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THE INFLIGHT MAGAZINE OF VIRGIN NIGERIA

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Book review

Nigeria Through the Eyes of a Passerby

Victor Politis
Voyager Media, 2008

Review Jahman Anikulapo

A picture says a thousand words to a thousand people in a thousand ways. To every person, his own interpretation of the image he or she is encountering. Thus a book of images is expected to speak a million words to a million people in a million ways.

As everyone wants to do when we first encounter a coffee-table book, I raced through the pages of *Nigeria Through The Eyes Of A Passerby*, poring over the plethora of street photographs presented, astounded by the sheer lucidity of the vision, the swift poetic compositions, and pondering why even with my decades of living in Nigeria, the subjects of these compilations had never been so etched on my mind's eyes as they do now; why I had never seen those street vendors and prowlers worthy of a photographic study

or documentation.

I started to ponder why an otherwise busy expatriate company executive would become so fascinated with these sorts of usually considered inconsequential intruders to the urban landscape?

But then I was struck by the consistency of the theme of a chunky section of the collection: the daily struggles and triumphs of the vendors on the streets and the traders in the various markets that dot many of the urban centers of the country. I had then immediately concluded that this is a powerful recording of the very energies of the city life, and the people who inhabit such space; and that the author had succeeded in capturing the industriousness of the people.

I was instructing myself that the photographer has succeeded in creating a new mask for the



ugly face of Nigeria; a new mask to veil off the otherwise notorious scarred face of the so-called giant of Africa. I told myself this is one book that screams a challenge at the ugly character of Nigeria as a country peopled by fraudsters, tricksters, 419ners, lazy bones – whose greatest desires is to always reap where they had not sowed or to harvest maximum benefits from meager investments.

On the contrary Politis' photographs are an instrumental contribution to a discourse on the role that the creative arts or cultural products could occupy in national projection about nation building. This a great contribution to the often-mouthed but hardly demonstrated desire to make tourism a major player in the national economy

Mr. Politis's *LABOUR OF LOVE* – for that is what I insist the book is – as would be shown in this narrative, has articulated the intangible energies, human resources and essences of the people of Nigeria by 'zooming' his lens on the industriousness of the people. And as some people would say, he has done it through ordinary photographs or ordinary 'knack am', as his favorite friends, the heroes of his narrative in this book – the common man in the streets -- would call it.

In Mr. Politis's filmic collection the street hawkers are Street Businessmen; the beggars, the loafers, the

lay-abouts, the street geckos are the Salts of the nation. Through his lens we are able to share the pain and joy of the daily existence. For isn't it true that in Nigeria, the masses of the people, do not Live, they merely Exist?

Over 60,000 images recorded in five years of obsession with the open bowels of Nigeria – from Kano, to Lagos, to Abuja, to Port Harcourt and other corners of this vast country – Victor Politis is still connecting with his street friends through, mark it, SMILE; communing with them though SHOOTING; loving them through just being simply HUMAN.

This is a book of Contrasting Realities about a Country that is itself one huge cauldron of Confounding Contradictions. This is a book that challenges the very meaning of set logics, for instance people say The More You Look the less you see. In Victor's contention, the more you look, the More You see; the deeper you look, the deeper you come to understanding of why in spite of the odds that assail your sense of sight and smell and being, Nigeria is not an entity to be unloved. There is also the logic of the closer you look in the bowels of Nigeria, not minding the many stark oddity, the deeper grows your affection for its cantankerous and disingenuous character.

Anikulapo is Editor of The Guardian on Sunday – Lagos