ about Dutch ways.\textsuperscript{59} This suggestion tends to confirm the possibility that something similar had been arranged in Eva’s youth. It also gives a more plausible reason for her return to the fort: Oedasoa wanted to use her as his own agent within the heart of the Dutch establishment.

Whether Eva herself felt reluctant to remain within the pastoralist lifestyle or was not keen on marrying the chosen chief, the records do not tell us at this stage. Clearly, her ambassadorial role took precedence over other considerations. Malherbe interprets Eva’s return as ‘an expedient retreat’ from Khoena life. However, far more was at stake than Eva’s personal wishes and feelings. From this stage on, her career as not just interpreter, but as a key trading agent and intelligence-gathering functionary for Oedasoa took off.

However, Eva also continued to serve Dutch trading interests somewhat independently of the Cochoqua. Early in 1659 she provided the Dutch with elaborate descriptions of the Namaqua, an even more powerful chiefdom to the north of the Cochoqua, and, it would emerge later, their sworn enemies. On the basis of her accounts, Van Riebeeck authorized a northward expedition of exploration by free burger volunteers in early February.\textsuperscript{60} Eva suggested which inland people would provide the best guides for the journey and insisted that the Namaqua could link the Dutch with the powerful inland

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.  \textsuperscript{54} Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 147 (31 Oct. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
\textsuperscript{55} Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 149 (9 Nov. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
\textsuperscript{56} Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 150 (10 Nov. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
\textsuperscript{57} Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 151 (31 Dec. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
\textsuperscript{58} Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 152 (31 Dec. 1658), Van Riebeeck’s journal.  \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Thom, \textit{Van Riebeeck}, iii, 9 (1 Feb. 1659).
Chobona, and eventually the Monomotapa and Vigiti Magna river. This intelligence from Eva demonstrates her immersion in the Dutch beliefs and aspirations of the day. They trusted heavily in a map, now known to be largely mythical, drawn up by Huygens Van Linschoten and published in Amsterdam in 1623, which portrayed a northward-flowing river named Vigiti Magna, upon which sat the kingdom of the Monomotapa, believed to be rich in gold, ivory and pearls. While historians blame Eva for feeding the Dutch false information which whetted their appetite for inland exploration, it is more likely that she wove together a little fact and a little fiction to create a plausible story. However, the first northern expedition traveled scarcely thirty miles from the fort, before returning, frustrated by barren, arid conditions. The enthusiasm to explore the north then had to be postponed due to the outbreak of hostilities.

When the interpreter, Doman, led his Goringhaiqua people in open rebellion against the Dutch presence in May 1659, the Dutch viewed it as their ‘first war’ against Khoena. For Eva, it proved to be the conflict which put her intermediary position to its severest test to date. In the ensuing power struggle, she capitulated to Oedasoa’s wishes and, for the first time, clearly misled the Dutch.

During the early stages of the conflict, Eva maintained her familiar stance of marked hostility to the Goringhaiqua. She warned the Dutch of the Goringhaiqua strategy of attacking during the rain when Dutch guns would not fire properly. Eva alone, of all the Khoena in service to the Dutch, remained inside the fort as the conflict escalated. Malherbe takes this as an indication of her alienation from Khoena society. It is equally possible that she stayed to continue her role as Oedasoa’s ambassador. With the eruption of open hostilities, his relationship to the Dutch was very much in question.

From her position inside the fort, Eva raised Dutch expectations that Oedasoa might ally with them and join in the attack on the Goringhaiqua. However, Oedasoa consistently dodged this approach, projecting a position of studied neutrality. In an attempt to demonstrate his continuing trust and cooperation with the Dutch, he again offered a state visit from his wife, Eva’s sister. Another proposal suggested that Oedasoa should come to the fort himself so that he and Van Riebeeck could co-operate ‘like two brothers with one heart and soul’. Neither plan quite materialized. Throughout June and July 1659, Eva travelled back and forth between the fort and the Cochoqua, camped in the vicinity of Saldhana Bay, at times by boat to avoid hostilities and dangers on the overland journey. While tensions bristled between the

---

61 From the evidence, it appears that the term ‘Chobona’ was most often used in a generic sense to refer to larger, darker-skinned Africans living in the interior. This became distorted to refer to a powerful king called the Chobona, who ruled over the Monomotapa empire. The fact that Chobona people were described as living in stone houses and permanent towns could have been a reference to the Tswana or even to more ancient peoples, such as those who lived at the Great Zimbabwe or Mapungubwe. Since the Khoena people are believed to have migrated southward from the area of present-day Botswana, some lingering knowledge of stone structures is possible. See Elphick, Khoikhoi, 14–22.
62 Thom, Van Riebeeck, iii, 10 (3 Feb. 1659).
63 Thom, Van Riebeeck, iii, 24 (6 Mar. 1659).
64 Malherbe, Krotoa, 29.
65 Moodie, The Record, i, 172 (20 June 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
66 Moodie, The Record, i, 174 (21 June 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
Dutch and their Goringhaiqua adversaries, the prospects of trade with Oedasoa and his Cochoqua people blossomed.

By the time the rebellion ended, however, Oedasoa had proved to be far from neutral. Not only did he decline to attack the Goringhaiqua and refuse to give the Dutch any intelligence about enemy whereabouts, but he gave shelter to the rebels and eventually negotiated a peace settlement on their behalf. The evidence suggests that Oedasoa had to neutralize Eva’s independent actions. She spent much of the latter half of 1659 at Saldhana Bay, where she could not influence the Dutch prosecution of the war.

Clear differences between her and Oedasoa surfaced when she urged the Dutch to send a wagon to fetch him to come into the fort. He refused to come, claiming the wagon ride would be too uncomfortable and that he wanted to attend to a sick child. Although a relatively trivial event, it exposed open conflict and disagreement between Eva and Oedasoa. His unwillingness to take up arms against fellow Khoena became more and more apparent to Van Riebeeck, who also began to lose trust in Eva, expressing many doubts and misgivings. He was bitterly disappointed that Oedasoa’s Cochoqua would not help the Dutch in their war against the Goringhaiqua.

When Eva had left the fort in July 1659, she hinted that she might not return. However, after spending three months with the Cochoqua, she resurfaced as Oedasoa’s chief negotiator in peace talks. By this stage, she conformed completely to the Cochoqua position and tried to soothe the tensions by stressing the importance of achieving peace rather than point fingers at one another for past transgressions. In other words, she completely dropped her vituperations against the Goringhaiqua. From the tone and the style of the journal, it is clear that the Dutch saw Eva, by early 1660, as having swung over to serving Cochoqua interests more than their own. Some free burgers who had visited Saldhana Bay warned Van Riebeeck that Oedasoa was using Eva as a spy, taking advantage of Van Riebeeck having such faith in Eva.

Although Eva came out of the conflict decidedly more committed to the Khoena than ever before, she resumed her life as interpreter at the fort. She continued to help the Dutch find new trading allies again in 1660 when she described in great detail the potential wealth of the Hessequa and even set up an uncle from among the Chainouqua as a specially trained and coached trading agent. The journal represents her as headstrong and bossy when she refused to interpret for Sousoa, the Chainouqua chief, because he only wanted to exchange social pleasantries and not get down to the bartering business quickly enough. However, the journal no longer portrays her as the insider whose advice on everything was so eagerly sought. In addition to her growing Khoena loyalties, Van Riebeeck might well have been shaken in his relationship with her by the active entry into her life of Pieter Van Meerhoff, who arrived in the Cape in March 1659.

67 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 180 (8 July 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
68 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 179 (1 July 1659), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
69 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 198 (18 Jan. 1660), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
EVA AND PIETER PURSUE THE GREAT NAMAQUA QUEST

Surprisingly little serious attention has been given by scholars to the nature of the relationship between Pieter and Eva. Recent writers, such as Coetzee and Abrahams presume that this relationship reflected only macro-patterns of colonial exploitation of the powerful over the weak. They see the marriage as just one step along the road to Eva’s eventual tragic demise and her miserable alienation from the Khoena. Pieter comes across as simply one more cog in the relentlessly grinding colonial machine. They fail to notice that Pieter emerges from the pages of the journal as a vividly flamboyant personality. A few historians have noted his distinctive flair, but never analyzed or discussed it in the context of his relationship with Eva. Mossop referred to him as ‘that imperfect Sir Galahad’; Malherbe described him as ‘clearly a coming man’ and his writing as ‘vivid and informative’ and Elphick identified him as ‘one of the most intelligent and promising men in the colony’.

The relationship was a durable one, lasting nine years and producing three children. The couple remained unmarried for four years, then married in 1664 and remained together until Pieter’s death in 1667. Eva’s subsequent inability to cope with life surfaced following his death, suggesting that his loss had a devastating impact on her, perhaps triggering a full mental breakdown. Further circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that the pair also shared considerably in advancing the trading interests of the Dutch and Khoena – an enterprise for which they were, together, ideally suited. Given the broad outlines of their relationship, one can just as easily project theirs as a romantic liaison of choice.

Hailing from Copenhagen, Pieter first enlisted in the Dutch East India Company as a soldier and was subsequently appointed under-surgeon, the rank he held upon his arrival in the Cape in 1659. The records reveal no more about his background but that he was literate and used his medical skills to save lives and relieve suffering. His superiors viewed him as ‘good, sober and respectable,’ suggesting perhaps a religious inclination.

The steady stream of promotions during the nine years he spent in the Cape confirm that the Company considered him good material.

The chances are that Pieter and Eva struck up an intimate relationship soon after his arrival in 1659, since by 1663 they had two children. This implies that the relationship started just prior to or during the period of Doman’s rebellion, at a time when Eva was at the peak of her intermediary role. If Pieter acted opportunistically, it was to share in Eva’s power and prestige, not her weakness. An unconfirmed report from an employee of the Dutch East India Company who passed through the Cape in 1660 mentioned that Eva had a child by a European man. The author claims the father was a Frenchman who was heavily fined for making her pregnant, none of which

71 E. E. Mossop (ed.), Journals of the Expeditions of the Honourable Olof Bergh (1682 and 1683) and the Ensign Issaq Schriver (1680) (Publication no. 12, Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1931), 16; Malherbe, Krotoa, 45–6; Elphick, Khoikhoi, 201.

72 Moodie, The Record, 1, 281 (12 Apr. 1664), Resolution of Council.

is recorded elsewhere. Unfortunately, this memoir is rife with inaccuracies and repetitions from earlier accounts, casting doubt on its full reliability. If Van Riebeeck had indeed imposed a heavy fine on his rival – a thoroughly unprecedented measure – it is not surprising that he kept it out of the official record. However, a birth in 1660 fits into known chronologies.

Once the rebellion ended, Pieter flung himself wholeheartedly into the pursuit of the Namaqua and greater riches, a quest initiated by Eva even before his arrival. He alone volunteered to travel on all six northern exploration expeditions over the next four years. Perhaps he needed to pay off his fine, or perhaps he simply hoped to gain a share of any profits. In any case, Pieter’s enthusiasm for expeditions closely echoes Eva’s eagerness to provide the Dutch with fresh information about outlying chiefdoms. Their dedication to expanding trade, perhaps for personal gain, became a common thread in their relationship.

Since Pieter kept the official company journal for the second and third northern expeditions, it is possible to see how, in his own words, he understood himself. He frequently wrote in great detail about his acts of bravery and drew on experience gained during his first expedition to portray himself as an expert on local conditions. He rescued servants from an attacking lion, simply by shouting at it;\(^74\) leapt onto the back of a charging quagga, suffering a kick to the face when it bolted into a river;\(^75\) stuck to elephant or rhinoceros paths to get the oxen through difficult passages;\(^76\) and knew how to get around treacherous mountains.\(^77\) He revelled in the magnificence of a mountain named after him.\(^78\) But perhaps most notable is the way Pieter represents himself as particularly skilled and sensitive in his dealings with Africans. For one thing, he did not let his men fall prey to the incessant rumours of hostility between one chiefdom and another, nor to the frequent threats to kill off the Dutch. In every case, his skepticism eventually proved to be correct, suggesting that he had acquired an insider’s knowledge of Khoena political rivalries from Eva.

He also comes across as especially congenial in his personal dealings with wary chiefs and warriors. In his initial encounters with both Souqua hunter-gatherers and eventually the Namaqua, he first took time to teach them how to smoke tobacco, then plied them with drink and other gifts.\(^79\) He boldly strode into the Namaqua king’s kraal and secured an invitation into his house to open up business negotiations.\(^80\) When befriending the elusive Namaqua, he stitched up the ear of the chief’s son and created a rage for red caps by giving the king his own nightcap.\(^81\) Pieter portrayed various Khoena leaders

\(^{74}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 230 (5 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal. This was the second time Pieter reports a lion running away at the sight of him; the first occurred two days earlier, on 3 Feb.

\(^{75}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 224 (14 Dec. 1660), Van Riebeeck’s journal.

\(^{76}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 232 (17 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal.


\(^{78}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 230 (11 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal. It is worth noting that during the first expedition, the only two people who had mountains named after them were Van Riebeeck and Van Meerhoff.


\(^{80}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 232 (20 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal.

\(^{81}\) Moodie, *The Record*, i, 233 (20 and 22 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal.
as happy to see him personally, paving the way to further contacts and negotiations.82

This friendly approach paid great dividends. Not only had Pieter found the Namaqua, but he gained their promise to negotiate further about opening up trade. Hostilities between the Namaqua and the Cochoqua appeared to be the only obstacle. Accordingly, four days after his return from the exciting first encounter with the Namaquas, the Dutch governing Council sent Pieter to bring Oedasoa into the fort. Oedasoa had previously claimed he did not need their help to deal with the Namaqua, whom he could easily defeat on his own.83 So they clearly sent Pieter on a mission to persuade him to adopt a more flexible attitude.

At this point it becomes evident that Pieter already had a strongly established personal relationship with Oedasoa, Eva’s primary contact and kinsman. He successfully convinced Oedasoa to come in to negotiate. Once in the fort, Oedasoa initially refused to co-operate, but then changed his mind overnight. The next morning he agreed to send three ambassadors northward with Pieter to discuss a peace settlement. The scenario suggests close collaboration between Pieter and Eva. Though neither is recorded as influencing the chief, it would certainly have been in Pieter’s interests to secure his co-operation. Eva’s effective and sympathetic interpretation services would have been vital. Since the two were already lovers, with one child, their co-operation with one another is highly probable.

Even before securing Oedasoa’s co-operation, the Council had resolved to send Pieter off immediately as leader of another expedition to induce the Namaqua to come into the fort for trade.84 The Company also hastily arranged to send a generous supply of red caps and sixteen varieties of beads, tactfully chosen to please the Namaqua chiefs.85 At this point, Pieter is clearly pivotal, with all decisions revolving around him and his capacity to deliver.

He did not let the Company down. Pieter’s expedition returned within a month’s time, reporting complete success in its objectives. Although the Namaqua had moved off further into the interior seeking pastures, they had delegated ambassadors to remain behind with their friends, the Chariguriqua, for the express purpose of meeting Pieter and working out a peace settlement with the Cochoqua. Pieter triumphantly reported that not only had he brokered peace between the Namaqua and Cochoqua, but had also brought into the agreement the Souqua hunter-gatherer raiders, who had been pestering both.

The success of this mission nearly drove the Dutch into a frenzy of speculation about their imminent access to great wealth from the interior. The Namaqua had agreed to send people to the fort at the end of the rainy season (October) with all sorts of trade goods obtained in the interim from their trading partners further north.86 Two of Oedasoa’s ambassadors who had been on the journey convinced Van Riebeeck of the nearness of the Monomotapa cities, rich in gold and ruled by a powerful leader called

82 Moodie, The Record, i, 230 (11 Feb. 1661) and 233 (22 Feb. 1661), Van Meerhoff’s journal. 83 Thom, Van Riebeeck, iii, 359, 360 (15 and 16 Mar. 1661).
84 Thom, Van Riebeeck, iii, 361 (17 Mar. 1661). 85 Ibid.
86 Moodie, The Record, i, 235 (23 Apr. 1661), Van Riebeeck’s journal.
Chobona. Donald Moodie, an early translator of Van Riebeeck’s journal, however, suspected a Pieter-and-Eva plot, suggesting that they had coached the elders to say what the Dutch wanted to hear. Responding to Van Riebeeck’s reports, the Chamber of Seventeen exulted from Amsterdam, ‘you have found the thread of the clue’. Hopes soared of a new southern African El Dorado which might offset all the costs incurred in setting up the station at the Cape.

This journey, Pieter’s third expedition to the north, marks the high point of his career as an explorer. In a way, his trans-cultural skills brought too much success too soon for a Company employee of such junior rank. When in October the Namaqua failed to appear at the fort with trade goods, the Council resolved to send out another expedition to find them. With the hopes of striking it rich still running high, the Council appointed as leader, Sgt. P. Evrard, a man with sterling Company credentials, a commander of the military, who had served long in India and was a member of the local Council. He could better represent the ‘maxims and honour of the Company than one of inferior rank’. Pieter went as second-in-command, relieved of the duty of keeping the journal.

Neither this nor the subsequent two expeditions in which Pieter participated produced the results anticipated: one problem was that the Namaqua resided on the far side of a barren stretch of desert that the Dutch could not cross. But the finesse and sensitivity of Pieter’s leadership style were also clearly missing. The Dutch fell victim to rumours circulated by Cochoqua and Souqua about Dutch aggressive intentions. Opportunities to dispel or discount the ever-present rumours of inter-group hostility and to negotiate peace painstakingly proved evasive.

At least one reported incident reveals tensions, if not mutiny, within the Dutch ranks over leadership style. During the fifth expedition, when the Dutch came across a Souqua kraal consisting only of women and children, Commander Cruythoff ordered their execution and the destruction of their huts. His subordinates, no doubt including Pieter, ‘would not agree to the proposal on any account, stating that they were not willing to take revenge on these poor creatures’.

The deterioration and eventual abandonment of the Namaqua quest in many ways embodies the shifting climate which also marginalized the unique chemistry of Pieter and Eva working together as a team. As it became clearer that the Monomotapa empire was not at hand and that the great river to the north could not provide access to wealthy trading partners, the enthusiasm for sensitive and friendly contacts with the indigenous people faded. The

---

87 Thom, *Van Riebeeck*, iii, 374 (23 Apr. 1661).
88 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 236, n. The subsequent coming to light of evidence about the nature of the Monomotapa empire and Portuguese trade in general confirms, however, that there could have been slightly more truth in the stories than Moodie imagined.
89 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 240 (23 Aug. 1661 and 30 Sept. 1661), Despatch from the Chamber of Seventeen.
91 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 263 (3 Feb. 1663), Wagenaar’s journal.
whole spirit of Dutch/Khoena contact shifted to cruder pragmatism, laced increasingly with racism and militarism. Eva’s relationships with the key men in her life changed dramatically, one by one.

By 1666, she had clearly fallen out with Oedasoa. The Company commander Zacharias Wagenaar, speculated that he began avoiding contact with Eva because she had married a European, but this seems implausible since Pieter had been well known to Oedasoa and apparently trusted by him for several years and the couple already had two children together. In fact, in 1664 Oedasoa had made an unusually generous offer to Eva of 100 cattle and 500 sheep. Since this was also the year that Pieter and Eva formally married, it is possible that the offer was intended as a wedding gift, something sometimes given to orphans without other forms of support. Two months after the wedding, Pieter and Eva travelled together to visit Oedasoa, at his invitation, perhaps in an effort to collect, but Oedasoa never paid up and stopped coming into the fort. The journal sheds little light on the reasons behind this. Perhaps Oedasoa expected Pieter and Eva to leave Dutch employment since his gift to them would have made them wealthy enough to live independently. It appears more likely that Oedasoa became disaffected with the Dutch in general and the church wedding signified the young couple’s commitment to live in conformity with the dictates of Dutch society.

In the journal Wagenaar probably obscured the more deep-rooted reasons for the falling out between Oedasoa and the Dutch. During early 1664, the chief had become a regular visitor to the fort, bringing in large contingents of Cochoqua to be regaled and entertained by the Dutch. He often arrived with fifty people just as the Dutch were sitting down to church or dinner, much to the chagrin of Wagenaar who resented his presence as an intrusion. Oedasoa undoubtedly detected Wagenaar’s blatant racism. To the journal, Wagenaar confided that he saw Oedasoa and his followers as ‘these incomparably greedy and beggarly men’ – a sharp contrast to Van Riebeeck’s perception of Oedasoa as ‘stately and dignified’.

Perhaps Oedasoa’s biggest disappointment with the Dutch in this period came in the early months of 1664, when he actively sought their military assistance in a war against his Hessequa enemies. He offered to pay the Dutch generously in cattle if they agreed. The Dutch, however, declined on the grounds that they wanted to remain friendly with all Khoena chiefs and not show favouritism. Oedasoa soon stopped coming into the fort, although the Cochoqua trade in livestock continued.

Wagenaar’s clearly racist attitude towards Eva probably triggered the couple’s decision to have a church wedding after so many years together. Initially, it appears that Wagenaar saw Eva as an ordinary concubine, whom he also treated as a company servant. His first mention of her, a year and a half after his arrival in 1662 was scathing. At the time, Pieter was away on his last northern expedition. Wagenaar accused Eva of running away with the children without his permission, saying ‘the thoughtless wench has played us

---

92 Moodie, _The Record_, i, 289 (16 May 1666), Despatch from Wagenaar to the Chamber of Seventeen, Amsterdam.
93 Moodie, _The Record_, i, 275 (3 Feb. and 11 Feb. 1664), Wagenaar’s journal.
94 Moodie, _The Record_, i, 275 and 148 (3 Feb. 1664 and 7 Nov. 1658), Wagenaar’s journal and Van Riebeeck’s journal.
95 Moodie, _The Record_, i (29 Jan. 1664).
the same trick before, throwing aside her clean, neat clothing and resuming old stinking skins of animals, like all the other filthy Hottentoo women.*

When she was apprehended (at a house that fits the description of the location of Elizabeth van Opdorp-Reinertz’s home) and returned, he briskly dismissed her explanation that she had gone to visit her niece who had just given birth. In sharp contrast to Eva’s freedom of movement in the Van Riebeeck era, Wagenaar did not grant her the right to maintain free relationships with her Khoena kin. He considered leaving the fort without consulting him or getting his permission as intolerable behaviour.

The timing of Pieter and Eva’s formal engagement a few months after this event no doubt reflects the changing dynamics of their worlds. Eva was treated like a slut in Pieter’s absence, the Namaqua quest had fizzled out and Oedasoa was disaffected. Pieter and Eva, the pre-eminent contact people to new interior populations, had outlived their usefulness. Though the Company occasionally sent Pieter on short bartering expeditions and Eva still interpreted frequently for Wagenaar, basic trade contacts were now well-established.

In this context, the formality of marriage made sense. It certainly gave Eva greater status in Wagenaar’s eyes and removed any possibility of his treating her as an ordinary servant. It also signalled their capitulation to living as socially acceptable members of Dutch society and an end to their in-betweeness. Their bid for conformity worked well. Along with a proper Christian marriage, the couple received a wedding banquet, a promotion for Pieter and a special marriage gift for Eva, the same as for all company employees.* About one year later, Pieter was again promoted, this time to the position of Superintendent of Robben Island, moving there with a pregnant Eva and their two children. This appointment lasted two years before Pieter was given command of a prestigious expedition to Madagascar and Mauritius, key new spheres of influence for the Dutch. Clearly his superiors still appreciated his inter-cultural skills, as his instructions admonished him to treat the natives there well, not like the other Dutch. However, without the invaluable coaching from Eva and her kin, he misjudged his new native contacts, who killed him while trying to negotiate on the beach of Antongil Bay in Mauritius in 1666.

By the beginning of 1667, Eva had effectively lost all the influential men in her life. The loss of Pieter triggered a dramatic downhill slide that ended only with her dishonourable death on 29 July 1674. During those years the Dutch commanders accused her of abandoning her children, of rowdy drunken behaviour, of promiscuity and producing several more children. They incarcerated her on Robben Island several times, allowing her back on

---

96 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 271 (22 Nov. 1663). 
97 Moodie, *The Record*, i, 271 (24 Nov. 1663). The journal claimed that Eva was found at the house of a free burger living beside the main road to the Cochoqua, a description often given for Jan and Elizbeth Reijnertz’ house. 
100 Leibbrandt, *Précis*, 225 (10 July 1667). 
101 Leibbrandt, *Précis*, 238 (27 Feb. 1668). Although on primarily an exploratory and peace-making mission, Pieter was also engaged in purchasing slaves, having acquired ‘three young slaves’ prior to his murder.
promises of improved behaviour, but claimed she never reformed. Despite her disgraceful demise, the Dutch community gave her a Christian burial and a few years later laid down strict terms for the adoption of her two surviving children fathered by Pieter.\footnote{Moodie, \textit{The Record}, i, 354 (14 July 1677), Governor Johan Bax’s journal and resolution of Council.}

What killed Eva off was not simply her inability to adapt to Dutch society, as some believe, but rather the dynamic within colonialism which so soon made bridging, trans-cultural people like her and Pieter redundant. This became all the more painful to her after she had tasted the extraordinary power and influence that she could exercise as a woman trusted by both sides in the initial colonial encounter. Eva died her slow and miserable death in a world in which the illusion of harmony had already evaporated. The cause into which she had thrown her life no longer existed. Van Riebeeck’s restraint in dealing with the Khoena and his personal indulgence towards her left when he did; Oedasoa decided to tolerate the Dutch at arm’s length, disgruntled that they could not be made to bend to his will; and Pieter died seeking a new frontier. When the dream shattered, so did Eva.

While Eva’s story appears to rest on a unique intersection of personalities and context, it no doubt also contains within it elements common to many inter-cultural relationships. Surely, themes such as the non-threatening indigenous woman pressed into service and learning European languages and ways, powerful chiefs using such women as their eyes and ears in the strange new settlement, the ambitious and brave young explorer also seeking romance, and the heavy dependency of the tiny numbers of intruders on friendly relations with the locals could easily appear on virtually every colonial frontier. Similarly, on all such frontiers, the interlude in which inter-racial couples capitalized on having the best of both worlds was destined to be brief. As colonial hegemony took hold, reliance on good-quality relationships gave way to less kind forms of coercion, dominance and dispossession. Other Evas and Pieters appear quietly and marginally scattered throughout the history of not only South Africa, but probably wherever two cultures have met.

\textbf{SUMMARY}  

This article offers a fresh interpretation of the life of Krotoa/Eva, the famous Khoena interpreter of Jan Van Riebeeck, whose gender gave her a unique position in relation to both Dutch and Khoena society. It appears that her own people sent her to work for the Dutch as a young girl, both to serve as a token of goodwill, to gain prestige as the protégé of the household of a powerful leader and to become familiar with Dutch ways. The Dutch received her comfortably as a servant, child minder and companion for Van Riebeeck’s young nieces. When Eva learned Dutch expertly, she quickly became their most trusted interpreter. The evidence also hints at an especially close and sensitive, possibly sexual, relationship between her and Van Riebeeck. When military conflicts left Eva identified as a Dutch collaborator, she contacted her sister’s husband, chief Oedasoa. Her direct mediation enabled the Dutch to open up a profitable new trading enterprise with Oedasoa, who in turn used Eva as his personal agent within the Dutch community. Her unique position attracted the attention of a bright young employee of the Company, Pieter Van Meerhoff, who became her lover soon after his arrival at the
Cape in 1659. Pieter became actively involved in northern expeditions of exploration and prided himself on his sensitivity and capacity to get on well with various Khoena chiefs. Eva continued as an interpreter, intermediary with Oedasoa and the couple had two children together. Eva and Pieter married only after Van Riebeeck left the Cape. Their decision to conform to the norms of Dutch society disappointed Oedasoa who had offered them enough livestock to establish an independent lifestyle but brought both much higher levels of respect from the Dutch, including significant promotions for Pieter. When Pieter was killed in 1666, heading up a trading mission to Mauritius, Eva’s life sharply deteriorated. She died in 1674, accused of having become a drunken pest and prostitute. Eva’s story exemplifies how an African woman in an early colonial encounter could manipulate a variety of gender roles. Seen as a safe intermediary by both Africans and Europeans, she built herself a unique career and formed a durable liaison with a spirited young man. However, as the nature of contact between the races deteriorated, her role as intermediary diminished in importance. Ultimately, without Pieter, she could not sustain her pivotal place in Dutch society, dying a miserable death. Her life reflects the rapidly changing nature of early colonial contacts.