

III. Mechanics of Conquest

A river only flows one way, not so the traffic of a colonial frontier: expanding land claims, contracting Khoisan kraals; advancing commandos, receding herds of game. Even settler moves into the Cedarberg were not unitary marches northward, but rather a series of roundtrips, orbits rather than trajectories. Part III examines this undulating process one family at a time. It looks in detail at marriage strategies, household formation, material culture, the circulation of wealth, and the many, overlapping relationships that linked settler farms to one another while connecting the frontier back to the heart of the colony. 1

These four family histories illustrate how colonial settlement expanded from Cape Town to the Cedarberg, demonstrating the importance of women-anchored family networks to settler land claims, documenting the gradual dominance of settler orthodoxy, and highlighting the centrality of coerced labor even when the laborers themselves were effaced from the archives. 2

Each chapter is also a methodological essay that plumbs the possibilities of a particular documentary source. The van der Merwe story challenges the presumptions of patrilineal genealogies, revealing the depth of multigenerational relationships traced through women. The Burger story pushes estate inventories to reveal frontier dynamics as well as to document material culture. The Lubbe story unpacks the elements of kin, community, and status embedded in an auction roster (*vendu rol*). The Campher and van Wyk saga interrogates criminal depositions, combing these documents for clues about social relationships, household composition, the circulation of land ownership and labor on the frontier, and travel between the Cedarberg and Cape Town—everything except the guilt or innocence of the accused. These source-specific inquiries amplify the struggles over land and identity reconstructed through an imaginative reading of lists in Part II. 3

Ultimately, frontier conquest took shape in the nexus between belonging and belongings. Communities claimed, created, and exploited socioeconomic networks; colonial settlers used the ownership of land, slaves, and material things to assert a position of dominance within those networks. Aggregated and in hindsight, this process looks imperial. Its practice was local and ordinary, though, negotiated in churches and kitchens, over porcelain plates and by campfires, and, at least once, in the back of an ox wagon. 4