

To what extent did krotoa eva exist between two cultures? essay sample

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Introduction

There is no doubt about the fact that Eva, the Khoikhoi girl initially called Krotoa, is by far the most written about black woman in the History of South Africa. Her name resides in the many journals of the Dutch East India Company, from the very arrival of the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope. She became a very important and powerful asset in the Dutch colony, as an interpreter and as a mentor for the Dutch, with special regard to Jan Van Riebeeck himself. The discussion that will proceed will depict to what extent Eva was immersed in both the Dutch and the Khoikhoi culture and how this cross-cultural life may have affected her. Eva was primarily a woman stuck between two cultures. Body

Jan Van Reibeeck:

The Dutch East India Company, the VOC, in December 1651, appointed Jan Van Riebeeck to sail to the tip of Southern Africa to establish and command a permanent Dutch settlement. After four months of sailing, Jan van Riebeeck and his men arrived at the Cape of Good Hope on the 6th of April, 1652. Keeping in mind the interest of trading, Van Riebeeck was instructed to maintain peace with the indigenous populations of the Cape, namely the Khoikhoi. Krotoa Eva:

Krotoa was born in 1642, in the Goringhaikona tribe in the Cape. Soon after Jan Van Riebeeck had arrived in the Cape, the twelve-year-old Krotoa was taken in by the Van Riebeeck family at the fort, in 1653. Krotoa was renamed Eva due to the fact that all indigenous women that were adopted into Dutch service were to be given a Christian name. She was initially a servant, but <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-did-krotoa-eva-exist-between-two-cultures-essay-sample/>

when she could speak Dutch fluently she became a valuable interpreter between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi. She also provided Van Riebeeck with valuable information about Khoikhoi culture, political structures and plans. She was a key element when it came to trading negotiations, which enabled the Dutch to acquire livestock in exchange for tobacco, copper, beads and drink.

There was no doubt that from a very young age, Krotoa Eva, had established herself as a true ally of the Dutch. The period of peace between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi was somewhat very brief. Conflicts began to escalate due to runaway slaves and because the Dutch began the confiscation of cattle and land of rebellious Khoikhoi tribe. Unfortunately, for Eva, she had found herself right in the middle of the quarrels. Eva disappeared once; Aushumato took Eva out of the fort along with some stolen Company cattle and other livestock from the Dutch settlement in 1653. According to Van Riebeeck's journals she returned in 1654.

A few months later, the Dutch spotted the perpetrators, amongst them was Eva. Van Riebeeck refused to use brute force in order to get the livestock back and instead entered to negotiate with the Khoikhoi. In order to save her position in both Dutch and Khoikhoi communities, she was allowed to enter into the service of the Dutch and was indeed very keen to encourage the alliances and the trade between the colonial settlers and locals. Ever since then, the relations between the Dutch and the Khoikhoi resulted in a considerable improvement. Eva's initial entry into the Dutch colony was due

to her availability to the Dutch and the need that they had for an indigenous interpreter.

The second time she entered the colony signified as more of friendly gesture and a sign of good will from the Khoikhoi tribe which indeed settled the disputes between the two cultures. The Khoikhoi realised that her presence of Krotoa in the Dutch colony would work to their advantage too, with regard to the fact that it was seen as honourable and a useful way to gain more information about the Dutch settlers. Van Riebeeck was always highly impressed with how Eva integrated herself into the colony and most importantly, when she converted to Christianity.

Over time, the relationship between Van Riebeeck and Eva began to evolve. The relationship began to show signs of a transgression that exceeded the common boundaries of master and servant relations. He employed great trust in Eva, inviting her to almost all the important meetings he attended, he consulted with her and explained to her all sorts of imperative issues he had to address. He also gave her the freedom to come and go as she pleased between the colony and the tribes and gave her the position of a sales agent. Her position and relationship with Van Riebeeck gave her great power and mobility within the colony.

Her opinions and views were regarded with authority and respect. J. C Wells reveals comments from records from Van Riebeeck's journals, 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'". She was not only a rich source of information; her judgements were always concise and valid. The

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arrival of Pieter Van Meerhoff, the Danish-Dutch surgeon and traveller, in 1659, gave Eva's life new dynamics. He made a quick entry into her life and a relationship blossomed. They were married in 1664, after Van Riebeeck left the Cape; Eva was baptized in the church at the fort. They had a healthy marriage that produced three children in the process, until the death of Van Meerhoff in 1667. He was killed travelling up on a trading mission to Mauritius.

His death took a toll on Eva's life, slowly deteriorating. Even though she had converted to Christianity, her value in the in the Dutch colony and her fluency of the Dutch language, her status amongst the settlers began to fracture. Furthermore the only two protectors she had, Van Riebeeck and her husband Pieter Van Meerhof, were now gone. From then on, the relations with the Dutch commanders deteriorate. They accused Eva of heavy drunkenness, shameful behaviour, involvement in prostitution, and abandoning her three children on several occasions. Eva had lapsed into a life of immorality and abandonment. As result, she was sent back and imprisoned on Robben Island on the 26th of March 1669.

She was allowed back onto the main land on several occasions, with the promise that she would improve her shameful behaviour and live a reformed life, but she would fall back into the same ways and was always banished back to Robben Island. Eva's downward spiral life ended miserably on Robben Island, she died in 1674. Even though her life was disgraceful towards its end, the Dutch community felt they had to give her a proper Christian burial on the main land. What had caused Eva to deteriorate was

not her inability to adapt to colonial life of the Dutch society, but rather the events that occurred within her colonial life time, as well as the sudden shock of having lost her husband Van Meerhof.

Her downward spiral could have also been fuelled by the disappointment of knowing that she had thrown away extraordinary power, her great value to the Dutch and the exercise of power from both sides, Dutch and Khoikhoi. Eva's story serves as a good example of how African women in colonial societies were able to manipulate gender roles to empower themselves perhaps. However, the relations between the cultures deteriorated to such an extent that no such thing could occur any longer.

Conclusion

Eva's life depicts the immersion of an African woman in both a colonial and her local cultures. It depicts the early relations and systems of trade and communication that the colonial settlers used with the local tribes and clans. She may have died a miserable and shameful life, but her legacy still lives in the historical journals of today and in the History books of tomorrow.

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