

Meet the Families Who Live on a Dollar a Day

A Pulitzer-winning photographer teams up with a non-profit to document the lives of those who live in abject poverty

Thomas Gorton



A nine year old Bolivian child tending to his family's flocks of alpacas and llamas. He took over since his father died. - Renee Byer



These days, it's not so hard to believe that abject poverty still exists – after all, Britain woke up to the news today that almost one million food parcels were handed out to hungry and poverty-stricken people all over the

country. One sixth of the world's population lives under the poverty line, with a billion eking out a living on a dollar a day – that's about 60p, by the way.

This hugely marginalised group is the subject of *Living On A Dollar A Day*, a new photography journal from Pulitzer-winning photographer Renée C. Byer and writer Thomas Nazario, who founded The Forgotten International, a non-profit organisation. The pair travelled to ten countries and photographed over forty families, producing an enlightening and shocking document of those who live in poverty. We spoke to Nazario about their book, and what can be done to bridge the widening gap of inequality.

Dazed Digital: Do you think countries in the West are responsible for those living on a dollar a day?

Thomas Nazario: The truth is that no single country can be held solely responsible for the poverty that exists in many of the world's developing countries. There are never simple answers. Nevertheless, developed countries do bear responsibility for what has happened in other countries that has kept the poor, poor. Two or three hundred years ago, rich countries were only three times richer than poorer countries. Today, however, in part as a result of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism, rich countries are anywhere from eighty to a hundred times richer.

DD: Was there a country that you saw that you considered the most torn apart by poverty?

Thomas Nazario: I have some concerns about the use of the term "torn apart." Certainly there are countries that get hit by a sudden internal conflict or natural disaster, and as a result, those who live on the edge, in extreme poverty, simply die. That certainly tears apart the fabric of a country or region of the world. We however visited countries where poverty has existed for many years. I guess if I were to focus on one country that troubles me most, it would be India. One third of the world's poor live in that country alone, and there seems to be a great acceptance of the caste system there which has worked to keep almost 400 million people in poverty.



A Romanian man who sleeps near heating vents underground to stay warm Renee Byer

DD: Was there a particular story you found striking?

Thomas Nazario: The one that comes to mind first is the story of the children who live on an e-waste dumpsite in the city of Accra, Ghana in West Africa. Few had little hope of ever going to school, or even leaving the dumpsite where they lived. The children were infected with malaria, cried because of the pain, and all hoped that somehow we would save them. Other stories that troubled me very much were the stories about domestic, and how that abuse drove women and their children into poverty, as well as how both men and women are being used as human tools to clean out sewer systems, or clean up the faeces of others, simply because they were of a lower caste, impoverished and had few options in life. Anytime we saw people being stripped of their dignity simply because of poverty, that was the saddest sight of all.

DD: Why do you think it is that the world has become complacent about poverty?

Thomas Nazario: I'm not sure that the world has become totally complacent. In the last twenty years, the world, through the United Nations and other non-profits, has begun to tackle the problem of global poverty, and have actually made some progress. There is of course much work to be done, but some 25 years ago about 40,000 children under the age of five were dying each day as a direct result of poverty. Today that figure sits at about 19,000, and I suspect that it will be reduced further over the next ten years. Nevertheless, populations continue to grow and 1.2 billion people still exist on less than a dollar a day. That's about one sixth of the world's population.

DD: What would you like to see change?

Thomas Nazario: I believe that we all must start thinking far more globally. We have to leave our lives of extreme consumption and many of the frivolous things that occupy our time, whether that's spending hours on video games or buying things we don't need. We must all try to leave the world a little better for having been here. We don't have to be millionaires to decide to help someone else, and whether we decide to help others around the world or around the block, giving is something we must all incorporate into our life plan and not simply take. That should be totally unacceptable. It is in fact, the message of our book.

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