

Nataly Kelly

KROTOA

The Interpreter from Whom Many South Africans Descended



"It sometimes seemed as if she only had to hear a word or expression once to have it imprinted on her mind, so that soon she knew more Dutch words than any other Khoi-khoi man or woman..."

In my ongoing search for interpreters of historical significance, I looked for native interpreters in Africa and stumbled upon a book (quoted above) which tells the story of **Krotoa** (also known as Eva), a woman born in the 1600s who interpreted for Dutch colonists. She started out as a household servant but learned Dutch and soon found herself working as an interpreter in high-stakes settings.

Krotoa was instrumental in helping negotiate the terms for ending the first war between the Dutch and the Khoi-khoi people. As was the case with many interpreters, she has also often been viewed as a traitor and a controversial figure. However, her role was so important that she became the first woman from the Cape to ever be documented in European records.

She bridged more than just language gaps. Her marriage was the first recorded legal union between a black African native and a white settler. She had many children which led to numerous prominent South African descendents as part of her bloodline later on. Some have even called her a mother of the nation.