

STORY BEHIND THE SHOT

THE KISS

Under Apartheid, interracial relationships were forbidden...

Post-Apartheid, the 'born-frees' are the first South African generation permitted to love and marry anyone regardless of their race. Ilvy met this couple, Wilmarie Deetlefs (24) and Zakithi Buthelezi (27) in Johannesburg. "They met on the Tinder dating app and they were very much in love," she says. "He is from quite a wealthy family, his grandfather was in parliament with Nelson Mandela. Wilmarie is from a smaller town and a conservative family." When Ilvy first met the couple Wilmarie had not told her parents about her new boyfriend. "He did and they loved her," she continues. "I took this photo while they were on a night out in Johannesburg. They were kissing and that to me tells a lot about the way things should be, or about the way Nelson Mandela wanted to see his country."

ILVY NJIOKIKTJEN



For the past decade Ilvy Njiokiktjien has detailed the lives of the first generation of South Africans growing up free of the oppressions of the Apartheid regime. She tells Keith Wilson how her work reveals the realities of life for the 'born-free' generation

O **N MAY 10, 1994 Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president, thereby bringing an end to Apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation that determined people's rights by the colour of their skin.**

The realities of segregation meant 'Blacks' and 'Coloureds' had to carry legal passes in 'White' areas; schools, workplaces, transport and even beaches were divided by race. White minority rule was guaranteed by denying the vote to the non-white majority. But all that changed when the vote was finally granted to all adults regardless of race and Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) party won a resounding majority in South Africa's first fully democratic elections. In the 25 years since that momentous day, the first generation of free-born South Africans have come of age in a country now referred to as the 'Rainbow Nation'. *Born Free: Mandela's Generation of Hope* is Ilvy Njiokiktjien's

01 LOVE ACROSS THE DIVIDE

Wilmarie Deetlefs, 24, together with her boyfriend Zakithi Buthelezi, 27, on a night out in Johannesburg, South Africa

Lens Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L II USM

Exposure 1/40 sec, f/1.8, ISO2500

02 THE WORLD HAS BIGGER PROBLEMS
The statement on this white girl's T-shirt points to a different set of social issues now occupying the first generation of post-Apartheid South Africans

Lens Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L II USM

Exposure 1/250 sec, f/2.8, ISO4000

03 YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK
Friends and family take pictures of celebrity millionaire forex trader Jason Noah arriving at a club in Pretoria

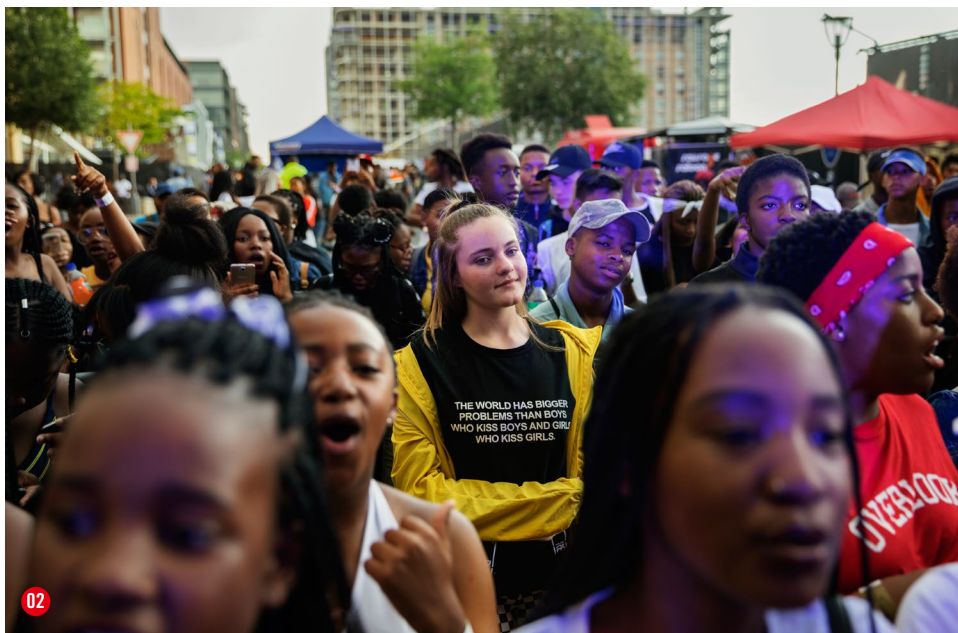
Lens Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L II USM

Exposure 1/60 sec, f/2.2, ISO5000

04 WHITE PRIVILEGE NO MORE
Breakfast time at Hilton College, a former whites-only boarding school

Lens Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L II USM

Exposure 1/80 sec, f/2, ISO2000



documentary in stills and video – an exhibition, TV broadcast and book – that provides an in-depth portrayal of life in post-Apartheid South Africa.

What was your connection with South Africa that led to you pursuing this theme?

I was there as a student in 2004. It was an exchange programme and the university was in Grahamstown, which was a very colonial, very English and quite posh little town. What really struck me was that the black and white people were not really mixing at all. I remember having a few black friends in that university and one of them explained to me, 'Well, you're actually my first white friend,' and I was quite surprised by that. Which is how I got into the idea for this story.

What were you studying?

Journalism. As an extra subject I took photography. I hadn't taken any photography classes prior to that, so being in that photography class in Grahamstown with my fellow students marked the beginning of photography for me in general.

When did you go back next with the idea of photographing life in post-Apartheid South Africa?

That started in 2007 because I went back to start an internship at a national newspaper, called *The Star* in Johannesburg. It was the biggest paper in South Africa and when the newspaper sent me out on assignments it was often students protesting and things that I had never experienced in the Netherlands. It opened up a whole new vision of the



world to me. There were students here who were politically active! I was from the Netherlands and was just used to students partying all the time!

It sounds like it was a learning experience for you on many levels?

I don't think the editors there realized how much of a difference it was going from the Netherlands, where I did an internship at a small newspaper, to South Africa. The news in the Netherlands was so different at the time... News there was when our king and queen open a new hospital and they cut a ribbon.

When I arrived in Johannesburg, it was like, 'Right, there's been a shooting, there are riots and somebody got killed, there's an investigation into the government,'

stuff like that. I was busy with those types of assignments everyday, so I learned a lot about being quick, being safe, shooting pictures under pressure and getting the right frame.

How did your photography develop after your experiences in South Africa?

When I went back to the Netherlands in 2008 I said to everyone, "I'm a news journalist!" So I became a freelance photographer for a Dutch press agency and I remember only wanting to get the big assignments, but I was never getting them. They put me on jobs like the Queen opening hospitals... It seemed to me that hard news was only interesting if you're in Afghanistan or Iraq, for example.



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I remember going to Afghanistan in 2009, thinking, 'Okay I'm going to be a war correspondent,' and I was quite scared! That's when I realized that maybe I'm more the kind of person who photographs news, but in a different way.

When did you work out your approach to news stories?

It took me until I won the World Press award, for my story on the Kommandokorps racist camp, to realize what it was that I was focusing on. I won in the category called Contemporary Issues, and I had to look it up in the dictionary. I really didn't know what it meant! I was looking it up on Google and I saw all these different kinds of stories called contemporary issues and that's when I understood, 'Oh, that's what I'm interested in, these are all the things that interest me specifically!'

How much of the country did you cover for the *Born Free* project?

I tried to be as diverse as possible and travel throughout the country – I visited little farming communities as well as the big cities. City life in Johannesburg is so different to a little town. In small places, racism is more open, more visual, there are still more black people living in townships on the outskirts of the cities

or towns. It's the white people living in the centre. This is still the case in Johannesburg, but it's much more common to see black and white people mixing in bars and in schools. However, in small towns it's definitely not as mixed as it is in those larger cities.

So, the signs of social segregation are still obviously visible?

Yes, but what I have tried to stay away from in my series is having too many pictures that show that, mainly because it's quite repetitive. For instance, I have an image of a domestic house worker – a black maid – who's cleaning while the white lady who's sitting on the couch is lifting her feet and the maid is cleaning under her feet. I could have made tons of similar images like that.

Pictures like that, too often, can become a cliché, can't they?

Yes, exactly, so I really had to watch out, especially when I was making my exhibition. The director of the museum wanted to add more images like that, and yes, those images are strong because racism can be quite tough, for some people, to visualize. But it's such a cliché and I wanted to move past that, so I had to tell him, 'No, we're just going to have this one image and then we'll make a mix

of different imagery.' It's easy to fall into the trap of showing just that specific type of racist behaviour.

What cameras did you end up taking with you when you were shooting in the townships?

I've been working with the Canon 5D Mk IV since it came out. I've been thinking about switching to the EOS R because when the R came out Canon let me use it to do a campaign. I really loved it but the only reason I didn't switch is because all of my projects have been shot on the 5D Mark II, III and IV, so I figured I should stick with what I'm used to working with.

What are your lens choices?

When I go out I always take two bodies, mostly working on an EF 35mm f/1.4L and on the other camera I usually have a 24-70mm f/2.8L. I used to always shoot

// I learned a lot about being quick, being safe, shooting pictures under pressure and getting the right frame //



05 MOURNING MANDELA
Crowds gather in the streets to express their grief after the death of Mandela

Lens Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM
Exposure 1/160 sec, f/3.2, ISO1000

06 KEEPING A DISTANCE
Armed police avoid getting too close to mourners of white separatist, Afrikaner resistance leader, Eugene Terre Blanche, at his funeral in Ventersdorp, April 2010

Lens Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L II USM
Exposure 1/400 sec, f/5, ISO250

07 TOWNSHIP KIDS
Children play in the street in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS II USM
Exposure 1/4000 sec, f/4.5, ISO400

// I switched back to pictures because I'm thinking, 'Oh my goodness I cannot miss this moment!' //

on 35mm and 50mm, but when Canon came out with that new version of the 24-70mm... I hardly ever take it off my camera now, it's amazing. The quality of the lens is astounding. I've also been carrying around the 70-200mm and the 16-35mm for the last 12 years, but I hardly use them. For instance, the 16-35mm went to Canon to be cleaned about three years ago and it's still wrapped in the plastic they sent it in, I still haven't taken it out!

What about flash?

I hardly ever use flash, but I always carry a flash with me. I did a big assignment for UNICEF at the beginning of 2018 using flash, it was more like a studio thing, but what I always try to do is to find a way to use natural light and with the 5D Mark IV you can go up to ISO6400, or even higher. When I have a big show I'd rather not use images with a super high ISO to get printed on the wall. Mainly, my images are used for online long reads or newspapers online, so you don't need that much light to get something nice.

I've started using different light sources more, my phone for instance, just to shine on the subject by getting someone to hold my phone and they shine the light on someone. I've started using that to add a different light source, so I'm

becoming more creative with the way I'm using natural or available light.

But isn't the light from a mobile phone too concentrated?

I put my finger over it! When you put your finger over it the light that comes out is very diffused and kind of reddish because it shines through your finger. Well, it doesn't shine through it, but if you cover almost all of it and put your nail on one side, it just gives a bit of light and with a long exposure you can get nice stuff.

So it helps to have long fingernails?

Definitely, you need them!

I suppose what colour you paint your nails matters too?

It matters a lot. Unfortunately, I don't have long fingernails because they bother me when I'm photographing, but when you use the tip of your finger and you cover almost all of the light of the phone, it's really perfect. I'm just not a big fan of using flash. I really love natural light.

Video is an important part of this project, but many photographers aren't comfortable shooting both stills and video, so how do you decide which medium to shoot?



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that to tell a story you will need a wide shot, a close-up and an establishing shot, because that's exactly what you do as a photographer. So to translate that into video hasn't been a massive issue. The bigger challenge for me has been the technical side of things like working with audio recorders.

Did you use a separate camera entirely for video or did you keep switching back and forth on the 5D Mk IV?

No, I was constantly switching. Interestingly, when I was looking back at the footage I noticed that even though I was working with two cameras and switching either of them to video mode, I had a tendency to use the camera that had the 24-70mm lens more for video.

Why was that?

Because when you do video and suddenly you need a close-up, it's nice that you can actually zoom in. That's the lens I used mostly for video, so one of my cameras was more geared up for video with an external mic on it.

Now that the project is finished, will you go back to South Africa?

Two years ago, I became a member of VII photo agency, they also have the VII

All the most important parts of the *Born Free* project I actually photographed. When I put the camera to video mode something important happened... I switched back to pictures because I'm thinking, 'Oh my goodness I cannot miss this moment!' So, doing video and photo at the same just isn't possible.

A lot of the major events that happened I didn't capture on video – I have them in pictures. But the nice thing is that within the short documentaries I have made, I've

always mixed photography with the video side of the art.

What are the similarities between shooting video and stills?

Many clients have started asking for video, people like UNICEF, Oxfam, all the big NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) that I'm working for. They're all asking for video, and it's quite natural because as a photographer you do know how to frame an image. You know



08 MAKING A SPLASH
Members of the National Youth Orchestra enjoy one of Cape Town's beaches

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS II USM

Exposure 1/320 sec, f/6.3, ISO400

09 IN HARMONY
Students of Merensky High from Tzaneen perform during a school choir contest

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS II USM

Exposure 1/100 sec, f/2.8, ISO1000

10 RACIST SUMMER CAMP
The Kommandokorps organizes camps during school holidays for young white Afrikaner teenagers, teaching them self-defence and how to combat a perceived black enemy.

Lens Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS II USM

Exposure 1/1000 sec, f/4, ISO640

// We are the first generation without Apartheid. The trauma in our parents is still so great that they don't like speaking about it //

academy, and I will be giving a photography lecture in South Africa to students. Ideally, I want to integrate other photographers into the community. South Africa has some of the best photographers in the world, it's amazing what they're making, but sometimes people don't get the right platforms, so I want to give lectures and workshops. At least one is planned for now, a workshop in Johannesburg. The second thing I want to do is to get an exhibition in South Africa, to get my work out there as well.

South Africa seems like the obvious place to show your work

The *Born Free* story is not just about being born free and growing up in a democracy, to me it's also about modern day racism. Questions like, "what's it like to be black?" "What's it like to be white?" "How do people relate to each other nowadays?" Not just in South Africa, but also in places like the United States, Europe, Asia, anywhere.

Racism is everywhere and I think the best way to find racism is to show what racism does in our day-to-day lives. I'm hoping to create a tour, a show, or an exhibition in South Africa that talks about modern day racism and integrating that with school children, maybe doing tours. I'm hoping to work with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and to do something

with Nelson Mandela's legacy. School children today in South Africa do not know a whole lot about Apartheid, I noticed that while doing this project. When I asked them about Apartheid many of them didn't know that much.

Really? Are you talking about both black and white school children?

Yes, it was over the colour line. Both black and white, I noticed an imbalance between what we are being taught in Europe, or at least in The Netherlands, about Apartheid and Nelson Mandela. I had the feeling that we knew more than the people I'd been speaking to, but I also asked a few of the youngsters I'd been following, "Why do you think that is? Why do you think the knowledge is low? One said, "We are the first generation without Apartheid. The trauma within our parents is still so great that they don't like speaking about it." Something similar happened after World War Two in Europe where the generation that were born after World War Two: the most uneducated about the war because their parents didn't want to talk about it.

You've built up some fascinating experience over the years, so what's your best piece of advice for someone wanting to follow in your footsteps?



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ILVY NJIOKIKTJIEN

News and documentary photographer



Ilvy Njokiktjien is a photographer and multimedia journalist based in the Netherlands, specializing in current affairs and social issues.

Her work has been published in the *New York Times*, *Stern*, *Der Spiegel*, *Time*, the *Telegraph Magazine* and many other titles. Ilvy rose to global prominence after her photo story from South Africa about the right wing Kommandokorps organization, for which she received a World Press Photo award. In 2013, Ilvy Njokiktjien became Photographer of the Nation in the Netherlands which involved travelling around her home country photographing birthday celebrations.

www.imagesbyilvy.com
www.bornfreegeneration.com

Next issue: Ellie Rothnie, award-winning wildlife photographer and tour guide

I think what helped me most was having a mentor and doing internships. The combination of those two things can take any photographer anywhere. Of course, you need to have a certain amount talent, but that's a given. Well, not a given, but I don't think I'm the most talented photographer. However, by having a mentor who taught me things and doing internships, if you're lucky they will start giving you assignments. If you're dead lucky those assignments will lead to other assignments. Even if you cannot find one, do one for free, stay somewhere for half a year, just put your foot in the door and

say, "Hey, I'm here, I'm not going anywhere, teach me something please!" That's exactly what I did and just keep going because in the last 12 years I've had more people say, "You cannot do this, photography is dead, there are no jobs!" Oh man, I've heard it so many times. In fact, for the past 12 years I've had more than enough assignments. Just keep going and don't listen to naysayers, that's my advice. ♦

Born Free – Mandela's Generation of Hope is available to order for €39.50 from www.bornfreegeneration.com