Koné came into sad prominence in 1917, for it was from the nearby native settlement of Koniambo that bearded chief Noël started the last of the kanak revolts. . . . But unlike the 1878 revolt, which has been the subject of more than one book, and to which the Sydney Morning Herald sent a special war correspondent, the later revolt received little mention in the outside world, probably on account of the first World War, also because for long Noumea lived in a sort of forgotten world of its own, miles as the expression goes, behind the times.

—Lewis Priday, Cannibal Island

THAT A HISTORY of “1917” is still long overdue is in part due to the shadow cast by the Great War and New Caledonia’s contributions to France’s war effort. The small antipodean colony, with a population of just over fifty thousand, sent overseas some 948 Kanak volunteers and as many as 756 French citizens. One-third of these men—382 Kanak and 193 French—would never return. Today, in a country where the majority of the resident population still wishes to remain a part of France, it is little surprise that New Caledonia’s participation in the Great War—a symbol of the ties between the two countries—still overshadows the war fought in New Caledonia itself. In most published accounts, the conflict’s scale and significance has been consistently downplayed, with the result that its principal signifier in general histories, the date “1917,” has been emptied of almost any meaning other than as “the last of the kanak revolts.”
Introduction

In the absence of a published Kanak history of this war, and in the presence of a colonial history and memory that has long denied its significance, the local scale of “1917” demands acknowledgment at the very outset. The war lasted for nearly a year, involving some four hundred soldiers (both settlers and Kanak), about four hundred Kanak auxiliaries, and as many as three hundred “rebel” Kanak warriors. The sporadic fighting involving guerrilla and scorched-earth tactics resulted in at least 120 dead, including two soldiers and twelve settlers and immigrant laborers. By the war’s end in 1918, 250 Kanak prisoners crowded Nouméa’s prisons. Weakened and malnourished, sixty prisoners died before the end of 1919. Still more people died from epidemics in the reserves where they sought refuge. In all, the war caused about three hundred deaths. It directly affected people living in the districts of Koné, Voh, Pouembout, Témala, Hienghène, Touho, and Poindimié, and its reverberations were felt even further afield; the Kanak auxiliaries who supported the French-led repression came from the districts of Ponérihouen, Houaïlou, Canala, Kouaoua, and Bourail. For the settlers and Kanak who joined the French army in early 1917, the war in the north of the Grande Terre marked the beginning of their military service. The Kanak volunteers from the central-northern districts of the Grande Terre who returned from Europe in 1919 found devastated settlements and communities struggling to regroup after having been dispersed; others returned to villages whose numbers had been swelled by refugees and captured women and children.

Colonial Violence and Power Relations

This book is about more than counting the dead, however. As well as providing an account of the war and its aftermath, one of its main concerns is to explore the dynamics of violence and warfare in a colonial setting that was both European and Melanesian in character. Part I explores the part played by the dual specters of Kanak revolt and settler violence in the collapse of power relations that preceded the outbreak of war. Part II considers the ways in which violence was mobilized, controlled, and contained (or not) on either side of the conflict and the terms on which power relations were eventually restored. Part III examines the place of postwar representations and interpretations of the conflict in the ongoing articulation of power relations.

This particular history of “1917” builds on earlier writing about violent conflict in New Caledonia and in other colonial settings. In the field
of Pacific history, earlier approaches have been categorized by Douglas as, first, a fatal-impact approach in which “conflict [was] assumed to be inherent in colonial situations” and indigenous violence was seen in reactive terms; second, the islander-oriented approach, which compensated for the first by illustrating indigenous agency but was limited by a reliance upon concepts of “resistance” and “collaboration”; third, a more empirical approach that saw indigenous violence as a “by-product of local intergroup relationships.” Intermeshed with these are the strands of nationalist histories. In the historiography of New Caledonia itself, all these categories were used in histories of the largest war of the nineteenth century, that of 1878–1879.4

Aspects of these approaches continue to inform research and popular representations, but over the past two decades romanticized and binary models of resistance and agency have been challenged. Instead, there have been calls to examine resistance as “a diagnostic of power,” identifying its strategies and structures so as “to trace how power relations are historically transformed.”5 Greater attention has been paid to describing “a political terrain populated not only by unconscious resisters and alienated ideologues, but also by agents . . . who challenge existing and permeable structure of domination, with varying scope of intention.”6

Examining the conflicts that occurred in New Caledonia between 1853 and 1879, Douglas moved from a preoccupation with “colonial encounters,” in which colonial agency is inevitably central, toward the “ethnographic recuperation” of traces of fighting and the identification of indigenous agency.7 The results are fine-grained studies of “past actions in context,” describing “the activity of fighting itself, what people did and what it signified to actors and observers, rather than . . . its causes or broader political dimensions.”8 Interpretively, Douglas’ contribution has been to re-examine the nature of French reliance on indigenous support; “the extent to which Melanesians forced the French to adopt their methods”; the involvement of Catholic missionaries and how they were “imagined, exploited and opposed by Kanak”; and to reassess the nature of French victories.9 Of particular relevance to this book is the repertoire of strategies and actions identified and the concern to question assumptions about the completeness of hegemony, to consider “when and how colonial hegemony was established in particular places and what it involved.”10

Histories of violence in colonial contexts more generally may be characterized by the extent to which they consider the violence of colonialism and the colonial era as physical, symbolic, or structural, or
the degree to which they focus on the state or society, or interpersonal and collective actions. While this book’s focus is on organized and collective violence in the form of warfare, I adhere to a broad definition of violence, acknowledging ritual, the use of magic or sorcery, the embedding of violence within colonial power structures, and the use of fear and terror. For the most part, however, what passes for violence is in the eye of the beholder or the victim. While settler accounts and histories dwell on the savagery of attacks on isolated settlers and (with the principal exception of some humanitarian critics) are silent on the violence of the repression, Kanak accounts and histories evoke massacres conducted by the forces of the repression and seldom detail the raids on settler homesteads. As elaborated by Stewart and Strathern, drawing on Riches’ exploration of the “contestability of violence,” “The issue of violence turns on the question of whose perception of order is at stake. Violence pinpoint points the differences between people’s perceptions of what is proper and appropriate in different contexts of conflict.” This study brings into focus the moments of contestation that can be identified in “1917,” and where possible it explores what they reveal about the dynamics of social and political relations in this particular colonial context.

In examining such contestations, the contrast between micro-level and structural perspectives has been productive. Recognition of the structural dimensions of violence suggests that “violence was not just incidental to the way in which colonial expansion was conceptualized. Violence was instead invented, necessitated and governed by, and in, service of colonial expansion.” Voices of colonial dissent were a permanent feature that indicate “the very reasoned and conscious foundations of colonialism’s violence.” On the Australian frontier, Elbourne notes the “central importance of violence to frontier relationships” and the relationship “between intimacy and violence (as interaction and violence co-existed).” Humanitarian critics of colonial violence neglected structural issues that drove frontier conflict “despite moments of real recognition of the importance of structure” and instead emphasized notions of sin, virtue, and morality. In New Caledonia, claims to intimate knowledge and virtue or respectability were important elements in the contestations that took place among Europeans around the recourse to violence in the repression of “1917.” While the critiques offered by missionaries and others help expose the arbitrary violence of the repression, most critics were also often complicit to varying degrees with the colonial administration and the repression, and the war’s long-term outcome was to reinforce structures of colonial dominance.
Attention to the complexity of colonial situations is also important. Recognizing that a “multiplicity of actors and relations of force defined colonial society and shaped its violence,” Brower has recently examined the “multiple logic of violence” in French Algeria’s “compartmentalized world.” While coercive power was important, “a great deal of violence eluded the logic of colonial oppression and anticolonial resistance,” notably the violence of local political entrepreneurs:

When colonial administrators failed to achieve a monopoly of violence, they supplemented coercion by exploiting cleavages in Algero-Saharan societies, using them as arteries to distribute colonial power. This often ended in violence, albeit one that does not correspond to uprisings of the “wretched.” In other cases colonial policies targeted institutions of social cohesion, seeking to break down indigenous social norms, but the violence unleashed by this anomic remained tied to endogenous, precolonial dynamics and idioms. Violence during the colonial period thus reflected the social makeup of the country itself, and it expressed a variety of political strategies, tensions, hopes and anxieties.

A similar situation prevailed in New Caledonia, France’s other settler colony, where the pursuit of classic strategies of divide-and-rule and indirect rule, in combination with cantonnement (containment), evangelization, and rural colonization established reserves, settler properties, and mission stations as autonomous spheres within which other forms of power relations and violence were exercised. In New Caledonia the penal and colonial arms of the administration both “employed violence in an effort to establish a social order and an inflexible hierarchy of meaning in the lives and the minds of ‘savages.’” By and large, the administration did not intervene in conflicts between Kanak unless settlers complained or were threatened, and it generally turned a blind eye to the everyday violence of labor relations on the stations, mines, and plantations where Kanak came into contact with indentured laborers, freed convicts, and settlers. The entrepreneurs in these situations included administrative chiefs, station owners, indigenous stockmen, and evangelists. As shall be seen, administrators, chiefs, settlers, and missionaries all shared a concern to exercise greater influence over persons and to concentrate settlements within reserve boundaries, which in turn created further tension and potential conflict. Simultaneously,
sorcerers and other authorities not recognized by the administration could exercise very different modes of power in more diffused domains, sometimes subverting the seemingly more obvious domains of colonial power relations.

Throughout this book I refer to changing power relations and strategies, rather than resistance, to nuance the analysis of the relations between the opposing parties. I draw on Michel Foucault’s analysis of the distinction between the indirect forms of action involved in relations of power, acting upon the actions of others, and relations of violence:

A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any other resistance it has no other option but to try and minimize it. On the other hand a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable . . .: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.¹⁷

Requiring attention to both the act of recognition and the “antagonism of strategies” of the parties to the power relationship, this conception is especially apposite in a colonial context where identifying its opponents proved to be the colonial administration’s main challenge. When examining the recourse to violence at particular moments and the exercise of restraint at others, it is appropriate to consider the field of possible responses and the ways in which such decisions are structured by power relations as well as by established patterns of behavior. By highlighting the fine line separating relations of power and violence, this study brings into focus some of the limits of colonial power—though the force of the latter should in no way be understated.

Violence, Warfare, and Pacification: New Caledonia on the Eve of “1917”

On the eve of “1917,” New Caledonia had been a French possession for more than six decades, during which the colony slowly had expanded from an enclave around Nouméa. Annexed in 1853 to meet strategic
naval and imperial objectives, the colony’s early growth was driven by penal settlement (1863–1897) and with it the expansion of the pastoral (cattle) frontier. By the 1870s, spurred by speculation, cattle were grazing their way northwards along the plains of the west coast. In 1917, on the back of wartime demand for the colony’s canned beef, the herd would reach its “historic peak.”

Well before the end of the century, however, a further transformation of the colonial economy was underway. Within a decade of the discovery of nickel and other ores in the early 1860s, mining had begun, and by 1877 the first nickel smelter was operating. Mining provided New Caledonia with an industrial base and its multiethnic composition. At the last prewar census, in 1911, New Caledonia’s population was estimated at just over fifty thousand people. This comprised of a “free element” of 13,138 (including 1,202 Japanese citizens), a “penal element” of 5,671 people, 3,214 “regulated immigrants,” and 28,075 “natives.” The penal element included 3,227 libérés (fledged convicts), many of whom were subject to compulsory residence in the colony and a significant proportion of whom, referred to as “Arabs,” were of North African origin. If the libéré was New Caledonia’s archetypal vagabond, the “Arabs” in particular were the bandits and bogeymen of New Caledonia’s early colonial literature and a source of preoccupation for free settlers until at least the 1920s. The “immigrants” were for the most part indentured laborers from Tonkin, India, Java, and the New Hebrides, but included 760 Kanak. All other Kanak “natives” lived in reserves on the Grande Terre (16,297), the Loyalty Islands (11,173), and the Isle of Pines (605). Penal settlement and indenture provided New Caledonia’s mines with most of their manpower, while rural development (cattle, copra, and coffee) and free settlement schemes languished.

Notwithstanding their early trading interactions and some involvement in colonial agriculture, the slowly expanding colonial economy generally isolated and marginalized the Kanak people, whose ancestors had settled New Caledonia some three thousand years earlier. For Kanak, the nineteenth century had been marked by the political instability and upheavals arising from introduced diseases, depopulation, warfare, clashes with settlers and colonial authorities, and the loss of land. This was especially true of the region at the center of “1917,” which over the previous six decades had experienced several major conflicts. In addition to inflicting considerable physical devastation, these conflicts resulted in significant migrations, allowing the establishment of tribus (reserves), European townships, and new or modified political structures.
THE KONÉ-HIENGHÈNE REGION

For convenience, I refer to the trunk of the Grande Terre lying between the townships of Poya, Voh, Hienghène, and Ponérihouen as the “Koné-Hienghène” region. Its main geographical features are the dividing ranges—with Até peak at their center—and the rivers descending from them. These valleys formed the principal theaters of the war and they provided the local, political, or regional contexts within which most Kanak participants—as well as their descendants—explained their actions: the Koné, Tipindjé, and Hienghène valleys. This region encompasses nine of New Caledonia’s twenty-eight linguistic groups (map 1) and, in the administrative terminology current in 1917, eleven districts (see table below).

A central theme in the history of the region in the nineteenth century is the ability of Kanak to rise above their multiple linguistic, political, and cultural divisions. The “apparent fragmentation” of Kanak societies was “transcended by complex networks of reciprocal obligations, enmities, alliances, trading and marriage patterns extending over whole regions.” This capacity for alliance formation was demonstrated in a series of wars in the 1850s and 1860s as the gradual extension of French rule brought the administration into conflict with several prominent chiefs— notably Bouarate (c.1815–1873) and Mouéaou of Hienghène (d.1862), Kahoua of Poyes (d.1875), and the Koné chief Goodu (d.1869). These conflicts have been characterized as local struggles in which the Catholic mission, present since the 1840s, and the nascent colonial administration, following their own agendas, became enmeshed in reaction to the actions of a shifting lineup of indigenous protagonists who sought to use or abuse the newcomers to their own best advantage. French intervention, on one or another side, was sporadic but sometimes critical.

These earlier wars, and those that occurred across much of the center of the Grande Terre in 1878–1879, at Hienghène in 1897, and at Poyes in 1901, loom large over the history of “1917” and the Koné-Hienghène region. The migrations and resettlements they prompted were the last prior to the establishment of reserves in the region and thus shaped its sociopolitical landscape for decades. This was especially evident around Koné and Koniambo; while certain Koné and Koniambo chiefs had allied with the administration in 1878, the groups resettled in the region following the clearances from the Muéo-Poya region after the war included people who had fought on the opposing side. Political divisions (enmities and alliances) involved, or established, in all these wars would also
Violence, Power, and Representation

Map 1: New Caledonia showing main linguistic divisions.

play a critical part in “1917.” Just as importantly, actions and representations from these wars contributed to the specters of violence that haunted both Kanak and settlers on the eve of “1917.” Certain Kanak leaders, notably the Koné chief Goodu (d.1869) and the Pamalé chief Poindi Pwacili (d.1888), had established fearsome reputations amongst both Kanak and settlers. While neither of the wars of 1897 or 1901 involved significant attacks on settlers, the 1878 war had begun with devastating surprise raids in which up to two hundred Europeans had been killed. In the following decades, New Caledonia’s settlers were more than mindful of the potential threat presented by Kanak and were attentive to the possible signs of war; as one wrote in about 1900, “Revolts, like wars and all
actions requiring prior agreement among many tribes, are preceded by the despatch of a veritable herald of arms.”

The various wars contributed to migrations and clearances, making way for new settlements. Following the defeat of Goodu in 1869, European settlement on the west coast of the region began with the establishment of cattle stations in the early 1870s. Colonization was boosted after the 1878–1879 war by the establishment of a permanent military post at Koné, the creation of penal settlements at Pouembout and Koniambo, and the development of centers for free settlers at Koné, Voh, and Témala. Though the region’s colonial future was initially seen as agricultural, the development of mining in the Koniambo and Kopéto massifs brought indentured laborers and *libérés* to the area. On the east coast, the pace of settlement was slower due to the absence of penal settlements, large mines, a larger Kanak population, and poor communications. However, when the Feillet administration (1894–1902) promoted a new wave of free settlement, much of the allocated land was on the east coast. At Hienghène, settlement was facilitated by the 1897 war and the clearance of Kanak from large parts of the valley. In 1879, there had been few non-Kanak living in the Koné-Hienghène region; by 1911, there were just under two thousand non-Kanak settlers, many of whom had been born in the colony, and three-quarters of whom resided on the west coast. Over the same period, the region’s Kanak population was estimated to have declined from around 9,000 people in 1882 to just 5,564 people in 1911, concentrated mainly on the east coast.

**THE COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK: RESERVES, CHIEFS, AND THE INDIGÉNAT**

Violence and warfare were important tools in the process colonials thought of as pacification, but the colonial state’s assertion of a monopoly of violence involved more than just warfare. As described by one colonial writer, the decades to 1900 were the period of conquest marked by a rapid extinction of Kanak; all that remained was the complex task of organization and the delicate question of establishing a “*modus vivendi*” for colonizers and colonized. Much of the administrative framework governing relations between Kanak, settlers, and the administration was drawn up in the 1850s and 1860s and over the following decades it was institutionalized.

The expansion of European settlements went in hand with the
delimitation of reserves. By 1868, the administration had asserted the principle of collective ownership and established the *tribu* (tribe/reserve) as an administrative unit and legally accountable collectivity.²⁹ By 1884, the delimitation of reserves was underway in the Koné-Hienghène region and large areas were reserved for use by the penitentiary in the Pouembout valley and at Koniambo. Between 1895 and 1900, new delimitations made way for free settlers in the Tipindjé (Oué-Hava), Amoa, and Tiwaka valleys and for the expansion of existing centers at Koné, Voh, Ponérihouen, Poindimié, and Hienghène.³⁰

The land left to Kanak was isolated from the new economic centers as well as from productive land. In addition to the resulting economic marginalization, the grouping together of people from different clans gave rise to new forms of sorcery, as violence was reinvested in theories of illness and death interpreted as aggressions by others, and conflict occurred around the requisitioning of Kanak labor, the collection of the head tax, and the appointment of administrative chiefs.³¹

Importantly, however, the *cantonnement* of people within the reserves was not immediate; this occurred gradually between 1880 and the 1920s as land was surveyed, released, and occupied, as settler demand grew, and as cattle grazing extended. In the 1880s, “many villages” fell within the blocks reserved for the penitentiary, but much of this land returned to the public domain “before the villages were disturbed.” This happened with 1,100 hectares at Hienghène in 1897 and larger areas at Koniambo and Pouembout in 1911. Though Kanak were displaced from the lower reaches of many valleys and urged to gather in villages centered on a church of one or another mission and bounded by settler properties, the traditional settlement pattern of dispersed homesteads and gardens remained at least partially intact throughout much of the interior.³² After the disestablishment of the Pamalé reserve in 1904, many people remained on the fringes of European stations in the area. At Koniambo-Grombaou, Kanak continued to reside on land set aside for the penitentiary. At Bopope, it was not until 1911 that people started gathering in a single village to cope with the problems caused by settler cattle.³³ As shall be seen, the war in 1917 would give further impetus to this process of resettlement within reserve boundaries.

As with *cantonnement*, the extension of colonial government also evolved haltingly and unevenly, as seen in the development of the Service des affaires indigènes (SAI),³⁴ in the introduction of the *indigénat*, and in the administration’s troublesome relations with Kanak *grands chefs*. The administration in place by 1917 was essentially repressive and
served very limited purposes: to collect the head tax, to procure labor, and to ensure the security of settlers and the means to punish Kanak. Occasional attempts at reform were often blocked by the Conseil général, which refused to approve budgets for all but the most rudimentary of services.35 As a result, most education for Kanak was conducted in private mission schools, though since the 1880s there had been a number of Kanak monitors paid and appointed by the administration.36 Enforcement of regulations depended upon administrative chiefs whose compliance in turn depended upon the sanctions of the indigénat regulations—an essential instrument in the “legalization” of colonial violence, introduced to New Caledonia in 1887, renewed in 1897, 1907, and 1917, and not eventually abolished until 1946.37 Although this system of administration was regularly criticized, and although the rhetoric of reform was periodically revived (often in the context of broader colonial debates), there were no fundamental changes until well after 1917.

The administration’s limited presence in the interior accentuated the punitive approach to native affairs, but considerable latitude also existed for Kanak autonomy within the *tribus*. In 1916, the SAI consisted of just one junior administrator, Alfred Fourcade, a couple of clerks, and two representatives in the Loyalty Islands. The appointment of gendarmes as *syndics* or agents of native affairs in 1898 (taking over from a handful of civilian administrators) ostensibly increased the opportunities for more direct contact with Kanak, but without training and with limited resources such contact was minimal. The size of the gendarmerie diminished in the following decade and by 1912 there were only twenty-four gendarmes assigned to duties as *syndics* on the Grande Terre. The *syndics* depended heavily upon the administrative chiefs and other Kanak auxiliaries to enforce regulations.38 The outbreak of war in Europe would only compound this situation.

As in many colonies, a form of indirect rule was a central feature of colonial administration. By the 1890s, the administration was asserting the power to appoint and dismiss administrative *petits chefs* and *grands chefs* and to pronounce their imprisonment or internment. The district *grands chefs* were responsible for maintaining order in the reserves, collecting the head tax (imposed since 1899), providing labor, and enforcing hygiene regulations. They could pronounce unspecified punishments against *petits chefs* and other subjects and could themselves be punished for the failure of their subjects to pay fines.39 In the 1870s and 1880s, the men identified as *grands chefs* tended to be treated with some respect as both potential allies or adversaries of the
colonial government, but from the 1890s the administration’s stance toward them became increasingly coercive and arbitrary, as reflected in its frequent recourse to the *indigénat’s* political internment provisions during the following decade.39

As might be expected, Kanak modes of authority and leadership and the administration’s conception of chiefs as cogs or auxiliaries in the colonial system were frequently at odds. The Kanak populations of the mainland and Loyalty Islands formed a host of localized political entities in which authority was exercised by a variety of office holders and decision makers, including clan and tribal chiefs, war leaders, masters of the soil, priests, sorcerers, and elders. By the beginning of the twentieth century, two broad and overlapping political domains existed.

**TABLE 1** Administrative districts and *grands chefs* of the Koné-Hienghène region, c.1917

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>GRAND CHEF</th>
<th>MEN PAYING HEAD TAX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koné (or Baco)</td>
<td>Tein Bayyol (Mango) Mwââgu</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poindah</td>
<td>Téâ (Tein) Antoine Katélia</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muéo</td>
<td>Cassouet</td>
<td>c.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voh</td>
<td>Tareki</td>
<td>c.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hienghène</td>
<td>Doui Philippe (“Mouéaou”)</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bouarate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendo</td>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touho</td>
<td>Ferdinand</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiwaka</td>
<td>Tobie Moakéo</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poyes (Paola-</td>
<td>Titelet</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poyes and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongouma)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipindjé</td>
<td><em>Petits chefs</em>: Tiéou of Oué-Hava;</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kavéat of Ouen-Kout; Néa of Ouanache; Doui of Tiouandé</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poinđimié-Bayes</td>
<td>Appoint</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Until 1908, the Tipindjé *tribus* were part of the Poyes district, but following the internment of the Poyes *grand chef*, Amane, each of the Tipindjé *tribus* was considered to be independent.
On the one hand, as members of dispersed patrilineal clans, Kanak continued to be “subjects” to clan chiefs (to whom they were bound by an ideology of common descent) as well as the tribal chief of the particular locality where they resided. On the other hand, for French administrative purposes, all Kanak belonged to *tribus/reserves* subject to designated administrative *petits chefs* and district *grands chefs* with the aforementioned responsibilities and powers.\(^{41}\)

While able leaders could build and draw on influence in both domains to advance the interests of their groups, the potential for tension between the two domains was considerable.\(^{42}\) The *tribus*, districts, and administrative chiefs figuring in official reports did not necessarily correspond with Kanak perceptions of where customary respect was due—and Kanak continued to honor as well as disrespect leaders as they had always done. The identity of traditional authorities could be more contested than Europeans imagined, particularly with respect to control of land, and chiefly authority was seldom as absolute as Europeans supposed. Following the internment of several Hienghène chiefs in 1897, for example, a Catholic missionary was surprised to learn that they might not be the “true” chiefs of the coastal area and that the “true chief” might not be the most influential.\(^{43}\) In most localities tensions existed between members of clan segments claiming to be “masters of the soil” and the members of more recently arrived groups; the latter often occupied the position of tribal chief while the former exercised “covert authority through their control of land” and relations with seers and sorcerers who mediated with the spirits.\(^{44}\)

As a result of this sketchy knowledge and the immense capacity that existed for political competition, a preoccupation with the identification of Kanak is a major theme in New Caledonia’s colonial archives. Before 1917, clear limits to the ability to identify were apparent in the administration’s inability to name individuals accurately or maintain a register of births and deaths. Officials carrying out a medical inspection of the Koné districts in 1913 noted that the *syndic* was unfamiliar with the local *tribus* and that “the control of the natives there was more embryonic than anywhere else.” Their attempts to register names met with passive resistance.\(^{45}\) An *état civil* for all Kanak would not formally be established until 1934. As a result, during 1917, the administration would depend heavily on other Kanak, missionaries, and settlers to identify allies and enemies. Such identifications were a critical part of the administration’s attempts to contain the conflict rhetorically and physically.
CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT EVANGELIZATION

By 1917, evangelization and the tensions between the two missions also had made their mark on the Koné-Hienghène region. The Catholic Marist mission had maintained an almost continuous presence on the region’s east coast since the 1850s. By 1900, the main hubs of its activity were the missions of Tié and Touho, and a permanent mission had been established at Waré (Hienghène) in 1898 after several false starts. Mission influence was concentrated in coastal areas, and mission records seldom refer to the interior reaches of the Tiwaka, Poyes, Tipindjé, or Hienghène valleys. In addition to the barriers presented by local geography and political divisions, reliance upon the Cèmuhí language also slowed the Catholic mission’s expansion. On the west coast, where the European presence was greatest, the Catholic mission’s influence among Kanak was almost nonexistent before 1905.

Catholic missionaries defended Kanak against the depredations of the colonial administration, at the cost of considerable opprobrium, notably during the governorships of Guillain and Feillet in the 1860s and 1890s respectively. Following the 1897 war at Hienghène and protests against the introduction of the head tax at Wagap in 1899, the Catholic mission was accused of fomenting Kanak resistance.47 However, the decade after 1900 saw the expansion of the Protestant mission on the mainland, as many Kanak expressed practical dissatisfaction with Catholicism. Indigenous Protestant nata (teachers/pastors) from the Loyalty Islands first arrived on the mainland in the mid-1890s. In 1902, the French missionary Maurice Leenhardt established a school at Do Néva (Houailou) that became the center for further evangelization under the auspices of the Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris. By 1914, there were nata in the Koné-Hienghène tribus of Baco, Noéli, Paola-Netchaot, Bopope, Tiouandé-Ouanache, Poyes, Tendo, Coulna, and Wérap, as well as at Tiéta, Témala, Tiwaka, and Poya.

If the success of Protestant evangelization drew hostility from the Catholic mission, it also mapped onto or stimulated local rivalries. Furthermore, the combative and antagonistic terms in which the Catholic missionaries saw the Protestant mission shaped their representation of developments within the reserves. To a lesser extent the same applied to Leenhardt, though his ethnographic proclivities, close personal relationships with Kanak, and superlative information network supplied by the nata meant that his representations were more nuanced. Though catechumens and baptized Christians were often in the minority, entire
Introduction

tribus were described as Catholic or Protestant according to the nominal political affiliations of their chiefs or some of the inhabitants. The language of religious difference was taken up by administrators and settlers and has permeated much of the archive.

The legacy of the previous six decades is easily traced in some of the key developments discernible in the Koné-Hienghène region on the immediate eve of “1917.” French annexation and colonization provided a founding, structural violence for the emergent colonial society. By the end of the nineteenth century, New Caledonia had acquired an invidious reputation for actual violence, as histories of both free and penal settlement attest. Neither European nor Kanak was a stranger to the other’s capacity for violence, and to a large extent members of both communities remained in mutual fear of the other. By 1917, however, rather than experiencing an “overt violence, New Caledonia suffered from a climate of insecurity, from a latent violence that was contained but always present.” At no time was this more evident than in early April 1917.