

# Socio-historical classification of Khoekhoe groups

Tom Güldemann & Alena Witzlack-Makarevich  
(Humboldt University Berlin, University of Kiel)

Speaking (of) Khoisan:  
A symposium reviewing southern African prehistory  
EVA MPI Leipzig, 14–16 Mai 2015

## Der III. Brief.

Von den unterschiedlichen Hottentottischen Nationen:  
und gegen welche Gegend der Welt / das ist : gegen Nor-  
den oder Osten/ jede derselben anzutreffen.

Kolb 1719

# Overview

- Introduction
- Khoekhoe groups
  - in pre- and early colonial period
  - in later colonial periods
  - today
- Problems and challenges

# Introduction

- The Khoekhoe played an important role in the network of language contact in southern Africa
  - a) because of their traditionally mobile economies  
→ larger migratory territories
  - b) contact with all language groups in the area
    - Tuu languages as the earliest linguistic layer
    - Bantu languages (Herero, Tswana, Xhosa)
    - colonial languages: Dutch → influencing Afrikaans

# Introduction

- The Khoekhoe played an important role in the network of language contact in southern Africa
  - a) traditionally mobile → larger migratory territories
  - b) contact with all language groups in the area
  - c) fled from the encroaching colonial system carrying with them their Khoekhoe language + Dutch and some cultural features
    - considerable advantages and prestige vis-à-vis the groups they encounter during their migrations

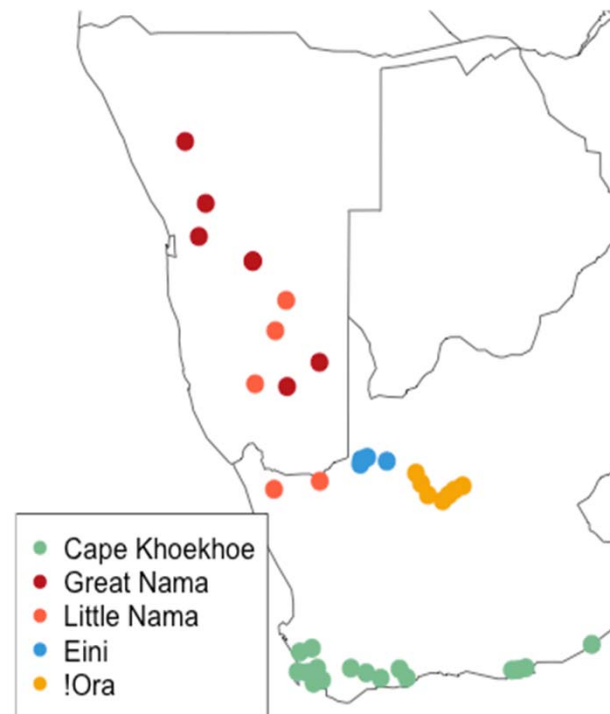
# Introduction

- The Khoekhoe language played a dual role:
  - the **substratum** of groups shifting to other languages (e.g. Dutch/Afrikaans)
  - the **target of language shift** by groups speaking other languages
- complexity unlikely to be disentangled completely
- especially problematic due to the lack of historical linguistic data
  - wanted: a more fine-grained distinction of Khoekhoe-speaking ethnic groups in space and time

# Groups in pre- and early colonial period

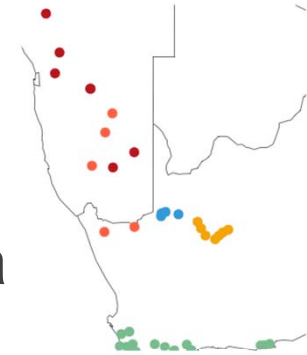
- Major groups before colonial disruption in the Cape:

- **Cape Khoekhoe**  
**Nama**  
**Eini**  
**(!Ora = Korana)**

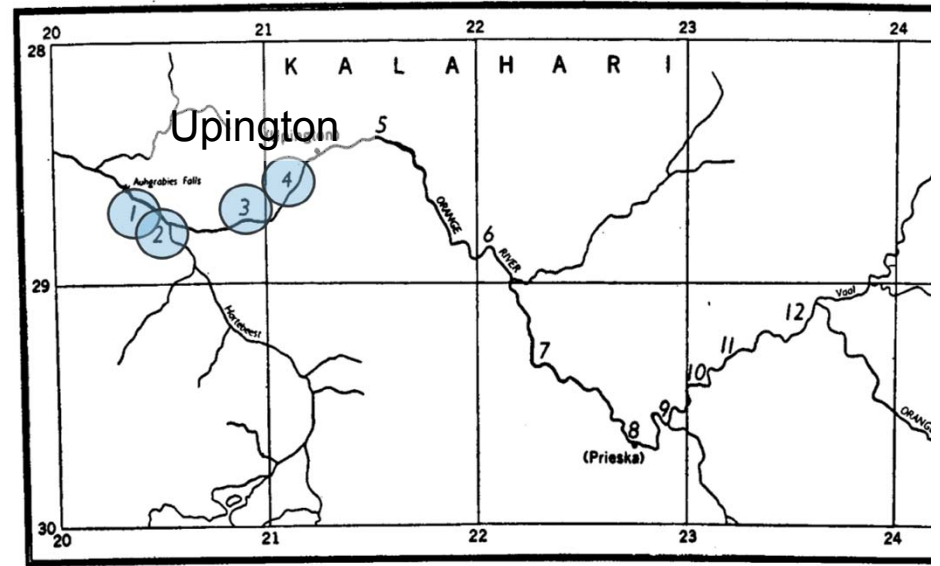


# Groups in pre- and early colonial period

- **Eini(kwa)** or Riverfolk (Engelbrecht 1936, Maingard 1964)
- often but erroneously subsumed under !Ora
- indigenous to the middle Orange River between Augrabies and Upington



Maingard (1964)

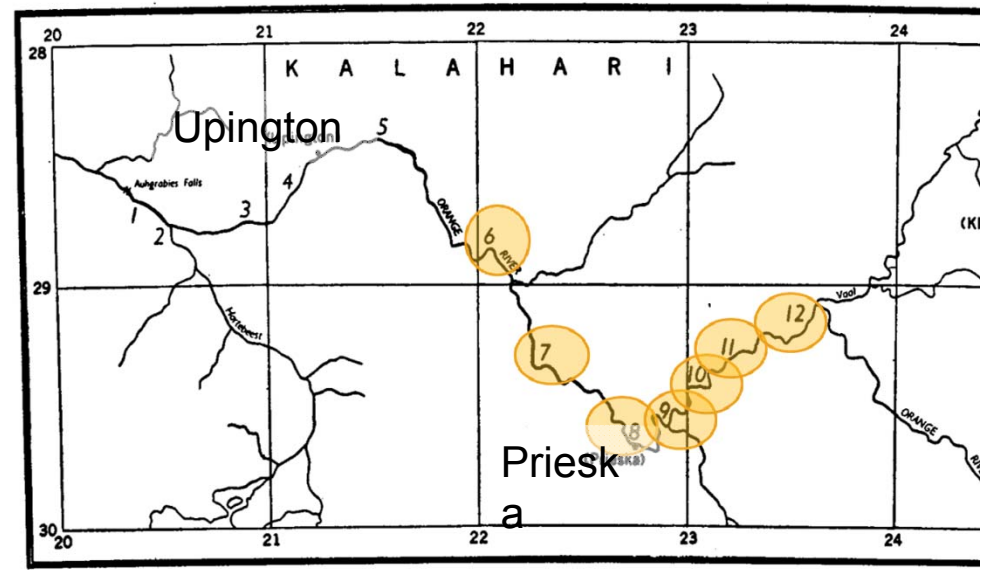
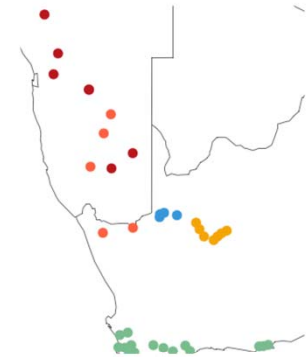


Map showing the distribution of the Korana tribes in Colonel Gordon's time (1799). The map correspond to the precise location of the tribes, as follows :

# Groups in pre- and early colonial period

- **!Ora** in the Upper Orange region migrated according to oral histories from the Cape area to escape colonial domination
- Two major routes:
  - to the east and then along the Orange northward
  - to the north into Little Namaqualand up to the Orange and then along the river eastward ("Ondervelders")

Maingard (1964)



Map showing the distribution of the Korana tribes in Colonel Gordon's time (1799). The numbers correspond to the precise location of the tribes, as follows :



# Later colonial period

- Colonial disruption leads to emergence of new diverse Khoekhoe-speaking groups distinguished according to various parameters:
  - original ethnic core group(s)
  - individual leaders (“captains”)
  - time and route of migration
  - final settlement
  - contact with non-Khoekhoe groups
  - influence by Cape Dutch component and degree of acculturation, including language maintenance

# Later colonial period

- Cape Khoekhoe becomes extinct in its original area
  - > virtually no linguistic data beyond short wordlists
- encroachment of Cape Khoekhoe descendants on areas away from the Cape strongly affecting other groups, thereby forming so-called 'frontier groups' like 'Oorlam', 'Basters', and Griqua
- language contact with a variety of other groups like other Khoekhoe groups, Cape Dutch, !Ui-speaking San, and also Bantu in the East

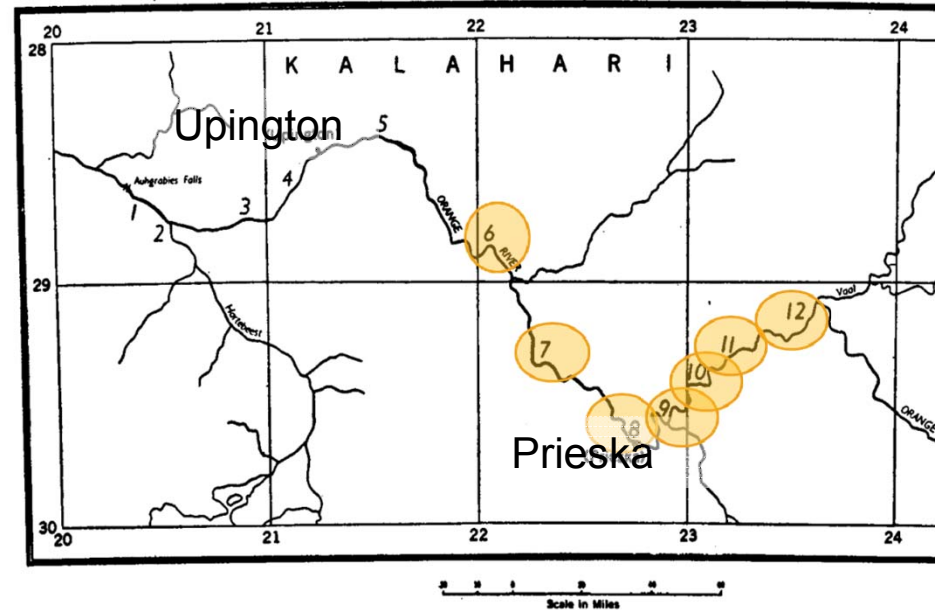


# Later colonial period

## 1. !Ora cluster in the Upper Orange region

- Hoogstanders
- Skerpioene
- Black people
- Side people
- Cats
- ...

!Ora may be closest to Cape Khoekhoe but with unknown nature and amount of linguistic admixture



Map showing the distribution of the Korana tribes in Colonel Gordon's time (1799). The 12 points on the map correspond to the precise location of the tribes, as follows:

- |                |                 |                    |            |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1. ≠namnikwa   | 4. ≠oxokwa      | 7. /hukxʔen//ʔeis  | 10. !kora  |
| 2. //kamaxakwa | 5. /gesikwa     | 8. ≠nu//ʔeis       | 11. /hoǎ!  |
| 3. !kao//ʔeis  | 6. !kurin//ʔeis | 9. !namkxʔam//ʔeis | 12. //are! |

Maingard 1964

# Later colonial period

## 2. Oorlam in Namibia (Budack 1986)

- Amraal Lamberts
- Bersebaers
- Afrikaners
- ...

- stronger bilingualism in Khoekhoe and Dutch
- documented in missionary contexts together with

Nama

- mainstream Namibian Khoekhoe is a koine of Nama and Oorlam varieties

# Later colonial period

## 3. “Baster” communities (cf. Steenken 1997)

- Xiri(kwa) aka Griqua
- Rehobothers
- Vilanders
- ...

- latest layer of Khoekhoe migration into diverse regions

of Namibia and South Africa

- possessed most European “know-how” such as political organization, Christian religion, guns, horses

- bilingualism with strong tendency to shift to Afrikaans

# Modern situation

- **South Africa:**

1. Pre-disruption groups:

- Cape Khoekhoe, Eini and most of Little Nama **extinct**
- some remnants of Little Nama in the Richtersveld and Namaqualand but influenced by other post-disruption groups

2. Post-disruption groups:

- Upper Orange !Ora, Griqua, “Basters” **extinct**

# Modern situation

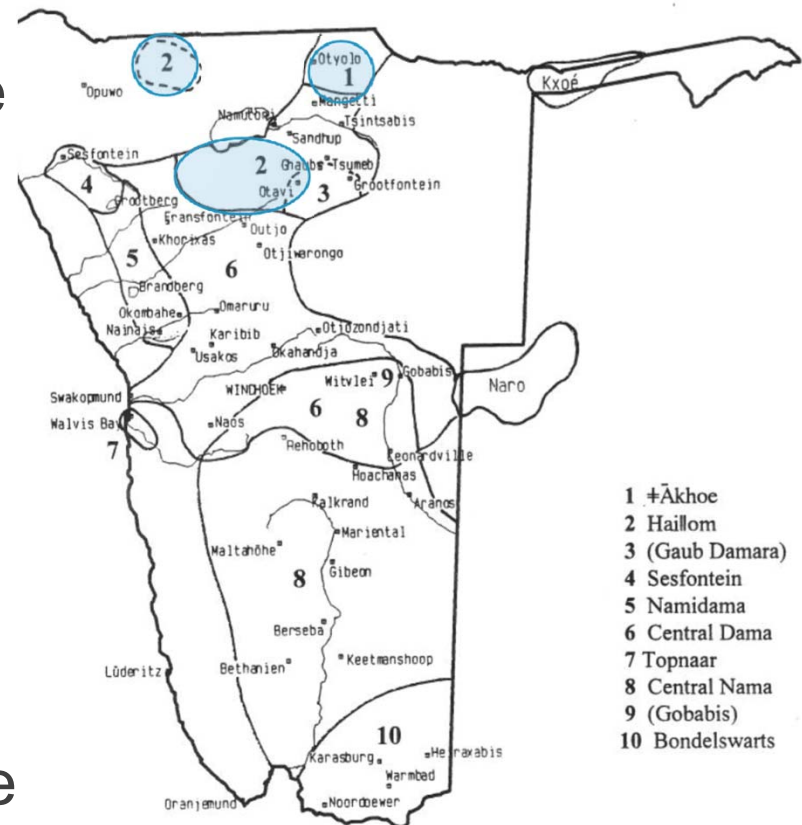
- **Namibia** with a diverse range of Khoekhoe varieties:

## 1. Nama-Damara

- basis of Standard Namibian Khoekhoe

## 2. **Hailom-ǀAakhoe**

- partly divergent varieties spoken by hunter-gatherers



MAP 1: Approximate Dialect Areas of Khoekhoegowab  
Haacke et al. (1997)



# Modern situation

- Ongoing controversy about the scenario how Khoekhoe in its present form came to be spoken by different groups in Namibia

Scenario 1 (e.g. Vedder 1927):

**language shift** on the part of Damara, Hailom and ≠Aakhoe

Scenario 2 (e.g. Haacke 2008):

**no Khoekhoeization** of these groups

# Linguistic challenges

- Insufficient documentation of both older and modern Khoekhoe varieties
- No systematic historical linguistic analysis of available data
- Overall homogeneity of attested pre-disruption Khoekhoe varieties does not match archaeological findings that pastoralism has a long history of 2000 years in South Africa