Chapter 9
Imposing Orthodoxy on the Frontier, or Why Endings Matter

The eighteenth-century Cedarberg was a time and place of intersections. The fluidity of social and geographic boundaries allowed space for people to negotiate the terms of belonging: to families, to households, to communities. But whether on the frontier or in Cape Town, colonial society was far from infinitely flexible. As the social norms of the ruling class—rooted in Christian, European customs—became increasingly dominant, the material benefits of membership in that society were evident. Although not all settlers had access to land and labor, very few who were not settlers could make a claim to those resources on the northern frontier by the end of the century.

The preceding chapters demonstrate how settlers construed, imposed, and maintained colonial orthodoxy in the Cedarberg—which remained a frontier region for a century precisely because those norms remained contested. While many inhabitants conformed to orthodox expectations, some pointedly did not. When the van der Merwes, Burgers, and Lubbes moved north in search of land, they brought ideas about family and property ownership along with them. They also increasingly acquired material goods that demonstrated their inclusion in the dominant culture and that served as symbols of their status within it. The Camphers and van Wyks were less economically secure, yet these individuals still clearly belonged to the orthodox social order—despite illegitimate births, the Camphers' mixed-race heritage, and a sexual transgression significant enough to warrant criminal proceedings against Willem van Wyk. These deviations from normative expectations suggest that everyone did not need to adhere completely in order for orthodoxy to prevail in the settler community. In fact, the persistence of some exceptions to the prevailing order demonstrates how powerful social norms became over three generations of frontier families. The status quo was entrenched enough to tolerate some nonconformity without being challenged fundamentally.

Household by household, colonial society fashioned this hegemony on an apron string, relying on domestic relationships to nurture a shared sense of community that permitted some variations. Maintaining claims to a frontier nevertheless required ongoing force. Two generations of Lubbe militia appointments highlight the active resistance that needed quelling. In 1739 Veldkorporal Barend Lubbe was directed not to "antagonize the 'Hottentot Pokkebaas Claas,' or any other peaceful Khoikhoi." The colony was, however, at war with several hostile indigenous groups, and for months during 1739 the settler occupation of the Cedarberg was precarious. Five decades later, colonists still defended their property with arms. In October 1793, Veldwagmeesters (militia officers) Frans Lubbe (Biedouw) and Johannes Hendrik Lubbe (Olifants River) sent Donderbosch Pokkebaas and four companions Caabwaards as prisoners accused of fomenting rebellion on the frontier. In light of Khoikhoi
naming practices, it is likely that the men called Pokkebaas were related—possibly grandfather and grandson, though perhaps they simply shared a clan name. In any event, Pokkebaas is an unusual enough moniker that a connection between them seems likely, making specific the Khoisan challenge to the Labbe family’s claims to the farms at Groote Vallei and Bloemfontein. Clearly, the Cedarberg was still actively contested in the 1790s and the dispossession of Khoisan clans was not forgotten easily.

Such frontier intersections in the archives were often unexpected, providing the kernels of good stories. Coaxing a larger meaning from these tales involves imposing order on messy, many-headed human experience, and shaping the events of the past into a coherent narrative that “. . . is essential to individual and social identity.” Narrative structure, however, requires a beginning, a middle, and an end, demarcations that neither lived history nor its traces—whether in the landscape or the archives—provide in tidy packages.

The starting and stopping points of a story extracted from the longer flow of human events are hardly arbitrary. Periodization is integral to interpretation. The history of the Cedarberg is as old as the hills themselves, but the history of the frontier opens exactly in 1725, when settlers began making land claims that brought the region into sustained colonial engagements between two groups of peoples with different cultural concepts of what claiming the land meant. Trekboere changed the physical and legal landscape of the Olifants River Valley indelibly by asserting permanent, alienable, and bounded claims to land, and by appropriating commonly used territory from Khoikhoi and San, eliciting violent retribution.

This shift in land tenure regimes was a monumental change with a precise date, but the subsequent imposition of dominant colonial norms was uneven, gradual, and long incomplete. The analytical tension between the characterization of frontier regions as either serially opened and closed or as orthodox and heterodox is particularly acute around questions of periodization. Working from Guelke’s articulation of frontier orthodoxy as a model, instead of working with the organizing principle of opening followed eventually by closure, makes specifying exact endings more difficult. But this approach provides other intellectual rewards—including the small comfort that a troubling periodization reflects the region’s troubled history.

Orthodoxy and Closure

If one conceptualizes a frontier as opening and closing—in many ways a visually and analytically useful metaphor of contested expansion—then bringing the region’s story to a close comes naturally. Part of the appeal of “closure” for historians is the comfortable parallel to periodization—demarcating beginning and ending points for processes, events, and lives subjected to scrutiny. The disciplinary form of history obliges scholars to frame such scrutiny
with dates. For Susan Newton-King, the frontier era in Graaff-Reinet ended with the quelling of a two-pronged rebellion against VOC authority from 1799 to 1801. In Nigel Penn’s view, the northern frontier closed a decade later, marked by the formal subjugation of Khoisan labor with the Caledon Code and the careful administrative scrutiny recorded in the Collins Report, both in 1809.

Closing a frontier conceptually seems, however, to shut off other analytical possibilities. How, for example, can we account for the visible eruption of resistance in a closed frontier zone? Penn himself chronicles the "Onder Bokkeveld Ear Atrocity" of 1812, when a newly assertive British state appeared to surprise settlers by its strict punishment of vigilante violence against Khoisan suspected of livestock depredations and the murder of a Khoisan herdsman. Consider also the Hou den Bek slave rebellion in 1825. Thirteen people, including slaves, Khoisan servants, and one white tenant farmer, were accused variously of murder, desertion, and rebellion when they acted in concert to kill their masters, terrify neighbors, and violently demand their liberty. Both events can be read as direct affronts to colonial order. Of course, even long-established and well-policed cities confront pockets of shifting lawlessness and resistance. A newly closed rural frontier zone would hardly be exempt from these challenges to state control. Government authorities responded decisively to both of these northern frontier crimes, so one could argue that these acts of insurgency, suppressed, demonstrate the reach of legal sovereignty to the fringes of the Cedarberg and beyond. I, however, am particularly intrigued by the persistence of specific frontier characteristics evident in these events.

In the retelling of an extrajudicial murder and mutilation and a slave rebellion, shared features of frontier zones stand out: the distance between homesteads, the importance of kin relationships linking those farms, the physical distance of legal authorities from the site where individuals violently contested the terms of colonial power relationships, and a sense of possibility that provocateurs might escape detection and get away with their challenge to prevailing norms.

Here settler orthodoxy, with the implied foil of heterodoxy—present among settlers, Khoisan and slaves—describes the terrain more aptly than the model of a closed frontier. Over the course of a century, colonists established prevailing social norms tied to an identity rooted in belonging to the community of the ruling class. Even though many inhabitants of the Cedarberg remained poor and minimally literate, their shared identity was based on kinship, material culture, household structures, community ritual (including Christianity), and participation within the rule of law.
An orthodox frontier thus allows for the prevalence of a dominant ideology without presuming hegemony or complete closure, leaving space—however small—for negotiations both historical and intellectual. The limited possibilities for Khoisan and mixed-race individuals to own land at the end of the eighteenth century that I document in Chapter 3; the "breathing space" achieved by Khoisan on the eastern frontier at the turn of the nineteenth century so poignantly evoked by Susan Newton-King;¹⁴ the individual settler reprisals against Khoisan; and the ongoing squabbles among settlers that punctuate Penn's work all point to a heterodox undercurrent in frontier regions, one that persists past logical dates of frontier closure.

Analytically highlighting the heterodox, putting an intellectual wedge into the frontier’s liminal spaces as though planting an explorer’s flag, adds to the critical mass of scholarship that productively troubles presumptions of uniform, monolithic colonial power.¹⁵ But it complicates efforts to demarcate the end of the frontier period in the Cedarberg.

**Orthodoxy and Periodization**

Along the Olifants River, intermittent colonial penetration became sustained and permanent with a group of five land claims first asserted in 1725. Territory initially exploited by Johannes Ras, François Smit, Jürgen Hanekom, and Arnoldus Basson—extended quickly by Willem Burger, Pieter van Heerden, Daniel Pfeil, and Jan Steenkamp—was tenuously colonial in the 1730s. The frontier war of 1739 significantly curtailed violent opposition to settler presence, and from the 1740s the region was increasingly stabilized (from the perspective of the settlers, at least) by a steady increase in the number and extent of settler households living there permanently.

Thus the Cedarberg was arguably incorporated into colonial geography as early as 1739, with the end of widespread, armed Khoisan resistance. The terms of daily life were hardly secure at that point, though, and the penetration of settler homesteads was thin. Nevertheless, from that point on settlers dominated access to land; individual, alienable, demarcated, and permanent land tenure predominated—but was not yet exclusively white. Throughout the eighteenth century there was space—albeit limited—for people of color to claim land. Meanwhile communities of settlers and communities of people descended from slaves, Khoisan, and mixed-race unions created separate identities, and also had identities with legal, hierarchical consequences imposed upon them. Yet together they forged households as masters and servants. As colonial land tenure practices prevailed, so gradually did elements of orthodox settler identity; until by the end of the 1830s, the area was indisputably within the fold of settler norms.
This dominance emerged gradually, marked by a series of changes evident between the 1780s and the 1830s. Since colonial conquest was multifaceted, there were many markers of ultimate settler success: economic ascendance, the spread of settler kin networks, the prevalence of colonial material culture, the imposition of labor regimes, the exercise of effective legal control, the establishment of a local political presence (a magistrate's office in Clanwilliam), the creation of a Christian religious infrastructure for the settlers (in the form of an NGK gemeente in Clanwilliam), and the increased subordination of the Coloured population (formally recognized and ministered to by a Rhenish mission at Wupperthal).  

None of these markers alone signals a moment when orthodoxy at last prevailed. Instead they are macrolevel indications of consolidation created at the local level of the household. Inhabitants of the Cedarberg were either settlers—construed as European-descended, Christian, and Dutch-speaking—or not. Even the Irish settlers of 1820 were integrated into the community in a generation. These settler households were increasingly orthodox in character, traits already evident along the Olifants River by the 1780s. The end of the frontier period in the Cedarberg was a culmination rather than a climax, a conjunction of processes whose cumulative effects were entrenched by the end of the 1830s—the point at which settler orthodoxy was unassailable.

**Orthodoxy Experienced**

Undoubtedly Khoisan, slaves, freed slaves, and settlers experienced this nineteenth-century transition differently from one another. For some Khoisan individuals, the opportunity for an independent existence diminished dramatically from the arrival of the first settler land claimants. Their descendants were subordinated into colonial labor structures before the frontier itself was secured. For other individuals of Khoisan heritage, the contested frontier
offered possibilities for formal land tenure in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that
nineteenth-century changes subsequently precluded. For this small group of people, the
triumph of settler orthodoxy would have been particularly harsh. Slaves, meanwhile, found
emancipation just as frontier orthodoxy was consolidated, constraining the possibilities of
independent existence for individuals described outside the parameters of settler identity.
Limited access to land kept most former slaves in service to a master.

For farmers seeking land and stability on the outer limits of colonial settlement, orthodoxy
proved ambivalent. The increasing presence of state and church structures stabilized
community life, but land tenure regulations after 1813 limited possibilities for
undercapitalized individuals and families. The rise and fall of family fortunes seems more
important for individual opportunity than any administrative fiat, as the case of Gerrit van
Wyk suggests. Head of a household with moderate resources one year, he was a hired laborer
the next. Such a dramatic reversal of fortune in an agrarian household would not likely
change with the status of the frontier. For farmers making a living from the land, settler
ascendancy ensured their physical security and societal stability, but did not change the
elements of water, sunshine, and pests that ultimately determined their economic success or
failure.

Despite the vagaries of individual fortune, we can see real continuities among settler
households in the Cedarberg from the 1780s to the 1830s. Land claims passed down through
generations. When Paul Willem Lubbe died in 1810, his wife Jacoba Mouton assumed
ownership of Brakkefontein, the farm he had inherited from his mother, Johanna Maria
Keyser. She had taken over the farm at the death of her husband, Barend Fredrik Lubbe
Barendsz, who in turn bought it from the original claimant, Daniel Pfeil, underscoring the firm
connection of a community to places in the landscape. The couple's household inventory also
suggests continuity in material culture. Paul and Jacoba had a variety of household goods,
though only one porcelain bowl, and nothing described as copper or silver. They also had basic
farm equipment, hand tools, and ample livestock—a typical inventory for middling farmers in
the 1760s, the 1780s, and the early nineteenth century.

Cross Reference:
The loan farm system enabled continuity in settler land claims.
(chapter3.html#p21)

Although Paul and Jacoba's household was far from grandiose, not all of Oud Barend's
grandchildren achieved even this limited level of economic success. Elsje Sophia Lubbe, like
many of her kinsmen (including Paul and Jacoba), married a first cousin—Schalk Willem
Petrus Burger. The couple's four minor children had many fewer assets to divide than were
evident in Oud Barend's auction or in Schalk Willem Petrus's grandparents' estate inventory,
an indication that partible inheritance forced each generation to coax new wealth from the land—and to expand settler land claims in the process. Schalk Willem Petrus and Elsje Sophia were not wealthy when Elsje died; their household inventory does not mention a farm, but they must have lived at least in "rough comfort." They had a wagon, trek oxen, and two saddle horses, suggesting mobility. They also had livestock enough to suggest the beginnings of prosperity: six breeding horses, 27 cows, 321 sheep, and 56 goats. Their housewares were not elaborate; they possessed only three pewter plates, five pewter spoons, and five steel forks for a family of six. Apparently they all snuggled into two beds; the youngest child was nearly 7 years old, too big for a cradle. The inventory does not mention any farming implements, but does list 18 feet of cedar planks and various carpenter’s tools. Schalk Willem Petrus must have earned at least some of their keep by woodworking. Even with this limited material comfort, they fared better than their cousin Jacobus Lubbe Andriesz, who died in 1829, a 73-year-old bachelor with only 11 old silver buttons and two silver shoe buckles to his name.

Another significant continuity in nineteenth-century households was the continued subordination of labor, including Khoisan servants and slaves. Although Emancipation dramatically changed the terms of subjugation for enslaved individuals, in most cases, it did not significantly improve their material circumstances. The earlier abolition of the slave trade, mandated by the British Parliament in 1807, was a more abrupt challenge to the labor supply at the Cape. For example, Paul Lubbe and Johanna Mouton’s household included two slaves from Mozambique. The presence of Moses and Damon in the Olifants River Valley points to the ongoing connections between this frontier region and the wider world.

**Frontier Orthodoxy in a Global Context**

This broader context is important for understanding the gradual consolidation of settler identity and colonial dominance in the Cedarberg. Continuities in land tenure, marriage patterns, material culture, and labor subordination crystallized against a backdrop of global changes. The collapse of the Dutch East India Company brought major shifts in imperial oversight at the turn of the nineteenth century. Britain claimed the Cape during a period of dramatic changes in the world economy; the accelerated, capitalist incorporation of colonial territories and the ongoing extraction of resources fueled the industrial revolution. Meanwhile, a revitalized evangelical, European Christianity began sponsoring increased missionary activity worldwide. This religious outreach had direct consequences for the end of slavery and a greater focus on southern Africa as a multidenominational mission field. By 1800, concerted armed reprisals on the part of Khoisan had petered out, though individual assaults and livestock depredations continued. These ongoing challenges posed limited, specific threats, so the grandchildren of the first colonial settlers found themselves firmly entrenched in the Cedarberg. This increased local stability combined with global changes to
draw the frontier into the colony's embrace, securing the region for settler farmers at the expense of independent Khoisan and agricultural laborers. By the end of the 1830s, the Cedarberg was firmly in the administrative, judicial, and religious orbit of the Cape Colony. Although still relatively thinly populated, the region was no longer a frontier zone.

The most significant large-scale change for the Cedarberg was the Cape's transition to British rule, officially instituted by 1806. The Cedarberg became part of a global empire trying to try to regularize its rule, promote local economic growth, and make itself profitable. Though still remote from seats of power in Cape Town and London, the Cedarberg increasingly was connected to imperial administration and incorporated into a modern, bureaucratizing state. The continuities evident on the frontier by the end of the eighteenth century were compatible with markers of formal inclusion into the colonial order that came later. The Cedarberg became a place that both needed and could sustain a magistrate’s office and an NGK gemeente. These outposts of civilization did not arrive to subdue a wilderness—settler households had already done that work over the previous century. The magistrate and the pastor were not colonial vanguards, they were the signs of colonial success. This ascendance of settler orthodoxy in the Cedarberg did not, however, end intense frontier interactions across the nineteenth century. Hostilities continued along the eastern frontier, bubbled up elsewhere in South Africa, and emerged with renewed ferocity along with the mineral revolution.

Orthodoxy and Identity

Frans and Johannes Hendrik Lubbe surely did not think of themselves as "orthodox land owners" when they arrested Donderbosch Pokkebaas and other troublemakers, casting them as rebels and sending them to the Castle to be questioned. Yet in this event, the brothers demonstrated conformity with the colonial government, acted to secure their own property interests, and operated within the rule of law—unlike some of their neighbors who were
frequently reprimanded by the landdrost and other authorities for inappropriate violence against Khoisan. Even for families like the Lubbes and the Burgers, who clearly cast their lot with colonial conformity, life in the Cedarberg at the end of the eighteenth century was a struggle—against the elements to make a living and against Khoisan who still fought to evict them. In spite of these challenges, the settlers stayed put. In retrospect, their saga is one of incremental conquest finally achieved—over and over again. Colonists did not win a single or decisive victory in their struggle to claim the Cedarberg. Instead, there were many moments that consolidated the settler community and worked to impose social orthodoxy in much the same way as colonial farmers sought to cultivate fields from the wilderness.
Notes


Note 6: See, for example the *American History Review* forum on periodization, *AHR* 101 (June 1996), 749–82.


Note 9: Susan Newton-King, *Masters and Servants on the Eastern Cape Frontier, 1760–1803* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 210–31. Having a firm end point for her narrative, Newton-King opens her book with a meditation on colonial beginnings (pp. 1–10), a point I did not consciously seek to mirror. As coincidence, it suggests to me that colonial periodization is still very much open to fruitful debate.

Note 10: Penn, *Forgotten Frontier*, 274.


Note 16: Readers unfamiliar with nineteenth-century Cape history may refer to the Appendix for an elaboration of these events as they relate to the Cedarberg.


Note 19: Dawn Nell, "Land, Land Ownership and Occupancy in the Cape Colony During the Nineteenth Century With Special Reference to the Clanwilliam District." (BA Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1997).


Note 21: The decline in Gerrit van Wyk’s fortunes is recorded in the opgaaf records of 1740 and 1741. ARA: VOC 4143 OBP 1740 opgaaf, Stellenbosch p. 4. ARA: VOC 4147 OBP 1741 opgaaf, Drakenstein p. 10.

Note 22: CA: MOOC 8/58.36a, Estate Inventory of Paul Willem Lubbe, 7 Mar. 1810.

Note 23: CA: MOOC 9/58.36a, Estate Inventory of Paul Willem Lubbe, 7 Mar. 1810.


Note 28: In her keynote address at the 2007 World History Association Annual Meeting, Marnie Hughes-Warrington provided an imaginative look at the insights possible from shifting between local and global perspectives.


Note 31: Elizabeth Elbourne, Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002).

Note 32: For example, Penn, "Ear Atrocity."


