



Wake Up, This Is Joburg

Tanya Zack

Mark Lewis, Photographer

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Duke University Press (Dec 2, 2022)

Softcover \$28.95 (368pp)

978-1-4780-1870-4

In *Wake Up, This Is Joburg*, photographer Mark Lewis and writer Tanya Zack document stories about people getting by on the fringes of Johannesburg. These pieces are sometimes sad, sometimes inspiring, and add up to a complicated picture of a city of contradictions.

The biggest city in South Africa, one of the country's capitals, and one of the continent's commercial centers, Johannesburg also has a reputation for danger. It's "a place of reeling...where making a living can be messy." That's quite true of the book's opening story, "S'kop," which focuses on an underground operation of men who butcher cow heads and sell the unregulated meat. The photo essay is gruesome and bloody, while the text focuses on the thin margin by which the butchers live and the challenging logistics of their business.

"Master Mansion" tells the story of Indian immigrants who began a successful hat-making business in the early twentieth century and lived in the building, and of how later generations live today. The photographs in this case include both vintage and current images and do a nice job of showing the beauty of the hats produced in the building. And one of the most memorable pieces is "Bedroom," which tells the story of Birthial Gxaleka's bedroom. Eleven mattresses fill the room, with a few times that number of people living there at any given moment. Gxaleka talks about taking in anyone who needs it, and how her opening her home serves as a stepping stone to help visitors find work and begin new lives.

Wake Up, This Is Joburg tells its range of interesting stories well, through on-the-ground reporting, with ample interviews and context, letting a variety of people around Johannesburg talk about both the struggles and successes of everyday life in the inner city.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2022)

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