

# AM I NOT HUMAN?

**Director:** Tyler Rhorick

**Crew List:** Max Eckhart, Awa Bousso, Uma Guarnaccia

**Project:** #3

**Statement of Objective:** “Am I Not Human?” is a documentary that will focus on the life of one homosexual man in Ghana. A story riddled with tales of abuse, employment discrimination, struggling to fit into a conservative, Christian society, and standing up for himself to help others in his position, Abu’s story will pose the question “Am I Not Human?” - pointing out how members of the LGBTQ community in Ghana still face basic human rights violations because of their sexual orientation and/or identity.

## **Treatment:**

- *Subjects*
  - Abu- the founder of a NGO organization called “The Solace Brothers Foundation,” which connects members of Ghana’s LGBTQ community to a legal resources and a help hotline. Abu has previously spoken out about this topic in *The Guardian* making him a prime candidate to talk about this issue. He has also been made privy to many stories of abuse and homicide affecting the LGBTQ community in Ghana because of his organization’s help hotline. It should be noted that while Abu has spoken out about this issue, he has never lent his face to the cause of fighting for basic human rights of LGBTQ individuals. Because of this, and for his safety, Abu has understandably asked his face not be included in the documentary. As an additional precaution that will be discussed with Abu personally, his name may be changed and his organization may not be singled out in name, as it could be a means of discovering his identity.
  - Members of “The Solace Brothers Foundation”- part of the agreement made to make this documentary was to make a separate production cut that could be used by the organization to advertise and receive funding. Because of this, shooting day will also include members of “The Solace Brothers Foundation,” who- with their permission of course- may be included in the final cut of “Am I Not Human?” Understanding that 5 minutes may be too narrow to include additional stories, this is probably unrealistic. These interviews may be included into a potential bigger cut of “Am I Human?” that I have thought about creating depending on how interview day goes.
- *Locations*
  - Church Crescent or the NYU Accra Academic Center
    - While these locations are not entirely ideal as a means of accenting the story, these locations have been

chosen as the primary base for interviews because of safety concerns for those involved. There was no space that Abu could offer because his organization currently lacks office space and those who don't know his sexual identity share his home. It should be noted, however, that the location may not play a great deal of importance, as the leading idea for disguising the identity of those involved would be to use dramatic backlighting from behind to make silhouette figures. This idea is the current front-runner among others because it is a way to utilize the confines of the space to ensure safety, but also plays on the idea that these individuals exist in a symbolic "darkness" where they are being ignored. It also highlights the human form, which will be an important symbolic connect to the question "Am I Not Human?"

- B-Roll

- While B-Roll is always important for documentary features, it will be even more important here, since the production must continue to hide the identity of those involved. Based on my personal conversations I've had with Abu, the following list includes important imagery that I will try to capture as a means to assist the documentary:

- Religious imagery- Churches, Mosques, adverts, taxi/tro-tro slogans, etc; to be used to emphasize the religious climate of Ghana.
- Places of previous stories- this means re-visiting some of the places that Abu mentioned in his interview- so far from my conversations this would imply that I would need to get shots of Nima, the area of his employment, and the present day buildings that use to be gay clubs in Accra. The idea is to have these stories be almost "ghost stories" ones that remain largely unknown as life continues in these places. Understanding how difficult this might be for Abu, it is not my current intention to bring him along to these locations.
- Crowd shots- Mikola Market? To be used to have this idea of a "society" of a majority where these members may not currently belong
- Dating App Shot- This will be used to emphasize how most homosexual men and women meet in Ghana, since being publically open is so taboo
- Walking shots- Shots of Abu walking down the streets with his back to the camera; the Labone area would be ideal because of minimal traffic and because Abu had indicated it is one of the communities he feels most safe in being "his true self"

- Facebook post of crime against an LGBTQ person- Abu told one story that was particularly compelling where an assailant lynched a gay man and posted the lynching on Facebook to shame him in the community. I will try to gain access to this posting.
  - More B-Roll inspiration will come from the primary interview of Abu
- *Shooting Schedule*
  - Since I had had my first personal encounter with Abu last night, the shooting schedule has yet to be confirmed on Abu's side. The current plan, however, is to have one rather long day shoot within the next week or two that will be dedicated to shooting the interview sections of the documentary. The current plan is to try to make a house in Church Crescent or part of the NYU Accra Building a closed set with only 1 or 2 additional crewmembers to create an environment where the participants would feel most forthcoming with their stories. After this initial shooting, most of the B-Roll will be collected in a way that accents the stories that are chosen for the final cut. The shooting schedule is admittedly loose at the time because this project took so long to get off of the ground and is still very fragile, meaning that the direction of the film might have to drastically change, if Abu ultimately decides that he doesn't want to take the risk in making this production.

## Evaluation

When I went into making “Am I Not Human,” I went in with the intention to find out what it meant to be someone who is part of the LGBTQ community from Ghana, which is a country where homosexual acts are still illegal and members of the LGBTQ community are often victimized by blackmail and violence. Why did I go in with this intention? If I am to speak honestly, I think I went in with this mission because my own sexuality is something that I’ve struggled to find a place for here in Ghana and I wanted to find someone who could understand that struggle or maybe give me a new perspective of that struggle. By doing this documentary, I have been granted access to this community. Though it was difficult to gain access initially, since others have betrayed many members of the community time and time again, they have now welcomed me with open arms, which has made this experience all the more enriching.

If I am to talk of the actual project though, I must admit that being welcomed into the community came with certain perks and disadvantages. As for the perks, I felt that the people that I got to interview, though all of them are not featured in the final production, were able to speak candidly with me and open up in ways that they might not have opened up to others because they already knew me in some way. They weren’t talking to a stranger, but with a friend- a friend who was dead set on protecting them in any and all ways possible. And this connection made for a good story. They told me their fears, I told them mine and in the end I am happy with the story we were able to tell together. But this familiarity did come with certain disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage that I had was that because I was so close to the topic it was hard for me to remain fully objective in the editing room. I wasn’t able to cut with the same ease as my peers because I thought that everything was important because I had had a personal connection to the conversations. This made narrowing the story down to 5 minutes a challenge, especially because I felt indebted to these people who trusted me to tell a nuanced story that fully captured their experiences in Ghana, which is almost impossible to do in just 5 minutes with a subject so heavy. This burden has also given me mixed reviews about the finished product because I know that I could have done so much more with time, which is why I might also make this the topic of my 10 minute documentary, if I am able to find a group that will continue this journey with me.

As for mistakes made along the way, I wish that we could have controlled the sound better. Awa did a great job booming and was keen to announce when the wind was picking up too much, but I think that we might have been able to find a location that in some way was able to block the wind, so that it wasn’t as big of a problem. The wind is still heard through parts of the documentary, which saddens me, but it was accompanied by words that were too important to remove, so I am okay with it because I think it doesn’t distract from the story being told.

As for the crew, they did a great job because I think they were also committed to the topic. Once they met Abu and his friends and started hearing their stories, they were committed to making sure that their stories found a stage worthy of them. They made keen suggestions on lighting and sound and even critiqued my editing along the way to help me find “the story” that was fit for 5 minutes.

And finally, if I am to review myself, which feels so odd to do, I feel that I did a great job. Not intending to boast too loudly, but I think that this feature was made possible because I was committed to making it possible. These stories couldn't have been told to someone who wasn't fully committed to it, as I was nor to someone who hadn't spent weeks researching and finding their way into the community. This is not to say that it was easy. Many times it seemed that someone might back out because they feared what might happen to them, but I was able to bring them back and stress to them that I was on their team and this is something we were doing together.

If I were to do it all over again, I might have reshot some of the B-roll to have correlated with this idea I had created of only filming scenes of society and others from behind barriers like car windows, screens, etc to emphasize this sort of implied separation between the society and people of the LGBTQ community, but other than that I can't say I would do much differently as I am overall proud of the final product. I can only hope that others will enjoy it as well!