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# Review of "Young and Gay: Jamaica's Gully Queens" Produced and Directed by Christo Geoghegan of VICE News

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International news and social media has highlighted some of the harmful and often deadly situations to which Jamaica's LGBTQI youth have been subjected. "*Young and Gay: Jamaica's Gully Queens*" constitutes one effort to outline the conditions of a subset of this population. The short documentary is directed by Christo Geoghegan of VICE News, an outlet committed to reporting and highlighting global issues often unseen in mainstream media, and is set in Kingston, Jamaica. It tells the story of more than 20 LGBTQI youth living in what appears to be an underground sewage system, having been rejected by their family, culture and broader society. These young LGBTQI refer to themselves as "*Gully Queens*," claiming the storm drain as their own. Most of the youth are gay males or male to female transgender persons. The documentary depicts their living conditions, and explores some of the political and social characteristics of Jamaica's society in the context of homophobia.

The documentary begins with gay and transgender youth from the "*gully*" (storm drains) describing the harassment and violence they face in their daily lives. They speak in Jamaica's native patois about attacks with stones and knives, beatings, and rapes, which some experience on a daily basis. The youth have been rejected by their communities but do not have the means for safer living conditions, so they live together, finding safety in numbers. Some work as sex workers to survive. According to the film, 2013 saw an increase in violence towards LGBTQI Jamaicans, even though homosexuality is not illegal. However, according to the director, the "Buggery Law" -- a law that has outlawed anal sex since the 1960s when Jamaica was still under the crown of England -- "can get you 10 years of hard labor."

The film depicts clearly how politicians stand on the issue of this outdated Buggery Law. Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller campaigned to review it in 2012, but as of yet, has not followed through on that promise. Alric Campbell, the People's National Party Youth Organization President says, "If the parliament overturns it without the people's strong support, then parliament will pay the bitter price." He deflects government responsibility arising from the law by saying "most of the persons who are there are rejected from their own homes; that cannot be the responsibility of the government."

Police are no more sympathetic. When Geoghegan asked why youth are living in the storm drains, Commander Officer Christopher Murdoch says "Living in the gully it is by their choice; their sexual orientation, that's their choice." He adds that they are welcome to make a statement to the police department, but his stance on the issue of homophobia and discrimination against gender identity is clear in his indignation and culturally incompetent vernacular. Geoghegan contests his argument, but the commander blames the youth for criminal activity, expressing disbelief regarding claims that people from the community attack the "*gully queens*." Classism is also evident among the LGBTQI community in

Jamaica. Maurice Tomilson, a LGBT activist, notes harassment of “*gully queens*” arises due to their lower class status. The “*rich queens*,” he notes, can protect themselves from homophobia. For instance, during filming, Tomilson is shown leaving Jamaica for fear of anti-LGBTQI harassment, a luxury these youth cannot afford.

“*Young and Gay: Jamaica’s Gully Queens*” gives the viewer insight into Jamaica’s blatant homophobic culture through the perspectives of natives. The viewer leaves with some deeper knowledge of the state of LGBTQI human rights in Jamaica’s storm drains. However, to understand the current conditions of the “*gully queens*,” the viewer would need to acquire knowledge of the history of homophobia in Jamaica, the source of this condition, and the means by which this cultural ideology is perpetuated. More insight could have been offered through an examination of the Jamaican Coalition for a Healthy Society, composed of the Evangelical community and fueled by Christian followers who are opponents of homosexuality. As it stands, the documentary only provides superficial comprehension, failing to provide a history behind this homophobic culture and the political, social, and economic conditions that account for a spike in homophobic violence, as well as for its international visibility.

## REFERENCE

Geoghegan, Christo. July, 2014. "Young and Gay: Jamaica's Gully Queens." Vice News. Retrieved November, 2014 (<http://vicenews.com>)