

## 2 Graduates | Situating *La Chance* in Graduates' Everyday Lives.

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### [We are here]

This chapter focuses on the graduates themselves. The first part portrays their everyday lives while the second part offers insight into their experiences and questions. I start off with vignettes (a soccer game and a wedding) connecting the two respective protagonists (Madou and Amadou, Simone and Safiatou), followed by an introduction of each university graduate's short biography and a vignette accounting for an everyday situation. The second part presents situations which raise questions for these graduates. The sections are arranged according to questions highlighting aspects of their professional and family lives, as well as their temporal dimension, i.e. present and future. The key questions here are: What are our graduates' questions? What do they know they do not know?

We will see that present-related questions refer to unknowns concerning dependencies and transitions into new situations, whereas future-related questions refer to unknowns concerning details about present knowledge and the consequences of present decision-making.

Investigating situations which raise questions is an entry point to what graduates know and what they do not know. The focus on everyday situations in individuals' lives allows me to relate the known and the unknown and in doing so elaborate challenges of everyday life. We will see that the unknown is not the counterpart of the known, but much more a part of it.

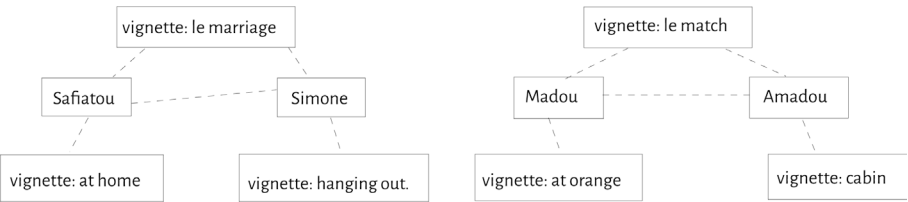
Throughout the entire chapter, *la chance* is absent and, yet, its purpose is to situate *la chance* in graduates' everyday lives.

PEOPLE

In this first part of the chapter, I will present four graduates. I start off with the vignette “the wedding”, which presents and connects Safi and Simone. Safi getting married and Simone facilitating for her. I will then introduce both of them properly by giving some background information on their family and their education. I end this part with a vignette that describes each of them individually in an everyday situation in the now. Safi at home with her kid right after work and before preparing dinner, and Simone in her car on an errand for purchasing a business dress.

I continue with a vignette of a soccer match which connects Madou and Amadou. Madou is playing on the field having fun and Amadou is on the sidelines analyzing the game. They are cousins and live in the same household in Bamako. Here too, I will introduce them properly by providing some details about their family and educational backgrounds, before closing with vignettes of Madou and Amadou in everyday situations at their workplace.

[MAP]



VIGNETTE: the wedding.

It’s a Saturday in 2014 when Safi and Abdoul get married. Around 2 pm, I meet the girls in ACI2000 at an American style beauty parlor. Safi is already wearing her white wedding dress, her hair is done and she is waiting to have her make- up applied. Simone, her best friend, is running around the parlor, answering and making phone calls with both her two phones and Safi’s two phones. There is another friend of Safi’s from Mauritania and an older lady who is observing the scene with a serious air.

I would find out later that this is the woman who is going to introduce Safi to the secrets of love and marriage. “There is TV and internet, so it’s not like we have no idea, but, you know, this is our tradition”, Safi jokes some days

after the wedding. Right now, Safi does not have time for anything. However, she's not busy, but calm and seems to be in her own world and just lets things happen. All of a sudden, she realizes she forgot to buy a white veil. Her facial expression changes from relaxed to eyes opened wide and eye brows up high. Simone takes care of this: one phone call and thirty minutes later a guy on a moto arrives carrying a white plastic bag with three different veils inside. Safi chooses the most transparent one, because obviously she is not getting her hair styled for no one to see it, she says. Her face is now covered in a mask of whitening make-up. Her eyes are silver; her lip gloss is shiny. Her dress is white and made out of heavy high-quality fabric. European style. The corset covers her pregnancy belly and pushes up her breasts. She's wearing a gigantic silver bracelet with about fifty white pearls attached to it. She's decently accessorized with a white brooch attached to her hair, white pearl studs and a silver bracelet around her wrist.

She's standing there and everything around her is fast and busy; we pause for a second to look at her. "Ma chérie, il faut pas pleurer dehh!" – "Honey, you're not going to cry, huh!" Simone is joking with a raised index finger and a serious face. Safi's eyes fill with tears. "Tu es maquillée!" – "You've got make up on!", Simone exhales and gives her a long hug. "Ce sont les emotions!" – "It's emotions!", Simone later explains to me.

It's getting even noisier now: Abdoul arrives. He looks like a great marabout in his gigantic white Boubou and his long white cylinder hat. We take some pictures; he's laughing and teasing as usual. Everyone is busy dressing up, so it's just the two of us going outside and looking at the car he parked at the back of the parlor to benefit from the shade. It is a white and shiny 2001 SUV Mercedes-Benz from 2001. There are some colorful, glittery flowers in blue, red and pink attached to it. "It's got air-conditioning, so we won't be sweaty by the time we arrive at the mayor's office", Abdoul tells me. But first, they are off for a photo session in front of a small hotel in ACI2000. The couple poses in front of green trees and bushes. First some couple shots, then one with mom and grandma and the other grandma and auntie and all of them together and friends. Quick quick. We don't even waste ten minutes at that spot. Safi and Abdoul climb back into their car.

Arriving at her family's house "la maison de la grande famille" in Missira, Safi sits next to her mom and grandma; they're preciously embedded in the

female wedding society and balloons and artificial flowers. It's about 16h45 when Abdoul arrives to pick up his very-soon-to-be wife. The house is about 500 meters away from the mayor's office, so the whole crowd heads off on foot. On the street, of course. No one minds the traffic; the traffic doesn't mind us. No one seems to be in a hurry and no one seems to care. "Le dimanche à Bamako, c'est le jour de mariage" – "Sunday in Bamako is wedding day". There are weddings all over the city. Men sit outside under a plastic tent on blue metal chairs. They all wear bazin boubous of various qualities in discreet colors. The women, in colorful bazin dresses and huge fulas on their heads, sit in the house's courtyard on their blue metal chairs. In front of the mayor's office, there is a huge crowd waiting. Some of them belong to Safi's and Abdoul's company, but half of them is waiting for another couple to appear. Safi and her future husband go in. I stay outside and talk to a close friend of Safi's, a journalist. He's proud of her and that she is doing everything right.

As they emerge from the mayor's office about thirty minutes later, they are holding hands. Everyone wants to take a picture with the newlyweds now. The guys tap Abdoul's back and he doesn't even know from whom he is receiving all those congratulations. Beads of perspiration cover his forehead. Safi's face looks tired, but she's smiling. (Field notes, August 2013.)

## SAFIATOU

Safiatou (born 1989) is *bamakoise* – born and raised in Bamako. Her father is a businessman and her mother travels all over the world for an international network-marketing company. She has two older brothers; one is working at the American embassy, the other one is a loafer, she says, and is employed at the ministry of environment in Bamako. Her younger brother is still in school. In her family, Safiatou is the first one with a university degree. In fact, she's got four. She adores writing, exploring new things, traveling, being on the move. "So do journalists", she says. Universities in Mali do not offer journalism as a subject of study, neither public nor private. That is why she decided to study English at the University of Bamako as well as Communication/Marketing at one of the best and most expensive private universities in the capital. Convinced of her talents, one of her teachers provided Safiatou a two-week internship at the state broadcasting station ORTM. After that time, she voluntarily kept working at the station, got in touch with journalists, benefited from their experience and started her own show on the radio about culture and fashion. After receiving two bachelor degrees in Mali, she

moved to Casablanca, Morocco another two masters studies in Communication/Multimedia and Journalism at the French Institute of Press. In her free time, she has been working for radio stations in Morocco and Mali. It was tough to meet the high demands of the Moroccan educational system and also to encounter daily racism in Casablanca, but nevertheless worth the effort, she reflects. Safiatou is convinced that she has gained a better education than the majority of her former fellow students; a better qualification for the Malian labor market and a head full of ideas for innovation.

In 2013, she marries Abdoul, a 25-year-old Malian, who just finished his studies in economics at a university in France. One of her former colleagues introduced them. Shortly after, they email and have Skype calls every day, before deciding to get married. “On était pressé!” – “We couldn’t wait,” she explains with a smile on her face. They marry religiously on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of Ramadan, which is said to provide special blessing. At the civil registry office, they register their marriage as monogamous, because they are convinced that their love is unique. Since she became responsible for her husband, his family, and herself, her life changed; no more clubbing with the girls.

#### VIGNETTE: At home.

I knock at the mint metal yard gate and shout the boy’s name “Abdrahmane!” He opens the door after quite some time and tells me that Safi is upstairs. She always is. I enter the house, everything is dark in the basement, I take the steps. I take off my flip-flops as I enter the living room. Safi and Abdoul are sitting on a white leather couch facing the TV. TM2 is on, but they do not look as if they have been watching consciously. They hang out snuggling, they look tired and blessed. First thing she does after welcoming me to their home is to lead me to their bedroom where the baby is sleeping. The room is about 25 square meters, no windows, a door that leads to the bathroom. The walls are painted pale blue. Two tubular fluorescent lamps that shed blue light onto the scene. There is a king-size double bed right next to the entrance door, there is a huge wardrobe in front, a bassinet fills the empty corner on the left. The small corridor to the bathroom is filled with shoes and DVDs. Bakary is bedded like a little treasure in the middle of the mattress on a couple of baby blankets; two tablets lie on the very edge of the bed. The aircon is turned off; only the fan provides a soft breeze. Bakary is breathing hastily and softly at the same time. Safi looks at him with a blessed

smile, slightly touches his head. The baby wakes up slowly while she looks on, delighted by every move he makes. Ten minutes later, she passes the baby on to her maid Aissetou so that we can talk. (Field notes, May 2014.)

## SIMONE

Simone was born in 1989 in Bamako in a “famille mixte” – her mother muslim, her father catholic. Her father is her advisor and role model. “Je le considère comme le meilleur des meilleurs. C’est mon idole [...] Il a réussi”, she says. Her dad was a successful entrepreneur and intellectual. When she was a kid, they watched the news on TV and talked about it afterwards. That is how she got to love journalism – her childhood dream and her passion.

She studied law at the University of Bamako. At the same time, she was enrolled at a private university, where she studied communication and journalism. During her studies in Bamako, she worked as an intern at ORTM and a communication agency. For her Masters, she left for Morocco, where she was finally able to study journalism. It is her father who paid for her studies in Mali and in Morocco and she is thankful for that. She and Safiatou basically shared all of their student life in and outside of Mali.

## VIGNETTE: Hanging out.

Her room is all tidied up, the walls are blue, the classic Mali blue, like a neon sky blue, and there are some traces of dust. Her tiny TV with a decoder is running. And so is the ventilator. Her wardrobe has a big mirror. There are pictures of her and her friends attached to it, most of them show her though. The interview lasts for a little more than an hour. After that, we go see her parents sitting on the terrace clicking peanuts. We get into her car. It’s a grey Toyota Starlett. She is the only girl I know in Mali that owns a car. Still, she is being laughed at because of it. No air condition and the doors only open from outside. So, if you want to get out you either have to ask someone to open the door for you or you have to roll down the window and unlock the door from outside on your own. She makes fun of her car as well, but if others do so she is there to defend her baby. She plays it cool and cruises through the dusty roads of her neighborhood. No music, but we sing; she says hi to people she knows and doesn’t know and complains about bad drivers for no reason. After Simone has had her afternoon lunch at her Senegalese friend Awa’s beauty parlor, we head to Halles de Bamako. Simone is looking for a dress she could wear at a fancy din-

ner her boss from the airport company invited her to. He is from Dubai. And the dinner is at some fancy place in ACI2000. She wants a dress that looks like business, but not overly respectable. Awa suggested a nice boutique. We park the car too far away from the store because Awa does not want to be associated with it. The staff shows us dresses. Simone tries everything on. It feels like we're in a luxury boutique because the girls comport themselves that way. They are the queens here. Heads held up high, they look down at the staff, their eyes barely open. One of the guys suggests a white dress and Awa doesn't even bother to look at it closely, waves it aside and says with a voice full of boredom: "Chose djeman-là, nous on est pas tellement dedans quoil!" One dress is nice, but Simone's belly looks too gigantic in it, she says, and she does not want to bother about that for the whole evening: "It's a dinner and I am sure going to eat!" We leave the place without buying anything. Awa has got a nice dress at home. We go look at that. Simone looks pretty in Awa's dress and there is a lot of space around her belly. They add earrings and Awa's glasses to her outfit, because that makes her look professional. "Now, back to the salon, chop chop! We need to get your hair straight!"

### VIGNETTE: *Le match*.

It's on a Tuesday that Mohammed tells me that there will be a game on Sunday. "Madou's team against ours. We do that sometimes. Just for fun. I'm organizing this. Come!" On game day, I arrive ten minutes early to find Mohammed and his teammates warming up. His team is AS Faladie, a third division team; they train and play together regularly. They are all dressed in their team shirts with black and pink stripes saying "Coupe Beidi Niang Premiere Edition". No one knows what that means. 13 is Mohammed's squad number. They are all wearing cleats and their socks are pulled up right below their knees.

Madou's team is called DjeLaFa United – like Manchester United and like Faladie, but with the syllables inverted. They used to wear second quality red and white Manchester home jerseys. You get them for 3000 Franc CFA all over Bamako. Back in the days, they were the best team in the area, but ever since they graduated and started working, they play irregularly and just for fun. Madou and his two best friends Djeli and Oumar arrive by the time the match was supposed to start. The three of them plus the funny, but unexperienced

goalie Soufi are the only ones of Madou's team present. They have a laugh as they pick up their phones and make some calls to friends who might want to join their team quickly. Within the next 15 minutes, four more people show up.

In the meantime, Mohammed wants me to take a picture of his team. They align like soccer teams do: five in the back, their arms on each other's shoulders and five in the front with slightly bent knees. Professional, strong-willed faces. I take a couple of pictures, before I start teasing them for being so serious. They laugh, I take some more pictures.

Now, Madou and Alpha roll the ball around a little, do some relaxed dribbling. Whenever a guy their age passes the field, they scream: "Ehh, toi-là, vient jouer!" They laugh and high five each other. It's been a while since AS Faladie is done warming up. Their faces are sweaty. Adama, who is said to be the most talented kid in the neighborhood, passes by and decides to join Madou's team. He's only 17, trains every day; and he's quick and cheeky. Finally, Djelafa United is complete and ready to roll. No debrief. They magically organize themselves as a team even though they have never played in this formation before. They are all wearing soccer jerseys: all of different colors, all of different teams. Madou's wearing Di Maria's white Real Madrid jersey with the squad number 22, white AC Milan pants, black Adidas soccer socks, Umbro cleats in black and white. He's going to score: "Je suis Christiano!!"

Amadou is standing at the sideline watching as the match starts. He used to be a passionate soccer player himself, but then he injured his knee. Now, he takes a lot of pride in coaching a local football team. Adama over there is one of the teams' best players and regularly approaches Amadou for advice concerning the game, but also girls and school. "I'm unemployed right now, I've got the time to do these kinds of things. I really want to help these kids." Playing soccer on Amadou's team is preconditioned by good grades in school. Soccer only is not enough. "Dans le foot, tout ça, c'est *la chance*. Mais il faut au moins avoir un diplôme" – "Everything depends on *la chance* in soccer. You have to have a degree, at the very least." Adama wants to become a successful player; that's his dream. Amadou is aware of the fact that despite all of Adama's talents he is probably not going to be a professional soccer player. However, there's no point in destroying the kid's dream, so Amadou told him



to combine soccer and education in order to be on the safe side. Every famous player had *la chance* one day, Amadou says. Playing soccer is not about individual fulfillment and passion, but about gaining huge amounts of money fast – “et c’est ça” – and that’s it. Samuel Eto und Didier Drogba never wanted the huge career, they just wanted to get paid, he says.

On the soccer field, there is no referee. Things regulate themselves. Conflicts suddenly appear and disappear. Fifty minutes later, a referee arrives. His inexperience makes everyone laugh. His judgement is respected though. The game is fast and dynamic. Everyone wants to win. Mohammed gets fouled quite often; he falls down three times and gets up quickly without complaining. Whenever the ball gets close to the goal, the few spectators would scream “But! But! But!” – “Goal! Goal! Goal!” In the end, the result is 1:1. Mohammed prepared a goal. Madou made one. Match tied. No celebration, little frustration. They both won, both lost. Adama playing for Madou’s team was unfair, Mohammed says. Madou exchanges “bien joué”s (“well played”) with his friends and teammates for one day. (Field notes, March 2014.)

## MADOU

Madou finished school with a BAC in Sciences Exactes in 2005 and then enrolled at the University of Bamako. He wanted to study informatics, because he wanted to become a researcher. “Informatics is the future”, he says. It was exceptional for a kid in Mali to know what he or she wants to become, so his parents were proud of him and his dream. In fact, he reflects, it was his family that made him appreciate education. Unfortunately for him, there is no such subject as informatics at the University of Bamako, but people told him to start with physics at the Faculty of Natural Sciences (FAST), because this is where some informatics courses will be offered, at least in the later semesters. This, ultimately, was not the case. So, his studies became frustrating and money became his primary motor to keep going: He failed some exams, passed some, received average grades until he finally made a bet with his dad: if he passed his exams with very good grades, Madou would get a gift. And there was also the scholarship: “That was kind of my motivation, you know.” In his third year, he studied until late at night to get the grades he wanted – for the money. And ironically, it was during that time that he learned to really like studying physics, which then made him want to become a physics researcher.

After his graduation in 2010, he did not want to continue studies in Mali, because this would have meant to study either at ENI in order to become an engineer or at ENSUP in order to become a professor, neither of which Madou aspired to. Plus, he did not want to restart. He wanted to continue with his studies and since there were no consecutive study programs offered in Mali during that time, he needed to go to another country – which he did. In 2011, Madou went to Bayreuth in Germany, where he approached a professor at the physics department who appreciated him. Plus, it's even less expensive to study in Bayreuth than at a private university in Mali. He received a PhD-scholarship. Madou does not think that his interest in science and research has anything to do with the fact that his father was a scientist, who did his PhD in Germany. The difference between the two of them, however, is significant: "I know he loved doing research; he loved publishing articles. To me, this is different... I always wanted to become a star! Invent something, you know." In the end though, he could not accept the scholarship due to Mali's 2012 coup d'état, which made it impossible for him to leave the country. In the meantime, he found himself a job at Orange, where they made him conduct another studies program in Marketing Management.

He says, he still dreams of becoming a researcher, but it's expensive to continue your studies. Marketing management is the profile Orange wants him to have. "It's a bonus" – A bonus that is going to take him three years. He tells me that he still wants to go to Germany to do his masters studies, but the priority for now is the scholarship that was given to him by Orange. It's important to have as many diplomas as possible, because "this way you can work a little everywhere".

#### VIGNETTE: At Orange.

On Saturday, Madou and I chill in his room. We talk about his father, business and love. His colleague calls him saying that she's about to pull into Orange. He hadn't planned on working today, but ultimately decides to take advantage of the ride. He's getting ready to leave in an instant. "Have fun!", I say. He seems confused and says that he's going to go and work and not to have fun. I tell him that I always felt like he seems to be enjoying his work and that is why I told him to have fun. He asks me to come along and I'm happy to. 15 minutes later we're on the road and Madou is driving. His colleague is taking the back seat, he calls her big sister. She doesn't enjoy Bamako traffic all the way to

ACI2000. Orange occupies an entire building, it looks all shiny and clean. The elevator on the inside isn't working, so we take the dusty stairs. There's security at the entrance. We're cleared. The office is spacious: 40 work stations, 5 people working. Of course, it's the weekend. They're working on things they didn't get done during the week. The airco is running at full blast, there's a water tank providing ice cold and hot water. Every worker has a desk and a PC with their name tag on it. Lots of boxes, lots of chairs, clean. The internet connection is incredibly fast. Everyone is talking either to each other or on the phone, sometimes both. I sit on a desk next to Madou and type up some notes. He's focused. Every once in a while, he gets up to fix himself a bowl of cereal, to chat, to listen to and sing along with music, to perform a few dance moves. He is constantly listening to music. He does not react to the others calling for him. Tunnel vision. Only interrupted by him singing a couple of deeply emotional lines. Always staying in his tunnel. After an hour, cleaning staff arrives. Everybody is talking, teasing each other, discussing work with each other. "This client right here has four million F CFA in his account", Madou says. His colleagues are astonished: "4 million!". Back to work. I actually do think we are having fun. On a weekday, Madou spends approximately ten hours a day here. He says, his boss keeps on distributing tasks to him.

## AMADOU

Amadou (1983) was born as the oldest of eight children in Segou. His father died when he was in his teenage years and his mother lives today in Bamako as a business woman. Amadou is proud of his education because he has not only been educated by school and Islam, but also by the street. He started his school career in Segou at a public school, which he perceives as an advantage because that is where he learned to take his education seriously. At the time of his first years in school, teachers used to love their profession, they did not teach in order to make a living as they do today. In fourth grade, he moved to Sèvre where he was at the hands of a strict teacher who employed violence to force his students to study. Amadou hated that, but has realized today that this is the pressure he needed in order to study effectively. He acknowledged that laziness hurts. After another move to Bamako, he put a lot of effort into his studies voluntarily and he even aspired to be better than the most intelligent girl in his new school. He obtained his baccalauréat with a focus on human sciences in Segou, which is the most difficult branch because it requires advanced knowledge in both languages and mathematics.

Amadou then decided to study international law at the University of Bamako because his idea was to work for an international company, or even for the United Nations one day. He therefore returned to Bamako, where he lives with his aunt. His studies at the University of Bamako are paid by the government, but he has been engaged in some kind of business or other ever since. As a child, when there was no electricity in Segou's villages, he sold petrol to Bozo fishermen. Amadou also fabricated tiny toy cars and made his friends do some advertisement by playing with them. "Almost every kid wanted to have my cars!" As a student, he received from his uncle the keys to a telephone cabin right in front of the house. People from the neighborhood made all their phone calls at Amadou's cabin. He gradually transformed the cabin into a business and meeting point for the neighborhood's youth. Every night, Amadou hosts tea sessions.

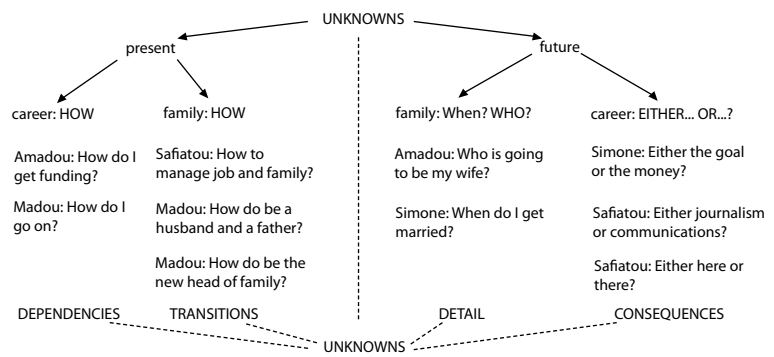
#### VIGNETTE: At the Cabin.

Tonight is some final match in the Spanish premier league: it's FC Barcelona against Real Madrid. The telephone cabin is closed. There are only a few reasons that justify the fact that he closed his business: Friday prayer, evening prayer during Ramadan and soccer. Not even the need to sleep is a justification to close it. He postpones his daily closing hours as much as possible: sometimes his eyes fall shut involuntarily. His friends would be talking, teasing, laughing around him, but he just wouldn't mind them. Amadou would then sit in his metal chair, with a straight neck and back, eyes closed. From a distance you wouldn't even be able to say that he's sleeping, only if you take a closer look at his face. His friends have stopped telling him to go to bed a long time ago, but I did it once. He was suddenly more than awake: "If a client wants to buy credit with me and would find the cabin closed, he'll probably never ever come back", he explains. "Tu as bien compris?" – "You get me?", that is how he punctuates extended monologues. I nod. He continues. He would take the risk, though, for important things: God and soccer. And yes, at the time of important prayers and important matches, most people are at a mosque or in front of a TV. (Field notes 2011.)

## 2    UNKNOWNNS

The following section is about questions in graduates' lives concerning the future or the present horizon. Both questions regarding the present and the future come with unknowns about career and family aspects. We see how these questions connect people in different and unexpected ways.

### [MAP]



### KNOWING THE UNKNOWN in the present.

The unknowns presented in this section are rooted in the present as graduates deal with questions about how to deal with a current situation related to their careers or family lives. Depending on the present situation, they know what they do not know.

#### Career unknown: DEPENDENCIES.

Overall, crucial questions concern the when and how of a situation. Since the question of when is answered here in the now of the present moment, the how is what is remaining, i.e. how to proceed from a road blocked either due to an ongoing lack of funding or an emerging political crisis.

### **Family unknown: TRANSITIONS.**

With regards to their emerging family life, both Safiatou and Madou are figuring out a situation yet unfamiliar to them. Here, their questions concern them being and becoming a part of their own family. Whereas Safi is concerned with managing both her career and family, Madou deals with questions about responsibility for the family he was born into, him being a husband and soon to be a father.

Both unknown dependencies and transitions are rooted in the present situation, which is either unknown due to external factors graduates are suddenly and temporarily (see Madou and the coup) or naturally (see Amadou and his clients) currently unable to account for. Both find themselves in situations in which they do not know: Facing everyday dependencies, Amadou knows what he knows and what he does not know and will not be able to know; Madou facing sudden change requiring knowledge on an everyday basis, which is new to him. Knowledge that will ultimately allow him to distinguish between what he knows he knows and knows he does not know.

Or due to recent voluntary decisions (getting married) or sudden events (death of the father) leading to new situations, which comes along with new questions and demands and, therefore, requires new knowledge and routines. Moreover, these situations challenge graduates to take on a new becoming: a business woman and wife to become a mother and a bachelor to become a husband.

### **CAREER: HOW?**

#### **Amadou: How do I get funding?**

In 2013, four years after his graduation, he has abandoned the telephone cabin, because it does not pay anymore. He accepted a fixed employment at his aunts' cafeteria, where he operates as her representative: he supervises the staff, purchases food, takes care of customers and negotiates with clients. Every day, he leaves the house at six in the morning and comes after dinner has been served. He goes jogging, because he has gained some weight and he is aware of the fact that women regard fat men as being lazy and not attractive. He goes to bed around one 'o clock in the morning. Before that, he

quickly takes a shower after coming home and leaves for his *grin*<sup>1</sup> behind his house, where he has his three rounds of tea, launches into lively discussions on almost every topic and takes some extensive naps. For more than a year now, this is his daily routine – not even one day of vacation. “Some people say that I can’t do this job every day without any rest. But their limits are not mine! I force myself to do that and I know that I’m strong.” Amadou has a lot of projects in his mind, but he feels like he has got to give something back to his aunt, where he has been living for years. It seems as if he has abandoned his former aim of becoming a diplomat in favor of becoming a famous and generous businessman. He has read everything about Steve Jobs and Bill Gates – once derided mavericks, now among the best-known and most respected people in the world. If you want to be a successful businessman, “*il faut voler la conscience des gens*” (“It’s all about stealing people’s conscience.”). It really does not matter whether you offer the best product or the best price, it is really all about convincing people. He feels that this is what he is learning in the cafeteria right now; that is his benefit. To him, the job is not waiting, but a sacrifice for his aunt and preparation for his own future career.

Africa can only advance if it recognizes its own realities and strengths, Amadou argues. His analysis debunks the false belief that everything associated with Europe is better; this is what paralyzes his generation. Africa’s main issue is that people have just adapted to European ideas, definitions and also to European dreams. “I studied law, but hardly anyone in Mali can afford a lawyer” (conversation with Amadou 2014). His cleaning business idea responds to an African problem, and it has got the capability to revolutionize the continent, he assures. His business idea is cleaning households, offices, government buildings and whole neighborhoods. The city is dirty and no one likes the dirt, he says. The dirt makes people uncomfortable and it causes disease. Things and places will always get dirty again, he says, and people will recognize the beauty and the advantages of cleanliness, which assures future demand for his business. Amadou already presented his project to government officials and businessmen. Both parties told him that he needs to finance his service in advance. The government pays well, but only after prolonged waiting periods, which easily destroys young enterprises. Amadou has the capacity and a promising idea, but no seed money.

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1 *grin*, le: (French) tea circle. For further information on the shared practice of drinking tea in West Africa, see (Ralph 2008) and (Masquelier 2013, 2019).

He knows that it is going to be tough again, but here is no respect for people who had an easy way to the top. Only fighters get respect, he says, and he will fight. He wants to taste success and he is convinced that it is going to taste better to him than to any son of a millionaire.

### **Madou: How do I go on?**

On 21 March 2012, military forces under the leadership of Captain Amadou Sanogo conducted a coup d'état in Mali (Whitehouse 2017). Amadou Toumani Toure, the reigning president, was ousted and left the country. Initially, the intention was to end the current regime's disrespect for the national military's needs, especially in the northern part of the country. Within a month after the coup, an interim government was put in place in Bamako. Meanwhile, benefiting from the absence of the Malian military in the North, separatist and jihadist groups took over and occupied Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. They increasingly gained territory towards the south of the country, which resulted in French military intervention (Operation Serval) in December that same year. For years,<sup>2</sup> UN-troops (MINUSMA) continue their peace-keeping mission in Mali. The event and its close aftermath constituted a sudden rupture for Malian society. Here is how it affected Madou's life.

So, he (physics professor at a university in Germany) sent me an invitation letter saying that he would supervise me during my Master's and later on for the PhD... But then there was the Coup d'état here in Mali. So, that kind of messed up things. (My translation, interview, 2013, with Madou, graduated in Physics.)

After his graduation in 2010, Madou did not want to continue studies in Mali. This would have meant studying either at ENI in order to become an engineer or at ENSUP in order to become a professor. Madou did not aspire for either, nor did he want to start anew. He wanted to continue with his studies, and since there were no consecutive study programs offered in Mali during that time, he needed to go to another country, which he did. In 2011, Madou spent his summer vacation at a friend's house in Germany. At the local university, he approached a professor at the physics department who appreciated his talents. Ultimately, he received a PhD scholarship which was supposed to

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2 For further information on the aftermath of the coup d'état see Moseley, 2017.



start in April 2012. In January though, the coup d'état took place and made it impossible for him to leave the country.

A little more than a year later, Madou had already passed all his exams at a private university and signed a contract at Orange in January, where he is now working as a financial analyst. He also started studying a business master he pays for himself. Orange is big in his life now. He shares the whole story with me: He started out at the company as an intern and later worked on his first limited contract in the archives, then in the back-office, then as assistant operation support. There was a new position for which he had the experience, but not the qualification, so he went for the master. This assured him a new promised contract. He is happy all round with his new job for which he worked hard and he is motivated. It was difficult, he says, but a nice experience. He likes working for Orange, because they give him responsibility, money and respect. *“C'est l'entreprise idéal pour les jeunes.”* – “It's the perfect company for young people.” Basically, because they prioritize experience and competence over age, he says. His father died six months ago, but with this job, he says, he is able to support his mother and family, and is going to be able to found and support a family in the near future.

He still wants to become a researcher. There is a “disponibilité” program at Orange. He will soon ask for that. So, it is still totally possible for him to go, leave the country in order to do research. He likes physics, if he did research and his Phd, this would really not be for the money. Sometimes, when he is working night shifts and there is not a lot of work, he would do research on his office computer. But right now, he cannot, because he is way too exhausted for that. “I just want to get distracted”, he says. It's been three years without vacation. But this is on him, he admits. He prefers to not go on vacation if he knows he is going to stay in Mali for his whole time off. Otherwise it's no real vacation, because people call him all the time.

How come he is so confident in his ability to accomplish all the things he would like to do? It is that easy: “On peut faire les deux.” – “You can do both.” He can both be employed at Orange and do his PhD research; he would only have to take a year off for his research, but with the guarantee to get his job back after that. And he finds solutions to make that possible.

Unknown: DEPENDENCIES.

**Dependence on external factors: sudden political change.**

To Madou, the coup d'état constituted a moment in which his “seemingly established future” (Johnson-Hanks 2002, 878) of becoming a researcher was suddenly blocked. Caused by a sudden rupture, Madou was forced to reorient and look for other perspectives he might not have thought of before. New questions arose; new knowledge was required. The coup came along with immediate consequences for Madou, which would not necessarily have to be a foregone conclusion. For his younger brother Mohamed, the situation was different. When the coup occurred, he was still a student. Due to the circumstances, the university was closed for a couple of weeks, and it was difficult to anticipate the political and social consequences of the coup. However, the coup did not immediately make him question his own situation as a student. In 2014, however, Mohamed, too, recognizes the impact of the coup:

“The crisis slowed down a lot of things. Maybe our former president would have put many young people into the administration, maybe he could have done that. The coup d'état... I mean, compared to other countries... it's not good, because it slowed down our economy and put the country behind. When you're behind, it's like standing still. It's been shocking, but now we're trying to forget about that little by little.”

Noticeably, Mohamed refers to the coup as something that has turned into a long-term, tangible crisis on a broad societal level. He does not explicitly relate this to his personal situation.

**Dependence on external factors: business.**

Amadou is an entrepreneur and knows that his everyday business is dependent on external factors. He knows what he knows and does not know. He does not know if there will be clients today or business partners and investments tomorrow. During his days as a telephone stall owner, he depended on the demand of his customers. He tried to balance that out by being on standby for as long as he could every day. In the end, the demand declined to a point that he could no longer justify his time spent there. Later, and by

virtue of his need to give back to his aunt, he is entirely dependent on her and her business's schedule. Though he knows that he will not do this forever, there is still no tangible alternative yet. While he does have a business idea, its success is dependent on business partners' liquidity or his family member's willingness to invest. Amadou is convinced he will succeed in business one day. However, today, his employment opportunities are dependent on external factors such as clients, bosses and business partners.

## FAMILY: HOW?

### Safi: How to manage job and family?

Every morning at eight, Abba gives her a ride to her workplace. At five, she takes a taxi back home and starts preparing dinner for her in-laws. On the weekends, she visits her mother and spends time with her friends and her husband. She lives with her husband at his parents' house now. "C'est le changement totale" – "Everything has changed". On her facebook page, she posts "*En train de vivre les plus beaux moments et importantes de ma vie... Yessss a cette transition Hamdoullah tellement fière de tout ça*" (Safiatou 2013). While she looks forward to becoming a mother, her pregnancy is exhausting. Nevertheless, she will not let that affect her professional duties. She works full time until the week before her first baby, a son, arrives.

"Marriage is one of the steps in a woman's life"<sup>3</sup> – just like giving birth to children and getting a job, Safiatou says. "This is every girl's dream in Mali," she once said. Safiatou is happy to be with a man she loves and with whom she shares the same values. She appreciates hanging out with him, doing business with him, and cooking dinner for him and his family. She is aware of her responsibilities at home, and she contributes to the family's well-being with both recipes from her mother and the salary from the communications agency. At the same time, new uncertainties arise out of the very fact of being married, such as acclimating to the role of being a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. In other words, while marriage puts an end to some uncertainties in life, new uncertainties are attached to it. The new situation raises new questions, which, consequently, demand new answers: how do I manage to be both a good copy writer and a good wife and a good daughter-

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3 Whitehouse summarizes and discusses current common Malian discourse on marriage (Whitehouse 2016).

in-law? Should I keep the job that needs me to commute two hours a day or should I look for another one that is closer to home?

### **Madou: how to be a husband and a father?**

Madou is a tall man. As always, he dresses up, but his style has changed from urban cool to business. Rather than baggy pants and t-shirts, he now wears suit pants and button-up shirts, and sometimes a sack coat. He is also comfortable in Boubou, on Fridays at least, and he still buys random soccer clothes, which he wears in his free time. Madou likes women, and he knows that women like men who work for large companies like he does. He emphasizes that he has become serious now, which means he does not play around with various partners and is committed to one relationship and is faithful to his future wife. Since he works on an unlimited contract, he is finally able to save money for his wedding, which is scheduled for next year. Also, there is a woman in his life, Sara. She is pretty, listens to his problems, gives advice, and is always interested. In 2015, he is engaged to a different woman; her name is Bintou. They are the same age and they studied physics together at the university. She is “pretty, slim and a good Muslim,” he says. Of course, he is going to provide for his little family, but “she’s going to help me, too.” Married life is going to be a new situation for Madou. He will be responsible for his own family and not only for himself and his mother’s household anymore. To him, responsibility in marriage means to provide and to be faithful. The financial aspect is not an issue, but being faithful causes uncertainty. He used to go out with several partners at a time; now, he is going to spend the rest of his life with just one. He fasts two days a week now, because that increases his wisdom and decreases his sexual appetite. Just as fast as Madou gets excited about things, he gets bored by them as well. He wants to have kids soon, because they help keep things exciting, he says.

He is engaged now, not to the woman we talked about last year. He feels ready to get married now: “*Maintenant, il y a beaucoup de responsabilités, j’ai grandi et j’ai un travail et je peux m’occuper d’une famille maintenant*”. Even though he loves and appreciates his future wife, he does not know what marriage is going to be like and what is going to happen. He would like to have kids fast, because kids mean change and it is by change that things stay exciting. Of course, he is going to provide for his future family, but his wife is going to work as well. “*Elle va m’aider, quoi.*” – “She is going to help me, you know.” Right now, the house gets a makeover in order to be nice for the newlyweds. He does that for his wife, not because he thinks it is necessary. He likes it the way it is.

### **Madou: how to be the new head of my family?**

In fall 2013, Madou experienced a sudden rupture with the death of their father. I regard this event as a context of uncertainty, which requires for him to figure out how to deal with this new situation.

You know, I've lost my father. So, as the first son, I am supposed to take over his position in the family here. [...] I have to support the family and make sure they are happy... just like my father would have done. That's it. (My translation, interview, 2014, with Madou, graduated in Physics.)

With his father's death, Madou's position in the family immediately changes. As the first son, Madou is supposed to be a role model for his brother and sisters, and now, he is the new head of the family. Previously, Madou had always contributed some money to the family's household voluntarily, but now it is his duty to do so. He is responsible for paying the electricity and doctor's bills; he also gives money to his younger sisters for gas and food. That hurts, he says jokingly. "I just have to improve managing my money... avoid wasting it." But there are a lot of things you cannot foresee. "Il y a beaucoup d'imprévues." Of course, you can save money for something, but then someone gets sick and the money is gone, he says. He has to manage his money even better and avoid wasting it. "Instead of taking advantage of my youth, I have to grow up now," he says. Saving money or dealing with money responsibly is associated with being grown up, whereas youth is associated with wasting money. If his father were not dead, he could do everything he wanted with the money he is earning. With his father dead, he takes over responsibility – not necessarily, because his family forces him to, but because he feels like doing it. Additionally, his employment enables him to do so. Madou sets the rules that enable him to present himself as a responsible person, he says. In this sense, a responsible person is someone that knows how to deal with money, or even better, how to evaluate between different expenses. He says, if there is a problem and he does not have money, "C'est grave" – "It's bad". In case of unexpected problems, he must be able to provide money. To prepare for this, Madou saves money he would usually spend on travel, go out at night, probably for dinner and dancing. In either case, while problems themselves cannot be avoided, the possibility that a problem may become "grave" can be avoided, by growing up and saving money. It is this kind of thinking and realizing the connection that made him become a more responsible person.

Unknown: TRANSITIONS.

### **Being a businesswoman and wife and becoming a mother.**

Safiatou loves her job, but she needs to find another agency, she says in 2015. Her workplace is an hour's drive away from home. This is precious time she could spend with her son, who has now begun to speak little by little. One of the words he uses most often is "Marietou," which is the name of the housemaid who carries him around all day, while Safiatou is at work. Safiatou knows that she has all the support she needs from her family in order to manage both her career and her home life, but the fact she only sees her son for half an hour in the morning and about an hour in the evening makes her sad. All in all, Safiatou realizes that it is no longer possible for her to simultaneously work her job and care for her baby to her satisfaction. It is a challenging situation, which requires new knowledge on how to arrange the new situation. In Safiatou's case, uncertainty is more a matter of decision-making and dealing with the consequences, of getting used to and developing new routines rather than a matter of not being able to predict consequences. Realizing that it is a true challenge to satisfy both her ambitions at work and at home is new to her, making her call a seemingly established future into question. It is a different situation with a kid – a situation that requires re-evaluation of priorities, new routines, new knowledge.

### **Being a bachelor and becoming husband and father.**

Madou, too, wonders about how to be a good husband and a father, which is a new situation. In contrast to Safiatou, that he keeps working at the telecommunications agency is not a question at all; in fact, it is his responsibility as the provider in the family.

### **Being a son and becoming the head of the family.**

Whereas the first two new and unfamiliar situations are result of the voluntary decisions the respective graduates took by themselves, the death of Madou's father constitutes a personal loss and rupture he certainly did not welcome. The death of his father opened up a new situation for Madou, which required new knowledge. Up until that moment, Madou did not expe-

rience the responsibilities of being a head of a family. Even though he knows very well what he is expected to do in general, his questions are answered as he becomes familiar with his new position.

### **KNOWING THE UNKNOWN in the future.**

The unknowns presented are pointing towards the future as graduates deal with questions about when particular events related to family lives or careers are going to take place. With regard to the future, graduates know what exactly they do not know about it.

#### **Family unknown: DETAIL.**

Graduates know they are going to get married. However, there are details such as time and partner, which are unknown. Yet, this does not only apply to marriage, but also to career questions. We saw that both women, for instance, know they are going to succeed in their careers, just not in which exact domain or based on which exact contract. They do not know when they will know about these details, but they do know that they will. They know about the fact itself, they do not know about the details of the parameters that make these facts come into existence.

#### **Career unknown: CONSEQUENCES.**

The difference between transitions in the present and consequences in the future is connected to the decision itself. Both unknown transitions (present) and unknown consequences (future) are connected to decisions. The difference is that the situation of an unknown transition in the present is characterized by the consequences of a decision already taken. So, whereas the decision itself is located in the past, the present outcome of the decision is constituted by a new situation. The situation of unknown consequences in the future relates to a decision under evaluation in the present. Therefore, the decision is located in the future, in which the currently unknown outcome of a decision will present itself.

## FAMILY: WHEN? WHO?

### Amadou: Who is going to be my wife?

We're sitting in front of the cabin. Issiaka, Madou, Amadou and me. Amadou is preparing tea for us. Issiaka starts teasing Amadou: "Look at him, he's just sitting there, waiting to get money." Two years ago, Amadou had finished studying and ever since he has been working two jobs, three months each. Issiaka says that Amadou has a girlfriend, but he refuses to marry her, because he can't afford to buy her anything. He grabs his shoulder, laughs. Amadou is obviously not interested in what Issiaka is saying. Since I've never seen Amadou with a girl and I know Issiaka's provocations, I don't engage in the discussion, but listen closely. Issiaka continues with his teasing. Ignoring him does not work, so I finally decide to react to it with an ambitious "Ah bon!" Amadou instantly responds. "Mais c'est vrai." – "But it's true." And continues repeating what Issiaka just said: "I don't have any money to pay neither for the wedding nor for a house or a car". (Field notes 2009)

On a Friday in March 2015, Amadou arrives from Segou. He's doing fine. He looks good – "en forme". He's set up his own business which serves as a kind of mediator for Orange Money. Not directly Orange Money though. It's Orange Money that pays his business, but not him. In fact, Orange Money needs his business in order to gain access to more rural areas like Segou. He calls it "ma boîte" – "his company". Tonton Hamidou, who lives in the United States as a manager, invested in Amadou's company. He came up with the idea. When he tells me about it, he speaks softly and quietly and does not look me in the eye. He's telling me the truth though. I know that it was Hamidou's idea. He believes in Amadou and his talents. He told me it hurts him to see Amadou's talents getting wasted in the cafeteria. Amadou later talks about how his business is advancing: he talks about how he manages millions of Francs CFA, transfers them from one account to another – easily. He stands in front of me like a professional boxer only minutes before a fight. His head up high, I can see where his chin beard ends. He feels good about it, obviously. I always felt like he brightened up his duty in the cafeteria and I'm happy he doesn't have to do that anymore. He came to Bamako only for the weekend, because he needs to take care of his future marriage. He doesn't do that because he wants it, but because his mother does, he says. She found him a future



wife. He doesn't love her yet, but she's educated and is working in journalism. The two of them met some time ago and now things are getting serious. He says, he can feel the pressure and he doesn't want to disappoint his mother. You can't ignore your mother's request, he explains, especially because he's getting paid big time now, so no one believes anymore he's unable to found a family in terms of finances. Anyway, he's going to do it. He adapts easily, he says, he's simple and if there is one thing he can do it's make things work. "Bon, c'est la famille maintenant, hein?", I comment. "C'est ça même la vie. Devenir indépendant et puis fonder une famille." – "That's what life is: you become independent, then you found a family", he responds with his serious thinker face eyebrows far apart from his eyes that are focusing me, "hein? T'as compris, non?". (Field notes, March 2015.)

Six years lie between these two vignettes. One might assume that this new context creates uncertainty, but it does not seem to do so. Amadou knows everything he needs to know for this marriage to work out: he earns enough money, his mother suggested the woman, and the woman is educated. Now, they just have to get along, which he knows they will, because, to him, getting along depends solely on his own mindset.

### Simone: When do I get married?

#### *C'est ton rêve!*

Simone's hair is tightly attached to her scalp; her bun explodes on top of her head. She wears make-up, just a little, so that no one sees that she's tired. I first met her in 2009, when I was doing an internship at national TV. She sat in the conference room focused on her writing, but participating in the joking that happened around her. She was the "wife" to a lot of men there.<sup>4</sup> "That's Simone, my wife! Isn't she pretty?", says a sports journalist, introducing her with his arm around her shoulder. She laughs about it and gets rid of his arm. With her back straight, her arm firmly against her chest, and her head up, she says: "C'est ton rêve, petit!" (Field notes, April 2009.)

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4 For studies on joking in relationships see, for instance Jones 2007.

As a single woman in her twenties, marriage is a topic in Simone's life as well. "2015 is going to be my year," she says. "I will get married and pregnant!" Simone became engaged to a Malian living in France when she was still a student. When her father got sick, she took care of him, which made her fiancé feel neglected. So, "je l'ai abandonné" – "I abandoned him", she says. For quite some time, she is in love with an older man. "C'est un papa cool pour moi" – "He's a cool daddy for me", she says and laughs. Yet, she breaks up with him, because he is simply too old. Religion is also an issue: He is Muslim and she is Christian, and he is married.

Simone is 25 years old and not yet married. She broke up with her boyfriend, whom she loved, because she knew they would never get married. Over the years, she learned that falling in love with a man does not necessarily lead to an engagement, nor does an engagement lead to marriage. "I'm getting older; I'm not in a hurry though," she says. She is confident that she will get married and have kids; it is the fact that she has not met her future husband yet and the fact that she is getting older that increases her feeling of urgency, but not of uncertainty: she will marry this year.<sup>5</sup> She knows she needs to find her future husband soon. She is not uncertain; there are no questions. And that is based on everything she knows about her circumstances and marriage in Mali.

### **Unknown: DETAIL.**

Future marriage is not questioned. Graduates know they are going to get married. Just that important details such as time and partner are unknown.

### **CAREER: EITHER... OR...?**

#### **Simone: The goal or the money?**

### **VIGNETTE: At work.**

Simone is working on her paper. It's about mobile phones, because today is the International Day of Mobile Phones. She has conducted interviews, which are all quite alike. She records her commentary, then we have to wait quite

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<sup>5</sup> She did get married in December 2015.

some time for a cutter to finish up her clip. Meanwhile, the place becomes noisy to a point where it becomes difficult to follow the conversation. “C’est pas un marché ici” – “This is not a market right here”, Simone shouts in French, not in Bambara. Everyone is quiet.

40 Minutes after my arrival, we are off looking for a quiet place in order to conduct the interview. We walk around the station and say hello to everyone. Today, Simone is wearing a dress with dices on it; they show the numbers one and six. The dress’s cut is in style, it is tight with puffed sleeves. She is carrying two Ray Ban – Originals from Morocco. We end up in Cheick’s office; he actually quits his office and hands his keys over to Simone. He is the news director of Mali’s national television. Here we are in his office. Simone puts her phone on silent mode, stretches her back and takes a deep breath: “Alright, I’m ready, let’s go!” [...]

Straight after the interview, we’re taking a taxi to a communications agency in Missira, where she’s been working for quite a while. So that’s what she does after work. TM2 is not about the money, but about the job, but still, she needs money to eat. She sometimes finds money “sur le terrain” when she is doing research in the city. Sometimes people, especially government institutions would give journalists some money for their efforts. The agency produces shows for TM2. They have expensive stuff and technological expertise, but no journalists around. Simone knocks at the front and the backdoor – the place looks closed and empty. She has to call someone on the phone before we can finally enter. There is an office with wooden walls inside a big room, no windows, no nothing. The walls are covered in blankets. Simone says hi to three people and sits down on a couch comfortably and checks Facebook. She’s tired, exhausted and has a headache, she told me before. After 20 minutes, she’s annoyed and says that she’s going to leave. Nothing has happened so far. The boss of the group now seems to get out of his chill mode, grabs a piece of paper, a pen and starts talking about what’s going to happen at “Le monde des enfants”, the new TV format. Simone suddenly puts her phone away. Focus! No more signs of tiredness in her face.

Her boss suggests having something like kids news in the middle of the show: Every week there should be a portrait of a good and interesting student... just like they’ve been doing it sometime else. Simone says, she saw that story the

other day and “this was not a portrait!” She’s talking with a strong and dominant voice. Everybody listens. She tells them what journalism is, how questions are asked, which images it needs and which topics are interesting. She makes them understand that they really got the facilities and all, but it’s her expertise they’ll need in order to succeed. Whenever the conversation stops, she gets back to her bored face asking “That’s it? May I leave now?” At 7 p.m., she says she’s got to leave now, because she’s obligated to watch the news tonight, otherwise people would give her a hard time at work tomorrow. She doesn’t leave to watch it, but she keeps repeating she relinquished. Around 9 p.m., Adama, one of the guys, gives her a ride home. Sitting in the car, Simone instantly falls asleep. Her boyfriend is going to come see her tonight, too. Maybe not. He’s still at the TV station. And she’s got to rest, she’s still having that headache and she has to be ready to perform tomorrow – as chef d’édition. (Field notes, February 2014.)

### Simone: What am I going to do?

In 2014, Simone is working as an intern at Mali’s new, second TV channel. She has been working there since 2009. She started off as an intern, accompanying journalists and realizing her first reports on the radio. She did her Masters in journalism and spent every semester break at the station. Today, everybody knows her at the station; she is allowed to use one of the directors’ offices for private purposes, as she did during our interview. She works on her own reports and supervises the evening news. She is one of the few people working for the new TV channel. However, she is still working there with the status of an intern: full time and for free. “Je suis jeune. Je peux faire ça” – “I’m young. I can do that,” she repeats. For nearly five years, she has been told that she would get a contract as a journalist. This promise has been changed from “one day, you’ll get a contract” to “once you have a degree” to “once we employ new staff” to “next time, you’ll get a contract.” It is always so close. In August 2014, she says the officials told her the station would contract new employees “on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2015.” Soon. “Reaching goals is more important than money,” she said, reflecting on her status as an intern with the goal to become a journalist.

Dans trois ans, je me vois sur Africa24 où France24. On ne fait que souhaiter le meilleur. (Rire) Donc, je souhaite le meilleur pour moi. Et c’est mon rêve d’aller présenter un jour où entendre ma voix sur France24 où correspondante de RFI au Mali. C’est un rêve. (Simone 2014)

In this situation, Simone was promised a contract, which she has not yet been given. Though she may get it in the future, here is what she knows for now: after five years and everything she has accomplished so far in journalism, it is supposed to be her turn. Her professional future depends on the station's decision. So, the discrepancy between what is being promised, along with her continuous engagement and being repeatedly disappointed, constitutes her uncertainty. Now, based on what she knows about that situation, Simone evaluates her options. For the time being, she decides to stay with the station as an intern without a promised contract.

By the end of 2014, Simone starts working mostly at night at the International Airport Bamako-Senou as an airline assistant. Her uncle called her attention to this job and since her father has gotten sick, she felt like she needed to support the family financially, so she decided to apply for the job and got it. She left TM2, because “c'était juste des promesses... pas de contrat”, she explains. Nevertheless, she has found an opportunity to continue with her journalist activities as she also works temporarily as chief editor at *sahelien.com*, a website that informs mostly on politics from the region. Its reporters are locals that have been trained by BBC, RFI and Reuters journalists.

**Safiatou: What is best?**

### **Journalism or communications?**

Back in Mali in 2013, Safiatou starts working as a copy writer at one of the world's largest marketing agencies. She receives this opportunity by using her networks – “j'ai joué sur mes relations”. Her contacts at national TV, where she had her first working experiences, provided her this job in marketing communication. Safiatou loves writing. To her, the beauty of journalism is not about information, but about words – as is the case with marketing. Plus, she argues, journalism is poorly paid and time consuming, which makes it impossible to do any other business along the way. She is better off with communications, which offers advantageous working conditions. She supervises the production of television ads for Malitel and Diago. She is building up experience for her own communications agency, which she plans to set up in a couple of years. She still admires journalists, but she understands that it's difficult to make money in that sector. She says that in

the end, the only difference between a copy writer and a journalist is fame. Safiatou does not want to become famous, but a successful businesswoman.

### **Here or there?**

Five months before the baby arrives, Safiatou and I meet again. At that time, the newlyweds are planning to move to the United States of America. Abba needs to get his Master's degree and their baby, once born in the States, will get the US as well as the Malian citizenship. That will facilitate traveling, studying and even living for their baby. They both prefer to stay in Mali, but since they will become parents soon, they cannot continue to think about themselves only and moving is just the most responsible way to go, she explains. They are both still young, but they have to think about their future, about a better life than this, she says. She is well aware of the fact that their chances to get the visa for the USA are low, but they won't pass up any opportunity. Her pregnancy is exhausting and she can hardly live with the fact that she cannot work with the same energy and enthusiasm as she did before. She does not want to be seen as a pregnant woman, but as a business woman, who is also expecting a baby.

### **Unknown: CONSEQUENCES.**

Safiatou and Simone are best friends. They received the same education in journalism, and though they face the same challenges in the same profession, they deal with them differently. While both women were committed to journalism, Simone sticks with journalism, Safiatou has decided to switch jobs. They knew at a young age they wanted to pursue this goal, which they did as they studied abroad, acquired four diplomas, and engaged in various internships. Realizing that the qualifications they had acquired and, more importantly, they had dedicated themselves to for years, are likely to not pay off, creates uncertainty – it “calls a seemingly established future into question” (Johnson-Hanks 2002, 878). It raises questions about evaluation and priorities. They both possess similar professional qualifications, but they evaluated their choices in accordance with their individual, differing priorities. Recognizing the difficulty of becoming a journalist in Mali, Simone continued moving forward, while Safiatou reoriented her course. To Simone, journalism was about delivering the news and the fame. She does not know when she will get her contract – which depends on her boss' decision (exter-

nal factor see unknown: DEPENDENCIES) – but she believes that she will get one. To Safiatou though, journalism was about writing and the excitement that comes with it. Ultimately, she knew that copy writing has the same traits plus a bigger salary, so she changed professional directions. In both cases questions are raised which are evaluated based on current experience and knowledge, followed by a decision: Simone sticks with her current employer and stays in her situation, which is highly dependent on other peoples' decisions – 'social contingencies' (Whyte 2015). Safiatou accepts another job, which creates a new uncertain situation requiring new knowledge.

### Summary.

To sum up, I chose to focus on individuals' biographies first, before I continued to present in detail the questions they are concerned with in their everyday lives in relation to knowledge. Based on graduates' everyday experiences, I extracted present and future unknowns. The unknowns rooted in the present indicate dependencies and transitions. There are everyday external dependencies, such as social contingencies, and dependencies, which suddenly become apparent. Whereas everyday dependencies are known to be unknown, sudden dependencies open up a new unknown, which requires new knowledge. Another unknown originates in transitions, which follow decisions or events and require an individual to become what is yet an unknown to them. Transitions raise new questions and require new knowledge. The unknowns rooted in the future draw from present knowns about the future, but contain unknown details, i.e. the exact time, person or condition) and there are also known unknowns concerning the overall future outcome of present decisions. Ultimately, these findings sketch out the intersection between the known and the unknown, which is the foundation for the phenomenon of *la chance*. Let me explain:

Graduates' everyday uncertainties vary in their relationship with knowledge: everyday uncertainties describe situations in which current knowledge is evaluated, part of that knowledge is the awareness of conditions which are impossible to know. Immediate uncertainties are triggered by ruptures or new situations, which require new knowledge. Situations with no uncertainty are defined by a present which is sufficiently known. Contexts of uncertainty are characterized by the unknown; *la chance* – once identified – puts an end to the unknown. *La chance* appears in uncertain situations as

knowledge and difficult situations as a solution. More explicitly, contexts of uncertainty are contexts of *la chance* in two manners: first of all, contexts of uncertainty (e.g. job situation for Simone and Safiatou, coup d'état for Madou) open up space for *la chance*; meanwhile, contexts of no uncertainty (e.g. Amadou: marriage, Simone: marriage, Mohamed: coup d'état) are characterized by *la chance* as well, but in a different sense. Whereas contexts of uncertainty offer potential for *la chance* to appear, contexts of no uncertainty are predicated by *la chance*. This distinction is crucial and indicates the need for a more detailed analysis of *la chance*, which I offer in part two.