

## 4 *La chance* | Emergence.

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### Layer 1. Members predicates: *La chance* appears.

The first layer (L1) is about the phenomenon of *la chance* as categorized by university graduates. The questions raised in this chapter are: What do the graduates categorize as *la chance* and what do they know about *la chance*? In order to find out how *la chance* was experienced by graduates in the past, we will explore university graduates' stories about their lives through their own narrated autobiographies.

Now, this is where the description gets a bit technical:

Guided by the question “What is *la chance*?” I coded the interview transcripts for category-tied predicates of *la chance* applied by my informants. The category I focused on was *la chance*; and within that members' category, I focused on the devices which categorize *la chance*. Overall, I coded 244 accounts in which graduates related to *la chance* and came up with 17 predicates of *la chance*. By virtue of that first round of coding, I came up with the following devices: “companion”, “social context”, “means”, “networks”, “opportunity”, “special” and “possession”, for instance. To put this very simply, *la chance* categorized with the device “social context” means that “*la chance* is social context” and likewise, “*la chance* is networks”, “*la chance* is special” and so on. In the second-cycle coding I refined the devices I categorized in my initial coding by splitting (Dey 2003, 139), for instance, “networks” into family, friendship and professional networks. Similarly, I distinguished “opportunities” as a result of previous “choices”, as a “reward” for previous action or as “success”. For instance, “*la chance* is an opportunity resulting from previous choices”. More importantly though, by comparing and combining the devices resulting from my first-cycle coding, I identified patterns shared by some of them and spliced them accordingly (Dey 2003, 139). For instance, I realized the devices “means”, “networks” and “social context” were perceived

as a given “privilege” by graduates, whereas “possession”, “possibility” and “access” are attributed to a personal “achievement”. Quite unlike these groups, “opportunity” and “special” share the commonality of being manifested in a unique “moment” of time. Accordingly, on this level “*la chance* is a privilege”, “*la chance* is a moment” and “*la chance* is an achievement”. Abstracting from these overarching categories, which are based on the category-tied predicates of *la chance*, I developed the constituent parts of *la chance*, namely “prerequisites of *la chance*”, “sprouts of *la chance*” and “outcomes of *la chance*”.

All in all, the examination of *la chance* as a category resulted in a differentiation of the phenomenon into prerequisites, sprouts, and outcomes. I chose these terms as representative for the kind of *la chance* to which they refer. In that sense, *la chance* might as well be considered a collective category – a membership categorization device consisting of these three categories each featuring different predicates. At first, these categories (prerequisites, sprouts, and outcomes) were invisible; they represent graduates’ taken-for-granted knowledge of the features of *la chance*.

### **Layer 2. Clues: *La chance* emerges.**

The second layer (L2) contains clues extracted from graduates’ narrative accounts that indicate (I) how *la chance* emerges in particular situations and (II) how *la chance* operates in general instances.

#### **I What is *la chance*?**

We will see that:

##### **(1) *La chance* is possession. *La chance* is ability.**

Within the relations between *la chance* and work, *la chance* and education, *la chance* and money as well as *la chance* and employment, we will see how *la chance* emerges as a possession, namely, something people have and as an ability, which refers to a person’s potential of having something like employment or money, for instance.

##### **(2) *La chance* is connected to and different from “not *la chance*” and “*la malchance*”.**

Example.

Susann: Est-ce que tu penses que tu auras besoin de (la) chance pour réussir?  
 Mamadi: Ça c'est clair, même si tu es diplômé avec un doctorat, si tu n'as pas la chance tu restes toujours à la maison. La chance aussi a un impact.

Original Interview Extract in French.

L1: predicate prerequisite companion

Susann: Do you think you need la chance in order to succeed?  
 Mamadi: Of course I do! Even if you have a PhD, if you don't have la chance, you're going to stay at home. La chance does have an impact as well. (My translation, interview, 2015; with Mamadi, graduated in Sociology.)

Layer 1: Coding Scheme.

Narrative Interview Account.

La chance is impactful and necessary in ensuring success, which is, in other words, "to not stay at home". Even having a PhD does not ensure success in this endeavor, not like la chance does. The equation is simple: with a PhD you stay at home, but with a PhD in combination with la chance, you will not. Mamadi does not quantify la chance's impact; la chance seems to be binary. One either has la chance, or one does not – the possession of a PhD does not equate to the presence or absence of la chance. In other words, la chance is like a companion.

Interpretation 1:  
 Membership Categorization Analysis focusing on predicates (chapter 4) and activities (chapter 5) of "la chance" as an empirical phenomenon.

L2: La chance is having what you want.

I specifically ask for the causal relationship between la chance and success. Without la chance, you stay at home, which is something you do not want. The exceptional qualification of a PhD is not enough to get you out of the home and into a job. You do need la chance in order to get a job, which does not mean that it is enough to have la chance. A PhD is not la chance. La chance is to get out of the home and into a job.

Layer 2: Clue.

Interpretation 2:  
 Explorative Content Analysis focusing on predicates (chapter 4) and activities (chapter 5) of la chance as a concept.

## II How does *la chance* operate?

We will see that:

**(1) *La chance* is a process and a product.**

*La chance* emerges within a combination of structural and agentive factors and it becomes visible through its particular distribution among university graduates.

**(2) *La chance* is distributed, thus, *la chance* distinguishes.**

*La chance* is distributed in different ways. Therefore, *la chance* is special and not taken for granted by those who have *la chance*. Furthermore, *la chance* is relative, i.e. a matter of consideration – relative to oneself and relative to others.

**Assemblage: *la chance*.**

***La chance* is a prerequisite.**

Susann: Est-ce que tu penses que tu auras besoin de (la) chance pour réussir?

Mamadi: Ça c'est clair, même si tu es diplômé avec un doctorat, si tu n'as pas *la chance* tu restes toujours à la maison. *La chance* aussi a un impact.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\companion

Susann: Do you think you need *la chance* in order to succeed?

Mamadi: Of course I do! Even if you have a PhD, if you don't have *la chance*, you're going to stay at home. *La chance* does have an impact as well.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Mamadi, graduated in Sociology.)

*La chance* is impactful and necessary in ensuring success, which is, in other words, “to not stay at home”. Even having a PhD does not ensure success in this endeavor, not like *la chance* does. The equation is simple: with a PhD you stay at home, but with a PhD in combination with *la chance*, you will not. Mamadi does not quantify *la chance*'s impact; *la chance* seems to be binary. One either has *la chance*, or one does not – the possession of a PhD does not equate to the presence or absence of *la chance*. In other words, *la chance* is like a companion.

### L2: *La chance* is having what you want.

I specifically ask for the causal relationship between *la chance* and success.

Without *la chance*, you stay at home, which is something you do not want.

The exceptional qualification of a PhD is not enough to get you out of the home – and into a job. You do need *la chance* in order to get a job, which does not mean that it is enough to have *la chance*.

A PhD is not *la chance*. *La chance* is to get out of the home and into a job.

Susann: Tu as dit que tu aimais travailler dans un bureau, pourquoi ?

Ibrahim: J'ai envie de travailler dans un bureau et je voulais toujours travailler dans un bureau, et puis pourquoi? Parce que j'ai dit que si tu as pu étudier, ce n'est pas obligatoirement pour travailler dans un bureau. Chacun a sa chance dans la vie. Mais quand même, moi j'aimerais travailler dans un bureau. Pourquoi ? Si tu travailles dans un service, c'est comme si tu avais beaucoup d'assurance.

### **L1: predicate\prerequisite\companion**

Susann: You said you like working in an office, how come?

Ibrahim: I like working in an office and I always wanted to work in an office. Because having graduated doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to work in an office. Everybody has his/her *la chance* in life. Anyway, I wanted to work in an office, because if you work in an office, you've got some guarantees.

(My translation, interview, 2013, with Ibrahim, graduated in Law.)

Again, graduation does not necessarily guarantee an office job; it results from a degree plus *la chance*. Ibrahim's office job represents what he likes and has always wanted, because it comes with guarantees, which seems to be an advantage. The difference between those who do have an office job and those who do not is not the acquisition of a degree, but *la chance*. Everybody is provided with *la chance* individually. Again, *la chance* is not quantified; it is either about having *la chance* and therefore, the office job, or not. You only know you have it, if you have something. Ibrahim knows that he has *la chance* in his life, because he works in an office.

### **L2: *La chance* is dependent on the person having it.**

Graduation from university does not necessarily lead to an office job.

An office job, his office job, comes with specific traits, i.e. it is guaranteed in general and it is desired by him in particular. An office job is a guaranteed job. A guaranteed job is not for everyone who has graduated. An office job is *la chance*. *La chance* is personalized to an individual's life. Some individual's do have *la chance* to work an office job, others do not. The distinguishing fac-

tor between those graduates who do have guaranteed employment and those who do not is *la chance*.

Susann: Est-ce-que tu penses que c'est Dieu qui nous a fait rencontrer ?

Siaka: Ah, non. C'est une coïncidence. Tu sais, chez nous, quand on parle de Dieu seulement, c'est la religion qui est là. Ça c'est une coïncidence, donc le fait que nous étions presque dans le même carré, c'est une coïncidence qu'on s'est rencontrés. L'être humain, il n'est rien s'il n'est pas dans le milieu, je veux parler du milieu, quoi en fait. Il y a certains quartiers à Bamako où tu ne vois pas les Blancs. Oui, ça, c'est ma chance, je t'ai rencontrée.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\social context

Susann: Do you think that God made us meet in the first place?

Siaka: Ah, no. That was a coincidence. You know, if we talk about God here, it's all about religion. But this is really a coincidence. So, the fact that we were almost neighbors. It's a coincidence that we met. [...] Human beings are shaped by their environment. So, I'd say that it's the environment. There are areas in Bamako where you'd never meet a white person. And yeah, that was ma chance.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

University graduates do not consider *la chance* as a part of their personal achievement; they are provided with it. Mostly, prerequisites are attributed to external circumstances. The previous example demonstrates a clear distinction between the two: God is religion; coincidence is different. Yet, both provide *la chance*.

*La chance* is the reason that Siaka and I met. He knows there are no white people in some areas of Bamako. Siaka lives in a middle-class neighborhood about forty minutes away from the city center, and he met a white person in his own neighborhood. That was a coincidence; to him, that was his *la chance*.<sup>1</sup> The environment is important when it comes to *la chance*. Living in the same area and getting to know each other are coincidences, and living in the right environment makes it more likely to find *la chance*, even if one is not looking

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<sup>1</sup> Siaka, my field assistant, described the fact that we met as *la chance* because it later led to employment for him.

for it. To him, the area in which he lives is a prerequisite; and this is *la chance* in the sense that it predestined us to meet each other. Coincidence is *la chance*.<sup>2</sup>

L2: *La chance* has nothing to do with religion.

God? No!

*La chance* has nothing to do with religion.

This is really the clue here. And he argues for that as well.

How come we met? I ask explicitly about God.

God did not make us meet.

God is religion and both is NOT coincidence.

Our first encounter is coincidence.

He and I are neighbors.

We met.

We are shaped by our environment. We are shaped by our neighborhood.

I am a white. I live in Faladie. Faladie is not a neighborhood where you'd never meet a white person.

With regard to our first encounter, to him, *la chance* was to live in Faladie.

The environment made us meet. The environment is *la chance*.

If I take all these accounts and analyze them like that, it is almost as if I were putting together a profile of a potential perpetrator in a legal case. I collect all the accounts and check them for clues. Is that exciting? I take three things away from this extract: *La chance* has nothing to do with religion. *La chance* is coincidence. *La chance* makes people meet in certain environments.

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2 Furthermore, he makes a distinction saying that God is religion and not *la chance*; instead, coincidence is *la chance*. I will go into more detail about this later when elaborating on the standardized relational pair: *la chance* and God.

J'ai eu *la chance* d'être allée à l'école, il n'y a pas beaucoup de filles... Certains n'ont pas eu cette chance-là, qui sont dans les rues. Des filles et des garçons. (...) Les parents ont des problèmes pour payer la mensualité des enfants. (...) Donc, moi je trouve qu'aller à l'école, c'est une chance. Être instruite, être intellectuelle c'est une chance, parce que tout le monde n'est pas intellectuel, tout le monde n'a pas eu *la chance* d'aller à l'école. Moi, je dirais que j'ai eu cette chance-là, ça c'est la première chance que j'ai eue dans cette vie.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\means

Going to school as a kid was *ma chance* to me. There are a lot of girls and also boys that do not have this *la chance* and they are on the streets today. [...] It's because their parents did not have the means to send them to school. [...] I'd say school is *la chance* for me... being literate, being intellectual. That is *la chance*. Not everyone is an intellectual, because not everyone had *la chance* to go to school. I'd say I've had that *la chance*, that's the first *la chance* I've had in this life. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Rokiadou, graduated in Sociology.)

Graduates are aware of their privilege of education. *La chance* is going to school. Rokiadou is aware of the fact that a lot of kids did not go to school and that many Malians cannot read or write. She also knows that there are not a lot of intellectuals. She is one of the few that has been able to go to school and even graduate from university. The difference between her and those who did not go to school is their parents' means. Since her parents did have the means to send their daughter to school, Rokiadou is part of the country's educational elite. To her, this is *la chance*.

### L2: *La chance* is not taken for granted.

Going to school is a person's *la chance*. Going to school is not a taken-for-granted for boys, but especially for girls. The reason why some kids do not go to school is because of their family's lack of means. The consequence of not going to school is being out on the streets. To her, going to school has been *la chance*. Having been able to go to school not only kept her off the streets, but it also made her become an intellectual. Being an intellectual is preconditioned by the capability of going to school rather than the intellectual capacity of an individual. Being on or off the streets starts here in school. Being an intellectual is not primarily about an individual's mental capacity, but more about an individual's preconditions, i.e. sometimes gender (girls, but also boys) and the family's means.

Moi j'ai eu *la chance* de la génération qui a eu beaucoup de performance en fait, mais j'ai étudié dans la sérénité, c'est-à-dire que les maitres étaient sévères en fait. Je sais quand j'ai eu ce courage d'apprendre, je peux même dire qu'on n'avait même pas besoin d'être dans les écoles privées pour étudier en ce moment parce que les maitres étaient rigoureux. (...) J'ai bénéficié même plus qu'un élève d'une école privée, donc je peux dire que j'ai eu *la chance*, c'est une chance pour moi aussi parce que c'est l'école publique : quand on est là, on ne paye pas, ici au Mali.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\societal context

I've had *la chance* to be part of a very performant generation, really. I studied seriously, which means that our teachers were strict. I know that they were the ones to encourage me to study. There was no need for me to go to a private school because they were really rigorous. [...] I benefited from that even more than most students at private schools did. So, I can say that I've had *la chance*. This was *la chance* for me, also because public school is free of charge in Mali. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Amadou, graduated in International Law.)

Amadou emphasizes *la chance* in connection with his education as well, except that he locates *la chance* within a specific period in time that was especially advantageous to him. It was *la chance* that he went to public schools at a time when they were still performant and teachers were still rigorous. At that time, public school was free and he did not need to go to a private school. That was *la chance*, too. He knows that this has since changed, and today, public schools are still free of charge, but their educational quality is highly contested. Private schools are expensive, which is why it is assumed they offer better education. Amadou, however, had the advantage of receiving his education at a time when public schooling was free of charge and still associated with quality – this was *la chance* to him. Both graduates who attended private schools and graduates who attended public schools consider their schooling as *la chance*. The private students, Safiatou, Simone and Boubacar, emphasize the advantage of small class sizes and better learning conditions, and are thankful for their parent's decision to pay expensive fees. The public school students, Amadou and Oumar, instead emphasize the privilege of getting high quality education provided by the state; their parents never could have afforded it. *La chance* makes the difference between those who

live in a certain area, and those who do not, between those whose parents are able to pay for education and those whose parents cannot, or between those who grew up during a certain period in time and those who grew up later. In other words, *la chance* exists in a state of relativity. Graduates recognize their own prerequisites in respect to *la chance* as they compare their circumstances with others' and at the same time, they identify their advantageous position.

## L2: *La chance* is coincidence.

*La chance* is to coincidentally be part of a particular group of people, in this case of a performant generation. He went to a public school free of charge and high in quality of education provided by strict, rigorous teachers who made him understand the value of studying. He distinguishes generations, i.e. his generation from other generations as well as schools, i.e. public and private schools, which are different in terms of fees and education. He contrasts his public school experience with private school students who receive quality education for money. His education was high quality, but for free. His parents would not have been able to pay for his education, so, it was *la chance* to him to receive it despite the odds. He found the traits of a private school in his public school.

J'ai eu *la chance* de voyager, aucun membre de ma famille, de ma vraie famille, de mes descendants n'ont eu *la chance* d'aller à l'extérieur pour avoir un bon diplôme. Je remercie Dieu pour ça. J'ai eu *la chance* après mes études ou bien avant mes études d'intégrer un milieu que je ne pensais pas intégrer. J'ai eu *la chance* de faire des grands reportages avec les personnalités de ce pays alors que je ne pensais pas que j'aurais pu avoir des contacts avec eux ou créer un lien d'amitié avec eux ; j'ai eu *la chance*. (...) J'ai eu *la chance* d'avoir des parents merveilleux, j'ai eu *la chance* d'être issue d'une famille mixte où chrétiens et musulmans vivent dans l'harmonie sans contrainte, j'ai eu beaucoup de chances dans la vie. (...) j'ai eu beaucoup de chances dans la vie. J'ai eu *la chance* d'être en bonne santé.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\means

I've had *la chance* to travel. No one in my family had *la chance* to travel abroad before. I did my university degree (Master's) abroad. I thank God for that. I also never thought of integrating professionally that fast. That was *la chance*. [...] I also had *la chance* to have wonderful parents. I grew up in a family with different religious beliefs in harmony. I have a lot of *la chance*. [...] I have *la chance* to be healthy. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Simone, graduated in Law.)

Traveling is *la chance* to Simone. She knows that she was the first person in her family to travel and even study abroad. Simone recognizes her personal circumstances as exceptional in relation to the rest of her family – and that is what makes her think of *la chance*. In contrast to many other graduates, Simone also quickly received an offer of employment. She lists numerous examples of what *la chance* signifies to her: her opportunities, her job, her family, and her health. She expresses gratitude for these many instances of *la chance*. She had a lot of *la chance*, she says, and attributes her *la chance* to her family and to God. Now, to Simone, *la chance* is that the family she was born into made her become an exception.

### L2: La chance is something unlikely.

Having *la chance*:

Travels. First one in the family.

University degree abroad.

Thankful to God.

Getting a job fast.

Parents. Harmony against the odds.

Health.

Different religious beliefs in one family come along with potential conflict.

Harmony in her family.

*La chance* is things she does not take for granted and are exceptional relative to others in her family or the situation in Mali.

Two important lessons here:

To have *la chance* is to be able to do x when it is more likely to do y. X is something to be thankful for.

Being thankful to God for *la chance*, which does not necessarily mean that *la chance* originates in God.

*La chance* makes you an exception.

When you are the exception, you know it is *la chance*.

Is there a difference

Oumar: C'est ce fait-là, seulement, quand je vois les gens que j'ai comme amis, comme compagnons de tous les jours, vraiment je me dis que j'ai beaucoup de chance, voilà. *La chance*, elle peut venir aussi comme ça.

Susann: Donc, ce n'est pas que tu as reçu le boulot?

Oumar: Non, non, parce que le boulot que j'ai eu, c'est grâce à Adama, voilà, c'est *la chance* que j'ai eue, c'est *la chance* que j'ai eue d'ailleurs d'avoir Adama comme ami, qui m'a permis d'avoir le boulot à l'Orange. Et c'est la même chose : quand j'ai fait les études, oui bon, pendant mes études, très souvent il payait mon transport pour aller à l'école - je t'avais dit ça, non ? Pour moi quoi, donc c'est *la chance* que j'ai eue de le rencontrer qui fait qu'on est là aujourd'hui.

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\friendship

Oumar: I've always met amazing people in my life. I consider that to be *la chance*. But it wasn't me who provoked it. [...]

Susann: So, receiving your job is not?

Oumar: No, no. [...] It's because of Adama that I got that job today. So, *la chance* that I have is to have Adama as a friend. At university, it was the same... he often paid for my transport to school because I couldn't afford it. [...] It is *la chance* that I met him and the reason why I am where I am today.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Oumar, graduated in Economics.)

To him, *la chance* is his friendship with Adama, which he did not enforce. How come their friendship is *la chance* to him? Oumar attributes the fact that he was able to finish his studies and find employment to his friend Adama, who has always been supportive. Oumar's father lost his government job and ever since his family has been struggling with money. Oumar was not able to pay his transport to school. His situation seemed predetermined to Oumar, yet, his friend helped him out and changed everything. Overcoming this predetermination makes Oumar speak of *la chance*. In this case, friendship prerequisites access to a job and money.

L2: *La chance* is a matter of consideration.

Meeting amazing people is *la chance*, he considers. *La chance* is a matter of consideration. Meeting people is not something you can provoke. (It is probably coincidence.) Siaka. *La chance* is found in the encounter.

I ask for the job. Was that *la chance*? No. He got the job because of Adama, a person he met in his life and who became a friend. *La chance* is having Adama as a friend. Adama did not only get him the job, but he also contributed to him qualifying for the job in the first place. Meeting Adama was *la chance*.

There is *la chance* you can provoke, and there is *la chance* you cannot provoke.

La situation du travail c'est insupportable. Si tu n'as pas de relations, tu penses que tu ne seras pas engagé quelque part. Sauf si tu as *la chance*, et cette chance est provoquée par quelqu'un que tu connais. Si tu ne connais personne, qui va t'engager ?

### L1: predicate\prerequisite\networks

The labor market situation in Mali is untenable. If you don't know people who might employ you some place... unless you've got *la chance*. But who's the one to provoke *la chance* in this case? Somebody you know. But if you don't know anyone, who's going to employ you? (My translation, interview, 2015, with Amadou, graduated in International Law.)

Amadou connects job access to *la chance*: *La chance* is to get employed, according to Amadou. This is based on his knowledge about the employment situation in Mali: he knows that the labor market is unstable and unemployment rates are high. He also knows that people tend to employ people they know. Put differently, people you know might provoke *la chance* for you. Now, if you get an employment, it is *la chance* either because it is rare to get a job due to the unstable situation, or because of networks of people who support you. Amadou connects *la chance* with networks and employment. Knowing people is *la chance*, because this leads to employment. *La chance* opens up for you with the people you know. In knowing people, you have and you will have *la chance*. And vice versa: if you don't know people, you don't have and you won't have *la chance*. Relations are presented as *la chance* in a sense of prerequisites. In fact, those prerequisites act for individuals as they look for someone's *la chance* and provide them with a sprout of *la chance*. These prerequisites accumulate *la chance* further; they are a sure-fire success. Amadou presents relations as not subject to change, one either has or does not have relations. And since he doesn't have relations, there is nothing he can do about his unemployment.

### L2: *La chance* depends on the context.

Due to the conditions of Mali's labor market, employment is *la chance*. It is specific to that untenable situation. Employment is not *la chance* in general, but against the background of the labor market situation in Mali, knowing people and having *la chance* is the same thing when it comes to employment.

People provoke *la chance* for you. You cannot provoke *la chance* of being employed on your own. You need *la chance* to know particular people who have access to jobs.

## KNOWLEDGE: PREREQUISITES.

### **Prerequisites – everyday.**

Prerequisites represent ordinary circumstances in the everyday lives of the graduates. To Siaka, it is the area in which he lives; for Rokia, it is her parents' means that allowed her to study; for Simone, it is specifically her travel opportunities; for Amadou, it is his academic conditions. Oumar and Madou point out friends and relatives. Prerequisites are external conditions considered to be positive and advantageous, such as education, traveling, or living conditions. Mostly, prerequisites are related to family situations.

### **Prerequisites – luck.**

Luck comes by accident and is perceived as either good or bad (Rescher 1990). Prerequisites are also accidents, because they constitute primordial conditions which are randomly distributed amongst individuals. We cannot determine the circumstances of the life into which we are born nor can luck be enforced by an individual. There is no merit. The fact that Siaka or Simone, for instance, received that exact kind of socialization and education is good but completely random. Prerequisites are not reflected as taken for granted, but as something for which they are thankful. Graduates are aware of the fact that their circumstances could have been different, which is a way of acknowledging contingency (Bromber 2015). Prerequisites represent luck because they describe the appreciated conditions in which graduates happen to find themselves.

### **Prerequisites – capital.**

Prerequisites are forms of capital in Bourdieu's sense. Just like prerequisites, capital makes the difference, and its distribution appears to us as a given. Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of capital: economic capital (e.g. money, property, material objects), social capital (e.g. membership in a group), and cultural capital (e.g. education, diploma) (Bourdieu 1986, 6-8). When speaking about *la chance* in the sense of prerequisites, economic, social and cultural capital intertwines. The 'university graduate' is cultural capital. Rokia, for instance, considers herself "an intellectual", which "presupposes a

process of embodiment” (Bourdieu 1986, 6). Most graduates’ economic capital lies within their social capital, i.e. their parents’ money, which ensured their education, their travels, and the environment in which they grew up. It is true that they acquired their diploma themselves; however, it was their parents who determined their educational circuit, which was again determined by their capital. Social capital signifies access to resources through the people we know, for example family, friends, fellow students, colleagues, neighbors, etc. Oumar’s friendship with Adama is social capital, for instance.

All in all, prerequisites represent individual circumstances which are considered advantageous; they are distributed randomly and define an individuals’ point of departure in the process of opening up *la chance*.

*La chance* is a sprout.

*La chance* c'est quoi ? L'être humain, l'être humain, ça veut dire quoi, mettre en jeu ses capacités sans *la chance* ? Quand moi je t'ai vu, je t'ai approché, je t'ai parlé, mais combien de personnes qui t'ont vu sont passés sans te parler ? C'est beaucoup, non ? Et moi quand je t'ai vu, je t'ai rapproché et je t'ai parlé et là, quelque chose est venu comme ça, paf, tu m'as donné l'opportunité, alors. Et si je ne t'avais pas approché, est-ce que tu allais me voir ? C'est un peu ça.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity

*La chance* is also in human beings. What I'm saying is that humans come with all their capacities to the game of *la chance*. When I saw you, I came closer, I talked to you... but how many people have seen you too and simply passed by? I talked to you, we got to know each other and as soon as you had something... BAM! You gave me the opportunity. You think you would have given me the job if I hadn't talked to you in the first place? It's like that. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

Siaka knows that *la chance* is in people. He also knows that there are not a lot of people that approach and introduce themselves to a foreign person as he did when he talked to me. Consequently, *la chance* is in him. I assume the reason this matters to him is because ultimately, I offered him a job. Siaka interacts and connects easily with people. He initiated a conversation with me, while a lot of other people living in our neighborhood did not. Without him approaching me this job opportunity might not have been available to him. It was his qualification, in combination with his behavior, that distinguished him from others and "BAM", there was *la chance*, there was the sprout for which he was looking:

You needed someone to transcribe those interviews. That was *la chance* for me. You knew me already. That was an advantage. You did not know anyone else for that... and then, simple as that, you took me. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

My need to find someone to help with interview transcripts appeared as Siaka's *la chance*, he says. Because I did not know anybody else for the job, Siaka became an exclusive choice for me, and for him, it became his *la chance* (*ma chance*). It is interesting to note that he depicts this sprout as *la chance* to him,

whereas it was “simple as that” to me. Even though he acknowledges that I was looking for someone to assist me, he does not speculate that knowing him might have been *la chance* to me as well. Obviously, *la chance* is a matter of perspective.

L2: *La chance* is in the encounter.

In “the game of *la chance*” (see chapter 5), human’s bring their capacities to the table. People are different, they have different capacities. Some stop and talk, others pass by. He considers the job I gave him *la chance*. Player one: talking to player two; player two seeing player one and having an opportunity for player one at hand.

The moment of encounter can be *la chance* to both. It can be *la chance* to only one. Or nothing at all. In the moment of the encounter, it is *la chance* only if it corresponds to the players predefined goals about what it is they want and work for.

There is a difference between knowing people and finding friends, the difference is purpose. Obviously, he does not see me as a friend, but as a person that is potentially useful to know or to be in touch with. He approached me knowing I could be a valuable contact now or maybe at some point. We did not meet and become friends. It was enough for me to just know what he did for studies and that he was currently unemployed. This qualified him as an assistant.

How is this different from coincidence? How is this different from finding friends in accordance with a purpose “I know what I want, so I chose friends accordingly” and “I just walk around and talk to people with no particular goal in mind“?

Me taking him for the transcription of the interviews was *la chance* to him. My need was *la chance* to him. Player two’s need is *la chance* to player one. The players know each other prior to the need occurring. Player one has an advantage, player one is the only person player two knows and who has that advantage. Player two picks player one. It is *la chance* for player one. Is this *la chance* for player two as well? Finding someone who can do the job?

The concrete matter of *la chance* here is the transcription of interviews. Qualifying for *la chance* is knowing player two (internal attribution as in what player one brings to the table and external attribution as in environment and coincidence), who is in need (external to player one) and being the only option for player two (external).

Player one is the receiver of *la chance*, player two distributes *la chance* to player one.

Knowing player two, who distributes *la chance*, is an advantage. Being the only one player two knows simplifies things.

Je me dis que j'ai une expérience déjà, je sais que je peux y arriver, il suffit de le vouloir et de travailler dur pour ça. Et c'est sûr que c'est Dieu qui donne de *la chance* et Dieu va me donner *la chance* d'accomplir cet acte-là parce que moi-même, je le veux et je vais travailler dur pour ça, donc ça se complète.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity\succes

I tell myself I already have some (professional) experience and I know that I can get there. If you know what you want and you are willing to work hard for it, God will help you to get there for sure. God is going to provide me with *la chance* to succeed, because I know what I want and I'll work hard for that. So, the two complement each other. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Simone, graduated in Law.)

*La chance* is to succeed. Simone knows that God provides *la chance* to those who know what they want and work hard for it. Consequently, if she works hard, she will be provided with *la chance* to succeed. In other words, to her, *la chance* is the result of both goal-oriented hard work and God's blessing. Simone knows her way already, and it is this knowledge that enables her to identify God's provision of *la chance*. Knowing what you want is presented here as the key criterion to *la chance* in the sense of an initial sprout.

### L2: *La chance* is to succeed in what you want.

*La chance* is to succeed in what you want. Prior to success is the pursuit of success and knowing what defines success to the particular individual. In order to be able to identify *la chance*, one needs to know what *la chance* looks like, what success is relative to the person having it. *La chance* is not to just succeed in anything, but to succeed in what you want. And you can only succeed in what you want if you work hard for it. So, 1: dedication, 2: commitment, 3: *la chance* leads to success as defined by the initially formulated dedication.

She tells herself that is the case, talking it into existence. Her experience shows for two things: 1: dedication. She knows what she wants, i.e. becoming a journalist. And 2: commitment. She is working hard for it. That is all she can do. Now, *la chance* will come. God will help and provide her with *la chance*. God is the second player here: Help is contribution rather than 100 percent provision. Her dedication plus her commitment meet God's *la chance* and both elements together make up for success. She knows she cannot do it all on her own.

On a trouvé beaucoup de stagiaires là-bas, plus d'une vingtaine de stagiaires, mais nous, on a eu *la chance* de faire nos propres tournages, nos propres reportages alors qu'on est allé les trouver là-bas ; c'est une chance. (...) Les stagiaires, il y en avait aussi qui étaient vraiment intégrés, qui travaillaient dur aussi. Moi, je ne sais pas, je crois que c'est un coup de pouce. Un coup de pouce, c'est *la chance*. C'est vrai que nous avons contribué à cette chance-là, mais c'est une chance aussi.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\special

There were a lot of other interns, more than 20, but we were the only ones allowed to produce our own reports. That was *la chance*. [...] The others were also honest and hard-working. I don't know, but I believe it's like an impulse for something to flourish. *La chance* is a *sprout*. It's true that we've contributed to it, but it was also *la chance* itself. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Simone, graduated in Law.)

Such sprouts create differences; they privilege some people while leaving others with what is considered to be normality. Generally speaking, "*la chance* is like an impulse for something to flourish". In her specific case, *la chance* is to be able to realize her own reports. Simone explains that she is not different from the other interns, but she and her friend were the ones to receive *la chance*; she became the exception. From this perspective, people are not perceived to be different, but it is *la chance* that creates difference. In this sense, *la chance* is like a sprout that enables something new. Now, the only difference between her and them is *la chance*. *La chance* distinguishes. She identified a norm, which is that interns do not usually produce their own reports. *La chance* is characterized by an exception to the rule. In other words, *la chance* exists in relation to the norm. To Simone, it is her own work, but even more so *la chance* that made her the exception.

### L2: *La chance* is an impulse for something to flourish.

This is about the "why" of *la chance*. Why them? It is them, because they had *la chance* and they received *la chance* because of *la chance*. This explanation is indexical. It is *la chance* because it is *la chance*.

Creating journalistic reports is *la chance*, the reason why it happened is *la chance*. *La chance* is both part of the process (it was also *la chance* itself) and the outcome (realizing their own reports). As an outcome, *la chance* exists in a

very concrete form, i.e. the opportunity to produce their own reports and as a part of the process *la chance* is like a sprout, like a catalyst that sets things in motion, an opportunity that allows people to get their things going. *La chance* is both the result and the driving force. There are more than twenty interns, all of them working hard. Only two of them get to realize their own reports. Realizing their own reports distinguishes them from all the other interns. It makes them special without them having to be special in the first place, because remember: all the others are hard-working, too.

*La chance* is like an impulse for something to flourish. *La chance* is a sprout. People can contribute to *la chance*, but there is also *la chance* itself. There are structural and agentive aspects about *la chance*.

Susann: Qu'est-ce que tu penses de *la chance*?

Mohamed: *La chance*? Mais ça existe.

Susann: Comment ça?

Mohamed: *La chance*, ça existe. Par exemple, je te donne un exemple. Madou vient de se marier... il a eu de *la chance*. Il y a beaucoup de mecs, qui proposaient à la fille de se marier avec eux. Mais c'est lui qui a eu *la chance* de se marier avec cette fille-là. Ça, c'est *la chance*. Voilà. Si moi, j'ai *la chance* aussi de marier celle-là... Parce que tout le monde aime une fille qui a reçu une bonne éducation dans sa famille. Tout le monde veut ça. Tout le monde veut proposer ça à son enfant ou bien à son petit frère. C'est comme ça. Si tu as *la chance*, tu peux l'avoir. Mais si tu n'as pas *la chance*... c'est quelqu'un d'autre qui va la prendre (se marier avec elle), hein.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity\choice

Susann: What do you think of *la chance*?

Mohamed: *La chance*? It exists!

Susann: How so?

Mohamed: *La chance* exists. Let me give you an example: Madou just got married... he had *la chance*. There are a lot of guys who proposed to that girl. But it was him who had *la chance* to get married to her. That was *la chance*. Voilà. Everybody would like to have a wife like her, a woman coming from a good family. Everybody likes that. If you have *la chance*, you can have her. But if you don't have *la chance*... somebody else is going to take her, right?!

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Mohamed, graduated in Administration.)

Looking at his older brother's marriage situation, Mohamed has no doubt that *la chance* exists, referring to his older brother Madou as an example. Recently, Madou married the woman to whom he proposed – that is *la chance*. Mohamed is aware of the fact that she received a good education and that a lot

of men proposed to her. She rejected all of these men and decided to marry his brother. That was *la chance* for Madou. Now, *la chance* distinguishes between the chosen one (his brother, who gets to marry her) and everybody else. Again, *la chance* is referred to as exceptional or especially valuable. Getting married is *la chance*, but even more so, it is to marry a woman like her. Though Madou was one of many interested in her, it was he who “got her”. Speaking in more abstract terms, *la chance* means to get what is desired by many, but only given to a few. In this sense, a sprout of *la chance* distinguishes. It appoints a privilege to an individual. Mohamed speaks about *la chance* from an outside perspective, specifically his brother’s *la chance*. It is interesting that this kind of *la chance* appears to him as a sprout Madou received. Mohamed doesn’t mention any reason for Madou finding his future wife – other than *la chance*. During that time, Mohamed looked for his future wife as well. He visits her and her parents regularly, they always meet at her place in front of others, and they never go out. “I hope this will work out well. Because you cannot ever be sure, hein!” A year before, he was disappointed in his efforts to engage with a woman who in the end refused to marry him. He did not have *la chance*.

## L2: The allocation of *la chance* is imperative.

*La chance* exists. Getting married to a woman lots of men propose to is *la chance*. If everybody likes to have something and you are the one to get it, it is *la chance*. Not the thing or the person itself, but the fact that you are the one to get it is *la chance*. Beating the odds is *la chance*. If you are not the one to have *la chance*, somebody else is going to have it. *La chance* is a singularity only for one person to own. *La chance* is either for you or for somebody else to get. *La chance* does not dissolve. *La chance* cannot be shared or distributed. *La chance* not being distributed is not an option. The allocation of *la chance* is imperative.

*La chance*, c'est peut-être obtenir quelque chose que tu ne pensais pas avoir et que tu obtiens. Ça, c'est *la chance*. Tu désires quelque chose, tu sais en âme et en conscience, même en travaillant, que tu ne peux pas l'avoir et que tu n'as pas de chance de l'obtenir, mais le bon Dieu faisant bien les choses, il y a un petit truc qui va enclencher ça et tu l'auras. Ça c'est de *la chance*.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\special

*La chance* is maybe to achieve something that you never thought you could. Yeah, that's *la chance*. You want something, but you're aware you'll never get it if you don't have *la chance*. But there is God who provides you with just some little thing, but that gets things moving so you'll get it. That's *la chance*. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Simone, graduated in Law.)

Here, *la chance* exists beyond the realm of possibility and at the same time, as “just some little thing”. *La chance* is provided by God. Simone knows there are things she will not ever achieve, and if she does achieve them anyway, it is because of *la chance*.

### L2: *La chance* is unlikely.

*La chance* is achieving something which seemed unlikely to the person achieving it. To achieve something you thought you could achieve is not *la chance*. There is something you want and *la chance* is undeniably necessary to get it. In other words, it is impossible to get that something without *la chance*. It becomes possible though by God providing you with a little thing, which is not *la chance*, but it gets things going and ultimately leads to *la chance*. So, the process is this: 1: there is something that you think you do not get, 2: God provides a little thing, which gets things going, 3: *la chance*. *La chance* can only appear in unlikely circumstances. *La chance* is not taken for granted. God is able to provide the preconditions for *la chance*, but not *la chance* itself.

Si je viens en vacances, bon, je pars me promener... ça c'est clair. Mais, si je pars peut-être en Allemagne, je ne peux pas m'asseoir comme ça. Je vais aller jouer au foot, ça c'est sûr et certain. Si j'ai *la chance* d'intégrer un club là-bas, je vais jouer. (...) Tu peux jouer au foot, quand tu gagnes de l'argent, tu commences d'abord à faire un petit boulot. Donc, tu essayes un peu de travailler, étudier, travailler, étudier... et puis avec un club, si j'ai *la chance* seulement... fiiiiiiuu, ahahaha!

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity

If I go on vacation, well, I'll enjoy myself... of course. But if, for example, I go to Germany, I can't just sit around. I'll play soccer, that's for sure. If I have *la chance* to get contracted by a club, I'll play. [...] I could play soccer and once you start earning money... Well, I'd start off working a little job, then start studying, you know, work a little, study a little, work, study and then... with a club, if only I had *la chance*... pheewwww. Ahahahaha! (My translation, interview, 2015, with Mohamed, graduated in Administration.)

Mohamed imagines *la chance* somewhere in the future, when he will become a professional soccer player. The whole account is conditional: “if” he goes on vacation, “if” he goes to Germany, and so on. To Mohamed, *la chance* is becoming a contracted soccer player. He knows that becoming a contracted soccer player would make a big difference in his life, and for that difference to be made, *la chance* is needed. Let us get a little more into detail here: there is a difference between going on vacation, which is about walking around and going to Germany, where he cannot simply sit around. If he went to Germany, he would play soccer, which requires effort and is not the same as “walking around”. So, becoming a member of a club where he can play is *la chance*, a kind of *la chance* that would enable him to do what he desires so much: play soccer on a professional level. His preference for playing professional soccer in Germany or the United States seems to be tied to his family: Mohamed was born in Bavaria, and his parents spent several years there and both speak fluent German; and, the States are interesting to him because his older sister lives in Maryland with her husband. He prefers Germany because of soccer's popularity there. Though his favorite team is Arsenal London, Mohamed does not mention England as an option, which I assume is because he does not know anyone there. Once he gets to either Germany or the States he plans to work, study, work, study.

Playing soccer in a professional team in Germany would be extraordinary, and it is beyond working in order to make a living and finance university studies. In order to get the extraordinary, in order to move beyond and towards the extraordinary, he would “only” need *la chance*.

L2: *La chance* is to be able to do or to have something.

*La chance* is to be able to do or to have something. To have *la chance* to do something. *La chance* allows individuals to do something they have not been able to do before. *La chance* is to get contracted by a soccer club. *La chance* is a precondition in order for something to happen. You need *la chance* in order to sign with a soccer club. Having signed with a club would allow him to do other things, i.e. work and study and phееееwww. “If only he had *la chance*”. In other words, *la chance* is all that is missing for him to sign with a club. He needs *la chance* in order to get a contract with a club.

Susann: Et pour le moment est-ce que il y a des gens qui te soutiennent financièrement?

Boubacar: J'ai terminé les études depuis 2007, présentement nous sommes en 2011. Après, directement, j'ai eu *la chance* de faire le concours de la fonction publique que j'ai eu en 2008. J'ai terminé 2007, j'ai eu le concours de la fonction publique en 2008 en tant qu'inspecteur des services économiques.

### L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity\succes

Susann: Right now, is there anybody who supports you financially?

Boubacar: I finished my studies in 2007. [...] Straight after that, I had *la chance* to participate in the concours for public administration. I got employed in 2008. I finished in 2007, passed the concours in 2008 and ever since I've been working as an inspector in economic services.

(My translation, interview, 2013, with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

I ask him if there are people that support him financially, and in response Boubacar recalls the time when he found employment, clarifying that he is not a student anymore. In 2007, he finished his studies, and in 2008, he had *la chance* to do the *concours* for public administration and passed. It is not clear whether it is *la chance* that he was able to participate in the *concours* or that he passed. Later, I would learn that the *concours* does not take place every year, and sometimes graduates must wait several years for the opportunity to participate. In many cases, about 5,000 people apply for 10 jobs in public service. He knows that *concours* take place irregularly and *concours* are difficult to pass. Therefore, I argue that *la chance* is about two things here: first, about the *concours* taking place exactly by the time Boubacar finished his studies – a sprout of *la chance* and, second, about him passing that *concours*. In other words, he transformed the sprout of *la chance* into an outcome when he passed it. Boubacar became administrator at the Ministry of Economy, but he was quickly transferred to the Ministry of Commerce, where he currently works. Being employed in public administration has quite an impact: as a civil servant, you get paid monthly, and if you get paid on a monthly

basis, people depend on you, he explains. This was not the case before. First, he was dependent on his parents' money, but now that he works at the Ministry, they depend on his salary as well. Even though they don't need his money, he contributes to his parental household because this is how it is supposed to be, he explains. He is married now as well, which comes along with financial duties. He concludes, "One can say that my wife depends on me; my parents depend on me; my brothers and sisters depend on me because they are part of the family, and I pay for their food sometimes, so, somehow they depend on me as well." Boubacar's parents work for the government as well; all of his brothers and sisters (except his younger brother who is still studying at the University of Bamako) work for the government, as does his wife. As such, they all work in secure jobs that ensure their financial futures. And yet, Boubacar does not get tired of emphasizing his contribution and the fact that members of his family depend on him. Dependence does not seem to be an "everyone depends on me" scenario, but more of a "we are all dependent on each other" scenario. Every member contributes to the family's overall well-being. It is not important for him to be performant as a single person, but to be performant as one part of his family.

All in all, this short extract gives insight into the relationship between *la chance* and employment and security, which in this case is characterized by responsibility towards his family. Boubacar had *la chance*, and no matter what this *la chance* refers to specifically, it indexes towards fixed employment, which guarantees a fixed salary at the end of every month. In addition to Boubacar, it also provides security to his parents, his wife, and his brothers and sisters. His financial support is more about contribution, rather than dependence or help. His parents do not need his money, which means it is not about survival; rather, it is about the certainty that they will get a share of his money every month. With this money, they can make plans, spend, or save. In any case, it is money they will most certainly get. His job is connected with a certain amount of money, which switches the relationship between him and his parents. Whereas before he depended on his parents' financial support, now he no longer needs it as he works for the government himself. Thus, his contribution is a bonus to the household. Boubacar says that the concours was *la chance*, and that was the starting point of secured employment, which enabled him to take a second step to become not only independent from his parents, but also able to establish his own family.

L2: *La chance* is the ability to participate.

I ask a question about his financial status and he responds with a story of him getting a job that pays off. *La chance* is to be able to participate – in this case in the *concours*. This account is about timing: *concours* “straight after” university; employment the next year. It is also about the ability to participate, pass and ultimately, become an economic services agent. He attributes *la chance* to the participation rather than the passing or the timing of the *concours*.

J'ai fait du football, et en fait, j'ai eu la malchance de ne pas pouvoir être – parce que j'avais l'idée d'être un jour – un joueur professionnel. En fait, comme j'ai eu des blessures au niveau du genou, c'est ça qui m'a un peu ralenti. Mais je me suis dit avec cette petite connaissance sur le football : pourquoi ne pas aider les enfants qui veulent vraiment pouvoir devenir un jour professionnels ? Donc j'ai créé une petite équipe dans mon quartier.

### L1: predicate\malchance

I used to play soccer. In fact, I've had *la malchance* to not have become a professional player because I injured my knee. That's what slowed me down. But I told myself that with my modest knowledge in soccer, I could help kids become professional players one day. So I set up a little soccer team in my neighborhood. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Amadou, graduated in International Law.)

To Amadou, *la malchance* was a knee injury, which kept him from becoming a professional soccer player. In this case of *la malchance*, which for Amadou means not being able to become a professional soccer player, we deal for once with the contrary of *la chance*. Because Amadou was injured, he could not become a professional player. This chain of events represents *la malchance*, but is *la malchance* the reason why his dreams did not work out? For instance, if we turn it around: even if Amadou had not been injured and had had *la chance* to become a professional player, we do not know if he would have actually become a professional player. Perhaps *la chance*, in the sense of a sprout, would have been needed for him to accomplish his goal. Since this very event definitively blocked his path, his injury is defined as *la malchance*. *La malchance* is just as definitive as *la chance*, but whereas *la chance's* connotation is genuinely positive, *la malchance* is intended to be understood negatively. Again, both concepts define crucial moments. *La chance* is not about a genuinely positive future, nor is *la malchance* about a genuinely negative future. Both have the capability to shape real futures, but while *la chance* enables, *la malchance* disables. With an injured knee, Amadou knew he could no longer become a professional player. *La malchance* is bad and undesirable, but it comes along with certainty – a certainty of the dead-end of one's chosen path. In addition, a moment of *la malchance* puts an end to the conviction that *la chance* is to be found on this path. In other words, *la malchance* puts end to the process of looking for *la chance*, and at the same time starts a new one.

Another aspect to consider is the temporality of *la malchance*. Amadou refers to it in retrospect, which makes it just as definite as *la chance*. Maybe at the time of his injury, he did not know that it was the end, but over time, he realized he became slower and wasn't good enough anymore to justify to himself that he was capable of achieving his dream.

## L2: The opposite of *la chance* is *la malchance*.

*La malchance* seems to be the opposite of *la chance*; *la chance* in a bad sense rather than a positive sense. *La malchance* is different from the absence of *la chance*. *La malchance* is soccer players injuring their knee, so they will not be able to go professional. Healthy knees are preconditions of playing soccer.

He does not say that he would have become a professional soccer player if he had stayed healthy. However, his knee injury put an end to him potentially becoming a soccer player. Injuring his knee was *la malchance*. *La malchance* is final. *La malchance* closes the door on *la chance*. A healthy knee is a precondition to having *la chance* of becoming a professional soccer player.

## KNOWLEDGE: SPROUTS.

### **Sprouts – special.**

Some informants referred to the following constituent of *la chance* as ‘a sprout’ that suddenly appears. I like this metaphor because it conveys the sense that ‘opening up *la chance*’ is like planting seeds: university graduates are the ones who plant, and the seeds themselves need the conditions to grow as well. A sprout appears. It doesn’t show up in a flashy and noisy fashion. It’s small and fragile. Therefore, it can easily be overlooked by people who previously did not cast any seeds. But those who do see a sprout still have to take good care of it in order to make it flourish. University graduates refer to it in real life as opportunity, coincidence, or hazard. This sprout itself cannot be created by individuals though. Its very emergence is beyond individual influence, but it does require an individual to recognize it. Put differently, a sprout of *la chance* needs to be identified by the prepared individual.

Sprouts are positive ruptures, which enable impulses and trigger welcome change. Sprouts are a result of both external conditions and individual effort. For example, Simone receives the opportunity to do her own reports as a result of her previous journalistic work. Similarly, Siaka gets a job offer and Boubacar passes the concours. By these sprouts of *la chance*, change was introduced: Simone turned from a usual intern into one of the two to have her own project, Siaka turned from one of many into an assistant and Boubacar received a civil service job as one out of several thousand applicants. Simone worked hard, Siaka was qualified, and Boubacar was performant – as the chosen ones out of many, they were the ones to receive a sprout of *la chance*.

Sprouts represent a rupture of the everyday and describe an extraordinary event. The moment a sprout is identified, there is no more contingency; all possible futures are eliminated but one, and one specific future materializes. Therefore, moments like these are reflected as meaningful in retrospect, which is why they require an explanation. Rare events have “a greater emotional impact than common events do” and “we are especially likely to keep thinking about them” (Gilbert 2006, 207).

### Sprouts – serendipity.

Sprouts are positive accidents – just like luck (Rescher 1990). Sprouts “can alter the course of our lives” (Becker 1994, 185) – just like coincidence. Sprouts of *la chance* are also similar to what Shanahan describes as “chance events”, which are unlikely and unintended, causing change and warrant explanation (Shanahan 2006). In a much more narrow sense, Gladkova and Mazzucato, investigating migrants’ trajectories, describe “chance encounters” as “a transitory social interaction with a previously unknown person that is perceived [...] as unintentional and can be viewed as a risk or an opportunity in the future” (Gladkova 2015, 4). All in all, luck, coincidence, chance events and chance encounters describe exceptional and defining moments, which is true for sprouts of *la chance* as well. In some cases, university graduates planted the seeds themselves and watered them, which means they kept their eyes open for the appearance of the sprout, while simultaneously playing a part in making the sprout appear. We saw that in Simone’s case, when her journalistic efforts allowed her to realize her own reports, or when Boubacar chose to not go abroad for further studies but accept the job he received through the concours. Both familiarized themselves with an image of a sprout of *la chance*. In other words, sprouts of *la chance* require identification by the individual. The concept of serendipity (Merton 2004) does that. Serendipity is a “happy accident”, “a mixture of wisdom and luck” (Merton 2004, xiv), a “eureka moment in the process of discovery” (ibid. xv). As much as serendipity is about the event, it is just as much about the individual involved. Serendipity has to be identified by an individual, which is essential to our discussion on sprouts of *la chance*. Merton and Barber connect the idea of serendipity with discoveries in sciences: “Obviously a chance discovery involves both the phenomenon to be observed and the appropriate, intelligent observer” (Merton 2004, 172). Put differently, serendipity needs recognition – just like sprouts of *la chance* start to matter through their identification by the prepared graduate:

When having serendipity is considered meritorious, the component of luck in serendipity is minimized; when serendipity is regarded as discreditable, the factor of luck is thought to be of paramount importance. To put it another way, when serendipity is used to enhance the reputation of an individual, the component of luck is made dependent on qualities that are unambiguously admired. Luck or chance, according to these formulations, does not favor

people at random; rather, it is prepared minds who are able to benefit from luck, and to preparedness may be linked such qualities as alertness, flexibility, courage, and assiduity (Merton 2004, 171).

Serendipity is no hazard; it only appears to those who deserve it. Serendipity is about merit, as are sprouts of *la chance*, but they can be just as much about randomness (c.f. chapter *La chance: Explained*). In sum, sprouts are positive ruptures of the everyday routine that come into existence as a result of both an external force and individual effort.

*La chance* is an outcome.

On dit : quelqu'un qui a *la chance*, c'est quelqu'un qui a toujours quelque chose. Tu comprends ce que je veux dire ? S'il a quelque chose, on dit qu'il est chanceux, il est chanceux, parce qu'il a quelque chose. Si tu n'as rien, qui va dire ; il est chanceux ? Maintenant quand tu cherches... c'est comme ça.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\possession

We say that someone who's got *la chance* is someone who's got something. Do you understand what I want to say? If you got something, we say you have *la chance*. But if you don't have anything, no one is going to say that you have *la chance*. So, you have got to look for it. That's it. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

*La chance* is to have something. Siaka knows that possession is recognized by people and it is then identified as *la chance*. He also knows that people must look for *la chance* in order to have it – and in order for people to say that a person has *la chance*, this person must possess it. *La chance* is about possession.

### L2: *La chance* is recognized by others.

This is what people say about people who have *la chance*: People say something about people who have *la chance*. People who have *la chance* have something. People recognize people who have *la chance*. They recognize them by seeing that they have something, which is *la chance*. People talking are player 3. They see and talk about another person's *la chance*. To have *la chance* is to have something. If you don't have anything, nobody is going to say you have *la chance*. When people say you have *la chance*, it means they see you have something.

Susann: D'accord et qu'est-ce que tu penses de ta vie?

Safiatou: Je pense que j'ai beaucoup de chance aujourd'hui. Il ne reste que la moitié de ce que tout le monde recherche. Aujourd'hui, j'ai un boulot plutôt stable, j'ai un bébé, j'ai un mari, je ne demande rien de plus que...

Susann: Tu ne demandes rien de plus que...

Safiatou: Que d'avoir encore plus de chance et arriver à mes fins, réaliser mes rêves, on va dire, mais sinon, tout le reste que je pense que je veux aujourd'hui c'est juste un surplus. Je trouve que ma vie, elle est belle, je suis chanceuse.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\possession

Susann: What do you think of your life?

Safiatou: Today, I think I've had a lot of *la chance*. I've got half of what everybody is looking for these days. I have a stable job, I have a baby, I have a husband, and I couldn't ask for more, but...

Susann: You couldn't ask for more but?

Safiatou: But for more *la chance*, so that I will be able to get to the end... 'To realize my dreams', we'd say. Other than that, I think that anything that adds to what I have already is a bonus. [...] I think [...] my life is beautiful. I'm very lucky.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Safiatou, graduated in English.)

Safiatou has had a lot of *la chance*. Her life is beautiful, because of her job, her husband and her kid – to her, all of that was *la chance*. The realization of her professional dreams might be her *la chance* to come. She knows most people do not have all that, and this comparison of what she has and what others aspire to but do not have is essential to her perception of *la chance*. However, she is only halfway there. She could not ask for anything more, except *la chance*. She knows she is going to need *la chance* for her life to stay good or

get even better. *La chance* pushed her to where she finds herself today, but she cannot resign from *la chance*. *La chance* is crucial to both maintenance and change. She needs *la chance* to stay with her in order to enable her to arrive at the end. The end means to fully realize her dream, which is to set up a communications agency – but that would be a bonus anyway. She acknowledges that she has had a lot of *la chance* already, and she just wants it to stay that way. The point is there is no ultimate outcome, but a continued process. One instance of *la chance* might enable another *la chance*. Opening up *la chance* is a process that has no finite end.

## L2: La chance is a bonus.

Life (a setting?).

*La chance* is to have what everybody is looking for. *La chance* is to have a stable job, a husband and a baby. She has *la chance* to have a stable job, a baby and a husband. She looks at her life. Is life a setting, in analogy to “a professional setting?” In a way, she talks about herself as player one from a player three perspective and concludes that she had a lot of *la chance*.

*La chance* ensures people get to realize their dreams. At some point, when life is beautiful already, *la chance* is a bonus.

Bon, pendant mon temps libre, en fait, je suis obsédé par l'ordinateur. Comme tu vois, je n'ai jamais, je n'ai jamais eu assez de l'ordinateur. En fait, je suis toujours curieux, j'ai été toujours curieux de chercher à connaître. (...) Je télécharge des livres, je lis ces livres sur le développement, comment on doit se développer, pour essayer d'avoir mes idées sur l'avancement de mon pays, tu vois, essayer de corriger l'expérience passée des autres. Si je fais l'analyse de ces trucs, j'ai forte chance d'avoir une solution, dans mon cas.

### **L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\potential\access**

Well, during my time off... The truth is, I'm obsessed with computers. I just can't get enough of it. I'm always curious, curious to find out something new. [...] I download books. I read these books that problematize 'development' like how should we develop, try to develop my own ideas concerning my country's development, and try to correct peoples' past experiences. If I analyze stuff like that, I'll have strong *la chance* to find a solution for my case. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Amadou, International Law.)

In Amadou's case, *la chance* results from his efforts, which he hopes will enable him to move forward. *La chance* is to find a solution for his scenario. With knowledge of his skills with the computer and analyzing society, Amadou is confident he is in a good position to find "strong *la chance*". In other words, *la chance* is a consequence of his skill set. Amadou likes to discuss current issues with his friends and play soccer, though his main activity is researching on the Internet. Somehow, he hacked the wireless Internet code from a little company across the street, which ensures his connection to the Internet, provided the company pays the bill. When he offers to share the password with me, I am astonished and ask how he got hold of it. He just smiles like a little boy, saying "I did some research". Drawing from all of that, I suggest that the Internet enables him to find answers to anything he could possibly ask. He looks for solutions himself by researching, experiencing, and analyzing. Nevertheless, he positions *la chance* between his effort and finding a solution. He provokes *la chance* by his effort, and even increases his exposure to *la chance* as it becomes "strong chance". Internet access is the outcome of his search for *la chance*. Amadou provided himself with an Internet connection, which he sees as requisite for him to find a solution in the future. In other words, the achievement of an outcome of *la chance* might as well lie in its potential in terms of gained access or new possibilities.

L2: *La chance* is finding a solution.

To have *la chance* is to have a solution. For his case. What does he mean by “his case”? What is his case? Is the solution like player two? Finding a solution is *la chance*. Player one can go player two. Player one can be player two, too. Player one can look for *la chance*, see *la chance* and give *la chance* to him/herself. Here, *la chance* is in the computer and the books, in the analysis itself. Engagement. *La chance* is in the encounter with another player. It is also in the encounter with resources such as books. He asks himself for help and maybe he will see, he will help himself. He intentionally looks for something in books, he does not just read books because he enjoys it, like people meeting people just because they meet people without giving it any thought and it is only later that the relationship leads to *la chance*. The encounter with books in his case is intentional. He looks for *la chance* in these books.

Susann: Pourquoi as-tu décidé d'étudier la physique ?

Issa: Bon, en principe, en principe, mon ambition c'était d'être un chercheur. Bon, parce qu'en physique pure, quelqu'un qui choisit la physique pure... il a *la chance* de pouvoir être un chercheur.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\potential\possibility

Susann: Why did you decide to study physics?

Issa: Well, my ambition was to become a researcher. Well, in basic physics... somebody who choses to study basic physics... is able to have *la chance* to become a researcher.

(My translation, interview, 2013, with Issa, graduated in Physics.)

Issa reflects along similar lines about a past decision which offers him an opportunity today: *La chance* is the opportunity to become a researcher. Issa knows that people who study become researchers, so he decided to study physics. He believed that if he studied physics, he would be capable of becoming a researcher or have *la chance* to do so. Here, *la chance* is connected with the idea of capability as well as qualification, which is represented by university studies, which is Issa's way to acquire knowledge himself. Again, *la chance* of being a researcher is situated further along in the future of the process – after the decision to study and after studying itself. By studying, he puts himself in a position to receive *la chance* to become a researcher later on. Issa transforms his studies into an outcome; a new prerequisite in looking for *la chance*.

### L2: *La chance* is not guaranteed, despite all efforts.

Being able to fulfill one's ambitions is *la chance*. In order to be able to have *la chance* to become a researcher, people study. There are ways to qualify for *la chance*, which does not mean that *la chance* is guaranteed. Temporality is interesting here as well: he decides to study back then, thinking of unlocking an ambition situated in the future, i.e. *la chance* to become a researcher. "The ability to have *la chance*" – these are the preconditions, that is what player one either has or can work for.

Mohamed: J'ai eu *la chance* de remporter la coupe CAF ici. Ça, c'est une chance. (rire) j'ai eu *la chance* de marquer quatre buts.

Susann: Quatre!

Mohamed: Mais pas dans un match, mais hors compétition. Ça c'est *la chance*. (rire) j'ai eu *la chance* d'avoir mon baccalauréat. J'ai eu *la chance* de terminer l'école, d'avoir une licence. J'ai commencé avec le master. J'espère avoir *la chance* de terminer tout ça. J'espère avoir *la chance* de me marier avec la fille dont je t'ai parlé.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\possession

Mohamed: I've had *la chance* when I brought home the CAP cup. That was *la chance*. (laughs). I've had *la chance* to score four times!

Susann: Four!

Mohamed: Not in one game, but during the whole tournament. That was *la chance*. (laughs). And I've had *la chance* to get my bac (baccalauréat) and *la chance* to finish school, and graduate. I'm starting with my Master's. I'm hoping to have *la chance* to be able to finish all that. I hope I'll have *la chance* to marry the girl I told you about.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Mohamed, graduated in Administration.)

*La chance* is winning a soccer tournament and scoring four times, finishing school with a Bachelor's degree, and starting a Master's program. All of these events and achievements are situated in the past. In the future, Mohamed hopes for *la chance* to finish his Master's degree and to get married to the woman he wants to marry. He does not mention why these are *la chance* to him. In both contexts, *la chance* is referred to as genuinely good and desired. The words he uses such as "finishing", "winning" as well as "having" share a commonality: the notion of accomplishment and success. Here, *la chance* is referred to in the sense of outcome. Both the victory in the tournament, as well as graduation from university, are outcomes of his personal effort in transforming sprouts of *la chance*. In other words, he was able to transform a certain play into a goal, and he was able transform his university studies into a certified qualification.

L2: *La chance* is not certainty.

This is similar to what Simone says on gratitude.

Winning a championship is *la chance*. Scoring four times in a tournament is *la chance*. *Le bac* is *la chance*. Finishing school is *la chance*. Being able to graduate with an MA is *la chance*. Being able to marry a particular woman is *la chance*. Accomplishing something successfully is *la chance*. Getting something desired is *la chance*. Accomplishing something is not just accomplishing something, it is *la chance*. Getting something desired is not just getting it; it is *la chance*. It is not something that is taken for granted. *La chance* is something out of the ordinary. In relation to those who did not win, those who did not score, those who did not finish school, those who won't graduate and those who won't get to marry that girl. You cannot be certain about *la chance*. *La chance* is not certainty.

Je suis économiste de formation. Maintenant après les études, comme je t'avais dit auparavant, j'ai eu *la chance* d'avoir la fonction publique, en tant qu'inspecteur. Bon, on a muté au niveau du Ministère du Commerce.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\civil service

I'm an economist. Right now, after my studies, like I said before, I've had *la chance* to get into civil service at the Ministry of Commerce. (My translation, interview, 2013, with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

*La chance* is getting into civil service. Boubacar knows that a lot of people apply, but only a few get in. He is one of the few, which makes that fact *la chance*. I think the difference between *la chance* in the sense of a sprout and *la chance* in the sense of an outcome becomes very clear in this example. Earlier on, Boubacar said: "I've directly had *la chance* to do the *concours* for *fonction publique*, which I got in 2008", whereas now he says: "I told you before that I've had *la chance* to have *la fonction publique*". Note that the emphasis switches from 'la chance to do' to 'la chance to have'. *La chance* to do the *concours* and *la chance* to have a job in public administration. In other words, the emphasis of *la chance* switches from opportunity (sprout) to result (outcome). First, *la chance* referred more to the opportunity to participate in the *concours*, with results that may lead to employment; then, *la chance* referred to the result of the *concours* itself, which is the employment in the public sector. There is a difference between doing and having. Both are *la chance*, but whereas "do" is connected with the idea of having something later, "have" refers to a requisite that is at one's disposal (for example a diploma and thus the precondition to participate in the *concours*).

### L2: *La chance* is to get into the civil service.

*La chance* is to get into the civil service. To have *la chance* to get into the civil service. He said before that *la chance* is not in the professional world. *Le concours* is probably not part of the professional world, but a means to get into the professional world.

Juste après ma soutenance, en 2008, deux mois plus tard, j'ai eu *la chance* de trouver un emploi. Il y avait un concours pour la fonction publique et j'y ai participé. J'ai été accepté en 2008.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\civil service

Directly after my defense, in 2008, two months later, I had *la chance* to get employed. There was a *concours* for the civil service and I participated. I got accepted in 2008. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

After he finished his studies in 2007, Boubacar says that a lot of things have happened in his private and professional life: "After my defense, right in 2008, two months later, I had *la chance* to have the job. There was a concours for public administration." "To have *la chance* to have something" is an important expression. One does not simply have *la chance*, but rather, one has *la chance* to have something. And accordingly, one does not have an employment, but rather, one has *la chance* to have an employment. Having a job and *la chance* is directly connected.

### L2: *La chance* is the right timing.

The relationship between timing and *la chance* is important here. *La chance* is to get employment in time. In this case, directly, two months after graduation. *La chance* is to get employment fast, right when it is needed. Getting a job at the right time, i.e. directly when it is required, is *la chance*.

Nous avons fait connaissance, parce que... par sa cousine. Je travaillais chez sa cousine. J'ai travaillé avec elle pendant cinq mois. Elle m'aimait beaucoup, elle m'a beaucoup aidé, même à trouver un autre travail plus intéressant. Elle a tout fait... elle est une personne très, très gentille. C'est juste de *la chance* de la connaître et de travailler pour elle. Et elle voulait faire des choses pour moi. Elle avait imposé des trucs bien. Voilà. Donc, elle nous a.... elle a échangé nos contacts. Et il y a eu des jours qu'on ne s'est pas appelés. Elle a insisté encore pour qu'on se parle vraiment. Donc, c'est comme ça que c'est venu. Mon mari, il n'était pas encore là. Il ne vivait pas encore au Mali. Mais on a fait connaissance en avril. En juin il est venu... Il est venu et tout se passait aussi bien que quand on se parlait à distance. Donc, on a attendu un mois et un mois et quelques jours après, on s'est mariés religieusement.

### L1: predicate\outcome\achievement\possession\by-product

We got to know each other because of his cousin. I worked with his cousin for five months. She liked me a lot and also helped me find another job which I'd find more interesting. She did everything. She's a very nice person. It's *la chance* that I know her and that I worked for her. She wanted to do good things for me. Voilà. So she gave us each other's number. She made us talk on the phone. She insisted sometimes so that we would really talk. So that's how it happened. My husband wasn't here in Mali yet. We got in touch in April, he arrived in June, and it went just as well when he was here as from a distance. So, we waited a few months, and then we married religiously. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Safiatou, graduated in English.)

Safiatou refers to an outcome of *la chance* in a way she did not at all anticipate – an outcome as a by-product shaped by her unintended action. She was looking for a job, but along the way, she met her husband.

I ask her how she decided to marry her husband Abdoul. “Moi, je crois beaucoup au destin” – “I believe very much in destiny”, she answers. You are going to receive those signs and you cannot resist them, you just understand them. Those signs point your way to the person that is made for you. Their story is full of such signs, starting from the way they were introduced to each other. Abdoul was doing his Bachelor in economics in France; he was also looking for a woman in Mali to marry and told his cousin about it. At the time, Abdoul's cousin is the head of a communications agency for which Safiatou

worked as an intern. Safiatou did not identify with her job there at all, but it served a different purpose she did not expect: she met her future husband.

She hadn't initially planned on marrying him, but she read the signs: she and her husband-to-be got in touch through his cousin and because of her insistence; they stayed in touch at the beginning. Maybe the whole thing would have ended early if it had not been for Abdoul's cousin. This woman provided Safiatou with *la chance*. Safiatou did not look for that contact, but this woman insisted on the two of them getting in touch and made sure they would talk to each other regularly. "In Mali, there are men running after you; they will promise you anything: 'I want you to be my wife! I will do this for you and I will do that for you!' But that doesn't ever happen", she says. But he was special somehow. "I've trusted him from the very start. I believed in what he told me. And it's because of the way everything happened that I speak of destiny." It was not necessarily Abdoul who was different, but her perception of him. She wasn't one of these women; she did not believe in what men told her they would do for her, but with Abdoul it was different. Even though they only met on the phone and it was all about talk and promises, she felt trust rather than rejection.

Safiatou was looking for *la chance* as she began that internship. Though the internship did not turn out as she wanted, something she did not anticipate happened: she met her future husband. While she did not transform the sprout of *la chance* into an outcome at her work, she found a different outcome along the way.

## L2: *La chance* is knowing particular people.

Knowing her is *la chance*. Player one knows player two. Player one works for player two. Their relationship is characterized by work. Player two wants to do good things for player one; these things have nothing to do with their work relationship. Player two gives player one a contact for a potential love relationship. Player two insists sometimes that player one and the external person be in touch and talk. Player one and the external person, player three, get married. Their relationship was initiated and established by player two.

## KNOWLEDGE: OUTCOMES.

### Outcomes – merit.

Outcomes are sprouts made one's own; they are about possession. Outcomes are positive; they are a reward for personal efforts. Outcomes can be different in nature: they signify change (e.g. improvement, new conditions, defining decision), maintenance (status quo, a closed deal), or something completely unexpected (by-product).

Outcomes are transformed sprouts of *la chance*. To transform a sprout of *la chance* means to transform an event into a property. Speaking in Bourdieu's terms, outcomes can be considered as products of capital conversion (Bourdieu 1986). The principal conversion of one type of capital "is nothing other than labor-time (in the widest sense); and the conservation of social energy through all its conversions is verified if, in each case, one takes into account both the labor-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labor-time needed to transform it from one type into another" (Bourdieu 1986). Capital conversion is based on effort. Outcomes are products of individual effort as well. However, outcomes are not simply prerequisites converted into something new or more; they are also the product of prerequisites plus a sprout converted. In Bourdieu's world, capital is based on its own and it is its own result or, as he puts it: "Everything is not equally possible or impossible" (Bourdieu 1986, 1). This means that difference is not only determined, but also persistent; it is apparent and there to stay. He describes a world without sprouts. In Bamako, there are sprouts. For instance, Boubacar got a secure employment in the civil service (outcome) as a result of his performance in the *concours* (sprout). Safiatou married a wonderful man and is pregnant (outcome) as a result of an internship she did not like; her boss, however, liked her and introduced her to her nephew (sprout). Mohamed won a trophy he will be forever proud of (outcome) and Moussa took the right decision that will now allow him to be flexible (outcome). Only those who identify and transform sprouts of *la chance* benefit from it. There are many people living in the same area, but not all of them are considered to have *la chance* –only some. *La chance* is not for everyone; it is distinctive. Once it is possessed, it is recognized in retrospect, if it has been grasped or transformed from sprout to possession, from 'la chance' to 'sa chance' ('her or his chance'). Others would only recognize *la chance* when in the state of possession.

In sum, outcomes are an accomplishment as they substantiate an individual's prerequisites – their new prerequisites. Outcomes are the product of an individual's work with *la chance*. Outcomes are, therefore, not randomly distributed, but individual merits.

## [Tracings]

### Tracing L1: KNOWLEDGE: prerequisites, sprouts, outcomes.

I presented a systematization of *la chance*: prerequisites, sprouts, and outcomes. Prerequisites are categorized by graduates' social context, their families, the environment they grew up in and their education. Graduates possess their prerequisites; they have been assigned to them. Prerequisites have the potential to enable further *la chance*, namely, sprouts of *la chance*. Sprouts of *la chance* are opportunities appearing; they need to be identified by graduates. Sprouts potentially advance new paths which can be established by graduates as they turn sprouts of *la chance* into outcomes. Outcomes of *la chance* are sprouts that have been turned into possession by the graduates themselves, e.g. an employment contract based on an internship or civil service employment based on the successful participation in a *concours*.

Prerequisites, sprouts and outcomes of *la chance* differ from each other when it comes to how they are perceived by individuals and their origin.

	<i>la chance</i>		
	prerequisites	sprouts	outcomes
state	possession	event	possession
perception			
positive	yes	yes	yes
everyday	yes	no	yes
special	no	yes	no
origin			
randomness	yes	yes/no	no
merit	yes	yes/no	yes

Figure 4.1 Overview of the constituent parts of *la chance*

*La chance* is generally perceived as positive. Prerequisites, sprouts, and outcomes are positive. Prerequisites are ordinary; outcomes are made ordinary. Sprouts, on the other hand, are special. In terms of origin, each part is different. Whereas prerequisites are mostly random, outcomes are mostly merit. Boundaries blur when it comes to sprouts, which are both random and merit. The three parts of *la chance* are not simply parts of *la chance*, but they also presuppose one another. In fact, their connection describes a process of how a state changes through an event into a different state. Prerequisites and outcomes define a status; a sprout is an event. Individuals possess prerequisites; they might also own outcomes, which then again changes their prerequisites, but only if there was a sprout in between. Simply put: no sprout, no outcome.

Sprouts are special; they are a rupture of the everyday, which is why they require an explanation: “infrequent or unusual experiences are often among the most memorable” (Gilbert 2006,3 219). Certainly, the day *la chance* showed up in Amadou’s life was crucial, as he remembers and explains. In other words, memories of sprouts come to our mind quickly, exactly because they are uncommon (Gilbert 2006, 219). Sprouts are also special because of their origin, which is contested in terms of its explanation. Whereas prerequisites are attributed to randomness and outcomes to merit (see figure below), sprouts of *la chance* are contested in that regard. Sometimes sprouts are attributed to individual effort, sometimes to randomness<sup>3</sup> (Lewis 1998, 108). Either view has different impacts on the way we see ourselves as agents in the present and our influence on the future.

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3 “We need to recognize that randomness really does exist. Although chaos theory suggests complexity, it does not argue that truly random events or chance exists and affects our lives. Given the existence of chance, no predictive course of development is likely to be possible” (Lewis, 1998).

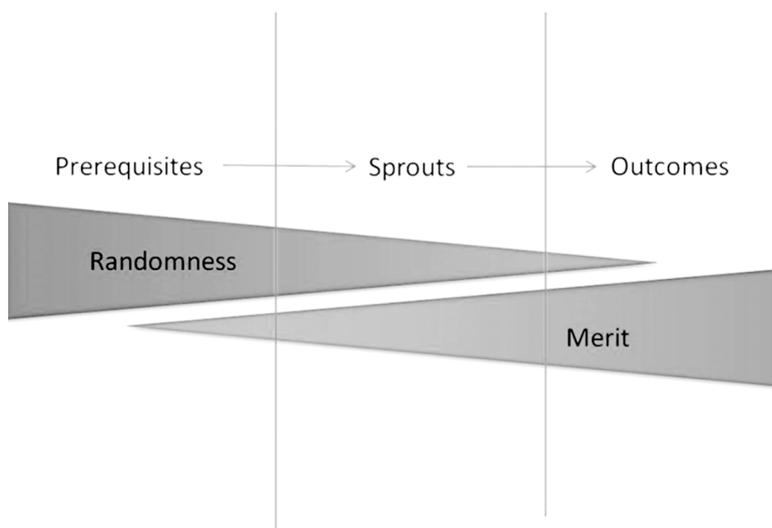


Figure 4.2 *Randomness and merit in la chance.*

To conclude, in this chapter I established a differentiation of *la chance* and thus defined this thesis' exact research object. Based on the analysis of graduates' knowledge about *la chance*, I identified and described prerequisites, sprouts, and outcomes. These constituent parts of *la chance* are connected, but not necessarily so. For instance, a sprout does not necessarily emerge from prerequisites, but it can. *La chance* represents knowledge (prerequisites), knowledge about the unknown (sprouts), and knowledge of how to get to know (outcomes).

How does this differentiation of *la chance* contribute to research on the future and uncertainty? To put it in perspective, there are aspects about *la chance* that are very certain, i.e. the prerequisites. Graduates know what their prerequisites are, how theirs relate to others', and what they can do with them.

Sprouts are a little more complex; they are uncertain. Sprouts are rare; they are ruptures and they are desired prospectively, yet, they are explained in retrospect. In a way, sprouts relate to the idea of "black swans" (Taleb 2007). A black swan is defined by its rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective predictability (Taleb 2007, xviii). The swan story goes as follows: every swan is white and we are certain about our knowledge that every swan is white, until

we see a black one. Seeing a black swan is a surprise, because we are proven wrong in thinking they did not exist. Black swans represent the unexpected. We realize that our knowledge was incomplete. Nevertheless, we do not transfer this finding into other contexts, i.e. we do not project that experience into the future, for instance. As a result, we are always surprised by events we did not expect to happen – not only because of their impact, but more importantly because of them happening in the first place. Taleb puts it this way:

Black Swans being unpredictable, we need to adjust to their existence (rather than naively try to predict them). There are so many things we can do if we focus on antiknowledge, or what we do not know. Among many other benefits, you can set yourself up to collect serendipitous Black Swans (of the positive kind) by maximizing your exposure to them. [...] We will see that, contrary to social-science wisdom, almost no discovery, no technologies of note, came from design and planning – they were just Black Swans. [...] The strategy is, then, to tinker as much as possible and try to collect as many Black Swan opportunities as you can (Taleb 2007, xxv).

In other words, we continuously refuse to expect the unexpected. Taleb claims the assumption that we are able to predict the future based on what we already know is the major source of uncertainty, because it leaves us vulnerable to surprise. Back to *la chance*: the appearance of a sprout marks a rupture from the everyday; yet, it is a desired rupture. Sprouts are desired and anticipated, yet not expected to appear. In other words, to know that there are sprouts of *la chance* is to acknowledge the possibility of seeing a non-white swan at some point in the future. And this impacts graduates' knowledge of their everyday practices, such as the preparation for sprouts of *la chance*. The next chapter will focus precisely on these practices.

## Tracing L2: Clues on *la chance*.

### What is *la chance*?

#### **1 *La chance* is the preferred option, not just an option.**

For instance,

*La chance* is getting the job you want, not just getting a job.

*La chance* is to have many jobs, not just one job.

*La chance* is getting a paid job, not just a job.

*La chance* is not money, but having money.

*La chance* is to be able to share money.

*La chance* is a privilege.

*La chance* is to know people, who have access to jobs, not just to know people.

#### **2 *La chance* is special.**

*La chance* is the exception, not the norm.

For instance,

For a girl, going to school is *la chance*.

For a boy, going to a good school is *la chance*.

*La chance* is unlikely. *La chance* beats the odds.

*La chance* is beneficial.

*La chance* is popular.

*La chance* is rare.

*La chance* is an important factor in peoples' lives.

*La chance* is a driving force and a result. *La chance* is process and outcome.

#### **3 *La chance* makes a difference.**

*La chance* plays by its own rules.

*La chance* cannot be enforced.

*La chance* cannot be predicted.

*La chance* emerges in relation to others and to one's own particular situation.

In both relations, *la chance* is special. From an individual perspective, *la chance* is highly unlikely. From a collective perspective, *la chance* is very likely to emerge for certain people. And individuals draw from these observations and sometimes gear their actions accordingly.

*La chance's* agency is characterized by its presence and its absence. In other words, the agency of *la chance* shows in its emergence. Graduates'

agency is constituted by practices of preparation for *la chance* and the identification as well as transformation of it. *La chance* is neither the graduates, nor the circumstances only. *La chance* emerges in an assemblage of the graduate and the circumstances. *La chance* is the product of an assemblage which is decomposable into its parts, i.e. graduate and circumstances, but not reducible to them.

**What is NOT *la chance*?**

Religion is not *la chance*.

Work is not *la chance*. Paid work is *la chance*.

Money is not *la chance*. Having money is *la chance*.

**What is *la malchance*?**

*La malchance* is negative *la chance*.

*La malchance* is the absence of *la chance*.

*La malchance* precludes the possibility of *la chance*.

