

Woubikan: Queering Language and Experience in Côte D'ivoire

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To gather data for his thesis, Miguel Gonzalez spent eight weeks among Queer communities in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, a city of over four million people in West Africa. Gonzalez completed his research under the additional guidance of Dr. Jacques N'goran Kouakou, a sociolinguist at the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Félix Houphouët-Boigny University and with the approval of Dr. Jean-Martial Kouamé, the Institute's director. Through his study, Gonzalez developed a basic lexicon of Queer vocabulary, called Woubikan, used by Queer Ivorians to talk about their lives without straight people understanding them.

In doing so, Gonzalez also undertook an ethnography of Queer life in Abidjan, a city that offers relative freedom for LGBT West Africans. The documented Woubikan lexicon of 160 words and thirty phrases gave insight into how Queer Ivorians resist homo- and transphobia. Through Prof. Hellweg's colleague, Igor Coffi, I also contacted several Queer Ivorian NGOs, including ONG DADI, ONG Katia, Organisation Jovial, and Qet Inclusion. I then undertook fourteen hours of semi-structured, focused life-history interviews with my contacts as well as additional focus groups, asking interviewees about the struggles and triumphs of their professional, religious, and romantic lives.