

## 5 *La chance* | Encounter.

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### Layer 1: Members' activities: *La chance* is practiced.

This layer explores the question: How is *la chance* accessed? Drawing from Membership Categorization Analysis, I analyze category-tied activities articulated in the accounts of university graduates in order to grasp their knowledge on *la chance* in terms of a practice they call “opening up *la chance*”.

Just like in the previous chapter, I concentrate on the members' category “*la chance*”, but this time I investigate how university graduates approach *la chance* in terms of practice. For that purpose, I coded my informants' accounts for a different device in relation to *la chance*, namely category-bound activities. As a result of first-cycle coding, categories such as “attitude”, “applying”, “building relations”, “knowing”, “deciding”, “continuing” and “anticipating” emerged. This means that graduates approach *la chance* by their attitude, for instance, by being flexible or persistent, by applying for jobs, by knowing what they want to do, by making decisions or by anticipating future events. Later on, I compared between these categories and spliced them in accordance with their differences and commonalities (Dey 2003, 148). I realized the categories differ with regard to their temporal orientation in relation to *la chance*. In other words, some activities are conducted prior to *la chance* and others in response to and, therefore, after *la chance*. I recognized that activities like “applying”, “qualifying/improving” and “attitude” are characterized by their pursuit of *la chance*, i.e. by graduates “looking for *la chance*”. The activities “knowing” and “deciding” are about graduates “finding *la chance*”, provided that *la chance* appears. Furthermore, I grouped “proving oneself worthy”, “taking advantage”, “continuing” and “anticipating” as devices which categorize the practice of “working with *la chance*” once it has appeared. Based on these compiled categories of activities, I conceptualized three ways in

which graduates approach *la chance*, i.e. “preparation”, “identification” and “transformation”.

**Layer 2: Clues: *La chance* emerges in the encounter.**

***La chance* and the encounter: How does *la chance* emerge?**

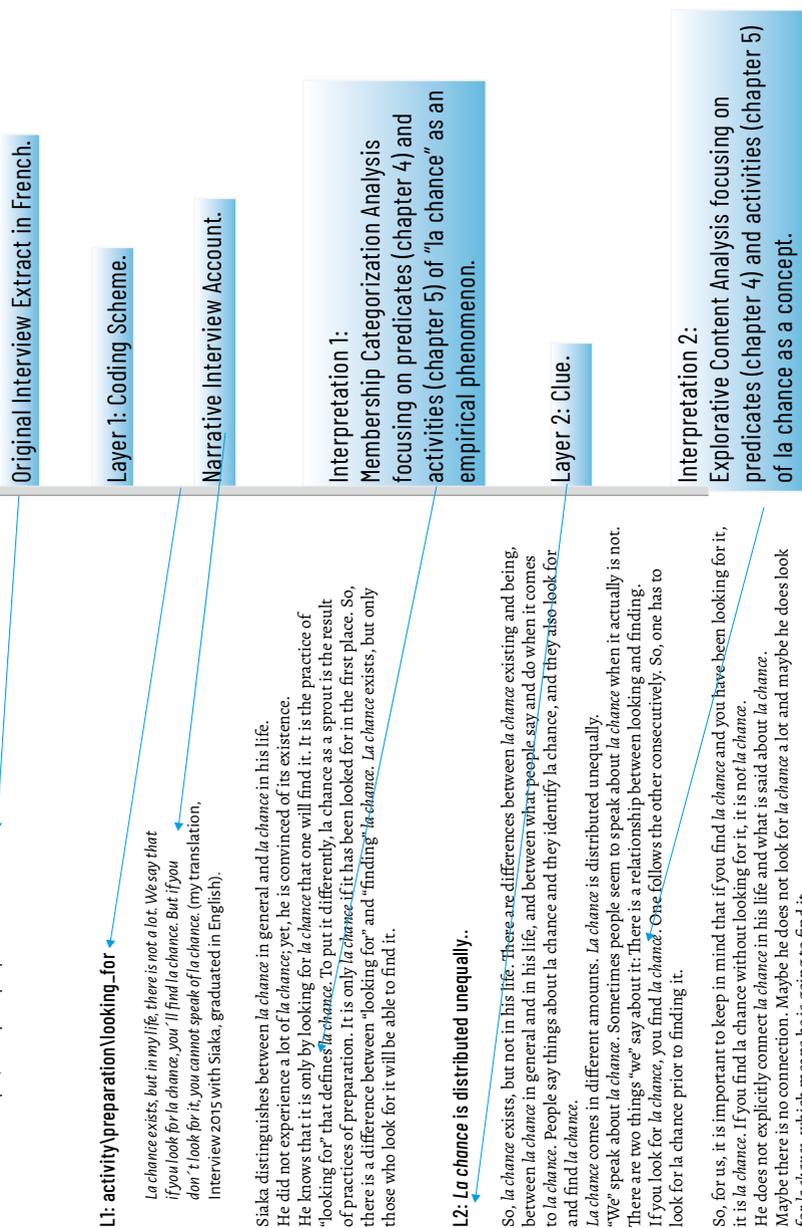
Drawing from the clues extracted in layer two through an explorative content analysis, I carve out the idea of a game. Please note that as opposed to game theory, playing games is not about the strategic decision-making in anticipation of a desirable outcome prior to action, but rather about the continuation of action itself. In other words, the game of *la chance* is not about winning, but about playing. As graduates open up *la chance*, they play what I call “the game of *la chance*”.

**How do people engage with *la chance*?**

*La chance* is found in the encounter, i.e. in relationships and in collaboration between the players. I describe the players and their relation to *la chance*. I focus in particular on the relationship player one and *la chance*, which is characterized by knowledge and practices of deciding, preparing, seeing and influencing.

Furthermore, I introduce various plays (workplace, friendship, business, success, by-product and parenthood) in which *la chance* emerges in the encounter between the players. This is also where we find out about the difference between having *la chance* and having the ability to have *la chance*, the co-constitutive relationship between the players characterized by the difference between players seeing and being seen as well as the interchangeability of players one and two.

## Example.



## **Assemblage: Opening up *la chance*.**

### **Looking for *la chance*.**

University graduates know they do not simply receive *la chance*, but they are “looking for” or “provoking” *la chance* as a means of preparing for *la chance* to appear. They are preparing, not because it is guaranteed that *la chance* will emerge like a sprout, but because graduates know that otherwise it is unlikely for them to find it. However, *la chance* is not only about getting or finding it, but also about preparing for it.

*La chance*, ça existe, mais moi, chez moi ça n'existe pas trop. On dit 'qui cherche trouve, en cherchant tu vas trouver', mais lorsque tu ne cherches pas, tu ne peux pas parler de chance.

### L1: activity\preparation\looking for

*La chance* exists, but in my life, there is not a lot. We say that if you look for *la chance*, you'll find *la chance*. But if you don't look for it, you cannot speak of *la chance*. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

Siaka distinguishes between *la chance* in general and *la chance* in his life. He did not experience a lot of *la chance*; yet, he is convinced of its existence. He knows that it is only by looking for *la chance* that one will find it. It is the practice of "looking for" that defines *la chance*. To put it differently, *la chance* as a sprout is the result of practices of preparation. It is only *la chance* if it has been looked for in the first place. So, there is a difference between "looking for" and "finding" *la chance*. *La chance* exists, but only those who look for it will be able to find it.

### L2: *La chance* is distributed unequally.

So, *la chance* exists, but not in his life. There are differences between *la chance* existing and being, between *la chance* in general and in his life, and between what people say and do when it comes to *la chance*. People say things about *la chance* and they identify *la chance*, and they also look for and find *la chance*.

1. *La chance* comes in different amounts. *La chance* is distributed unequally.
2. "We" speak about *la chance*. Sometimes people seem to speak about *la chance* when it actually is not. There are two things "we" say about it: There is a relationship between looking and finding. If you look for *la chance*, you find *la chance*. One follows the other consecutively. So, one has to look for *la chance* prior to finding it.

So, for us, it is important to keep in mind that if you find *la chance* and you have been looking for it, it is *la chance*. If you find *la chance* without looking for it, it is not *la chance*.

He does not explicitly connect *la chance* in his life and what is said about *la chance*. Maybe there is no connection. Maybe he does not look for *la chance* a lot and maybe he does look for *la chance*, which means he is going to find it.

But what about *la chance* one has not looked for?  
And who constitutes the “we” he refers to?

Je prends l'exemple du football : pour avoir *la chance* de marquer, il faut savoir jouer. Voilà, donc dans ce sens, on peut provoquer *la chance*. Mais dans la vie courante, comme pour aussi avoir beaucoup de chance, il faut avoir *la chance* d'avoir du travail, un bon travail. Pour ça, il faut avoir fait les bonnes études, après ça, il faut chercher du travail. Voilà, comme ça, tu pourras avoir *la chance* d'avoir un peu de boulot, donc dans ce sens, on peut provoquer *la chance*. Mais elle peut venir aussi comme ça, d'elle-même, voilà. Par exemple quand j'ai rencontré Adama, je ne savais pas quel type de personne il était.

### L1: activity\preparation

Let's take soccer as an example: if you want to have *la chance* to score, you need to know how to play first. So, it is in this sense that you can provoke *la chance*. In real life, you need *la chance* to have a good job, and for that, you need a good diploma in the first place. [...] So, in this sense you can provoke *la chance*, but *la chance* could also show up just like that. For example, when I met Adama. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Oumar, graduated in Economics.)

Oumar gives an example based in soccer: scoring is *la chance*, and if you want to score, you need to know how to play. In reverse, if you are not fit and are unable to lead the ball or read the game, you cannot score. Figuratively speaking, there are skills required in order to open up *la chance*, skills that are informed by preparation and practice. “In real life,” *la chance* is to have a job, Oumar says. If you want that *la chance* of being employed, you have to be qualified and well-educated. Mastering the game of soccer or holding a university degree render individuals capable of provoking *la chance* (sprout), and therefore more likely to receive *la chance*.

To provoke *la chance* is to look for *la chance* in the sense that individuals provide themselves with the skill set required to make sure they are able to identify *la chance* (sprout) when it appears. But there are also sprouts which come “just like that”. Oumar connects this kind of *la chance* with his friendship with Adama. We remember that to him, friendship is *la chance*. He did not provoke it. It just is. There is no rule for meeting great people. “We met just like that and we became friends just like that.” Friendship, it seems, cannot be provoked, only fostered. Oumar appreciates their friendship for everything it

is, and his employment opportunity was not expected. While it is true that the opportunity for employment originated in that friendship, it was not the reason that he cultivated the friendship. Oumar did not establish his relationship with Adama with the intention of finding employment. Nevertheless, Oumar found *la chance* without having genuinely looked for it. The intention to provoke *la chance* is outside of the scope of intention in friendship. When it shows up through friendship, it comes as a surprise and it is experienced as having ‘just happened’.

## L2: *La chance* appears just like that.

In soccer, scoring is *la chance*. In real life, *la chance* is to have a good job. Scoring is preconditioned by knowing how to play. Knowing how to play does not necessarily lead to scoring. You provoke *la chance* by knowing how to play. Having a good job is preconditioned by a diploma. However, a diploma does not necessarily lead to a good job. You provoke *la chance* by qualification. There is a difference between the provocation of *la chance* and the actual event of *la chance*. *La chance* does not show up just like that.

*La chance* shows up just like that. Meeting Adama was *la chance*. Who is Adama? And why was meeting him *la chance*?

*La chance* does not appear just like that, except when it shows up just like that.

Graduates can provoke it by knowing how to play the game of soccer or by virtue of their studies.

*La chance* can show up.

*La chance* shows up just like that, for instance, when meeting someone.

*La chance* shows up under certain conditions, but not necessarily.

He knows that *la chance* has the last word here, he can provoke, but not enforce. *La chance* plays by its own rules.

Mohamed: Tu ne peux pas influencer *la chance* d'avoir beaucoup d'années, hein, d'avoir une longue vie. Tu ne peux pas influencer ça. Tu ne peux pas influencer non plus *la chance* d'avoir, par exemple, d'avoir de l'argent.

Susann: Tu ne peux pas influencer ça?

Mohamed: Non, non.

Susann: Pourquoi pas?

Mohamed: Il y a des pauvres qui travaillent plus que les riches. Il y a des riches qui sont comme ça. Comme moi... l'argent, ça rend comme ça : fou, fou fou, fou fou... ils n'ont rien fait. Par exemple, prenons l'exemple d'un cultivateur ici au Mali. On suppose qu'il n'a même pas 100 francs. Il ne fait que subvenir à ses besoins. Il est pauvre. Il n'a pas assez de revenus. Ça, c'est un travail dur. Et celui qui s'assoit au bureau... il a beaucoup d'argent. Ça, c'est peut-être la chance... d'être pauvre et *la chance* d'être riche. Personne ne sait si... Toi, tu ne sais même pas, si toi tu vas être riche ou pauvre. C'est seulement *la chance* qui peut déterminer ça. Quand tu fais l'école seulement, *la chance* peut venir, parce qu'il y a des concours, il y a des examens : quand tu passes, tu as *la chance*.

### L1: activity\preparation\looking for\attitude

Mohamed: You can influence *la chance*, but not in every case. You cannot influence *la chance* to grow old. You cannot influence that. And neither can you influence *la chance* to have a lot of money.

Susann: You can't influence that?

Mohamed: No.

Susann: Why not?

Mohamed: Because there are poor people, who work more than some rich people. There are people, they are just like me and the money is just coming in...just like that, they don't do anything. Just look at a farmer here, he doesn't even have 100 francs, everything he owns, he needs for living. He is poor. He's working hard though. Then there are people sitting in an office and they earn a lot of money. That's his *la chance* maybe... being poor or having *la chance* of being rich. Nobody knows, nobody knows if he's going to be rich or poor. It's only for *la chance* to determine... but if you go to school, there is a little *la chance*. If you go to school, *la chance*

might come, because there are concours, exams and if you pass, you have *la chance*.

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

Mohamed talks about cases of *la chance* that people cannot influence. *La chance* is to grow old and *la chance* is to have a lot of money. Both kinds of *la chance* are beyond individuals' influence, which is the conclusion Mohamed draws from his observation of the difference between poor people and rich people. The difference between them is not effort, but *la chance*. The farmer works a lot and is poor; an office worker sits around and is rich. Therefore, the amount of money a person makes is independent from their workload and is dependent on the person's *la chance*. To Mohamed, influence equals work. Consequently, people cannot influence the amount of money they earn through work. Effort is detached from money; and money is attached to *la chance*. "Nobody knows if he is going to be rich or poor" means that one's *la chance* is also unknown. He does know though that *la chance* does not come with effort only. However, *la chance* might come with education, which then again offers potential access to the *concours*. Consequently, going to school might encourage *la chance*.

## L2: *La chance* can and cannot be influenced.

There are two different cases of *la chance*: some of which you can influence and others which you cannot. You cannot influence *la chance* when it comes to aging and having a lot of money.

People are rich because they have *la chance*. People are poor because they do not have *la chance*. The difference between rich and poor people is *la chance*; not hard work. *La chance* is not hard work paid off, *la chance* is *la chance*. If being rich were the result of hard work, farmers would be rich and people who work equally hard would earn equal money, people who do not work hard would be poor. *La chance* is the determining factor for the money people have. When it comes to the distribution of money, *la chance* does not evaluate people's efforts. In other words, you can work as hard as you want, but if you do not have *la chance* your work will not pay off. If you work hard and you are poor, it is because you do not have *la chance*. If you work hard and you are rich, it is because you do have *la chance*. The essential reason for being rich is *la chance* and again, not work. Farmers are considered to work hard,

office jobs are considered to not require hard work. It is not about being rich or poor, but about being poor and having *la chance* of being rich.

“Nobody knows, nobody knows if he is going to be rich or poor. It’s only for *la chance* to determine.” There is no connection between knowledge and money people make. People do not know if they are going to make money or not. If they do, it is *la chance*. *La chance* determines. *La chance* is unknown. *La chance* determines, randomly though. People do not know if they will have *la chance* of being rich. *La chance* ultimately determines your financial status. Going to school might be followed by *la chance*. Going to school, qualifying for the *concours*, passing the *concours* is *la chance*. Passing the *concours* is *la chance*. However, this is preconditioned by going to school and participating in the *concours*. People who pass the *concours* have *la chance*, not because they have the job, but because they are going to have money.

*La chance* is essentially about money. There is a lot of work and people do work a lot, but there is no money that pays for their work.

Bon, j'ai envie d'être polyvalent. Quelqu'un qui a appris... voilà. Quelqu'un qui a *la chance* d'avoir mille et mille travaux. Quelqu'un qui est monovalent, si ce n'est pas dans un domaine bien précis, il a des difficultés pour avoir un travail. Mais un polyvalent, tu sais, dans n'importe quelle situation, il a une connaissance adéquate.

### **L1: activity\preparation\attitude**

I'd like to be polyvalent, somebody that is educated... voilà, somebody that has *la chance* to have thousands of different jobs. Somebody who is monovalent, if he's not specialized, he'll face huge difficulties finding a job. But being polyvalent means to know a little something on everything. (My translation, interview, 2013, with Moussa, graduated in Physics.)

Moussa believes it is best to invest in multiple qualifications. He likes to be “polyvalent.” In this case, *la chance* is referred to as enabling; it leads to “thousands and thousands of jobs.” Being educated in many domains leads to *la chance* to have a lot of jobs. *La chance* here is a factor for possibilities – a sprout. However, *la chance* is preconditioned by polyvalence. Again, a sprout is an exception; *la chance* is the possibility to choose here. Moussa distinguishes polyvalent and univalent people: whereas polyvalence comes up with *la chance* to have a lot of jobs, univalence comes with difficulties of finding a job at all. His itch to be polyvalent is part of the attitude demanded by the process of opening up *la chance*. We continue the conversation, as I am curious why he is talking about polyvalence, even though he knows pretty well that he wants to become a researcher, which is in my understanding quite univalent. He explains to me that he found out that there are no studies in electrical engineering in Mali and going abroad did not work out for him. Electrical engineering is his biggest wish (“mon vœux le plus cher”) and he still wants to accomplish that, but he found out that he would not get far by sticking only to that wish. Out of necessity (“forcément”), he changed directions and decided to consider every emerging opportunity. Polyvalence is an attitude which describes the ability to take advantage of whatever employment opportunity shows up. Based on the general direction he chose in the past, he prepares for everything he can possibly do. Since he studied physics, he is now looking for employment in that particular domain: ENI, ENSUP, the private university was an attempt to look into another field of study that he assumed to have a future, and several other internships at Energie du Mali.

L2: *La chance* is to have options.

He likes to be that polyvalent person who has thousands of different jobs. Which is also a way of saying that he is not yet that kind of person. He seems to be working on it though, at the time we discussed this he was employed as a physics teacher and studying electrical engineering. He contrasts two ideas in relation to finding a job: polyvalence and univalence.

Polyvalence is a trait of a person who is educated, who knows a little about everything and therefore has plenty of different jobs. Having lots of different jobs is *la chance*.

Univalence is not specialization. To fill out the blanks in analogy to his point on polyvalence: To be specialized is to know a lot about something and to be univalent is to know a little bit about something. Univalence leads to difficulties finding a job.

*La chance* is having thousands of different jobs; polyvalence gets you there. Univalence does not.

Polyvalence leaves a person with thousands of options, univalence with one option. Having thousands of options is *la chance*.

Dans la vie, il y a toujours de *la chance*, mais *la chance* aussi, on peut aussi la provoquer. Comment on peut provoquer *la chance* ? Par exemple, toi et moi on se connait. Tout de suite, toi, en Suisse on te demande : "Est-ce que tu connais déjà quelqu'un au Mali qui a fait ça, qui a fait ça, qui a fait ça" et toi, tu vois que le profil que la personne te demande correspond à mon profil. Toi, tu m'appelles directement. Je sais comment j'ai eu beaucoup de temps avec toi. Moi, je peux dire qu'il y a des gens qui peuvent dire que ça c'est *la chance*, parce que j'ai eu *la chance* de te connaitre, c'est grâce à ça que j'ai eu le boulot. Il y a tout ça, mais *la chance* en tant que telle, par exemple tu postules quelque part, tu postules pour un boulot, tu ne connais personne là-bas, on t'appelle... On t'appelle pour quelle raison ? Selon moi, ce n'est pas *la chance*, parce que ça c'est grâce à ton CV. Peut-être qu'en envoyant le CV et puis la lettre de motivation, on voit que ton CV c'est un très bon CV, les gens te prennent en fonction de ça, moi je vois *la chance* en tant que telle. Moi je ne vois pas, selon moi il n'y a pas *la chance*.

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Mais *la chance*, peut-être ce sont les connaissances, et puis tout ce qui fait *la chance*. Les gens disent aussi souvent : même les examens, ça c'est *la chance*.

Les gens ont des examens grâce à *la chance*. Mais si tu travailles bien, tu n'as pas besoin de *la chance* ; quand tu bosses très bien à l'école, tu n'as pas besoin de *la chance* pour passer à l'examen, parce que tu sais déjà tous les sujets qu'on va donner ; toi, tu peux traiter les sujets. Mais ça ce n'est plus *la chance* !

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Boubacar: Dans le milieu professionnel, *la chance*, je pense que moi je ne vois pas *la chance* parce qu'il faut chercher aussi. Quand tu es bien, les gens vont courir derrière toi. Par exemple, toi, tu es un jeune, tu viens dans un département ministériel ; toi, tu ne connaissais personne, mais les gens t'ont reconnu, parce que toi tu aimes travailler. Si tu aimes travailler, les gens vont t'aider même s'il y a des gens qui sont un peu méchants, ils savent que tu es une fille qui est bien, qui veut travailler. Même s'il faut venir chaque fois chez eux, même s'ils te ferment la porte, tu viens, tu tapes : "Bon jour, ça va, j'ai besoin de ça, j'ai ça, j'ai ça". Les gens seront obligés de t'ouvrir leur cœur. Bon, il y a les milieux, il y a des endroits aussi, où il n'y a pas grand-chose. Il n'y a rien en tant que bon dossier, il n'y a rien en tant que formation, il n'y a rien en tant que tel. Selon moi ce n'est pas *la chance*.

Susann: Et toi, est-ce que tu avais *la chance* dans la vie?

Boubacar: Je n'accorde aucun crédit à *la chance*.

## L1: activity\preparation\looking for\applying

In life, there is always *la chance*. But one might as well provoke one's *la chance*. How? For example, you and I, we know each other. Now, if somebody in Switzerland asks you: 'Do you know anybody in Mali who does X?' And you see that my profile corresponds with what he is looking for, you're going to call me. I know that the two of us have known each other for quite a while now. But there are people who are going to say: "That's *la chance*!" and that it was *la chance* for me to know you and that it's because of this I got a job. There's all that. But *la chance* per se... for example, you apply for a job and you don't know anybody over there and they call you. Why do they call you? I think that is not because of *la chance*, but because of your CV. Maybe they saw that your CV is

a pretty good one and they take you because of that. But *la chance* per se... I don't see it. To me, there is no *la chance*. (My translation, interview, 2014, with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

For Boubacar, it all comes down to one's own qualification represented in a strong CV. He starts out saying "there is always *la chance*" and ends saying "there is no *la chance*". What happens in between? Boubacar makes a distinction between *la chance* and provoking *la chance*. He uses an example to make his point, and it turns out that there are two things behind *la chance*: knowing people and a good CV. In this account, *la chance* is a job, which he does not say explicitly. Now, if the graduate gets a job, because of his or her CV, it is not *la chance*. If the graduate gets a job, because of somebody he or she knows, it is *la chance*. Whether the reason for getting the job is the CV or a contact depends on the knowledge people have about the situation. Sometimes people say that something is *la chance* when it is not. Consequently, *la chance* is a matter of perspective. Back to Boubacar's opinion on *la chance*: it is not *la chance* if people get a job because of their application. It is *la chance*, though, if people get a job because of their contacts. To him, *la chance* is connected with networks; it is about knowing people and knowing people who know people or people you think might know people. There is a crucial distinction between what is *la chance* and what is not: merit. In his network example, somebody else created the sprout for him; he did not create it himself but received it just like that. In other words, Boubacar has no merit in this. There is no connection between effort and job, so it is *la chance*. If there is a connection between effort and job, it is not *la chance*, but merit. Merit is to get something for a direct reason, e.g. a strong application, while *la chance* is to get something for an indirect reason, e.g. a friend contact – both exist. On the other hand, getting something for no reason is *la chance* per se ("en tant que telle"), which does not exist. Put simply, since there is no *la chance* per se, people always merit their jobs for some reason. He goes on talking about that issue:

But *la chance*, maybe knowing people... Sometimes people say even that exams are passed by *la chance*. But if you work hard, you don't need *la chance*. If you study, you don't need *la chance* in order to pass an exam. You know already which subjects they're going to ask for, so you can prepare, but that's not *la chance* anymore! (My translation, Interview 2014 with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

Boubacar considers again what people say, which is that passing an exam is *la chance*. He further elaborates on the idea of need when it comes to *la chance*. You either need *la chance*, or you do not. You do not need *la chance* when you study and prepare for an exam. On the other hand, if you do not study, you do need *la chance*. In that regard, *la chance* seems to be a substitution for studies and preparation. According to Boubacar, it all comes down to two ways of passing an exam: by *la chance* or by preparation. Put differently, preparation or knowledge make *la chance* unnecessary. The prepared individual does not need *la chance*, because he or she achieves something by merit. To Boubacar, *la chance* is at the other end of merit. Again, people get employed because of their qualification, as he did:

Boubacar: In professional settings, I don't see *la chance* because you need to look for it as well. If you're good, people will approach you. For example, you're young and you go to a ministry, for example, you don't know anybody, but people there get to know you and they see that you like working and they're going to help you. Even if there are some bad people, they'll see that you're a good person who is willing to work. So, you've got to keep going, even if they'll sometimes close their doors in front of you, you go there again and say: 'Hey, how are you? I need your help.' People are forced to open their hearts for you. Now, there are settings that don't have much to offer for you. So even if they open their doors and hearts for you, there won't be anything. However, the most important thing is a good application and a decent education. To me, there is no *la chance*.

Susann: Would you say there was *la chance* in your life?

Boubacar: I don't give any credit to *la chance*.

(My translation, interview, 2014 with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

There is no *la chance*, unless people look for it. *La chance* does not come alone; it exists only in connection with a person looking for it. But how do graduates look for *la chance*? Boubacar takes the example of employment research: you need to be good, work hard, keep going, and convince people, and you will get a job. If you do all these things and still you do not get a job, it is because there is no job. But what about *la chance*? Boubacar does not give

credit to *la chance* (“Moi, je n’accorde pas la place à la chance.”), but rather to good applications and education. He has been working in the civil service ever since he graduated from university and passed the official entrance exam. We remember that sprouts of *la chance* need to be looked for, otherwise it is not *la chance*. To Boubacar, random distribution of jobs would be *la chance*, which means that jobs are an accomplishment to those who receive it – they deserve it. Qualification entitles to a job; *la chance* is for those who are not entitled to it. The difference is merit. In the beginning of this part, Siaka introduced us to the same idea: *la chance* is for those who prepared for it; it is a reward for their efforts.

## L2: *La chance* you see and *la chance* you look for are not necessarily the same.

In professional settings, he does not see *la chance*, which is different from “there is no *la chance*.” In professional settings, you need to look for *la chance*, so there is no *la chance*. There is a difference between *la chance* you see, *la chance* you do not see and *la chance* you need to look for.

Player one has particular traits: young, goes to a ministry, is unfamiliar with the people there, likes working and players two see that player one likes working, they help. Player one comes with traits which player two sees and reacts to by helping. When it comes to seeing player one, it does not matter if player two is good or bad. They cannot not see. However, they can still say no. So, there are two scenarios: 1: player one is seen, and player two says yes and helps or, 2: player one is seen, but player two says no and does not help. In that case, player one keeps going and forces player two to act on what s/he sees already and help. The third option is independent from what the players are doing, because they have nothing to offer. These are professional settings which have nothing to do with *la chance*. Instead these settings are about player one not showing up, player two’s closed heart or the fact that there are no jobs. Player one showing up with a good application and a decent education is the most important precondition. There is no *la chance* in a professional setting.

*La chance* does not emerge in professional settings.

The *la chance* he describes before I put my question to him is specific to professional settings. He does not give any credit to *la chance*. If you say you got a job because of *la chance*, it’s like saying you are not qualified and you did not submit a good application or that you did not show you are willing to work.

Giving credit to *la chance*. Attributing the cause of events to *la chance*.

Shortly afterwards though, he talks about *la chance* to participate in and pass the concours. There are different kinds of *la chance* and different settings for *la chance*.

Maintenant, je ne devrais plus penser qu'à moi. Ce voyage, je veux le faire pour mon enfant et aussi pour mon mari. Pour faire ma propre agence de communication... Ça peut attendre dans trois ans. Mais le fait est que je veux que mon bébé, il connaisse d'autres choses, il naisse dans un autre pays pour lui donner une chance de pouvoir étudier après. Ça ne peut pas attendre. Pour ça, il faut que je le fasse au début pour que mon mari, il fasse sa formation lui aussi, et quand on rentre ensemble, lui aussi il avance dans ses affaires... Ça aussi, ça ne peut pas attendre. Donc, la priorité maintenant, c'est le voyage, mais si ça ne marche pas, je dirai que on n'était pas faits pour ça et qu'il y a certainement une autre solution pour mon enfant.

### **L1: activity\preparation\looking for\attitude**

Safiatou already shared her thoughts on *la chance* in her life with us. She is confident about the level of *la chance* she has always had. Now, she is trying to look for *la chance*, but not for herself: she and her husband are planning to go to the United States so that he can finish his studies and for their yet unborn baby to get American citizenship.

Right now, I can't think of myself only anymore. This trip... I want to do that for my kid and my husband. My own communications agency has to wait... three years maybe. But I want my baby to be able to see other things and if it's going to be born in a foreign country, it will have *la chance* to be able to study there later. This can't wait. And my husband also needs to finish his studies and once he's done doing that, we will return together. This can't wait. The trip is our priority right now. If it's not going to work out, well, then I'd say it wasn't meant to be and I'll have to find another solution for my kid. (My translation, interview, 2014, with Safiatou, graduated in English.)

She wants to provide her kid with *la chance* be able to study in the United States. She knows that if she gives birth in the States, her baby will be an American citizen, and it is much easier to travel with an American passport. Additionally, it is easier and cheaper for American nationals to study at US universities, she tells me later in the conversation. Now, in order for that to work, she stops thinking of herself and her agency; instead, the trip becomes her priority. She wants to do this for her new family. Safiatou is planning way in advance: her baby is not born yet and she already anticipates its urge to study at a foreign university. Safiatou is trying to open up *la chance* for her

baby; she is looking for a sprout of *la chance*. This account is also about setting priorities straight. Their trip to the States cannot wait, because she will give birth soon and once the baby has arrived the opportunity will be gone. Her husband Abdoul needs to finish his studies, in order to “move forward”, so it is necessary for her to make that adjustment for her loved ones now. They both applied separately for their visas. Abdoul received his student’s visa already. Safiatou was still waiting for her tourist visa by the time we had this interview. She anticipates the possibility that her application might be denied; she knows most visa applications are denied.

L2: *La chance* can be provided for somebody else.

*La chance* is for the kid to be able to study in a foreign country. Player two is providing player one with *la chance*. This is a mother-child relationship. Here, the parent does not have to see the kid do anything specific in the first place, but it is about the parent, player two, initiating *la chance* for the kid, player one, to take or not to take. *La chance* here is something player two thinks is *la chance* or might be *la chance* for player one. In order to be able to provide *la chance*, parents have to do something, i.e. organize a trip to the US in this case. The temporality is interesting here: In order for their kid’s *la chance* to exist in about 18 years from now, it is on them as parents to make their kid’s *la chance* their priority today.

## KNOWLEDGE: PREPARATION.

### Looking for *la chance* is about preparing for *la chance*.

Looking for *la chance* means to prepare and to be attentive. Graduates prepare for sprouts of *la chance* as they sharpen their attention and provide themselves with the skills required to take advantage of them by working on their education, their networks, or their attitude. Oumar prepares for a sprout of *la chance* as he improves his skillset, Moussa is extending his qualification as he keeps on studying, and Madou is staying persistent in his efforts. Both Moussa and Boubacar emphasize the importance of education and a strong application in order to convince future employers. Safiatou is looking for her future child's *la chance* as she is trying to modify his prerequisites.

There are several concepts in literature similar to the idea of “looking for *la chance*.” For instance, “straining” in Freetown, Sierra Leone “is an everyday practice of young men at work” (Finn 2015, 41) which describes the process of ‘getting by’ and “refers to a type of work that is innovative and opportunistic” (ibid. 39). Straining is directed towards better employment, more education, or more support for their families. We find something similar in the emic concepts “trying” and “hustling” in Monrovia, Liberia (Kaufmann 2017) as well as “dubriagem” in Guinea Bissau (Vigh 2010), “débrouillage” in Ngaoundèrè, Cameroon (Waage 2006) and “managing” in Accra, Ghana (Langevang 2008). These concepts describe daily income practices and struggles that are both embedded in the present in terms of “getting by” and directed towards the future. “Managing”, for example, includes “making a plan, but not necessarily implementing it, and the ability to adapt to the moment. It involves a delicate balancing act between keeping in line with long lasting ideals while at the same time being able to envision, accept and adopt new paths” (Langevang 2008, 2046). Put differently, “managing” is essentially about dealing with and reacting to present circumstances. The temporal focus of these practices of “getting by” is the present, and they are undoubtedly part of graduates’ lives in Bamako. To look for *la chance* highlights practices that are embedded in the present but much more geared towards *la chance* situated in the future. Put simply, to look for *la chance* means to prepare in the present for *la chance* in the future. Along the same lines, Jeffrey emphasizes the purposefulness and the intentionality of “timepass” to which his informants in India refer as “the opposite of ‘seri-

ous' practice" (Jeffrey 2010, 77). According to him, the "timepass" period is crucial for his informants as they use it to acquire skills (Jeffrey 2010, 4) and develop "social contacts and acquire information pertinent to their search for employment"<sup>1</sup> (Jeffrey 2010, 97).

Preparation ensures that graduates are ready when *la chance* appears, but it neither guarantees the timing nor the appearance of *la chance*. Archambault makes an interesting point concerning timing with regard to the future: her informants in Mozambique anticipate with pleasure their monthly payday by making plans and projects with the money in the near future (Archambault 2015). It is crucial for them to know the date and the amount of money they are going to get paid; that constitutes predictability.<sup>2</sup> The appearance of *la chance* is anticipated, yet not predictable – and unlike with a monthly salary, graduates cannot plan and project with *la chance*. In contrast to a positive connotation of anticipation, Vigh discovered the notion of "apprehension" in a context of war and danger in Guinea Bissau. Apprehension "generally defines an experience of disquiet and anticipation of misfortune. [...] an attempt to sense, to understand, and to control the way that our surroundings engage us" (Vigh 2015, 112). While graduates do not anticipate misfortune, they do understand the ways in which their surroundings engage them.

Again, graduates anticipate *la chance* as they are preparing, though sometimes it is not clear what exactly they are looking for – like which job position or which study program, or like Archambault's informants, longing for payday. Along these same lines, Di Nunzio's informants in Addis Ababa "embrace uncertainty" (Nunzio 2015) as they expose themselves to chance. Or, as he puts it: "Before you get a chance, they argued, you do not know what the future will look like. When you get one, you start to know where your life could be heading" (ibid. 155). My informants do not know the future either, but they relate to the future with reference to *la chance*.

1 This was reported by informants who, by the time of the interview, were working in government positions (Jeffrey 2010, 97).

2 Her main claim is that uncertainty is a temporal experience instead of an omnipresent circumstance: "I propose to think about uncertainty as an experience broken up and shaped by moments of respite, by recurrent interludes set to the tempo of payday, as well as by more ad hoc ones, such as when one gets a lucky break (bolada). Key to my discussion is the idea that particular rhythms shape and modulate experiences of material uncertainty in ways that translate into experientially distinct temporalities" (Archambault 2015, 129).

Consequently, they do not expose themselves to any chance, but to a very particular one. Graduates know they need to prepare in order to be able to recognize their *la chance*, which is what I will now turn to.

## Finding *la chance*.

Finding *la chance* means identifying a sprout of *la chance*; it describes the moment in which *la chance* is recognized. Finding *la chance* is strongly connected to the practices of looking for *la chance* – as we have seen already in some of the accounts presented. Finding *la chance* is connected with the practices of working with *la chance* – as we will see in the following accounts. In fact, the identification of *la chance* is right at the intersection between preparation and transformation; it marks a transition. Despite that strong connection, I somehow insist on this distinction because it enables us to see that these practices have different purposes, as well as a different temporal orientation.

Susann: D'accord, comment est-ce que tu as reçu l'opportunité de faire ce travail?

Boubacar: J'ai fini directement les études. (...) Je me suis dit que je vais même partir en Europe pour continuer les études. (...) Je me suis dit que si je le dis à mon papa, de me financer les études, qu'il faut le faire, ça va jouer peut-être sur le financement de la famille. Après, je me suis dit que soit je vais en Europe, soit je reste ici pour faire le concours. (...) Maintenant j'ai postulé pour ça, on a fait le concours et heureusement pour moi, j'ai été reçu. Je me suis dit que ça, c'était ma chance, ma chance c'était ici, ce n'était plus la peine d'aller en Europe faire encore des études. Maintenant que j'ai eu le concours, je vais rester finalement pour faire le travail ici.

### L1: activity\identification\finding

Susann: How did you get the opportunity to do this job?

Boubacar: Directly after finishing my studies [...] I told myself that I might as well go to Europe in order to continue my studies. [...] I thought I could ask my father to pay for my studies, which he would have done, but that would have influenced my family's finances. So, I thought I'd either go to Europe or stay here in order to do the concours. [...] So, I did the concours and luckily, I passed. I told myself that this was ma chance. Ma chance, it was here! It wasn't necessary anymore for me to go to Europe for studies, because I passed the concours. Ultimately, I'm going to stay here for work.

(My translation, interview, 2014, with Boubacar, graduated in Economics.)

Boubacar reflects on a moment in his life in which he identified a sprout of *la chance*. It determined his future. After finishing his studies, Boubacar was not sure how to proceed: continue studying in Europe or get a government job in Mali by *concours*. Shortly after his defense, the government announced a *concours*, and he succeeded: "Heureusement pour moi, j'ai passé" – "Luckily for me, I passed". All of a sudden, his decision was clear, because he told himself it was *la chance*. In other words, it was not passing the *concours*, but rather, him telling himself that it was *la chance*. He was the one who identi-

fied *la chance*. This is important because he could have ignored the *concours* never mind the consequences, and he could have gone to Europe instead, but he didn't. Yet, he decided this was *la chance*, so he stayed in Mali and became a civil servant. "*Ma chance* was here (in Mali)," Boubacar said. That was the moment to determine his future. Until then, Boubacar imagined two possible futures: the 'Europe future', a continuation of his studies, and the 'Mali future' a fresh start into wage labor. Financially, the 'Europe future' implied that his father would pay for everything, while the 'Mali future' instead implied he would become financially independent. The 'Europe future' was dependent on his father's willingness to pay, while the 'Mali future' was dependent on the availability of government jobs and his performance in the *concours*.

## L2: *La chance* decides.

I ask about opportunity; he answers with *la chance* of him passing the *concours*. So, there is a relationship between opportunity and *la chance*.

Let us look at the details of this account: There is a before and an after, the timeline is interrupted by passing the *concours*. Boubacar has two options: continuing his studies in Europe with his family carrying the financial load, or doing the *concours* not knowing whether or not he is going to pass. Going to Europe for studies takes a couple of years, participating in the *concours* takes a day. Going to Europe is preconditioned by his family's means and ultimately his decision to take advantage of them. The variables of the *concours* are less calculable, however, simple participation is an investment of a solid day's work. Luckily, he says, his attempt to pass the *concours* was successful. Passing the *concours* is *la chance*. Why? This is specific to his situation, because it allowed him to stay in Mali with a job earning his own money. Two issues dissolve: him leaving for Europe and his family paying for it. *La chance* is passing the *concours*, because it comes with employment in Mali. Passing the *concours* is *la chance* because of the odds of passing, but also because of the government employment that comes with it. *La chance* is marked by the *concours*, yet it signifies secure employment in Mali.

Susann: Tu penses que *la chance* joue un grand rôle dans ta vie?

Abrahamane: Oui, *la chance* joue un grand rôle dans ma vie. C'est *la chance* qui a fait que je suis arrivé. Parce que quand j'ai postulé pour ce programme, on m'a dit que les agents seraient déployés au mois de juin, j'ai postulé en mai. Je suis resté en juin, ils n'ont pas appelé ; en juillet, ils n'ont pas appelé. C'est en août qu'on m'a appelé. Avant ça, j'avais... Dans le même mois, j'ai postulé pour un poste d'animateur, pour ne pas rester comme ça. Sinon, ce n'est pas un poste que j'ai voulu. On ne peut pas rester toujours au chômage. On m'a appelé pour faire le test écrit, et... Là où je suis présentement, ces gens-là m'ont appelé pour passer l'interview directement et j'ai été retenu. Donc, de l'autre côté, le même jour on m'a appelé pour me dire de faire l'interview, donc, vous voyez, donc les postes aussi, n'était pas pareils. Là où je suis, je suis conseillé technique, de l'autre côté c'était animateur, et je crois aussi que les salaires aussi n'étaient pas du tout pareils, il y a une grande différence, donc c'est *la chance*.

### L1: activity\identification\finding

Susann: Do you think *la chance* plays a role in your life?

Abrahamane: Yes, *la chance* plays a huge role in my life. *La chance* made me get where I am right now. You know, when I applied for this program, they told me they were going to recruit people in June. I applied in May. In June, they didn't get back to me. In August though, they called me. And well before that, I had applied for another job as an animator so I would not be sitting around unemployed. Other than that, it really was not the job I wanted. Meanwhile, the people at the place where I am right now called me, wanted me to write an exam, but then decided to just interview me and I passed and I did get that job as well. That's the job I wanted, I wanted to work as a technical advisor. And the salary is so much better as well. That was *la chance*.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Abdrahamane, 27, graduated in English.)

Abdrahamane mentions *la chance*, which he happened to find in a moment he did not look for it anymore. *La chance* made him get his current job, one that he wanted and is better paid than his previous job. In addition, he did not assume he was going to get it, according to the information he initially received. Abdrahamane applied for the position as a technical advisor, and once he thought he would not get it, he applied for another position, and successfully so. Though it is unclear what exactly *la chance* did that made him get the job, he does know that it was *la chance*. The ability to choose between two jobs is rare and so is the opportunity for getting the job you wanted. He applied a long time ago and the fact that they got back to him after such a long time with the job offer caught him by surprise.

## L2: *La chance* matters.

*La chance* is an important actor in his life; *la chance* made him get to where he is today. So, where is he today? He is working in the job he wanted as a technical advisor. The job also pays a lot better than the one he had at the time. He tells the story of how it all happened: This is not a causal sequence of events, it is rather an accumulation of unlikely circumstances: the hiring period was up, he found closure in his new job and then received an unanticipated call, which sent him straight to the interview process and ultimately, his desired, well-paid employment.

*La chance* in his case does not seem to be about the circumstances within which he received the job, but more about the fact that he got the job and the job being his preferred option both in terms of content and salary.

Oui, j'ai toujours dit, j'ai de *la chance* avec mes amis, parce que j'ai choisi les amis, donc je sais ce que je devrais choisir. Souvent, on parvient à faire des choses ensemble que j'aime bien. Donc, c'est *la chance*, mais *la chance* d'abord ça vient de la personne : il faut choisir ce que tu veux. Mais je pense que le choix est difficile, mais il faut savoir ce que tu veux faire. En ce moment, tu parviens à trouver ton chemin, et en le parcourant, tu vas avoir une chance.

### L1: activity\identification\finding\knowing

I've always said that I've had *la chance* when it comes to my friends, because I chose them. And I am what I chose to do. Oftentimes, we organize things together, which I like. That is *la chance*. First of all, you need to know what you want and then there will be *la chance*. I think the choice is difficult, but it's easy if you have priorities, then you'll find your way and as you go along, you're going to have *la chance*. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

Siaka is an active member of several associations. His passion is the English language and he wants to become a translator. He is a founding member of a network of English speakers in Mali, which enables him to participate in professional language courses, organize official activities, collaborate with well-known NGO's, as well as to access information on current job offers. His closest friends are fellow members of that association. Siaka's friends are *la chance*. He had his priorities which influenced him until his friends came along. In other words, he knows that his friendships are a result of the choices he made.

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

Friends are *la chance*. Friends are a choice. You can choose friends and you can choose *la chance*.

People are defined by their choices.

Organizing things together is *la chance*. Knowing what you want is a precondition to *la chance*.

You can provoke *la chance* by knowing what you want. Choosing what you want is difficult.

There are things you can do for *la chance* to show up: 1: knowing what you want and 2: making decisions accordingly. He chose his friends based on what he wants in life. They are *la chance*. The fact that he found them and is able to appreciate them for the things they do together is based on him

knowing what *la chance* is to him in the first place. Doing things. He is able to identify things as *la chance* because he knows what he wants. Getting what he wants is *la chance*. He only knows what *la chance* is because he has predefined *la chance* by knowing what he wants.

*La chance* is preconditioned by knowing what you want.

In other words, if you want to become an actress and receive a role in a movie, you know that this is *la chance*. If you receive an offer to manage a large hotel chain, you do not consider that *la chance*.

La chance is relative to what you want. Therefore, in order to know what *la chance* is, you need to know what you want. If you do know what you want, you can choose *la chance*.

Susann: Utile...Comment est-ce que toi, tu te rends utile pour ta famille?

Yousseuf: Je me rendis utile parce que ma famille, aujourd'hui je suis pas une charge pour ma famille, Dieu merci. Depuis que j'ai commencé ce stage, je ne suis jamais allé chez mes frères, mes parents, ma maman ou bien mon père pour demander : "donne-moi ça". Au contraire, si j'allais, je partageais. Dieu m'a donné cette chance, cette opportunité. Je n'ai jamais demandé de services après le départ de l'école.

### L1: activity\identification\finding\knowing

Susann: How do you make yourself « useful » for your family?

Yousseuf: I am useful for my family because today I don't need their financial support anymore, thank God. Ever since I've started this internship, I didn't need to ask my brothers or my parents for any money. On the contrary, I go there and share. God gave me that *la chance*, this opportunity. Ever since I finished school I didn't need to ask for anything.

(My translation, interview, 2014, with Yousseuf, graduated in Law.)

Yousseuf knows that his financial independence is due to God providing him with *la chance*. *La chance* is an opportunity that established Yousseuf's comfortable economic situation. Ever since he started his internship as a law student writing his thesis he worked at the ministry. For years, he has been a non-contracted intern without an official salary. In order to get a contract, he would have to pass the *concours*, which has not taken place yet. He knows that his ability to provide for himself and his family as an intern with no contract is special. Therefore, this opportunity, i.e. the internship, is *la chance* to him. We saw already that *la chance* represents the ability to work the job you wanted.

L2: *La chance* is to be able to share money.

Being useful for the family is to be able to support them financially. Usefulness is connected to money. He is able to do that because he has an internship. He started the internship when he finished school. And it changed his financial situation: Prior to the internship, he asked some family members for money, now

that he has the internship, he is able to even share some of the money he earns. God gave him that *la chance*, this opportunity. *La chance* is an opportunity. Is *la chance* an opportunity to share money or an opportunity to have an internship? I would say both is adequate here. It is not simply about the internship, but about the opportunity that comes with the internship, which is the ability to share money. The ability to share money is *la chance*. Internships do not necessarily come with salaries, so not all internships are *la chance*. He also accounts for the fact that earning money provides the opportunity and not an obligation to share.

He does account for the timing of the internship as the moment which changed his financial situation. Yet, this is not about the emergence of an event, i.e. the internship, but the significant changes caused by an event, i.e. financial status.

Susann: La dernière fois, tu as dit «je vais le faire, même si c'est pas ce que je veux.» Ça m'a étonnée. C'est toujours comme ça ?

Madou: Oui, c'est toujours comme ça, mais ça a un tout petit peu changé, parce qu'il y a des trucs que je ne connaissais pas, que je commence à connaître maintenant. Il y a des domaines dont je n'avais même pas connaissance, donc j'ai commencé à faire ces études-là et ce n'était pas ce que j'avais souhaité faire dans la vie, mais c'était ma chance, donc. Mais ça commence à changer. Maintenant, j'aime ce que je fais.

### L1: activity\identification\finding\deciding

Susann: Last time you told me that what you're doing right now is not what you want to do. Do you still feel that way?

Madou: Yeah, I still do. But it has changed a little, now that I start to understand certain things. I was totally new in the field, I didn't know what I was doing. Now that I've started studying... It was not what I wanted to do in life, but that was *ma chance*. So now things are starting to change and now I like what I'm doing.

(My translation, interview, 2015, with Madou, graduated in Physics.)

To Madou, *la chance* is a job he actually did not want to do, but he decided that this was going to be his *la chance*. Madou would have preferred to do his PhD in Germany, and he knew that this would have been his *la chance*. We know already that he did not get to do this, and in response, he started looking for other opportunities. Receiving an internship at the telecommunication agency allowed him to restart studies in another field, which he did because it was his *la chance*. Committing to that job was a decision based on the idea that this was his *la chance* now.

### L2: La chance is (in)visible.

It was not what he wanted to do in life, but that was *la chance*. Events can turn out to be *la chance* in retrospect. Something happened, he did not think of it as *la chance*, but it later turned out to be *la chance*. It is because he thought he knew what he wanted that he did not consider the events to be *la chance*. The

reason why he initially was not able to see *la chance* was because he was new to the field. He did not know what he was doing and he did not want to do it in the first place. Now that he studied a bit, he comes to understand and enjoy what he is doing. Looking back, it was *la chance*. Doing something he did not want and did not foresee for himself was *la chance*. *La chance* was invisible to him when it happened. It is only afterwards that *la chance* becomes visible to him.

## KNOWLEDGE: IDENTIFICATION.

### **Finding *la chance* is about identifying *la chance*.**

Similar to sprouts of *la chance*, there is another concept which captures the aspects of preparedness and chance in connection, i.e. the “serendipity pattern” (Merton 2004). Robert Merton, who researched the process and event of discovery in science, defines it as follows:

The serendipity pattern refers to the fairly common experience of observing an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic datum which becomes the occasion for developing a new theory or for extending an existing theory. All three elements in the pattern are essential to an accidental discovery, that is, to the unanticipated development or extension of theory – the observation in and of itself is no discovery (Merton 2004).

I will now establish the parallel between the serendipity pattern and the process of opening up *la chance* (sprouts). Let us therefore look more closely at the three elements “unanticipated”, “anomalous” and “strategic”.

“Unanticipated” refers to an observation which was initially unexpected. In other words, the observation is a by-product of the actual experiment (Merton 2004); it is what people find along the way. Safiatou’s account (4.2.3) highlights this perfectly: while she was looking for a job she found the man she wanted to marry. That was *la chance* – an unanticipated by-product. But what about Boubacar’s account? His stable job in government administration was not a by-product of his participation in the *concours* because he participated in the *concours* in order to get that job. More importantly though, he did not expect to pass the *concours* at all. Passing the *concours* was *la chance*; it was unanticipated. Sprouts of *la chance* are specifically looked for and desired; they might be imagined, yet not expected.

“Anomalous” describes a surprising observation which is in contrast to common knowledge and, therefore, stimulates the observer to make sense of the observation (Merton 2004). Boubacar, for instance, knows that it is highly improbable to pass the *concours*. He reflects on the fact that he passed as *la chance*, an anomaly. Sprouts make the difference – Boubacar becomes one of a few as he gets the job. Furthermore, sprouts of *la chance* are extraor-

dinary; they constitute a rupture of the everyday routine. We recall Madou's account which offers the established routine of passing by his uncle's house every day for more than a year. This was interrupted one day by Madou getting the internship he was looking for. It was normal for him to hear his uncle say "come back here tomorrow" until he said something different, namely, "we got you an internship" – *la chance*. Second, the anomaly stimulates the individual that identified it to make sense of that very anomaly. Graduates make sense of their identified sprouts of *la chance* as they work with them, i.e. both Boubacar and Madou accept the jobs offered.

"Strategic" genuinely relates to the individual observing rather than to the observed event itself. "For it obviously requires a theoretically sensitized observer to detect the universal in the particular" (Merton, 2004). In other words, the ability to identify an anomaly is preconditioned by an understanding of what is normal. It is precisely because of that strategic element that the identification of *la chance* is not an accident. It is not an accident because graduates prepare in order to be able to identify *la chance*. Madou prepared as he continued to ask his uncle for a job, which demonstrated persistence. Boubacar prepared to pass the *concours* as he participated. When it comes to finding *la chance*, the graduate is as important as *la chance* itself. Chance accidents in scientific discoveries are discussed in that exact manner as interaction of chance with the prepared mind: "the value of the accident depends on the kind of man, on the kind of mind, by whom or by which it is first observed. If the soil is not sufficiently prepared, the seed will not grow" (Merton, 2004).

To sum up, looking for *la chance* means to prepare for and to anticipate sprouts of *la chance*. The nature of that anticipation might be very concrete, i.e. an unlimited contract in a communications agency, or rather abstract, i.e. being able to get thousands of jobs. Now, the practices of preparation depend on what is anticipated. As we have seen, Safiatou, looking for a contract in communications, is applying for related internships, and Siaka, who is looking for a job, is working on his polyvalent qualification.

### **Working with *la chance*.**

Finding a sprout of *la chance* does not end the process. After having identified a sprout, it can be transformed into an outcome. It is important to note that working with *la chance* is different from looking for *la chance*. Looking for *la chance* refers to practices that are not directed towards a specific goal (e.g. becoming a researcher), but more towards a general idea (e.g. finding an employment). Practices of looking for *la chance* result in finding *la chance*. Working with *la chance*, by contrast, is directed towards a specific and anticipated outcome that has been inspired by the sprout of *la chance*. The product of working with *la chance* is the very possession of *la chance*.

Dans la vie quotidienne, bon, en tout cas quand je suis au boulot, je le fais correctement et dans ce sens-là, je suis en train de provoquer ma chance parce que le jour où ils vont faire les évaluations, ils diront : “celui-là il travaille très bien, on pourrait le mettre ici, on pourrait ceci, on pourrait faire cela”. Dans ce cas, c’est ce qui la provoque.

### **L1: activity\transformation\working with\proving oneself**

In my daily life, well, I’m at work and I work correctly. It’s in this sense that I’m provoking *ma chance* right now. You know, one day, when they’ll do their evaluation, they’ll say: “this guy is working well, we should put him in another position”... So, it is in this sense that I’m provoking *ma chance*. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Oumar, graduated in Economics.)

*La chance* here signifies ‘another position’. Oumar does not mention a concrete position, but he anticipates the possibility within the company. How does he get there? By provoking *la chance*, which means to ‘be at work and work correctly’. Thus, it also requires ‘them’ to recognize that he is working well. In short, for *la chance* to come into existence, it requires a twofold process of him working and his work being recognized. Oumar’s quality of work thereby tries to provoke *la chance* of being considered for another job. He is working for an anticipated outcome, i.e. *la chance*, yet he cannot enforce the outcome itself or create a vacant job position by himself.

### **L2: *La chance* is seeing and being seen.**

Oumar provokes *la chance* in a particular sense: He does something, which then allows “them” to say something about his work and do something about his position. Oumar works, “they” recognize his work and as a consequence put him in another position. Oumar provokes his *la chance* by working, but it is for somebody else to recognize it and act on it.

Time: Oumar works every day and one day, every single day of him working well will matter. Daily life is working well in his position, one day is evaluation day, the day they evaluate his work. He provokes his *la chance* by making sure they will be able to see that he is working well and therefore put him in another job. It’s not about the better position, but about them recognizing his good work and acting on it, which is prerequisite to his promotion.

Oumar’s ability to provoke *la chance* is focused on working correctly every day and evaluation day will come at some point in the future.

Constant work as opposed to one particular day, i.e. evaluation day. Evaluation day is the day they recognize that he is working correctly every day and draw desirable conclusions from it.

Timing. Doing and seeing.

First, he does and second, others, who have the capacity to do something, see him doing something. So, it is not about Oumar identifying *la chance*, but it is about others providing *la chance* in response to him looking for it in a – to them – convincing manner (convincingly to them) in the first place.

It takes two parties for *la chance* to work out for one party.

En faisant des relations sérieuses, c'est-à-dire, quoi, quand toi et moi nous sommes en train de collaborer, je vais faire du sérieux avec toi. Si je dis sérieux, de ne pas faire le malhonnête avec toi, je vais être honnête avec toi. Mais si tu as quelque chose dans ce sens qui correspond à mon profil, tu ne vas pas hésiter à me contacter, n'est-ce pas ?

### **L1: activity\transformation\working with\anticipating**

By creating serious relationships, I mean, we are collaborating right now and I'm going to be serious about it, and I'm not going to lie to you, I'm going to be honest. If you find something that corresponds to my profile, you surely won't hesitate to contact me, right? And that's it. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Siaka, graduated in English.)

*La chance* here is an employment that corresponds to his qualification. He anticipates that as he keeps working on his current sprout of *la chance*, which is his current job as research assistant. In this framework, he creates a professional relationship which requires him to work in a serious and honest manner. This is his means of establishing himself as a present collaborator and proving himself worthy for possible future collaboration. This is how he makes sure I would think of him if an opportunity arises for him in the future. But in order for this or *la chance* to work out, it requires some activity from my side as well: recognizing the quality of his work, as well as not hesitating to inform him. Again, this is a twofold process, which includes him working and his work being recognized, and, first of all, a vacant position.

### **L2: *La chance* is found in collaboration.**

*La chance* is to be found in relationships and in collaboration. Within this relationship player one is serious and honest. In case player two (me) finds something (probably a job) that corresponds to player one, player two contacts player one. So there are three things involved: two players and “something”. The two players have an established relationship (serious, honest) already. “Something” shows up, which has player two think of player one. The players are collaborating; the relationship is present. There is nothing new about the relationship, but “something” relates back to that relationship. Players know each other, their traits, i.e. seriousness and honesty as well as their professional profiles. The profile connects to “something”, but the relationship

allows for that associative connection to happen in the first place. In other words, three things are required for player two to be contacted by player one: collaboration, “something”, and the combination of the two, i.e. no hesitation.

Ces genres d'opportunités, c'est Dieu qui m'a donné *la chance* d'être parmi les cinq premiers de ma classe, d'être resté là-bas en tant que stagiaire et tout. Eeeeh, *la chance* a été que on a bien étudié, on a compris nos leçons et on avait la soif de connaître le savoir, on s'inquiétait et on a pu s'en sortir. C'est grâce à nous aussi que cette chance a pu fonctionner.

### L1: activity\transformation\working with\continuing

This kind of opportunity... it's God that gave me *la chance* to be amongst the best in my class, and to be able to do an internship there and to be allowed to stay there voluntarily. *La chance* was that we studied hard, we understood our lessons, and we were thirsty for knowledge. We were worried and we managed to get out and it's because of us as well that this chance did work out. (My translation, interview, 2015, with Simone, graduated in Law.)

As Simone reflects again on her and her friends *la chance* to become interns at the TV station she speaks of three different *la chances*: there is *la chance* provided by God, i.e. her being amongst the best students in her class and her becoming an intern at the station; *la chance* of her (and her best friend) studying well and staying at the station as an intern without getting paid that made *la chance* work; and *la chance* that “a pu fonctionner” – that worked out. It is because of God, as well as her own efforts, that *la chance* worked out, she says. *La chance* is not something that is supposed to work just like that, but it is something for people to work with. *La chance* is presented as an opportunity that has been recognized and exploited as such by Simone. In consequence, she had her part in transforming *la chance* from being a private school student to becoming an intern at the station and to “being allowed to stay there voluntarily”.

### L2: *La chance* is a combination of structural and agentic factors.

*La chance* is an opportunity given by God: being the best in the class, doing an internship, being allowed to stay. These things are consequential and accumulative. These are external factors.

*La chance* was them studying hard, understanding lessons and being hungry for knowledge. These are factors within her control.

*La chance* was given by God.

*La chance* is a combination of structural and agentive factors.

On fabriquait des petites voitures pour les enfants. (...) Tu sais ce qu'on faisait pour le marketing ? Il y avait un petit marché, on savait qu'il y a des enfants là-bas et leurs mères. Donc, on partait avec nos nouvelles voitures qui étaient sorties, on roulait avec ça, on faisait, on faisait la publicité avec ces enfants-là. Donc, dès qu'ils voyaient ces voitures : "Maman, il faut m'acheter ça, il faut m'acheter ça". C'était une publicité. On sait profiter de la situation, tu vois, on était tellement malin. (On vit cette capacité) ? si on partait voir ces enfants avec leurs mères, on avait plus *la chance* être assis et puis seulement ceux qui les voient les collectionnent et puis les achètent.

### L1: activity\transformation\working with\taking advantage

[...] we built a little matchbox. It was a company. [...] Want to know what we did for marketing? There was a little market; we knew there were kids with their mothers. So, we went there as well. As soon as we had new cars ready, we took them there and played with them... we advertised them. Kids that saw these cars... 'Mom, please buy that for me! I want it!' [...] That was advertisement! We took advantage of the situation. You know? We were smart. With that capacity, we went out there, saw the kids with their moms and, of course, we had even more *la chance* simply by sitting around playing. People saw the cars and bought them. (My translation, interview, 2014, with Amadou, graduated in International Law.)

Amadou talks about *la chance* as a result of smart advertisement. What started out as a playful way of selling their self-manufactured toys, *la chance* is now reflected as the origin of his entrepreneurial skills. To Amadou, *la chance* is selling toy cars. This *la chance* constitutes two groups of people conducting activities. The first group is Amadou and his friends who built the matchbox cars, did the marketing, went to the market, and played with the cars as advertisement. The second group is mothers with their children who saw the product, recognized it as desirable and ultimately bought it. It is customers reacting to the company's actions. This interplay creates *la chance*. As the youngsters saw their strategy working, they simply sat at their spot and played with their toys in order to sell more cars. Ever since his early childhood, Amadou ran businesses. First, he sold oil to the Bozo, so they had light during the night. The Bozo lived on the riverbed during the fishing season and, therefore had no electricity in their housing. Later, he had a little business with some of his friends. They produced little toy cars for younger kids. He describes it as "une société bien organisée" – "a well-organized

enterprise”. Some of his buddies were responsible for the fabrication of the product, and some gave it a new design, while Amadou was responsible for the marketing and selling part of their business. There was a little market where Segou women went on a daily basis in order to buy fresh vegetables and meat, and most of them were accompanied by their children. The only thing Amadou and his friends had to do was to play with their cars. This attracted the kids’ interest, and as soon as their mothers became aware, Amadou would tell them that the toys are for sale. They were not expensive, 75 to 100 francs, he says, so that really everyone could afford it. They took advantage of a situation that was already there – and it was almost effortless. “Tu vois, on était tellement malin” – “You see, we were really clever.” This form of advertising made them have more *la chance* than they would have had if they were sitting around with people passing by looking at their product. By playing with their self-made toy cars they attracted future clients, which is different from simply exposing the product, Amadou argues. The decision to approach the marketing differently is what ensured the outcome of *la chance* in terms of regular sales. Amadou speaks of “more *la chance*” – “increased *la chance*”, which refers to a kind of reward for cleverness and their courage to approach the market a little differently.

## L2: *La chance* is selling something.

Having “even more *la chance* simply by sitting around and playing”. Sitting around and playing is advertisement for the toy cars they are selling. Them selling cars is based on people seeing them playing with the cars. Being seen playing and selling cars are two actions linked to each other, it is making people buy cars. Selling cars is *la chance*. Player one sits and plays, player two sees player one and is attracted to it. Player two buys the cars, thereby increasing *la chance* of player one.

Bon, *la chance* me sourit chaque fois. Je te dis, je suis avec Dieu. Je suis un croyant quoi. Chaque fois, il y a des opportunités qui se créent et j’ai de l’argent dedans. Souvent, j’ai des amis qui préparent des choses, donc je participe et il y a de l’argent. Je suis dans les associations, tu vois, je ne m’assois pas. Souvent même, il y a mon tonton qui est à l’Université. S’ils font des examens, il m’appelle pour aller surveiller ses étudiants, et donc, il me paie. Tu vois ? Souvent aussi, on part faire du business pour pouvoir gagner un peu, par exemple aller acheter un ordinateur pour quelqu’un. On va te donner de l’argent : parce que tu es dans le

domaine, tu connais mieux que n'importe qui, donc on va te donner l'argent et puis tu vas partir pour aller acheter. Donc, tu te fais des bénéfices, tu vois ? Tout ça, les marchés, les business comme ça, les petits business, on le fait !

### **L1: activity\transformation\working with\continuing**

Well, *la chance* nurtures me every time. I'm telling you that I am with God; I'm a believer. Every time, there are opportunities that show up and I find some money in them. Sometimes, there are friends doing something. I participate and get some money. I'm in some associations, you know? I don't sit around. Sometimes, my uncle calls me to supervise his students at the university. He pays me. Sometimes, we go do some business in order to earn a little. For example, I buy a laptop for somebody. People give me jobs like these because they know that I'm into computers. So, I buy one and take some advantage. You see? These are all little businesses... we do them all. (My translation, interview, 2014, with Amadou, graduated in International Law.)

For Amadou, doing business is a learning process encouraged by appropriated skill. I ask how he makes his living. *La chance* nourishes him and ensures his living. He connects *la chance* with himself and various agents: God, his uncle, and other people. Either combination leads to money, which is *la chance* nurturing him. God provides him with opportunities that generate income, his uncle invites him to supervise exams, and people ask for his advice when buying technology. Amadou accepts all of them; he does not sit around. "There are little markets like that, little businesses," Amadou concludes later on. An uncle supported Moudou with the job at the phone stand, an auntie employed him in her restaurant, and yet another uncle funded his new company in Segou.

### **L2: *La chance* is a little business regularly.**

*La chance* nurtures every time. There are opportunities to make money, not by one player two, but by several players two, for instance, friends who are in associations, his uncle who works at the university, people who need assistance with their computers. Player one does not sit around, but finds money in doing things, little businesses. Player two needs assistance, which is an

opportunity for player one to do some business. Player two knows player one is good at computers, so player one qualifies for the gig. Little business every time is *la chance*. *La chance* is timing.

**KNOWLEDGE: TRANSFORMATION.****Working with *la chance* is about the transformation of *la chance*.**

A sprout of *la chance* is much more like an opportunity than a done deal. Once a sprout of *la chance* has been identified, it requires work. Working with *la chance* is a concrete response to the sprout identified and therefore describes practices with a concrete intentionality.

In anticipation of a promotion or future job opportunities, Oumar and Siaka both try to work hard in their current position. That worked out pretty well in Simone's case: as a result of studying hard, she received the opportunity to do a journalism internship, which ultimately enabled her to present her own reports on air. Amadou started to believe in his entrepreneurial skills, as it was usually rewarded with *la chance*. He kept working on that up until now. Safiatou, who said she just wants to keep *la chance* in her life, is working with the sprout of being married to the man she loves and pregnant as she is stepping back from her professional goals for now.

To identify and work with *la chance* is similar to what Johnson-Hanks describes as 'judicious opportunism' (Johnson-Hanks 2005), which talks about actors seizing promising chances in contexts of uncertainty (Johnson-Hanks 2005, 363). It is about evaluating and anticipating a "chance" to be "promising", and also about acting accordingly by "seizing" such a "promising chance". "Judicious opportunism" requires adaptation, flexibility, and evaluation based on "contingent, sudden, and surprising offers that life can make. On the basis of these offers, the aspirations, once vague, will be concretized" (ibid. 376). In other words, "judicious opportunism" is a reaction in response to an opportunity arising, which represents the idea of a sprout being identified and worked with. However, there are opportunities which are not considered as sprouts and, therefore, left untouched. A conscious decision not to take a certain opportunity is pre-conditioned by the fact that it has been identified as an opportunity in the first place. This is part of what Jeffrey describes as "timepass", which is sometimes a conscious decision made by his informants; it is a "form of an investment" – prioritizing long-term goals instead of short-term success (Jeffrey 2010, 4).

All in all, the practices of working with *la chance* are about transforming sprouts into an outcome. It is about possessing and holding onto *la chance*. Let us take employment as an example: graduates work with sprouts of *la chance*, such as an internship or a limited contract and, thereby try to maintain or transform their position into an unlimited contract, another job, or whatever it is they want it to grow their sprout into. A sprout of *la chance* is something to work with, something to cultivate. Figuratively speaking, it is something they can extract cuttings from and plant anew. Both looking for and working with *la chance* requires effort, but whereas “looking for” is about preparing the soil and inspecting it for sprouts, “working with” *la chance* is all about collecting the harvest.

## [Tracings]

### Tracing L1: KNOWLEDGE: preparation, identification, transformation

**Looking for *la chance* is about preparing for *la chance*.**

**Finding *la chance* is about the identification of *la chance*.**

**Working with *la chance* is about the transformation of *la chance*.**

Sprouts of *la chance* – just like serendipitous events – cannot be planned, so “[a]ll we can do is [...] put ourselves into a favorable position to profit by unexpected occurrences” (Merton 2004, 191).

In this chapter, I explored university graduates’ knowledge and understanding about how to put themselves into such positions – they open up *la chance* (*ouvrir la chance*). By applying membership categorization analysis to the accounts, I was able to systematically examine graduates’ knowledge about practices (category-bound activities) connected with *la chance*. As a result, I presented the practices “looking for *la chance* (sprouts)” or preparation, “finding *la chance* (sprouts)” or identification and “working with *la chance* (sprouts)” or transformation. Looking for *la chance*” means to anticipate *la chance* in a concrete or abstract manner and prepare for it accordingly. These practices of preparation are conducted in the present based on their prerequisites, but they are geared towards the future – towards a sprout of *la chance*. They need to be identified and evaluated by graduates, and again, their ability to do so depends on their preparation. Once identified, graduates work on the sprout’s transformation into a concrete and anticipated outcome. In contrast to preparation, transformation is not an activity directed toward a sprout of *la chance*, but a response to a sprout. The intersection of these two kinds of activities is marked by the identification of a sprout.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed some of the concepts in the literature on youth practices in uncertain contexts in Africa, and I have contrasted the identification of *la chance* to “the process of discovery” (Merton 2004, 196). Concepts such as “dubriagem” (Vigh 2010), “embracing uncertainty” (Nunzio 2015), “timepass” (Jeffrey 2010, 77) and “straining” (Finn 2015, 41) emerge out of rich ethnographic descriptions of practices in contexts of uncertainty. Indeed, there are many parallels to my findings based on graduates’ accounts on how they open up *la chance*, though the main difference is a result of the

question addressed in this chapter. I did not ask what graduates do; instead, I asked what graduates know they need to do. Graduates open up *la chance*: they prepare, they identify, and they transform *la chance*. Though the bottom line is that they know they need *la chance* in order to succeed in their projects, they also know that *la chance* will not necessarily come. They know preparation might not be enough for *la chance* to appear. They know they cannot force or enforce *la chance*. In other words, graduates are not uncertain about whether or not they will find *la chance*; they know that only some of them will have *la chance* to find *la chance*. They know that their efforts might not pay off, but they also know that it will not get worse if they try.

### Tracing L2: The game of opening up *la chance*.

*La chance* is found in the encounter, in relationships and in collaboration between at least two players. *La chance* is the (1) motivation, (2) the game itself and (3) the potential outcome of the game:

1. *La chance* makes players play. *La chance* is the reason players play.
2. *La chance* can and cannot be provoked by the players.

For *la chance* to emerge it takes at least two players: one player doing something and another player with the ability to do something.

3. *La chance* is what a player is looking for. It can be anything: a stable job, a husband, a baby, a vacation.

To some players, *la chance* is a bonus, to others, *la chance* is everything.

### The Players.



#### **Player one.**

Characteristics: Serious, honest, dedicated to the game.

Aware of the fact that she cannot play alone.

Activity: Opening up *la chance*.

Capacities: the ability to provoke, but not enforce of *la chance*.

**Player two.**

Characteristics: helpful, recognizing, rewarding.  
Activities: Contributing to someone else's *la chance*.  
Capacities: provision of *la chance*.  
Acknowledgement of *la chance*



**Player three.**

Characteristics: knowledgeable.  
Activities: observation and evaluation of player one.  
Capacities: recognition of *la chance*.



**The Plays.**

We recall:

*La chance* is highly unlikely.

Achieving something unlikely is *la chance*. Achieving something likely is not *la chance*. Likelihood depends on the person and the circumstances.

*La chance* emerges in the encounter.

*La chance* emerges in the encounter between two players. So let me recapitulate some of the situations from layer two of the assemblage in which two players meet and the highly unlikely, i.e. *la chance*, potentially emerges. There are patterns emerging, but in order to stay true to the idea of the game, I call them plays (I-VI).

**I In the workplace.**

Compare:

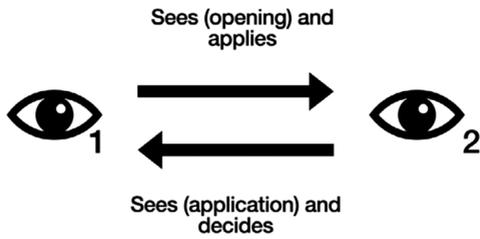
LI: predicate\prerequisite\networks (see page 127)

LI: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity\succes (see page 143)

LI: predicate\outcome\achievement\civil service (see page 161)

LI: activity\preparation\looking for\applying (see page 185)

LI: activity\transformation\working with\anticipating (see page 211)



Player two posts an opening. Player two sees player one (her education and her application.) And decides whether or not to work with player one. Getting a job is highly unlikely, therefore, it is *la chance*.

**II Friends.**

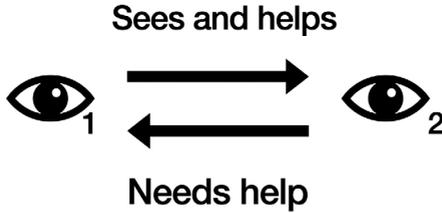
*Compare:*

*LI: predicate\prerequisite\friendship (see page 125)*

*LI: activity\identification\finding\knowing (see page 200)*

*LI: activity\preparation (see page 178)*

*LI: activity\transformation\working with\continuing (see page 216)*



Player two needs help. Player two sees player one (her education and her application) and decides whether or not to work with player one. The unlikeliness and, therewith, *la chance*, depends on the amount of people for player one to choose from.

**III Doing business.**

*Compare:*

*LI: activity\transformation\working with\taking advantage (see page 214)*



Player one is selling a product. Player two sees player one and decides whether or not to buy the product player one offers.

Since the majority of the people does not buy, actually selling one's product is *la chance*. The more players player one engages with the higher the chances of making money.

**The difference between having the ability to have *la chance* and having *la chance*.**

There is a difference between having the ability to have *la chance* and having *la chance*. To have the ability to have *la chance* is to be visible to other players. Remember, it is only in the encounter with another player that *la chance* emerges. Seeing player one is the precondition for player two to make a decision. Therefore, it is essential for player one to make herself visible and she does so by providing herself with the ability to have *la chance*. Though *la chance* requires the participation of a second player. In other words, being seen indicates the possession of the ability to have *la chance*.

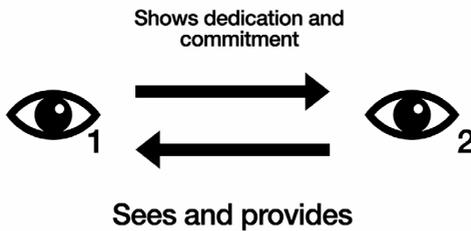
**IV Success**

*Compare:*

*L1: predicate\prerequisite\companion (see page 115)*

*L1: predicate\prerequisite\networks (see page 127)*

*L1: predicate\sprout\moment\opportunity\success (see page 143)*



Player one is dedicated and committed to succeeding in her endeavors. Player two either does or does not see player one and if so, decides to whether or not provide success.

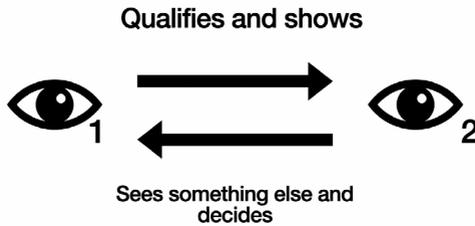
Player two can be anyone or anything player one can engage with and relate to, i.e. a friend, a family member, a random person, God or a material object like a book, a computer or a passcode. For player two to play along with player one requires player two to see player one in the first place. It is unknown to player one if there is going to be a player two.

So, no matter what player one does, two unknowns remain: being seen by player two and the emergence of *la chance*.

**V By-product**

Compare:

LI: *predicate\outcome\achievement\possession\by-product* (see page 162)



Player one is qualified and works. Player two sees yet another and different quality in player one and decides to put player one in touch with player three. *La chance* here is something player one wanted, but did not look for in that context.

So, from the perspective of player two the situation looks different.

**A co-constitutive relationship and the interchangeability of the players.**

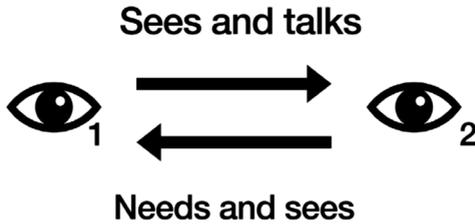
Depending on one's perspective, one player appears to be passive, but actually both players are active. Players are interchangeable in a sense that any player can be either player one or player two depending on our focus. That focus is a random choice and we need to keep that in mind. Otherwise, we end up reducing the emergence of *la chance* to a plain cause-and-effect relationship, which it is not due to the fact that a cause does not necessarily lead to an effect and if there is a cause and an effect, it seems impossible to determine which one is which.

## VI Business

Compare:

*L1: predicate\prerequisite\social context (see page 118)*

*L1: activity\transformation\working with\continuing (see page 216)*



Player one sees a particular feature of player two (new to the area) and talks to player two. Player two responds.

Years later, player two needs a job done and remembers a particular feature (qualification and looking for a job) of player two.

Player one puts herself in a position to have *la chance* in the encounter with player two. Player one did not know if player two would see him; neither did he know if she would have a suitable job to offer. Player one just played. Player two only joined years later. *La chance* emerges for both players, yet in different shapes: to player one, player two and his skills are *la chance*; to player two, player one and the job he has to offer is *la chance*.

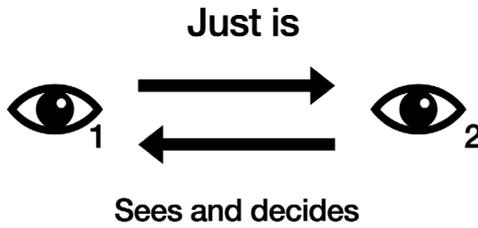
*La chance* is characterized by a co-constitutive relationship between the players who provide *la chance* for each other. It is only in the encounter of the two players that *la chance* potentially emerges.

## VII Parent-child relationship

Compare:

*L1: activity\preparation\looking for\attitude (see page 190)*

*L1: predicate\prerequisite\means (see page 120, 123)*



Player one (the kid) is seen by player two (the parent) and being put in a position to potentially have *la chance* at some point in the future. Player one is a kid and is seen by its parents who play for the kid's *la chance*. It is in that sense, for example, that Safiatou thinks about giving birth in the US, which would provide the kid with the future *la chance* of being able to study in the US and travel on a US passport, for instance. However, it is on player one in the future to evaluate whether or not that passport is *la chance* and potentially act on it.

**Playing.**

**The knows.**

Depending on how the game is set up, there are different ways to open up *la chance*, i.e. to play the game of *la chance*, all of which are connected to what players know and what they know they do not know.

**Knowing and Deciding.**

Player one knows *la chance* she wants and makes decisions accordingly.

**Knowing and Preparing.**

Player one knows *la chance* she wants and qualifies accordingly. In other words, player one looks for education, qualification and networks in order to be able to have *la chance* in the future.

**Knowing and Seeing.**

Player one knows what *la chance* she wants, therefore she sees only a certain kind of *la chance*. Here, knowing comes at a cost, because sometimes *la chance* remains invisible to the player who already knows what *la chance* is supposed to look like. Graduates are aware of that, therefore they play not knowing what *la chance* is.

So, there are two ways of playing the game: 1 knowing *la chance* prior to playing, i.e. playing towards a particular goal (*la chance*), or 2 getting to know *la chance* while playing, i.e. playing towards an elusive goal (*la chance*).

1. When playing, players know what *la chance* is. They play towards it. That is how they see *la chance* once it emerges. This way, certain manifestations of *la chance* remain invisible to them. They might miss out on a *la chance* they do not want and are not looking for. Remember that if a player does not want it, it is not *la chance*. Yet there is change to what players want and *la chance* (past or still present) becomes visible.
2. When playing, players do not know what *la chance* is. They play anyway and they know what *la chance* is, when they see it.

### The known unknowns.

There are two unknowns for each player. The first unknown relates to the visibility of the players to each other, i.e. to a player having the ability to have *la chance*. And the second one relates to the emergence of *la chance*, i.e. to a player having *la chance*:

- 1: Player one makes herself visible, but she does not know if she will be seen by player two.

At the same time, player two, looking for another player, does not know if she is going to find one.



- 2: Once player one is seen by player two, player one does not know if player two is going to act on what she sees.

At the same time, the consequences of an engagement with player one are unknown to player two.



Particularly, plays V (business) and VI (parent-child relationship) point to another factor, namely temporality, which is an unknown to the extent that it cannot be strategically approached. Every encounter might or might not count. Both the reception and the outcome of the plays are unknown, and so is their temporality. Yet, players know what they are doing now and in doing so potentially put themselves in a position to have *la chance*. Players play now.