

**LbE**

**Nr.2 Civil Society and political Commitment**

**Traditional social clubs - Mali: The Grin**

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**1 Female off voice (Featuretext + Outro)**

**2 Fictional characters (Intro+ Dialog) :**

- **Philomène (name can be changed):** young woman who knows a lot,  
Alphonse's big sister

- **Alphonse (name can be changed):** young man who is more naive,  
asks a lot of questions, Philomène's younger brother

**4 Voice Overs:**

- **Adama Sidibe :** man (ca. 30 years old)
- **Boubacar Kassogué:** man (between 40 and 50)
- **Aminatou Yattara:** woman (ca. 30 years old)
- **Moussa Kouyaté** man (30-40 years old)

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## Teaser LbE

### INTRO :

#### **Philomène (*cheerful*):**

Hello everybody -- good to be with you again!

#### **Alphonse (*annoyed*) :**

Well, you could say hello to me as well! (*articulating in exaggerated fashion*)

Hel-lo Philomène !

#### **Philomène (*amused*):**

Well, of course, I meant you too... Hello Alphonse. So we're off to Mali today aren't we?

#### **Alphonse (*cheerful again*) :**

Yep, today our series on civil society and participation is taking a look at "Grins" [grɛ̃].

#### **Philomène (*intrigued*) :**

Grins??? What are they?

#### **Alphonse (*proud*) :**

Finally, I can explain something to you for a change! Grins are like clubs, informal social gatherings -- they're typically Malian...

#### **Philomène :**

I understand -- young people meeting up regularly...

**Alphonse :**

... yes, well more or less young to be honest. They play games together, chat, but why don't you listen to the report then you'll want to set up your own grin!

**Philomène :**

OK, so let's open our ears wide and we're off to Bamako!

**REPORT :**

**1. SFX (street noise -- motorbikes passing)**

**Reporter:**

An afternoon in Magnabougou, a district of Bamako.

Some young people are gathered around a table in the shade, in front of a shop. They're playing cards, chatting, drinking tea. They are a Grin -- typical of Malian society. Adama Sidibé is a regular. The law graduate has been coming to the group since he arrived in the area in 2002:

**2. Clip: Adama Sidibé (French)**

"We chose to set up our Grin in the street so that everyone could access it. And the shop is the centre, we can all settle our business or problems, the shopkeeper is the Grin's heart."

**Reporter:**

The shopkeeper is Boubacar Kassogué, he came here with his wife about ten years ago. Naturally sociable, he met lots of people right from the start. He works and lives in the shop and has become a stable feature of the area. That's why it made sense for him to host the Grin. The regulars come every day to visit, as Boubacar explains:

### **3. Clip: Boubacar Kassogué/ (Bambara)**

"We get on although we're not from the same ethnic group. I'm the only Dogon, the others are Bambaras or Malinkés. But we've created strong bonds. If they don't come they don't feel good and if I don't see them I'm almost ill."

#### **Reporter:**

Yet, the community is not as homogeneous as it seems. Apart from their ethnic differences the group members aren't all of the same generation. They are between 20 and 40 years old. Still, the age difference doesn't stop them from having equal relations in the Grin. They've gotten to know each other, to respect each other and have become very attached to each other. Adama Sidibé explains how important the Grin is:

### **4. Clip: Adama Sidibé (French)**

"Depending on how busy people are we meet and play cards, drink tea, chat about everything and nothing and we're linked by a very strong social bond now. When there are ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings or funerals we do everything together. The Grin is like a family. I can share everything with my friends here, things I don't always share with my family. Here we talk about everything."

#### **Reporter:**

At the beginning, Grins were not mixed. Most of them were for young boys who had gone through the same kind of traditional initiation rites.

#### **Philomène**

What kind of initiation rites?

#### **Alphonse (annoyed by the interruption)**

Rites of passage from adolescence to adulthood for example, or circumcision  
...

**Philomene:**

I see. OK, I realize I'm getting on your nerves... Let's talk about it later then.

**Reporter:**

Since the 1960s, Grins in cities have been open to both sexes, giving young people the chance to meet in an informal setting to talk, listen to music or play cards.

**5. SFX (cards sound with Aminatou)**

**Reporter:**

Aminatou Yattara has been going to Boubacar's Grin for years. She says she prefers the Grin's company to that of her sisters:

**6. Oton: Aminatou (French)**

"We chat with the boys, talk about everyday life and, honestly, men can teach you much more than women can."

**7. SFX card game (to fade out)**

**Reporter:**

Cards and especially the game "belote" are very important to the Grin regulars. There's nothing better than a game after work says Adama Sidibé:

### **8. Oton: Adama Sidibé (French)**

"Belote is a game where the player can make a mark. It's always exciting and people express their personalities through the game. Most of the Grin members love this game, which is a bit like the backbone of our group."

#### **Reporter:**

The shopkeeper Boubacar Kassogué especially likes the fact that the Grin members are so willing to help each other. If someone needs money, he knows he can count on the Grin.

### **9. Oton: Boubacar Kassogué (Bambara)**

"We're more than friends, we're brothers. If one of us has a problem it's everybody's problem. It's more than simply friendship."

### **10. SFX preparing tea**

#### **Reporter:**

Another crucial ritual is tea -- the favorite drink of Malians.

### **11. Oton: Adama Sidibé (French)**

"Once we're at the Grin it's a reflex. If there's no tea people ask why. It's good for chatting. Tea gives energy and vibes, it's a symbol across Mali. Not only here - all these gatherings of young people like meeting for a cup of tea."

The Grin's SFXsphere, the exchanges, the friends are essential elements of the members' daily life. Some carry on going to the same Grin even if they move away from the area. Moussa Kouyaté, for instance, comes back every weekend even though he lives 12 kilometers away.

### **12. Oton: Moussa Kouyaté (French)**

"I moved less than a year ago and I have hardly any friends in my new area. So I've kept up my links with this Grin -- without it my life would be empty."

Adama Sidibé can't imagine life without the Grin, without the warmth and freedom it provides:

### **13. Oton: Adama Sidibé (French)**

"What would I do without the Grin? I don't know. I'd find another group where I felt comfortable. It's for escaping solitude and also for the SFXsphere. I've always thought that living alone isn't interesting. The Grin is a sacred thing for me, that's very important in my life."

## **MUSIC**

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## **TEIL 2 : DIALOGUE**

### **Philomène :**

Earlier on, we heard that Grins were originally for young boys who had gone through the same initiation rites -- I still don't understand what that means exactly.

### **Alphonse:**

Well, in some societies young boys had to go through certain rites of passage, such as circumcision for example. And the fact that they did it together and grew up together meant that some boys shared strong bonds so they naturally began to meet up in their free time.

**Philomène :**

Like you and your school friends?

**Alphonse:**

Exactly. The Grins are like clubs - they can have up to about 50 members, boys and girls, men and women.

**Philomène :**

Cool !

**Alphonse :**

In the 60s, for example, young people would meet in Bamako to listen to the music that was fashionable in Europe or the United States...

**Philomène :**

... rock music for instance?

**Alphonse :**

Yes and other stuff too. Often they took on the names of their favorite stars as nicknames.

**Philomène (laughs):**

Haha, I can't really picture our father calling himself "Jimmy" and dancing rock and roll with his Grin!

**Alphonse (amused):**

But he was young, too, once...

**Philomène (reflective) :**

Hm. One day I'll ask him how he was when he was my age!



**Alphonse :**

You might be surprised by his answer! But going back to Grins, it's poverty and unemployment which made them develop so much in the 1970s and 80s. People joined them not only for entertainment value but also to get help from fellow members.

**Philomène:**

In the report they talked about people helping each other out financially...

**Alphonse :**

Yes, when somebody needs money to pay for a wedding, for example, or for their studies or a project, the Grin members can club together and lend him or her money at a better rate than the bank would...

**Philomene :**

... and there's a basis of trust because the Grin members know each other well! **(short hesitant silence)** Listen Alphonse, I've got another question...

**Alphonse :**

Yes?

**Philomene (cheerful):**

Do you want to play belote with me? As if we had our own Grin in Mali?

**Alphonse (laughing loudly) :**

It's a bit hard with just the two of us but if you like we can make some tea big sis!

## **Outro (Music)**

### **Reporter:**

You've just heard a Learning by Ear program on the subject of civil society and participation. To listen to the program again or to send us your feedback, go to [www.dw-world.de/lbe](http://www.dw-world.de/lbe). Thanks for listening and don't forget to tune in again next time!