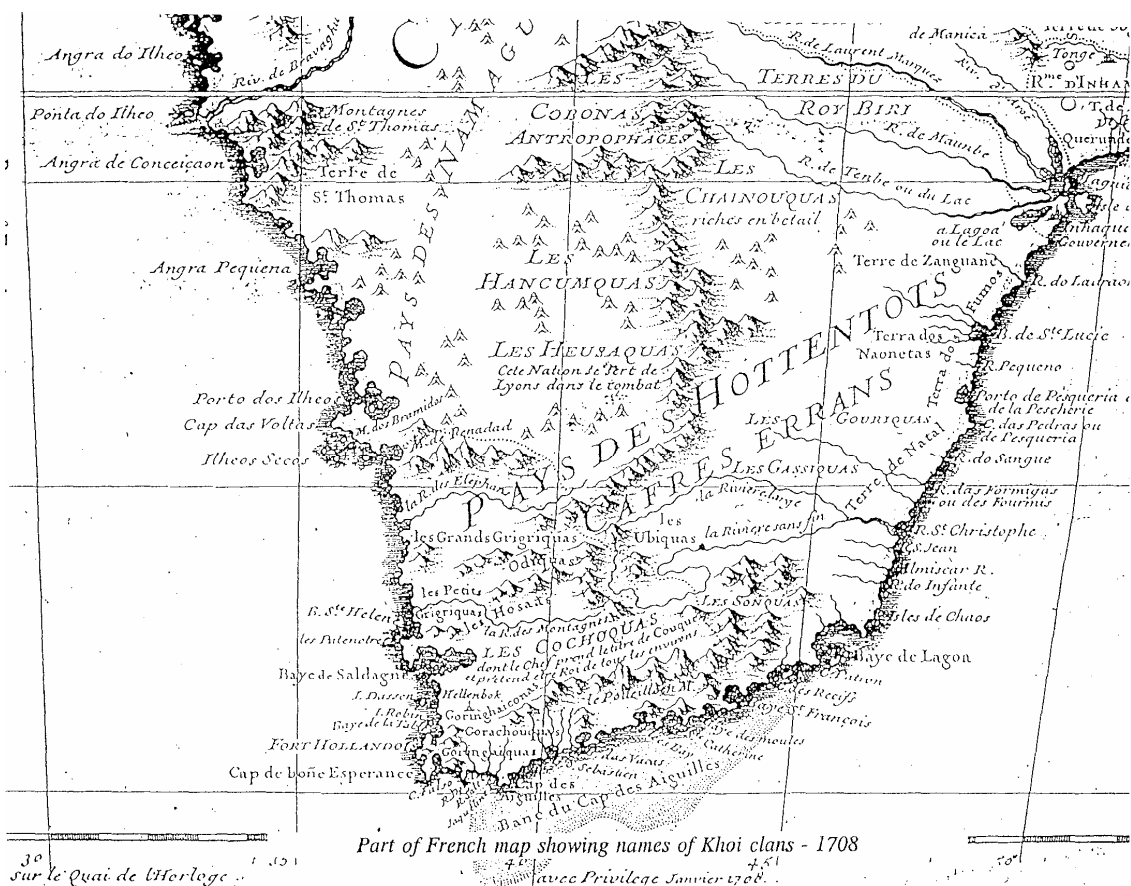


Encounter and Contact between the Khoikhoi and the European Colonists*

Because of their differing backgrounds and cultures (a policy of free access to all land versus one of "freehold ownership"), early clashes ensued between the two population groups in the "western Cape" after 1652. The Khoikhoi as nomads, were used to constructing their homesteads wherever they could find good grazing and water for their livestock, while the European colonists were developing a system based on "freehold property" and were residing on land occupied and declared their own by the Dutch East India Company (DEIC), on which they started farming.

The Khoikhoi encountered and experienced the European settlers as invaders and competitors who were depriving them of stock as well as grazing facilities. The Europeans considered the Khoikhoi inferior, lured and coerced them to labour and servitude. In an attempt to regain their territories the Khoikhoi resorted to taking arms against the Europeans and attacked them in 1659 and in 1673. Many of the Khoikhoi were killed in these clashes.



Part of a French map showing names of Khoi clans - 1708

Source: H.C. Bredekamp (1982), Van Veeverscaffers tot Veewagters, Kaapstad, in MALHERBE (1996)

* Source: J. E. MALHERBE (1996), Contact Between Indigenous Khoikhoi and European Settlers, Heritage Series No. 1, Huguenot Memorial Museum, Franschhoek, ISBN 1-919892-67-2 (27 pages). Transcribed, edited and circulated for study purposes: Liberation Processes in Pre- and Post-Colonial Southern Africa (LIPSA) www.benkhumalo-seegelken.de 2008-12-02.

The early Governors of the Cape used to be instructed by the DEIC not to interfere in local affairs, in spite of that the DEIC changed its decision and imposed in 1672 that its local administration be supplied by the Khoikhoi settlements of the region with a certain amount of stock annually and in turn exercise the right to deliver judgement in the matters of differences among the Khoikhoi. One of those early Governors of the Cape, Simon van der Stel, who took office on 14 October 1679, used the Khoi "minor chief", Dorhá ("Klaas") to procure stock for the growing European settlement.

By the end of the 17th century practically the whole of the "western Cape" was controlled by the colonists. Numbers of dispossessed and impoverished Khoikhoi from the "Cape Peninsula" and "Cape Flats" were driven or forced to move further north. Some joined forces with the Khoisan settlements in the interior and retaliated against their oppressors. Those Khoikhoi who remained in the "western Cape" were gradually absorbed into the community as farm labourers, specifically as herders and shepherds.

As the number of the settlers increased and more land became occupied - especially after the arrival of the "French Refugees" (1688) -, violence in the form of stock raids, assaults, burglaries and even murders, increased. In this was the Khoikhoi expressed their disapproval of being dispossessed of their erstwhile residential, grazing and hunting areas.

The extension of the European settlement prompted the need for more labour as the ground was completely fallow, farms were large and implements primitive. The DEIC hired out its soldiers and sailors as farm-hands to the farmers and slaves were imported. The Khoikhoi were canvassed as seasonal farm-labourers. They were cheaper since the European settlers employed them only during planting and harvesting periods and had to cater for their own housing, clothing or medical needs. The Khoikhoi had been cattle- and sheep-farmers and were as such not always keen or able to cope with the demands of land tenure.

The smallpox epidemic which broke out among the slaves in 1713 was the worst in the history of the settlement and led to the death of many slaves, Khoikhoi and some Europeans. The Khoikhoi in particular were hit hard, not having had smallpox before and thus having no natural resistance to it. Many died and others fled over the mountains to escape the scourge, resulting in clashes with other Khoikhoi settlements in those areas. The "Drakenstein area" was hit at the hardest, the epidemic lasting between three and four months. Further outbreaks occurred in 1755 and 1767. These epidemics almost totally annihilated the Khoikhoi population of the "western Cape". Those who survived later became westernised, were Christianised, wore European clothing and learnt to speak Dutch which gradually evolved to "Afrikaans".

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