

# Covid in Cartoons

(<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons>)

Bringing together an interdisciplinary team of researchers at the University of Leicester and external partners Shout Out UK and Cartooning for Peace to collaborate on a UKRI COVID-19 rapid response grant (2021-2022).

≡ Menu

## Cartooning in South Africa: Jonathan Zapiro on the Post-Apartheid 'Rainbow Nation'

(<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/cartooning-south-africa-jonathan-zapiro-post-apartheid-rainbow-nation/>)

Posted by fl47 ([https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska\\_louwagie/](https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska_louwagie/)) in Covid in Cartoons (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons>) on January 11, 2022 (Tuesday, January 11th, 2022, 1:49 pm)

**Jonathan Shapiro, also known as Zapiro, is a renowned South African cartoonist.**

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapiro>) **His cartoons have appeared in numerous publications in South Africa, as well as in *The Sunday Times*.**

**Shout Out UK has been working with Cartooning for Peace and the University of Leicester to run COVID in Cartoons, a project helping young people express themselves and engage in politics through cartoon creation. As part of the project, SOUK young writers interviewed a range of diverse and incredibly talented cartoonists from Cartooning for Peace about their craft and the importance of political cartooning as a whole.**

Shapiro was interested in cartooning from a young age and believes that this is the case for most other cartoonists. ‘When you’re a kid you feel like you’re a cartoonist’, he says. He also thinks that cartoonists tend to have a rebellious, non-conformist side. ‘You have to be a little bit at odds with the world’. And this was certainly the case for Shapiro. He studied architecture at university, but later changed to graphic design. He tried to avoid conscription into the Apartheid army but was ultimately conscripted. He would later be arrested for his involvement in the anti-apartheid movement, the United Democratic Front. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Democratic\\_Front\\_\(South\\_Africa\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Democratic_Front_(South_Africa))) However, he makes it very clear that as a child he was not political and that this is not what initially drove his love of cartoons. ‘When I was really young I was not thinking politically at all ... I loved Giles ... Tintin ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintin\\_\(character\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintin_(character))) had a huge influence on me’, he says enthusiastically. ‘Only when I was in my teens did I start thinking about the possibility of cartoons as a political statement’. Shapiro, like many cartoonists, is no stranger to controversy. I ask him what constraints and taboos he has had to confront in his work. He says that the most significant constraints he faces are ‘connected with where I speak from ... I am privileged, I am white, I am male ... I tick all those boxes’. This was apparent during a major controversy ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape\\_of\\_Lady\\_Justice\\_cartoon\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape_of_Lady_Justice_cartoon_controversy)) over one of his cartoons in 2008. The cartoon in question was called ‘The Rape of Lady Justice’. It depicts (<https://www.zapiro.com/080907st>) former President Jacob Zuma and his allies pinning ‘Lady Justice’ (a metaphor for the justice system as a whole) to the ground. Zuma is unbuckling his trousers, and his friends are saying ‘Go For It, Boss!’. The point Shapiro was making was that at this point, Zuma was faced with multiple charges of corruption, and he and his allies were trying to bully the judiciary. The cartoon was hugely contentious. Some argued that it was racist in its depiction of black men, and, as Shapiro himself admits; ‘there were many people who took issue with my using the rape metaphor at all’. But he is proud of the cartoon. ‘There is empathy with Lady Justice, and it [the cartoon] actually says things about the patriarchy and the violence in our society’.

## ***Legacy of Apartheid***

I ask him what impact the legacy of apartheid (<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/2018/09/11/the-perversity-of-reverse-apartheid-in-south-africa/>) has had on South Africa today and what role it plays in his work. ‘[Apartheid] has a huge impact on society and it plays a big role in my work’, he replies. He shows me one of his cartoons that addresses this issue. It has the caption ‘Whites Who Never Benefitted From Apartheid:’ (<https://www.zapiro.com/000905so>), followed by a blank space. His point is that every white South African benefited from apartheid in some way. ‘A lot of white people were very angry with this cartoon’, he recalls. ‘White people, as a group, really did not come to terms with the indignity and the inhumanity of apartheid’. Shapiro says he gets tired of the excuses made by some white South Africans; namely, that they were too young to have benefited from apartheid, or that they did not really know what was going on. ‘Every white person during the apartheid era and now ... by virtue of our white skin and privilege ... we are all beneficiaries’. Many people in the UK, and in the West more generally, have quite a dreamy view of South Africa post-apartheid — when Nelson Mandela (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12305154>) came to power. There was an idea of building South Africa as a new ‘rainbow nation’ (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7512700.stm>) (a term first coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu). This era has been the subject of films such as *Invictus* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1057500/>). I ask Shapiro if this image of South Africa was ever true. He believes that there was a moment when it was real and not an illusion. Mandela united South Africa at a time when it certainly was, as Shapiro puts it: ‘a real powder keg’. When ‘it could have blown up in ways that it didn’t’.

But it did not last. Shapiro maintains that as early as 2000, South Africa felt like a Black-and-White nation once again. Around this time Shapiro drew a cartoon (<https://www.zapiro.com/000825so>) that featured a black and white rainbow. The ‘rainbow nation’ was only temporary.

## ***South Africa During Covid***

This brings us to the present, and in particular, the impact of Covid-19 on South Africa. Shapiro argues that the pandemic has entrenched existing inequalities in South Africa, as it has in other countries such as India (<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/covid-deepened-inequalities-wealth-education-gender-7160341/>) and Brazil. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/22/brazil-rio-coronavirus-hunger-poverty>) ‘The way that a pandemic works is that it does exacerbate all those fault lines in society’. He accuses the South African government of implementing an ‘apartheid-style lockdown’. The way in which they enforced lockdown was: ‘very similar to how the old white government would have done, where soldiers and the police have come into townships ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Township\\_%28South\\_Africa%29#Post-apartheid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Township_%28South_Africa%29#Post-apartheid)) and humiliated and brutalised black people.’



‘Rumblings’ – (c) Zapiro (South-Africa) – Cartooning for Peace

In response, Shapiro drew a cartoon (<https://www.zapiro.com/200609dm>) of South African ministers saying: ‘we stand with African Americans over the murder of George Floyd (<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/03/us/george-floyd-case-timeline/>) by law-enforcement officers’ — while a black South African man is beaten to death by army officers in the background. Shapiro thinks that: ‘the response in South Africa [to George Floyd’s murder] was weirdly unrecognising of what had happened in South Africa ... in terms of numbers of people killed by army and police. We already had thirteen dead during lockdown’.


But despite the very real challenges that beset South Africa, Shapiro is not without hope. ‘I don’t want to give the impression that I’m completely hopeless. If I was, I would probably stop doing what I do’.

*Interview conducted by Laura Brick (Young Writer for Shout Out UK), as part of the GCRF-funded and AHRC-funded research on Covid in Cartoons (<https://le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons>), in collaboration with Cartooning for Peace (<https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/presentation/?lang=en>) and Shout Out UK*

(<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/>). Published also here (<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/2021/10/22/cartooning-in-south-africa-jonathan-zapiro-on-the-post-apartheid-rainbow-nation/>).

Posted in Uncategorized (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/category/uncategorized/>) | Leave a response (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/cartooning-south-africa-jonathan-zapiro-post-apartheid-rainbow-nation/#respond>)

Share this page:

 Tweet 0 0 Share


Tweet  
(<http://twitter.com/share>)  
Share



([https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska\\_louwagie/](https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska_louwagie/))

## About fl47

View more posts by fl47 ([https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska\\_louwagie/](https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska_louwagie/))

 Subscribe to fl47's posts ([https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska\\_louwagie/feed](https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/author/fransiska_louwagie/feed))

## Leave a Reply

### Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Post Comment

« Previous (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/pedagogy-and-the-covid-19-pandemic-the-covid-in-cartoons-project/>)

Next » (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/willis-from-tunis-interview-cartoonist-nadia-khiari/>)

**Research at Leicester**



**Jobs at Leicester**



**Study with us**



Find out about our undergraduate and postgraduate courses

**Search**

Search

## Recent Posts

Political Cartooning in Côte d'Ivoire: Interview with Lassane Zohoré (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/05/11/political-cartooning-in-cote-divoire-interview-with-lassane-zohore/>)

Political Cartoons in the Classroom: The 'Simple View of Reading' Approach (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/03/02/political-cartoons-in-the-classroom-the-simple-view-of-reading-approach/>)

On threats to freedom of expression in Hungary: blog post by cartoonist Gabor Papai (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/14/on-threats-to-freedom-of-expression-in-hungary-blog-post-by-cartoonist-gabor-papai/>)

Willis from Tunis: An Interview with Cartoonist Nadia Khiari (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/willis-from-tunis-interview-cartoonist-nadia-khiari/>)

Cartooning in South Africa: Jonathan Zapiro on the Post-Apartheid 'Rainbow Nation' (<https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/01/11/cartooning-south-africa-jonathan-zapiro-post-apartheid-rainbow-nation/>)

## Recent Comments

No comments to show.



Back to top

 (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Leicester/133372010036917>)

 (<http://twitter.com/uniofleicester>)

 (<http://www.youtube.com/UniversityLeicester>)

 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/universityleicester/sets/>)

 (<http://www.linkedin.com/companies/university-of-leicester>)

 (<https://plus.google.com/117567742134339880689/>)

 (<https://soundcloud.com/university-of-leicester/sets>)

---

University A-Z (<http://www2.le.ac.uk/indexes>)

---

Contact the University (<http://www2.le.ac.uk/contact>)

---

Legal (<http://www.le.ac.uk/legal>)



[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)