

Living Together in New-Caledonia and the Individual Paths in the SLN Company

S. Nyock Ilouga¹, A. C. Moussa Mouloungui², J. Machin³

¹Psychology, University of Yaoundé I, Yaoundé, Cameroon

²Université Omar Bongo, Libreville, Gabon

³CNEP, Nouméa, New Caledonia

Email: Nyock.ilouga@gmail.com

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Abstract

We cannot understand the psychological dynamics of the individual at work if we are not interested in the complex interaction between his or her individual trajectories and organizational practices. In this perspective, our research consisted in showing that the reproduction of the Caledonian complexity of self-identification within SLN determines the perception of organizational culture and mediates the effects of hierarchical status on the commitment towards the company. In this regard, we combined ethnological approaches and the analysis of individual behaviors to interview 450 SLN employees. Our results reveal that at SLN, community membership offers keys to understand identity attributes that employees use to be hired, evolve in the company, and justify the rank they occupy. While employees of metropolitan origin express an emotional attachment to SLN, Kanak employees maintain a relationship of interest with SLN, which they consider a source of wealth and employment.

Keywords

SLN (Société Le Nickel), Identity Positioning, Commitment

1. Introduction

Although it appears to all observers that New Caledonian society is made up of different communities, the complexity of self-identification that results from partition and social stratification can only be revealed in the light of scientific studies involving individual, intergroup and ideological analyses (Doise, 1982). In this perspective, Tajfel and Turner's theory of social identity (1986) can serve as a benchmark for clarifying individual positions in group relations. Our inter-

est in this work is precisely the knowledge that SLN workers have of themselves and the implications of the meanings they give to their community belonging to their relationship to work. This led us to highlight the notion of community identity in the light of Barth (1969) approach, which suggests more focus on the boundaries of communities, that is, where the consolidation of community identity in interactions between members of different communities takes place, rather than their cultural content. For the communities we are studying here, these boundaries have been drawn by the history of the New Caledonian settlement, which reveals that the Kanaks arrived first. Then, the French colonial administration invested the island. They brought thousands of men, free settlers or criminal colonists, mainly from the metropolis to build and govern the island, before resorting to workers Vietnamese, Indonesians (...), and more recently to Wallisians and Futunians, Polynesians and Europeans. As Viratelle and Christian (2010) say, New Caledonia is undeniably the theater of angry destinies: the colonized Kanak, chained and dominated on their own land, deported Caledonians of European origin, transported and settled on the same lands at the time of hard labor. We now realize the trauma caused to these thwarted destinies, which were punctuated by colonization at the cost of many sufferings. In the Caledonian society, we find all necessary ingredients to observe the phenomena of comparison and social confrontation. Communities that are present on the island offer individuals benchmarks for their positioning identity and, by the very fact of this cohabitation, cause an intergroup competition to occupy a dominant position on the social scale as provided by the collective strategies of change in the theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

However, the resulting legitimacy struggles and inter-community power relations combine both ethnic and political cleavages. We have tried to disentangle the skein by analyzing these interactions and social influences, but also their impacts on the working relationship at SLN. At the societal level, there is a confrontation between the Kanak (indigenous population, 40% of the overall population of the island) and the Europeans (29.2%). While the first group, appropriating their cultural identity valued by the Matignon Agreements (1988) and the Nouméa Agreement (1998), attempts to conquer a dominant political position occupied by the Europeans, the others are seeking for reasons to strengthen and legitimize their political, social and economic domination over the Kanak. Other communities, people from Oceania (11%), Asians (3.3%) and those who define themselves as Metis or New Caledonian (16.5%) rather have a discreet existence and weave alliances according to individual and community interests. Is this social reality, made of categorization and inter-community rivalry, prolonged in the SLN? How does it manifest itself? Does it affect the links that employees build among themselves and with the company? By answering these questions, we intended to show that the company is a place of meeting and transformation of reciprocal influences. The performance of its duties is influenced both by both the external environment and the ecological context that the company has helped to build in its own social environment. The SLN is thus

conceived as a viable coalition as long as it provides enough satisfaction to its members, so that they continue to contribute. In this sense, commitment to the organization can be a good indicator for assessing the balance of this coalition. It is the need to accomplish the objectives of the enterprise that the worker more or less identifies with his personal goals (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2001). Commitment is a force that stabilizes behavior when it is subject to contradictory injunctions, and it can take many forms: emotional (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1979), normative (Wiener, 1982) and instrumental (Becker, 1960). Emotional commitment refers to emotional attachment and identification with the organization (individuals remain in the organization out of deep desire, out of volition). Normative commitment refers to a feeling of moral obligation developed as a result of an internalization of the organization's norms through socialization and reception of benefits (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2001). This orientation includes the need for reciprocity and acceptance of the psychological contract (Paillé, 2004). Caldwell, Chatman, & O'Reilly (1990) define normative commitment as a product of the adjustment of individual values to those of the organization. It therefore appears that individuals feel involved with their organization that becomes an important issue (Lemoine, 2000). Established by the works of Becker (1960), instrumental commitment is defined by Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) as being related to how employees perceive the organization's encouragement of their contributions, and the benefits or investments related to the system that employs them: it refers to an individual's knowledge of costs associated with leaving the organization. But, rather than an exclusive focus on an adaptive project, which is not significant in itself, questioning the meaning of the community belonging to the relational dynamic presupposes to be interested in a number of elements: analyzing individual trajectories, translating real life situations into words, identifying priorities and attachment points, and finally, analyzing the perception of the company's culture by specifying which types of relations each one wishes to privilege with. Focus on corporate culture has three basic features. First, corporate culture can be a great tool to dramatically reduce energy loss at workplace. It increases involvement and enhances behavioral coherence (Nyock Ilouga, 2010). Second, corporate culture provides staff with benchmarks in a turbulent and troubling world, where institutions are losing more and more credibility. Finally, corporate culture is at the root of the company's growth (Burke & Deszca, 1982). This article aims at showing that community belonging influences the perception of the company's culture and mediates the effects of hierarchical status on employees' commitment to the company. It presents a theoretical framework for the study of self-identification, organizational commitment and corporate culture. It is followed by the problem that links our research objectives to this theoretical framework. It ends with a presentation of the results and their discussion.

1) Research hypotheses

General hypothesis

The partitioning and stratification of the Caledonian society suggest to us to postulate that: the reproduction of the Caledonian complexity of identity posi-

tioning (self-attribution of a community belonging) within the SLN, by fixing the hierarchical status of each employee in the company, justifies the perception of the organizational culture and gives the media coverage to the effects of the hierarchical status on the commitment to the company.

2) Operational assumptions guiding our quantitative survey

The self-categorization of SLN employees, by promoting the salience of community identity (Turner, 1999), favors the perception of the organizational culture with regards to community issues and rivalries. Also, we say, the perception of the cultural profile of the SLN is function to the community identity (H1). In other words, it is expected that perceived social support scores will be overall higher for Kanak employees than for others.

According to the theory of social identity of (Chrysochoou, 2003; Chrysochoou, 2004), our way of perceiving our environment is affected by the aspect of the active self. In this perspective, by considering oneself as member of a given community, the employees' commitment to the company will not only be function to their status in the company, but also and above all according to their community membership. We can therefore expect that the commitment to the company of the members of each socio-professional category (executives, masters, workers) varies according to the community of origin of the employees (H2). Emotional commitment will be more pronounced among Kanak employees as compared to others. This difference will be greater among the executives.

2. Theoretical Framework

If we consider Barth's (1969) point of view, community appears as a category of attribution and identification operated by the individuals themselves, and whose main characteristic is to organize intergroup relations. This perspective allows us to focus on inter community boundaries rather than cultural orientations and forms that are difficult to identify in some communities. In this regards, self-identification is the result of self-attribution, that is, an attribution by the individuals who choose to belong to a specific community. However, as emphasized by Roccas and Brewer (2002), this self-identification is complex, given that it is marked by overlaps between memberships to different groups to which individuals claim their simultaneous affiliations. But, obvious behavior differences between members of a community, or similarities between members of different communities do not matter. If individuals say they are members of community A, in contrast to another community B, it means that they intend to be treated as A's and to see their behavior interpreted and judged as a member of community A. Emphasis on socially relevant traits in the categorization process makes it possible to distinguish the following communities in New Caledonia.

2.1. Kanaks

New Caledonia Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (ISEE) prefers to use

the term “community of belonging”, rather than speaking of an ethnic community. It is more appropriate, especially with regards to families of various origins who are preferably placed in one community or another, or claim to be simply New Caledonian. During the census conducted by New Caledonia ISEE in 2014, 39% of respondents considered themselves to belong to the Kanak community. It is therefore the largest of New Caledonian community in which the clan, which includes individuals recognizing themselves as having a common ancestor, is the basis of social organization. Austronesians¹ have invested the island first. They won battles to remain owners of New Caledonia and gradually built a civilization that has endured about 1000 years². The customary organization reveals that the life of the community is very structured and punctuated by social and agricultural activities that take place according to the yam calendar. The cultivation of this masculine tuber (unlike the taro, which is female) plays a preponderant role. The planting and especially harvesting of yams give rise to great festive ceremonies. All stages of cultivation (soil preparation, germination, planting, gestation, emergence of leaves...) are associated with specific periods and community events (weddings, bereavements, alliances...). As for intercommunity relations, they take the customary paths and are governed by exchange rituals. Before colonization, in the absence of central authority, each clan or set of Kanak clans developed cultural particularities, as evidenced by the 28 vernacular languages as well as the 11 dialects still spoken in the country.

It is readily admitted that the Kanak have often been perceived and analyzed by western and foreign analysts and anthropologists (Leenhardt, 1947; Salaün, 2005) from practices considered traditional, as opposed to Western modernism. In this regards, the individual is often considered as locked up in a kind of system which restricts its capacities to blossom individually. But, as observed by Rigo (2004) in his analysis of the misunderstanding of Polynesian cultures, each sees the other according to its own cultural prism, thus developing an ethnocentric vision. Admittedly, the more usual customary organization in pre-colonial New Caledonia has marked and still influences the behaviors of affiliated persons, with a variable intensity according to the beings, their age, their place of life. However, an individual who belongs to societies described as traditional is not necessarily erased by the group, to which it cannot be confused. To emphasize this point, Salaün (2005) explains that indeed, it is right to accept the idea that the Kanak’s relation to their culture is not unique. Again, we lack survey data. But this is neither to plead the thesis of inexorable acculturation, nor to minimize Kanak’s attachment to their roots, but to assume that all are not equal in their relationship to culture. Indeed, culture is composed of a coherent set of practices invented by members of a social group, such as language, gender relations, social organization of space and time, religion, which are not fixed but adaptive, and do not impose themselves spontaneously on the heirs.

¹Kanak ancestors.

²The Decree of December 24, 1867, acknowledges native property and gives them the right to sell land to the sovereign nation.

2.2. Non Kanaks (Wallisians, Indonesians, Vietnamese, Futunans, Polynesians, etc.)

New Caledonia is the southernmost country in the Melanesian arc. From the beginning of our era, and sporadically until recently, Polynesian groups disembarked from canoe on Melanesian islands. These navigating warriors confronted the Melanesians already present or made alliances, then were assimilated by the local populations. With the discovery of garnierite in 1864 and the opening of the first nickel, chromium and cobalt mines, as well as the development of cash crops (sugar cane, cotton, coffee), the colonial authorities needed a substantial labour force they brought from the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), Tonkin (now Vietnam) and Japan. While he opposed the pursuit of convicts' convoys, Governor Feuillet also massively brought Javanese. The heterogeneity of this community is such that it is advisable to favor, for its description, clear signs that reveal its diversity. Note, for example, that New Caledonian gastronomy is one of its reflectors. Among the most popular dishes: the nem, of Vietnamese origin, the bami, of Indonesian origin, the raw fish salad and the poé, of Polynesian origin, the acras, of Caribbean origin, the achards, of Reunionese origin... These imported recipes compete with the bougnakanak, a mixture of meat or fish and tubers stewed, and French or Mediterranean gastronomic traditions. In terms of clothing, we have both the manou (equivalent to the Polynesian pareo) and shorts and flip-flops or "clappers".

2.3. Europeans (Forced and Free Immigrants)

Colonial New Caledonia is first thought of as a privileged receptacle for the "dangerous and laborious classes" of a France haunted by its social fears (Merle, 1995). A more positive functional orientation will replace this conception by the end of the 19th century. The island now embodies the image "of a small Southern France", symbol of the influence of one people and the power of a nation. The land is at the core of all issues because it is all about offering this so precious property to convicts and migrants. Thus, it was hoped to found a remedial "new world" built on the image of the idealized French countryside. This settlement project, carrying high ambitions, gives birth to a disparate and surprising "white" society; society that settles opposite a Melanesian world subject to a particularly severe indigenous policy. On the Melanesian civilization, with a thousand nuances, will be grafted with prison then colonization, a culture of French inspiration. For a long time, the only way to ensure one's subsistence out of Noumea being agriculture, most Europeans farmed there with more or less happiness depending on the regions. Some soils being arid, their owners devote them to livestock breeding. In the contemporary reality, they are farmers, breeders but also men of the mine.

2.4. Interbreeding and Difficulties of Intercommunity Dialogue

INSEE reports that during the census of the population of Caillou³ in 2014, ra-

³New Caledonia is commonly called the Caillou by its inhabitants.

ther than defining themselves by declaring that they belong to one of the eight proposed communities (European, Indonesian, Kanak, Vanuatu, Tahitian, Vietnamese, Wallisian, Futuna), 46,000 people (8.7%) said they were New Caledonians or not belonging to any community. At the same time, a substantially equal proportion—8.6%—claimed to belong to several communities. We can consider that these are the Metis who, a priori, do not constitute a community identified as such in New Caledonia. However, many New Caledonians are from interbreeding and recognition of this miscegenation has become a major issue after being taboo for more than a century. The history of interbreeding recapitulates the history of a society and the groups that meet there. It is that of tolerances and prohibitions, alliances and oppositions. Human groups, in the presence of each other on the same territory, meet, mingle and mix languages, customs, symbols, bodies. They engender something other than themselves, children who are different from their origins. Only imposed violence, that of apartheid, can prevent such a process (Audinet, 1999).

In New Caledonia, the first free or penal settlers being predominantly men, mixed unions were common although not much recognized. When the father assumed paternity, the child, fruit of these unions, was raised in the colonial society and identified with the European community. If not, this child was adopted by the Kanak Maternal Group. To this, (Mokadem, 2007) adds that the Kanak community identifies itself in cultural practices where miscegenation is not conceived in biological terms but in terms of identification with the group. The blood, he says, a vital fluid circulating in the bodies of individuals, does not belong to the biological father. It is the property of the maternal ones. This makes the skin color secondary. These two alternatives of exclusive socialization are at the source of what many call the absence of a cultural interbreeding that contrasts with a visibly marked interbreeding of the community, based on the coloring of the skin in particular. Moreover, there are badly assumed attempts of appropriating the Kanak identity among the Caldoches⁴. Of all the groups that make up the population of New Caledonia, the Metis actually embody this society. They are its true sons because they constitute a contingent datum. They are not Europeans seeking to take root in a new land; not more Kanaks who represent a reality and ancestral legitimacy linked to the knowledge of the country and the rooting to the land, itself inherited from the ancestors. They are the true novelty of New Caledonia. In other words, they are not only what would make it new, but “other” by giving it the chance to exist differently and singularly. This status is both their strength and their weakness because it makes them the embodiment of a reality often rejected: the Metis must reconcile the elements from different worlds to recombine them in a new identity. The Metis is the one who is not Kanak and not European for example, because he claims the plurality from which he is born. But how to position oneself, since one is at the same time

⁴Caledonians of European origin, or commonly called Caldoches, are the white descendants of free or criminal settlers (who may have been mixed with other communities), mainly of European origin, who arrived and settled in New Caledonia since at least one or two generations, and can be traced back to the beginning of colonization.

a foreigner and a mediator and that one seeks to build a new identity from the identities of the others? In this study, the Metis are non-Kanak and other Melanesians who claim neither membership of the Kanak community nor that of the community of Europeans.

2.5. Community Membership and Social Interactions in New Caledonia

The social identity theory of [Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) considers that the need for positive distinction is fundamental and constitutes the motivational basis of certain behaviors. Yet, in New Caledonia, some social groups, Kanak in particular, are in a situation where a negative and demeaning image of themselves is continually being displayed to them. The non-Kanak find themselves put in otherness⁵ and have neither the possibility of relating themselves to a real or symbolic ancestor who would legitimize their rooting on the Caillou, nor the feeling of the uniqueness, the unity, the history and the shared future of their community. Still others feel that they belong to several communities at once (Metis) and, in so doing, do not attribute to any of them. These situations, which compromise the satisfaction of the fundamental need for positive distinction, complicate the identity positioning of the Caledonians by blurring self-knowledge, hindering relations with the world and the recognition that others would be able to obtain in a normal identity construction process ([Chrysochoou, 2004](#)). Moreover, this complex situation creates the conditions for a conflictual inter-communal cohabitation on a daily basis because it generates a social stratification and unequal distribution of wealth and power. In this regard, here is what the theory of social identity of [Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) reveals. The structure of the New Caledonian society appears unstable since the island is engaged in a process of decolonization⁶ initiated by the Matignon Accords (1988) and the Nouméa Accord (1998). Members of the Kanak elite, represented by Tjibaou⁷, realized that despite their efforts to achieve a better status, they remain “blacks” in the eyes of the others and they are denied access to prestigious positions in the administration or in private companies. “A glass ceiling” seems to block this rise. Some, the Kanak, are confronted with the impossibility of social mobility because the communities involved can be considered not only as objective facts linked to primordial links such as phenotypic traits, but they are also products of the construction process mobilized to defend material and political interests. This relative imperviousness of inter-community borders hampers individual strategies of social mobility if it does not totally prevent them. Finally, there is no need to prove that the Kanak, at least, contest the political and economic domination enjoyed by Europeans, considering it as illegitimate, because foreigners on this soil that belongs to their ancestors. The observed inequalities therefore

⁵The practice of otherness signifies the refusal to enter with the other in the process of reciprocal influence characteristic of social relations ([Jodelet, 2005](#)).

⁶Several referendums of self-determination are planned in 2018.

⁷Independence leader assassinated by his family who accused him of compromising with the colonial administration.

exist for the benefit of immigrants and to the detriment of the Aboriginal people. This is why the New Caledonian situation is getting closer to its Anglo-Saxon neighbors of the region (Australia and New Zealand). The group discriminated against here is not a “minority group”. Such a context is a fertile ground for the development of actions aimed at shaking up the social equilibrium. Such a context is a fertile ground for the development of actions aimed at shaking up the social equilibrium.

2.6. The Meaning of Work: Commitment to the Company

To make individuals produce a desired behavior, [Kiesler \(1971\)](#) proposes the theory of commitment which stipulates that one must be made to act in order to modify the behavior of individuals and their beliefs. This is probably what SLN leaders achieved by hiring Melanesians at the Doniambo plant and surrounding mines. In fact Melanesians and specifically Kanaks probably did not want to work at SLN; firstly, because this hired labor made sense only for acquiring consumer goods imported by settlers and foreign visitors: people often said: “We would like to have some of these objects but we cannot have them without working, and that, we do not want it; so we prefer to do without it” ([Rigo, 2002: p. 105](#)). Secondly, because they certainly did not want to collaborate with a company that exploited their soil and their energies. Today, the question of involvement in professional life is increasingly raised, sometimes in terms of the meaning of work in general, sometimes again in terms of cogitation with regards to employment. This analysis had already been suggested in occupational psychology through research works on man’s conception of his work, the relationship between work and non-work life in which three lifestyles exist ([Karnas & Nkombondo, 1985](#)): the integrated style (where there is no limit between working and non-working life), the functional style (emphasizes the hard necessity of work and the feeling of dependence from work), the instrumental style (where there is a cleavage between work and non-work life). Work is perceived as a means of doing something and also gaining something from it (salary, social status, prestige). By accepting the work that was finally imposed on them, the Kanak today express an emotional commitment to this enterprise, which they say represents a lot for them. Also, will the understanding of the work activity systematically escape our simplistic analyzes as long as the researchers have not thought independently of any rational or objective gain, underlying one’s commitment in this laborious and expensive debauchery ([Rigo, 2004](#)). According to [McDermott et al. \(1996\)](#), there are two main dimensions in organizational engagement: the emotional dimension and the instrumental dimension. The emotional commitment is reflected in the fact that the employee remains attached to his organization, because he desires, while the instrumentally committed individual remains in the company, because he fears the consequences of his departure. [Allen and Meyer \(1990\)](#) distinguish three aspects in organizational commitment. For these authors, there exists the emotional, normative and instrumental type of commitment. The explanation that these authors give for these

forms of emotional and instrumental commitment is similar to that proposed by [McDermott et al. \(1996\)](#). Allen and Meyer attribute the normative commitment to a kind of moral obligation that justifies the fact that the individual wishes to remain a member of the organization that employs him. It is in the form introduced by [Allen and Meyer \(1990\)](#) that the concept of commitment to company is sought in this study.

2.7. Organizational Culture

As in many topics, it is important not to pretend to discover organizational culture as a new subject. Despite the claim of management best-selling authors to create their theory *ex nihilo*, the idea that organizations can be understood from the point of view of their culture is not of any youth. It was simply posed in different terms, which undoubtedly cross-check many elements of the meaning that is given today. [Murray \(1938\)](#) therefore paves the way to the consideration of cultural realities in organizations, emphasizing the internalization of organizational culture as an essential condition for the establishment of effective interpersonal and professional relations. Apart from the work of Murray, in 1953, Super developed a conception of how organizations “can develop emotional dimensions, acquire a distinctive ‘character’, ideology and competence, and encourage the identification and engagement of their members.” ([Albrow, 1997: p. 47](#); [Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984: p. 573](#)). organizational culture is an issue that became popular in the eighties as a result of the publication of *In Search of Excellence* by [Peter and Waterman \(1982\)](#) and organizational culture by [Deal and Kennedy \(1982\)](#) and, despite a recent declining interest in favor of total quality management, he left his marks in the field of analysis on organizations, particularly in North America. However, the way organizational culture is conceived and measured converges in two directions rooted in divergent currents of thought, the symbolic current, and the functionalist current. Symbolists view the organization as a social construct and doubt the very existence of the organization as reified by functionalists ([Albrow, 1997](#)). They see communities as processes by which members build this social reality ([Thompson, 1980](#)). Culture becomes both a collective process and product that is beyond the reach of any sub-entity (individual or group). It is therefore said that the organization “is” a culture. In functionalism, however, culture exists in the organization through its manifestations and artifacts that express shared values and beliefs, over which leaders may have some control. It is therefore said that the organization “has” a culture.

From an exhaustive review of the literature and strong empirical validation, [Rohrbaugh \(1981\)](#) then [Quinn and Rohrbaugh \(1983\)](#) developed an integrated model of competing values that can account for organizational efficiency (multi-dimensional scaling). The actual axiological content of their discovery became apparent later, as the book Quinn published in collaboration with Cameron in 1998 (*Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*) shows. The results of

their research reveal two main axes for distinguishing organizational values. The first axis reflects a “flexibility - control” continuum, while the second measures the continuum “inward orientation - outward orientation”. In each of the quadrants, the intersection of these two axes highlights a set of values supporting an organizational strategy implemented by concrete means.

1) Orientation towards support (internal and flexibility)

The human resource development strategy a) is based on trust in the human potential, the synergy and the fulfilling nature of work, b) it aims at generating commitment, sense of responsibility and high spirits, and c) promoting participation, cooperation, mutual trust, team spirit and individual growth.

2) Orientation towards innovation (internal and flexibility)

The strategy of expanding and transforming the organization a) builds on trust in the ability to learn, creativity, synergy, adaptability, b) it promotes the ongoing transformation of the organization (by internal growth and/or external acquisition) and c) by focusing on environmental monitoring, anticipation, experimentation and innovation.

3) Orientation towards the goal (external and control)

The strategy of maximizing production a) is based on faith in the clarity of tendencies and on the firmness in structuring, b) it targets the productivity, competitiveness and profitability of the organization and c) emphasizes on the rationality of decisions, on performance indicators, on individual or collective accountability and on the contingency of reinforcements.

4) Orientation towards the rules (external and control)

The consolidation strategy and internal equilibration a) is anchored in the valuation of order, predictability, control, b) it seeks to create stability, continuity, full control and c) through the controlled management of information, through the division of work, through the formalization of production, control and communication procedures.

These four strategic axiological sets (orientation towards support, towards innovation, toward goal, towards rules) constitute the most integrated, the best documented and the most scientifically confirmed axiological field. It will guide us in assessing the culture of SLN.

3. Problem

Considering that the communities studied in this research are more distinguished by their borders than their cultural contents, it appears that, by claiming a specific community membership, the individuals therefore appropriate the social position of their community of belonging to mark their difference. Barth (1969: p. 212) points out that: “If they say that they are As, in contrast to another category B of the same order, this means that they intend to be treated as and to see their conduct interpreted and judged as A and not as B; in other words, they declare their allegiance to the values shared by the As”. For all this, this methodological stance obliges us to immediately make a distinction between individual

characteristics and community characteristics. In other words, we argue that the collective is not to be confused with the individual. While interactions between different communities require common evaluation and judgment criteria, Barth argues that these criteria coexist with impediments in common understanding that make exclusion obvious. These obstacles and forms of exclusion concern specific areas of existence such as the relation to time, inter-individual solidarity, the relation to authority, the satisfaction of personal goals, the pre-eminence or notability of the uttered word. These elements may resonate with the company's cultural profile, which is based on operating rules and procedures, objectives, innovation, and support (Quinn & Rorhbraugh, 1983). This structuring of the interaction allows the expression of marked individual behaviors, in areas of separation. Our objective was to show that in New Caledonia, identity positioning provide explanatory elements for the understanding of the place occupied and the role played by individuals in the company, which (status and role) influence the perception of organizational culture and commitment to the company. By distinguishing ourselves from the conception of communities as cultural supports, we privilege the elements of the ecological contexts that constitute the social stratification of communities on the societal level on the one hand, the hierarchical structure and the culture of the company (the SLN) as perceived on the other hand, to reflect the commitment to the company.

4. Methodology

4.1. Population of the Study

The field of our investigation is the Doniambo plant of the SLN, in New Caledonia, which as from December 31, 2014, has a workforce of 2166 people practicing about 250 trades focused on the exploitation of ore or metal, the industrial maintenance, the support to production (management, research, human resources...). It is the island's largest private employer and an important source of revenue for New Caledonia. The SLN was for a long time the ambitions engine of all the Caledonian youth who planned to work there. It gradually loses the paternalistic image of a protective and generous company, crystallizes passions and fuels controversy over the socio-economic future of independent New Caledonia. The company is pursuing its efforts to integrate new skills on growth business sectors such as mining, geology, and security or information technology. In 2012, the company hired close to 100 new collaborators: executives, supervisors and employees. It claims a recruitment policy mainly targeting New Caledonians, thanks in particular to joint training programs implemented with the three provinces, the Rectorate and the University of New Caledonia. To extract a sample from this set, 900 questionnaires were distributed to employees selected according to the simple random method at the Doniambo plant and 430 were completed and deemed exploitable, a return rate of 47.7%. **Table 1** shows that this sample comprises 180 women (41.8%) and 250 men (58.2%).

We were able to establish the following identity attributions: employees of

Table 1. Sample presentation.

Sex	Men	Women
	250 (58.2%)	180 (41.8%)
Mean age (standard deviation)	38 (1.04)	
Community Origin	Percentage (%)	
Kanaks	141 (32.80)	
Non Kanak	144 (33.48)	
European	145 (33.73)	

Kanak community origin (141, 32.80%), non Kanak employees but who could be Indonesians, Wallisians, Futunians, Metis, Caledonians, Caldoches, Polynesians, etc. (144, 33.48%) and employees of European origins or free settlers and penal settlers (145, 33.73%). The participants' age varies between 20 and 60 with an average of 38 years. 75% of the participants in this study are not members of a trade union. Others cannot be considered as assiduous activists. The non-Kanak group is very heterogeneous because it brings together different communities; however, the choice of this community grouping is made, on the one hand, to make our results comparable to those obtained in the same circumstances in other countries where the heterogeneity within the non-Aboriginal groups is even higher (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and on the other hand, to satisfy the statistical requirements of an analysis of variance helping to measure perception differences.

4.2. Procedure

Researchers have established a first contact with the Human Resources Department and the trade unions officials in order to clarify the research objectives and its functioning. Site visits and brief discussions with employees and members of the management were organized in order to better understand the composition of the staff, as well as the nature of the work and the conditions under which it is executed. The research project has then been submitted to the ethics committee of the Pacific New Studies Center (CNEP) in order to obtain the ethics rules compliance certificate of the research.

The survey itself took place at SLN at the Doniambo plant site, at Noumea, from December 2013 to March 2014. The data collection procedure started with the sending of a mail, to all the different managements of the company. Then, our direct operation continued on the plant site in order to show the employees the aim of the study and the need of their participation. The questionnaire cover letter was informing the employees that the survey was not asked by the company management and hence, they were free to take part to it or not. We shared the questionnaires ourselves to the employees who expressed their informed consent. The filled questionnaires were returned directly to us. The focus on anonymity and volunteering takes into account the scope and the nature of so-

cial, economic and political issues of New Caledonia. Our sample reveals that, it is more likely to be an executive when one is originated from Europe than from Kanak or other. Conversely, it is more likely to be a supervisor or a worker when you are Kanak compared to Europeans.

Figure 1 shows that the Kanak and the non-Kanak employees are mostly workers and supervisors at SLN. That contrasts with Europeans who are usually workers or and supervisors. This link between the community of origin and the hierarchical status at SLN is statistically meaningful but remains liable. Certainly, we find more workers with the non Kanak than with the Kanak, but the profiles of the two groups of individuals remain comparable and distinguish themselves from Europeans.

With the Kanak, the employees having a primary school level are more numerous than those with bachelor's degree and master's level. However, we find more employees having a secondary school level with the non Kanak and more masters level employees with the Europeans. This link between the level of education and the community of origin is not a coincidence. In other words, the Kanak employees are the less educated in the factory. Primary and secondary school level employees are usually workers at SLN. Workers having a degree level are usually supervisors and those with masters' level are managers.

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis Instruments

In addition to the quantitative survey, we had recourse to a qualitative survey which consisted in questioning 30 employees of diverse communities using semi-directive interviews. The availability of the randomly chosen people to take

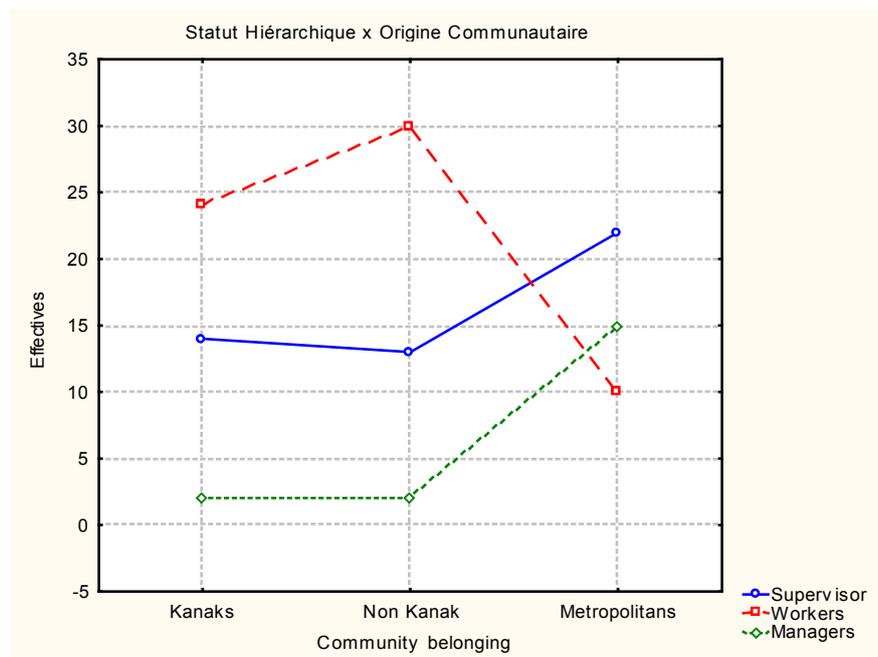


Figure 1. Breakdown of employees between different socio-professional categories based on the Community origin.

part to the survey obliges us to realize 15 interviews before handing over the questionnaire in the office that the company made available for us for the occasion, and 15 interviews out of the company premises, after returning the questionnaires. After the presentation of the subjects discussed during the interview, the employees were asked to express themselves freely and safely given the fact that the anonymity of the interviews was sure and that the data were only accessible to researchers and thus could only be exploited in the scope of our research. The discussions lasted for 2 hours average and were recorded on audio support with the authorization of the participants. This approach was used to describe the individual trajectories of the employees of the SLN, going from their communities to follow their career in the company, their experiences, their expectations, their perception of the company, their speeches on the management practices, conflicts and the cultural features or practices, while trying to specify their aspirations and their personal expectations. We have particularly, interviewed the employees on the identification with a community, the entry method at the SLN and the position they occupy there, using an interview guide. In order to keep the confidentiality of the data collected during the interviews, the data of this qualitative survey will not be presented in this study. However, the information resulting from it was used to give a meaning to the quantitative analysis presented here. The quantitative approach consisted of distributing self-administered questionnaires to employees in order to analyze the organizational culture and the engagement of employees towards the SLN. The data-collection tools used here are those of [Quinn and Rorhbaugh \(1983\)](#) for the organizational culture and of [Allen, Meyer and Smith \(1993\)](#) for the engagement towards the company. Every dimension refers to a theoretical model corresponding to a dominant cultural profile but non-exhaustive. We have used the French version validated by the focus research group directed by Lemoine (1998). For the three-dimensional measure of the engagement, we have chosen the scale validated by Vandenberghe et al. (2001). This scale has 18 items. The answers were collected using a six-step Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagrees to (6) fully agree. The collected data were analyzed using the version 6 of the STATISTICA software under Windows. We have focused on the use of the multivariate variances analysis technique, recommended when we compare simultaneously several groups of individuals reputed homogeneous and within which the observations are distributed normally.

5. Findings

5.1. Analysis of Trajectories

We have realized an analysis of the individual trajectories in order to trace the careers and individual experiences, understand the interpersonal relationships that establish themselves on workplace and the engagement of workers towards the company. This analysis has revealed that the Caledonian society is constituted of different communities that live together and sometimes mix up, mu-

tually influence each other and frequently involved in clashes to occupy a dominant position on the social, politic and economic scale. These oppositions, confrontations and reciprocal influences manifest in the speech of individuals and give meaning to communities. Our survey revealed that this social partition occurs within the SLN, guides the behaviors of the individuals and influences the minds of the workers. In other words, the privileged position that derives from their dominant community membership out of the company offers advantages and special status to employees of European origin in the company, favoring their employment and quick ascent in the company's hierarchy. And conversely, the inferiority position resulting from the belonging to the Kanak community equally continues within the company by defining the gateway and the role of "subordinate" played by some individuals in the company. Individual interviews thus reveal a trend of which we have tried to measure the scope in the framework of a quantitative survey. The protection of the people met in the framework of the trajectories studies forced us to limit ourselves at the presentation of overall summaries.

5.2. Verification of Assumptions

5.2.1. Perception of Culture Based on Identity Positioning (H1)

This **Table 2** shows that the perception of the dimensions of the organizational culture varies depending on the identity positioning ($F_{(2,8)} = 2.7$; $p < 0.007$). The perception of Kanak employees differs significantly from that of non-Kanak and European employees. The scores obtained, among the individuals of this community, in the evaluation of the dimensions of the organizational culture are higher than the theoretical average of the scale used. The meaning of this positive perception of the characteristics of the organization draws our attention. We know that the New Caledonia context is increasingly favorable to the Kanaks, who certainly benefit from preferential treatment at the SLN seeking to halt the wounds of the past and soothe inter-community tensions. We can cite, for example, the training program "cadres avenir" whose objective is to train kanak managers in all sectors of activity and the law of 28 July 2010 which gives priority to the employment of New Caledonian citizens (i.e. people born in Caledonia or settled there before the 1998 referendum on the Nouméa Agreement). The resulting positive discrimination creates tensions among members of other communities of employees (Europeans and non-Kanak employees) who see how their privileged status inherited from colonization is at stake. The Kanak are

Table 2. The impact of the identity positioning on the perception of the cultural corporate attributes.

The impact of the identity positioning on the perception of the cultural corporate attributes						
	Test	Valeur	F	Effet (dl)	Erreur (dl)	<i>p</i>
Ord. Origine	Wilk	0.033123	926.8082	4	127	0.000
Community belonging	Wilk	0.849020	2.7076	8	254	0.001

gradually becoming aware of the fact that SLN is their business. Whether the country is independent or not, the SLN benefits to New Caledonia and the tribes which send their children to work in the mines. The chart below gives a better representation of inter community gaps in the evaluation of the dimensions of culture. These observations are in line with our assumption H1 in which the perception of the cultural profile of the SLN is a function of the community identity. However, our results do not fully match with that because the differences do exist, but they are not all significant when comparing data from different communities pairwise. **Figure 2** reveals the gap between non Kanak and Europeans.

If one can consider the respect of the rules as an attribute of the tribal functioning then to what can we relate the need for change that occurs with renewed acuity? This probably reflects a quest for modernization. At SLN, innovation is part of the public debate and fuels communication of the organization. In general, the perception of the organizational culture does not vary according to the hierarchical level ($F_{(2,427)} = 1.26$; $p = 0.26$ NS⁸). There is, however, a slight difference in favor of managers who are significantly different from the workers. In other words, it is observed that the scores recorded among managers in the evaluation of the four dimensions of corporate culture are higher than those of supervisors and workers. But this difference is significant only with respect to the workers. On the other hand, the interaction between the hierarchical status and the Community of origin reveals very serious potential impact on the perception of the organizational culture. ($F_{(8,426)} = 1.86$; $p < 0.05$). It shows that community of origin, by conditioning the status of each employee in the company, influences the perception of organizational culture.

5.2.2. Interaction between the Community of Origin and Hierarchical Status

Table 3 allows to note that the effect of the hierarchical status of the employee on the perception of organizational culture varies according to the Community of origin ($F_{8,240} = 3.15$; $p = 0.002$). This observation is more pronounced on the dimensions of social support and rules of the corporate culture. The presentation of the result is in **Figure 2** below.

First of all, we know that Kanak and non-Kanak employees are mostly workers and supervisors at SLN. That contrasts with Europeans who are usually workers or and supervisors. Depending on the community of origin, this different distribution of the workforce affects the perception of the company's attributes. Kanaks, being managers or not, record the highest scores on the evaluation of all dimensions of the corporate culture. The graph in **Figure 3** shows that the difference found in the evaluation of the dimensions of the organizational culture is more pronounced among managers, who are significantly less numerous than other categories of employees. On all dimensions of the organizational culture, non-Kanak workers and supervisors record scores lower

⁸Not significant.

Table 3. Interaction effect between the Community of origin and the status on the perceived corporate culture.

	Tests Multivariés					
	Test	Valeur	F	Effet (dl)	Erreur (dl)	P
Ord. Origine	Wilk	0.061856	455.0008	4	120	0.0000
Community belonging [1]	Wilk	0.818997	3.1497	8	240	0.002075
Hierarchical status [2]		0.865554	2.2459	8	240	0.024945
[1] × [2]		0.787819	1.8636	16	367.2437	0.022565

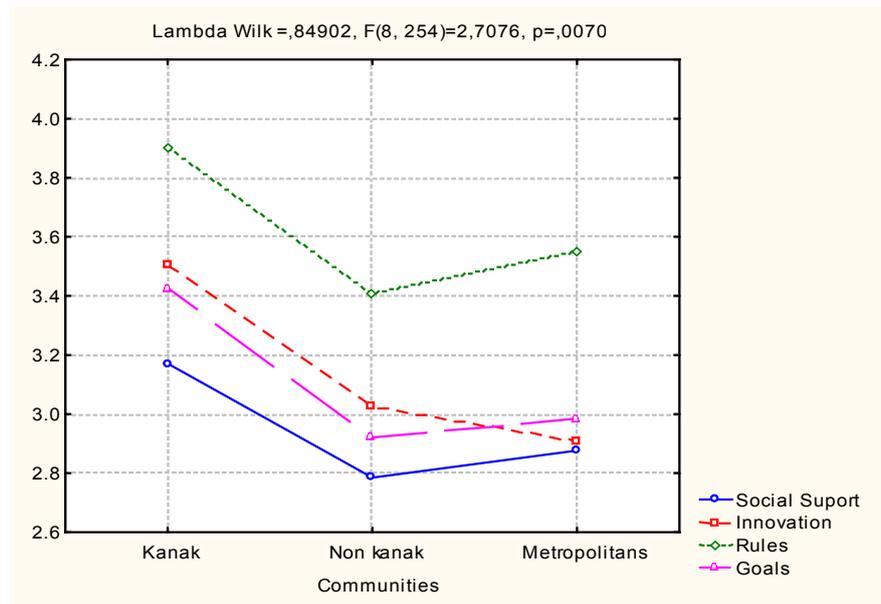


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the dimensions of the corporate culture based on the community of origin. Note: the numbers are indicated in percentage.

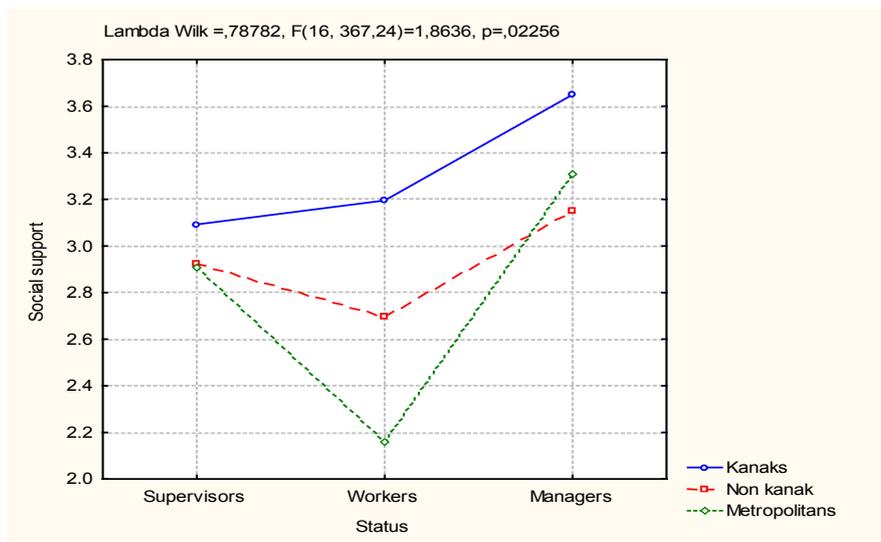


Figure 3. Representation of the perceived social support based on the Community of origin and hierarchical level.

than the Kanaks. Their scores are comparable to those of Europeans on the evaluation of rules and procedures. It is probably this community of employees that is seeking exemplarity and more procedural justice. It can be assumed that European workers and supervisors, some of whom arrived at the SLN through a career path, have various experience and values of equality, merit and rigor, and other profitability, and seem more demanding in terms of goals, social support and innovation. The results obtained corroborate the H1 assumptions.

5.3. Analysis of the Mediating Role of Identity Positioning in the Relationship between Hierarchical Status and Commitment

5.3.1. Direct Effects of Identity Positioning and Hierarchical Status on Engagement

It seems that the level and form of employee engagement with the company does not vary significantly from one community to another ($F_{(2,427)} = 1.79$; $p > 0.1$ ns). For all employees, it is the affective dimension of commitment that dominates, then followed by the calculated commitment. This feeling of emotional attachment to the company increases with age ($\beta = 0.26$; $p = 0.003$). In general, the level of commitment to the company does not vary according to the level of ($F_{(2,427)} = 1.83$; $p > 0.09$). However, regarding the calculated commitment, there were largely dominant significant differences among supervisors compared to managers and workers. Affective commitment appears to be prevalent among supervisors as well as managers and workers.

5.3.2. Interaction between the Community of Origin and Hierarchical Status

According to the data in **Table 4**, it can be observed that the effect of the employee's hierarchical status on the commitment to the company varies when we consider the three dimensions (emotional, normative and calculated) from one community to another ($F_{(6,12)} = 1.83$; $p < 0.05$). In general, it seems that managers express a higher level of overall commitment than workers and supervisors. **Figure 4** and **Figure 5** below show that the level of emotional commitment of European supervisors is higher than that of Kanak and non Kanak. Non Kanak managers get the lowest scores on this dimension.

Regarding the level of normative commitment, Kanak managers express a stronger feeling than their non Kanak and European counterparts. On the other

Table 4. Effect of interaction between the Community of origin and hierarchical status on commitment.

	Tests Multivariés					
	Test	Valeur	F	Effet (dl)	Erreur (dl)	P
Ord. Origine	Wilk	0.034998	1112.103	3	121	0.00000
Community belonging [1]	Wilk	0.910295	1.941	6	242	0.075005
Hierarchical status [2]	Wilk	0.858858	3.188	6	242	0.004973
[1] × [2]	Wilk	0.838844	1.834	12	320.4274	0.042108

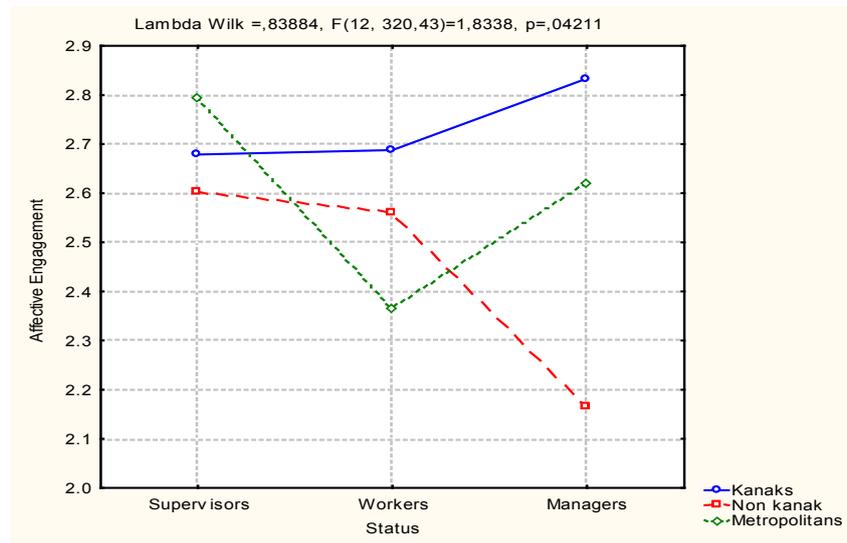


Figure 4. The graphic representation of the emotional commitment based on hierarchical level and the Community of origin.

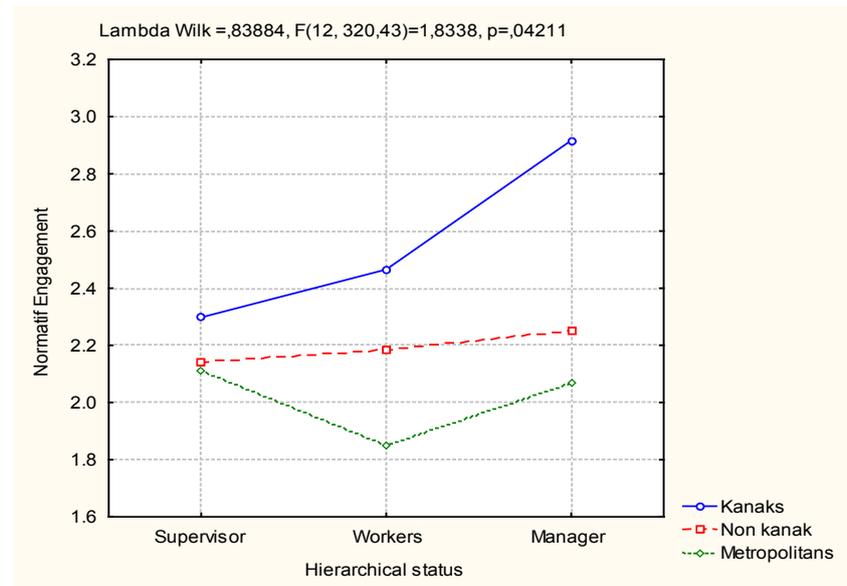


Figure 5. The graphic representation of the normative commitment based on hierarchical level and the Community of origin.

hand, the calculated commitment dominates among the supervisors of all the communities of employees compared to other socio-professional categories (managers and workers). This domination is more present among the executives.

To our H2 assumption that, the level of commitment of the members of each socio-professional category (executives, supervisors, workers) to the company varies according to the community of origin, these observations only give mixed support. Certainly, the identity position mediates the effects of the hierarchical status on the level of global commitment (which validates, according to the model of Kenny and Judd (1984) (Kenny & Judd, 1984), the absence of the direct

effects of both factors as well as the effects of significant interactions. But, taken separately, the dimensions of the commitment do not confirm these results as shown in the graphs of **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**.

6. Discussion

As part of this analysis, we have situated employees with respect to certain dimensions of their relationship with the SLN, such as organizational culture and commitment. This work had revealed, *inter alia*, that the Kanak and non Kanak communities are in permanent confrontation to occupy the privileged places on the social chessboard. As a result of the Matignon and the Nouméa Accord,⁹ the political will mainly benefits the Kanak community, giving the impression of preferential treatment, which can create tensions and frustrations among others, thus causing disaffection vis-à-vis the company. This social reality is reflected in the company by the distribution of positions according to the community of origin and the level of education. Based on these findings, we sought to clarify the impact of the community of origin and hierarchical status on the perception of working culture and commitment to the organization. It appears that the link between the Community of origin and the hierarchical status is systematic. In other words, Kanak employees, often the least educated in this enterprise, are mainly employed as laborers. The link between the community of origin and the hierarchical status at the SLN is statistically significant because, Kanak and non Kanak finally have a fairly similar destiny in the company where they often occupy the positions of workers and especially supervisors thanks to family recommendation. Also, their slow progress towards positions of moderate responsibility depends on the trainings. Depending on the community of origin, this distribution of the workforce, affects the perception of the organizational culture and the level of commitment to the company. Kanaks, being managers or not, score the highest results on the evaluation of all dimensions of the organizational culture. We find this perception mostly among managers, who are significantly less numerous than other categories of employees. In addition, the affective commitment of European supervisors is higher than that of Kanak and non Kanak. The dimension of the calculated commitment dominates among the supervisors of all the communities of employees. Domination is more present among the Kanaks who consider the SLN as a source of jobs and wealth. Working in this company, the Kanaks (at least the ones we met) have come into contact with the consumer society that creates needs, and whose satisfaction necessarily comes through work. These employees have realized that if they want to keep or even develop that way of life emerged from the relationship to hired labor, it will be better to preserve their jobs. At comparable levels, the presence of calculated commitment and emotional commitment in our results denounce a kind of confusion between the attachment to material goods acquired, through work,

⁹Since the signing of the Matignon Accords (1988) and the Nouméa Accord (1998), New Caledonia has embarked on the path of “re balancing” in favor of the Kanak community, an indigenous people who have long been discriminated against (Hadj, Lagadec, Lavigne, & Ris, 2012).

and the attachment to the company that has allowed the acquisition of these goods. Long rejected by the Oceanians (Ellis¹⁰ (1829) cited by Rigo, 2003 page 114) (Rigo, 2004), this relation to the hired labor is now a new fact and is gradually becoming embedded in the habits. The difference between the dimensions of the commitment suddenly seems more conceptual than real. There is a better perception of the transition from the calculated commitment to the emotional commitment. The transition will be made by calculating the difference between what the individual wants and what he gets. In any case, SLN employees do not appear to be committed to the plant so as to return anything than what was given to them (weak normative commitment). They express their pride of belonging to the company because it assures the satisfaction of basic needs. Let us not forget that, our observation raises the problem of the meaning of work because the experiences that give meaning are those affecting the ecstasy (Comte-Sponville, 2006). However, it is not the meaning that is nice, but the love that makes the meaning. This observation may seem inappropriate or at least unimportant. But in fact, the mental processes that allow an individual to distinguish an emotional attachment (self-esteem from work or business) from calculated attachment (exploiting opportunities) are so intertwined that most employees do not know exactly where they are at a given moment. The very treatment that managers reserved for employees fuels this confusion. Given the cultural realities, confusion that is mostly pronounced among the Kanaks is more of a question formulation to assess those dimensions which may not have been sufficiently adapted.

7. Conclusion

The power relations observed socially are reproduced on a smaller scale in the enterprise where the skill and the hierarchical level are used as a stone wall to any demands from trade union, community or other. This fact confirms our research assumption that the reproduction of the Caledonian complexity of identity positions within the SLN determines the perception of the organizational culture and mediates the effects of the organizational culture on the commitment to work and the company. However, we cannot blame any company for valuing competence in the service of the desired efficiency. However, one can develop competence through training, and the company would be well advised to do more training for all to promote access to positions of responsibility, to all communities of individuals that make up its payroll and thus, foster the very expression of diversity and play its role of incorporating behaviors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

¹⁰ELLIS W., 1829, In Search of Polynesia, Paris, publication of the Society of Oceanists, No. 25, Volume I, p. 172.

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