3 A Manual

VIGNETTE: Dieu donne *la chance*, mais toi aussi tu peux t'ouvrir *la chance*.

> He sat in one of these metal chairs with seats made out of plastic strings; he did not lean back comfortably, but he sat there with one of the armrests between his knees, legs squatting and wide open, his upper body leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands and forearms moving, sometimes meeting for a quick and concluding hand clap. He said: "Dieu donne *la chance*, mais toi aussi tu peux t'ouvrir *la chance*. Ou bien?!" – "God provides *la chance*, but you can open up *la chance* yourself as well. Right?!" (Field notes, May 2014.)

With reference to *la chance*, university graduates make sense of their situation and they play with it. Examining graduates' knowledge about their situation, we see that *la chance* is so much more than its translation "luck" reveals. Throughout this second part of the book, we see how *la chance* emerges at the intersection between what graduates know and what they know they don't know. *La chance* makes sense. *La chance* is known to make a difference between those who get employed and those who do not. However, *la chance* is elusive in a sense that it appears to be indexical in concrete contexts, but it escapes our grasp as soon as we try to approach its essence.

The chapters four and five are based on graduates' knowledge accessed through narrative interviews. Whereas layer one sets out to analyze the empirical phenomenon of *la chance* as referred to by university graduates in Bamako, layer two continues to develop a conceptual framework of *la chance*, which is disembedded from the particular Malian context. The assemblage style of the following chapters helps me keep these two layers separate and at the same time put them in relation.

INVITATION: Dear Reader,...

There are different ways of reading a book: reading for an argument, which means focusing on all the details and examples, reading for a particular quote, reading with the purpose of finding inspiration… Exploration is usually conducted in a superficial way, jumping across sections and sticking with whatever catches our interest, diving in deep and resurfacing above sea level again. Exploration comes along with the connotation of incompleteness. However, the idea of incompleteness only works when opposed to the idea of completeness, and the assemblage does not claim to be complete. Of course, you can read the entire assemblage provided here, but I would not recommend it. It is repetitive at times and always incomplete. An assemblage always remains incomplete, and thus, it allows for something to emerge within it.

The ideas which emerged through my engagement with the extracts in the assemblage are presented in the summaries in chapter four, i.e. *la chance* as prerequisites, sprouts, outcomes as well as the emergence and the summaries in chapter five, i.e. the practice of opening up *la chance* as preparation, identification, transformation as well as the game of *la chance*. You might see other things emerge, you most likely will, you might also see redundancies or feel like I missed important aspects and you might want to argue with me or add something, and that is exactly what the explorative reading experience is supposed to be.

SO,

You can read the following chapters in a linear way (layer one in its entirety, thus, skipping layer two and the other way around) and read about my journey of discovering *la chance* in the documentation of my research process. I went on this journey twice so far: the first time looking at *la chance* as a members' phenomenon, wearing an ethnomethodologist's glasses (see layer 1), and the second time looking for conceptual clues on *la chance* (see layer 2).

You can also read it in a fragmented way to explore and experience both la *chance* and *la chance* on your own: read a bit and stop, continue reading a few pages later, jumping back and forth. Do it. Allow for *la chance* to emerge. Confusion is part of the process. Enjoy the ride!

Imagine this part of the book like a road trip on which you can follow my traces or decide on your own where you want to stop and if you want to stop at

all. There might be traffic jams, you might want to roll down the window, listen to the radio and be reminded of the past, be present in the moment or fabulate about the future. Trust that you will recognize your destination when you get there. Until then, just keep moving. A road trip is about the journey.

So, if you have a hard copy of this book, please do not be shy to make effective use of its haptics and thumb through the pages, skim it, skip some pages, stick with some thoughts and let go of others.

If you have a digital version of the book, use it like an instagram feed: scroll. Trust that there will be thumb nails catching your attention and you might want to think about leaving a comment in the section below and it's alright if other posts fail to grasp your attention. Just keep scrolling.

Now, if...

... 1 you chose the linear option, please just keep reading. But if you chose the fragmented one, jump straight to chapter four. The is a map on the next page, if you like one.

...2 you would like to know more about the assemblage style before diving into it, please finish reading this chapter first.

[MAP]

If you are looking to explore *la chance* for yourself,

please explore the accounts on *la chance* in the assemblage by skipping, imagining, interpreting, skimming, comparing, stopping, reading closely... read however you like and allow for *la chance* to emerge.

If you are looking for a (1) structured assemblage of (2) graduates' accounts on *la chance* as well as the (3) findings and the (4) argumentative tracings I derived from them,

please follow my directions by reading along through sections (1) to (4):

(1) the major sections,

> e.g. "*La chance* is a prerequisite".

(2) the accounts,

> e.g. the code in layer one "L1: predicate\prerequisite\companion" plus the following clue in layer two "L2: *La chance* is having what you want".

(3) the findings from that,

> e.g. "PREREQUISITES"

(4) my tracings to layer one (L1) and layer 2 (L2),

> e.g. "Tracing L1: prerequisites, sprouts, outcomes" and "Tracing L2: clues on *la chance*".

What is *la chance*?

The Discovery: *La chance.*

During my second field trip in 2014, I had a conversation with my friend Sekou. It was dark outside already, and we sat in front of the house, drinking tea and watching the busy but calm street scenery in front of us. We talked about *la chance*. I vividly remember this encounter and especially him saying: *"God provides la chance, but you can open up la chance yourself as well. Right?!"* I was hooked. All of a sudden, I knew *this* was what I was looking for and what I had been looking at all along: *la chance*. The next day, I went through my previously transcribed and coded interview data from 2013 with MAXQDA. I did a quick in-vivo coding (189), in which *la chance* was mentioned 164 times. *La chance* appeared in graduates' accounts of the past, the present, and the future. It was referred to as both cause and effect of either a state in time or a transition of times. Approaching the idea of *la chance* analytically in the interviews, I looked at the various contexts in which informants mentioned *la chance*, i.e. in three different contexts: first, in fixed expressions such as "bonne chance" – "good luck" or "tenter *la chance*" "challenge one's luck." The second context centers on the description of *la chance*, either abstract "avoir l'opportunité de faire qc" – "to have the opportunity of doing something" or concrete "travailler dans les ONGs" – "work for an NGO" or "faire un stage" – "do an internship". Generally, *la chance* refers to *doing something*, whether professional (create, manage, realize) or non-professional (live, love, play), and it is also *to have* (diploma, opportunity, employment) or *to be something* (chosen, lucky, accepted). The third context in which *la chance* is mentioned problematizes how it can be accessed, which is either actively "se battre" – "fight," "prendre ta vie en main" – "take control of life" or passive "Dieu donne *la chance*" – "God provides *la chance*."

The Challenge: Access.

Though *la chance* emerged from the interviews, I could not observe it. The German anthropologist Gerd Spittler, for instance, dealt with an opposite challenge researching the Tuareg in Northern Mali. Asking them questions about their everyday activities did not reveal much information. The Tuareg execute their work on an everyday basis; it is familiar to the extent that it becomes hard for them to describe – Polanyi calls that tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1973 in Spittler,

2001). Spittler overcame that problem by accompanying his informants and asking them questions with reference to what he had observed in the first place. He calls this combination of observation and naturally occurring conversation "deep participation" (ibid. 6). Graduates' knowledge about the phenomenon of *la chance* is tacit knowledge as well, yet the challenge is different. Whereas Spittler dealt with the challenge of researching an everyday activity that was difficult to grasp by talk alone, but approachable by observation, my challenge is to research a phenomenon which is difficult to observe in action, but appeared frequently in how graduates talk about their everyday life and imagined futures. So, I did the opposite of what Spittler did and started asking specifically for *la chance*: What is *la chance*? What is *la chance* to you? Are there moments in your life in which you encountered *la chance*?

The Approach: Ethnomethodology.

> "God provides *la chance*, but you can open up *la chance* yourself as well". Drawing from this quote, you notice that I could have based my work on concepts around religion, the idea of youthful agency, or on the ambiguity of the concept of *la chance*. And this certainly is how *la chance* presents itself to me at first sight. To graduates I talked to though, *la chance* is a social fact and, therefore, "known in common without saying" (Garfinkel et al. 1988, 146 in Pollner 2007, 125).

Ethnomethodology encourages researchers to investigate what members take for granted as "unalterably 'factual', that is, what they unthinkingly, naturally, unreflectively see/experience as part of the normal order of things" (Pollner 2007, 125). One central point of ethnomethodological research reveals how the taken-for-granted is produced by members. *La chance* was familiar to the graduates with whom I talked, but it seemed strange to me after a first inspection. So, I took my curiosity about *la chance* as a point of departure and selected related data "to see what can be discovered in and from them" (Hester 1997, 1). The analytical tool I applied to my data is Membership Categorization, which originates in ethnomethodological thinking.

The assumption.

In order to explore the phenomenon of *la chance* in graduates' accounts, I accepted 'An Invitation to Ethnomethodology' (Francis 2004) and analyzed

their talk conducting Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA). MCA "is concerned with the organization of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk" (Francis 2004, 21). Graduates are members. And yes, "graduate" is a categorization I made by selecting them as part of my research sample. In conversation with me, graduates (or members) share ideas about themselves in context, about their past, their present and their future. In doing so, they establish relationships between the categories they use and thereby reveal their knowledge and understanding of the world. I analyze this knowledge with a particular focus on the phenomenon of *la chance*.

> One of the core ideas is that "social facts are treated as accomplishments" (Have 2004), which are produced by the members of a social setting. Ethno-methodology aims at examining the constitution of these accomplishments, not at their explanation (Francis 2004, 207). Considering individuals "as members" of a society producing social facts serves ethnomethodology's focus on practical accomplishments (Have 2004, 20). Members are "conceived as practical actors who are themselves (1) practical analysts of, and inquirers into, the world, (2) using whatever materials there are to hand to get done the tasks and business they are engaged in" (Hester 1997, 1f.).

Let me explain:
The Tool: membership categorization analysis (MCA).

MCA is about the identification of membership categorization devices, which are a collection of membership categories and their rules of application. Here is a popular example: "The baby cries. The mommy picks it up." The 'baby' and the 'mommy' are so-called categories. Now, there are rules of application such as category-bound activities, which refer to activities connected with a category (e.g. 'crying' as a category-bound activity of the 'baby' or 'picking up' for the 'mommy') (Stokoe 2012, 281). In other words, category-bound activities give information about what a certain category ('baby', 'mommy') does. Another rule of application pertinent to this case is category-tied predicates, which refer to characteristics connected with a category (e.g. 'demanding' as a category tied predicate of the 'baby' or 'caring' for the 'mommy').

Baby – mommy. → Graduate – la chance.

In our case, "graduate" can either be a collective category (a device) or an individual category depending on the way it is applied. For example, graduate is a device in case it subsumes the categories "sociology graduate," "physics graduate," "graduate from 2013, 2012 or 2015" and "female or male graduate," but it might as well be a category of "youth" or "society." In my analysis, I operationalize "the graduate" as a category because this enables me to explore the relationship to *la chance*. What does that mean? Again, "the baby cried; the mommy picked it up." There is nothing strange about this phrase, right? Vice versa though, it becomes irritating: "The mommy cried. The baby picked her up." This simple twist of words makes the familiar strange and thereby reveals what we take for granted: the mommy picks up the baby and not vice versa. However, when it comes to the phenomenon of *la chance*, both versions are accurate: "*La chance* called. The graduate picked it up." (In other words, *la chance* appeared and the graduate took it.) And vice versa: "The graduate cried. *La chance* picked her/him up." (The graduate was searching and *la chance* appeared.) At first, the relation between *la chance* and the graduate presents itself as ambiguous. "La chance" and "graduate" constitute what MCA calls a standardized relational pair, but it is not a unique pair: "la chance" is not constituted by "graduate," and "graduate" does not constitute "la chance." *La chance* exists without the graduate, and the graduate still exists without *la chance*. However, the relationship between the two is crucial because "la chance" defines "graduate" and "graduate" identifies "la chance." Membership categorization analysis has been a useful tool for me to disentangle the nature of *la chance*, first by itemizing informants' common-sense meanings of *la chance* and second, by systematizing different types of *la chance*. Rather than members' descriptions of persons (e.g. "baby," "mommy"), I was interested in their descriptions of a phenomenon, specifically, university graduates' descriptions of *la chance*.

To sum up,

ethnomethodology promotes the investigation of members' phenomena and their production. *La chance* is a relevant phenomenon to university graduates – it is a members' phenomenon. I will start my analysis in the first layer by presenting the accounts, which I will then contextualize.

"MCA focuses on 'members' methodical practices in describing *the world*, and displaying their understanding of *the world* and of the *commonsense* routine workings of *society*' (Fitzgerald et al. 2009, 47; emphasis added)" (Stokoe 2012, 278). In other words, instead of analyst categories, e.g. luck, chance, fate, MCA offers the opportunity to take members' categories (Stokoe 2012, 278) seriously, i.e. graduates' categories. Being interested in graduates' categorizations of *la chance*, I coded for devices of *la chance* as used by graduates.

What is la chance? Category-tied predicates (chapter 4: Emergence)

AND

What does la chance do? Category-bound activities (chapter 5: Encounter)

I focus on two aspects of these devices: category-tied predicates, which represent characteristics of the category coded, and category-bound activities, which represent practices attached to the category. In chapter four, "Emergence", I present the result of my coding for category-tied predicates of *la chance*, which helped me approach the question of what *la chance* is. In that same manner, in chapter five, "Encounter", I introduce my coding for category-bound activities of *la chance*, which represent graduates' practices of approaching *la chance*.

In the next section, I examine the knowledge on which the accounts are based in order to ultimately elaborate a systematics of the phenomenon *la chance*.

What is *la chance* – yet, again?

Having revisited my previous research, another puzzle emerges: how come la chance is so much more, yet again?

Vignette: A note to myself Why didn't I see this before?

> So, I started looking for clues, I found plenty and most of them seemed new to me. I started analyzing graduates' accounts on *la chance* again. First, I thought this would help refresh my sense of the details of *la chance*. (...) Now, I am in the process of going through the individual accounts again and I realize that I am still surprised by some of them. I am still able to find something new in them. Why didn't I see this before? (Note, May 2020)

This reflective jotting-down impacts the following chapters in two ways:

1. Naturally, you, the reader, might not agree with what I am saying. I do not shy away from saying what I think of it, of my own interpretation of it, but I allow the reader to do just the same thing, to disagree with me, and more importantly, access *la chance* in her or his own way and in doing so contributing to the concept of *la chance*. It is not a fixed concept, neither to the graduates, nor to me as a researcher, nor to you – the readers.

So, because graduates' accounts are more than my interpretation, I included their accounts.

2. That elusiveness is what *la chance* does. And that is what concepts do. It is precisely why this experience and the problematization of it is so valuable to conceptual work in African Studies.

So, because the result of my analysis changes depending on the way I look at it, I included my account of their accounts.

Now, I put these two layers together.

So, whereas in layer one, I focus on *la chance* as an empirical phenomenon situated in graduates' contexts in Bamako in order to capture a systematization of *la chance*, in layer two, I focus on the content level only, this time disembedded from the empirical context in order to extract conceptual clues, which I later relate back to the empirical level.

The idea of an assemblage helps me do that.

At the end of the chapters four and five, there are tracings which summarize my findings and abstract from them. I use the word tracing because I understand that the map allows for more connections in addition to the ones I see. And it is on you, the reader, to add to the assemblage.

In an assemblage.

What we see: A perceived idea of *la chance*.

We do seem to have a very clear idea of what *la chance* is from the very beginning. Hearing *la chance* we think of chance, luck, opportunity, for instance. If we hear about *la chance* in the Malian context, we associate it with Muslim religion, humbleness, an explanation. In that sense, *la chance* is very much what Flaubert refers to as a "received idea", which is an "idea so well understood, it no longer bears thinking about it in a critical way" (Buchanan, 3). Doing research on graduates in Mali challenged my reception of *la chance*, which is why I prefer to stick with the emic term "la chance" in order to allow for the concept to reveal its own meanings throughout the process of analysis. So, rather than finding a different word for *la chance* or altering its translation, I decided to problematize l*a chance* and in doing so open up the received idea of *la chance* for complication (Buchanan, 18).

In the following part of the book, we deal exclusively with graduates' narrative accounts of *la chance*, in which they describe *la chance*. Following ethnomethodology, we account for these descriptions as a practice, as something members do. Therefore, *la chance* is not simply out there, on the contrary, *la chance* is done by graduates, i.e. in their narrative accounts. So, we get to listen and explore their descriptions, rather than our own assump-

tions. As we try to grasp the phenomenon of *la chance*, we have to acknowledge that we cannot see it if we have not already seen it.

What an assemblage allows me to do: from a perceived idea to a systematics of the unknown.

Content and Form.

An assemblage does not work in a mechanical fashion; an assemblage works as a piece of art. It works by creating an association, a new kind of relation (Buchanan 21). Therefore, the question guiding Deleuze and Guattari's work on the assemblage is not "how does it work?" (that is what Delanda is trying to grasp with his assemblage theory though), but "why is it happening?" (Buchanan 12). Dealing with *la chance*, I approach both questions: How does *la chance* work? And why is it happening?

Logic: open.

An assemblage has a general logic, but it is an open system (Buchanan 15). So, the concept of an assemblage helps me to grasp the general logic of *la chance*, but also to keep it open. Specifically, assemblage relates to the book with regards to form, content and connection: First off, assemblage accounts for the way in which the chapters in this second part of the book are organized as well as how I present and describe the data I use. This assemblage shape further informs the assemblage content, i.e layer one, the systematization of *la chance* and layer two, the destabilization of layer one. Both layers ultimately allow for new connections and relations between the layers to emerge.

Form: An assemblage allows for the possibility to enter it at any point.

The assemblage shape and form of the following chapters helps me keep these two layers separate and put them in relation. It helps getting rid of the idea of providing a linear text within which one coding transitions smoothly into another. This also actively engages the reader in the experience of exploration. Of course, I provide my interpretation and my analysis with the codings, but at the same time I offer the possibility for you to explore on your own. Using the coding schemes and the clues for orientation, you will be able to move around

in the book, not reading it in a linear fashion, but depending on what you would like to read about. Really exploring things. Jumping around, moving through parts of the book at your own pace. For orientation, I provide a map.

Avoiding presuppositions and unsettling stabilities.

Developed by Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage remains an incomplete project. However, it has principles and one of them is the elimination of presuppositions, which means "to not know what everybody knows" and "to not recognize what everybody is supposed to recognize" (Buchanan).

In other words, an assemblage as an epistemological tool. It offers a way of looking at the world by avoiding presuppositions and, therefore, seeing the world differently.

I use the assemblage as "a mode of discovery" (Aneesh 2017, 129), a method which allows me to focus on a phenomenon hardly visible and seemingly ambiguous. It further is a reminder to keep questioning not only my own presuppositions prior to doing research, but also the very findings of my research. In that sense it is a reminder to actively destabilize what is already established (ibid.).

Systematization:
Grasping emergence within relations.

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's work, Delanda establishes the assemblage as a system for researchers to be used as a theory and method to account for empirical realities. According to him, an assemblage is a whole constituted by parts building relations, and within these relations something new emerges. That emergence is immanent to the parts, but only actualized in relation, which is why assemblages are decomposable and irreducible. Therefore, an assemblage can only be understood as a whole, including all its parts and relations.

Here is an example: A warrior is an assemblage (Delanda). A warrior is more than a woman plus a horse plus a weapon. The warrior emerges in the relationship between the components interacting with each other. If there is no interaction between the parts, we are dealing with a collection. The components have the capacity to build a warrior. Looking at a warrior as an assemblage, we see that the properties of the whole are irreducible to the properties of its parts. In other words, assemblages build connections within

which properties emerge. An emergent property comes into existence when parts interact and in doing so exercise their capacities. Something novel emerges only in relation, but inherent to the part. In other words, for these properties to emerge, the parts need to interact. Assemblages are decomposable, but they are not reducible. In assemblages, the parts' capacities are defined by their interaction with each other. Capacity is important here. A capacity is not a property. A capacity is actualized in relation.

Just like the warrior emerging within an assemblage of a woman, a horse and a weapon, *la chance* emerges in assemblages of heterogeneous units. *La chance* emerges in an assemblage and *la chance* is the assemblage. At least that is how we look at *la chance* here in this book. So, let me be very clear: People themselves do not become *la chance* like a woman can become a warrior in interaction with a weapon and a horse, but *la chance* comes into being within that assemblage. Put differently, *la chance* is the warrior itself. *La chance*, just like the warrior is decomposable, yet, not reducible to its parts.

Phases.

The nature of an assemblage varies between fixed and fluid, between closed and open according to Manuel Delanda (2006, 253). Depending on the parameters, the assemblage changes in its phases which emerge between sharp distinctions at the edges. These phases account for types immanent to the assemblage. For instance, water emerges as a type between the sharp edges of gas and ice. Water is immanent to the assemblage of H2O, just like gas and ice. The point here is not to carve out binaries and boundaries, but to work with them. Just like Deleuze and Guattari talk about trees and rhizomes, the tree has the capacity to become a rhizome and vice versa. One is immanent in the other.

I draw inspiration from these phases in the sense that I present a systematics of *la chance* that shows how *la chance* emerges in different phases (prerequisites, sprouts and outcomes).

Immanence.

Contrary to Delanda, Buchanan argues that phenomena in assemblages do not change incrementally, i.e. in phases, but they emerge all at the same time (Buchanan 2021, 18). Being more than the sum of its parts, an assem-

blage itself is about emergence. The stages are not progressing, but emerging. Similarly, *la chance* is not developing in stages, but rather in accordance with properties already immanent to its parts. *La chance* emerges in relations immanent (yet, not necessarily actualized) to the parts that constitute the world around us (yet, not in a linear fashion). In other words, even though there are multiple types of *la chance*, one type does not necessarily lead to another. In their potential, all phases exist simultaneously.

Destabilization:
Emergence of new kinds of relations.

For instance, prerequisites, sprouts and outcomes, or — to use Delanda's term — the phases of *la chance*, are one tracing I find in the assemblage. This layer is an offer I am able to make based on my analysis and interpretation, but I leave it to the reader to make sense of it in a different way. And in fact, I did the same, as you can see in layer two, with a second attempt to approach *la chance* via an explorative content analysis directed towards clues that speak to me rather than members' categories. This second layer is not me dismissing what I first did in layer one, rather I destabilize and rework the initial result of my analysis. Both layers are useful in their own terms, yet, together they inform each other and again allow for new relations to be made and new phenomena to emerge.