

EDITORIAL ON CHANGING JACKETS

When next I go shopping for a new jacket, I must remember a lesson I learned this year: it's the brand that counts.

At the 2007 convention, the Actuarial Society (not to be confused with the old 'ASSA') unveiled its new image: logo, slogan and all. Some thought the logo looked like a horseshoe—perhaps for luck, perhaps for getting places slowly or perhaps for reference to the forge at which the new Society was to “forge a new future” as the slogan suggested. Someone suggested that the association of actuaries with forgery was not such a good idea, and we were assured that the logo was not a horseshoe but a seal. The slogan was dropped, but the seal remains.

The Society's Research Committee, which is responsible for publishing this Journal, soon realised that the new logo would clash with the colours of its cover. A brand new jacket was called for. The Society's designers went to work. What they came up with was the Actuarial Society's branding gone wild. To be fair, it must be admitted that they had not been briefed on the need for a reflection of the Journal's editorial independence (Thomson, 2003), a reflection of the role of the Society as publisher rather than owner. After two more iterations, the last by the Journal's layout editor, the Committee agreed to the design sported on this issue.

The old design was inspired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 'rainbow nation'. The new has jettisoned that ideal in favour of a slick modernist image. The subtext of the change needs some unpacking. Have we reached the end of the rainbow? Have we surrendered our contextual commitment to Africa?

The end of the rainbow?

The point about the end of a rainbow is, of course, that it's an illusion. But there's a deeper point: was the rainbow itself an illusion?

First, was there ever any hope that we might become a rainbow nation? Of course there was. That is what Tutu's metaphor was all about. He has always been a prophet of hope.

And there still is hope. A rainbow is an effect, not a substance. You see it when the circumstances are right, but it's not intrinsic to a nation. You can't capture it in a jacket.

The hope is seriously clouded. It is clouded by the criminal mismanagement by government of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa. It is clouded by the failure of government to speak and uphold the truth about Zimbabwe. It is clouded by the failure of government to meet the expectations of the people for human security while wasting taxpayers' money on a corruption-riddled arms deal. It is clouded by the failure of government and the capitalist system to distribute wealth (Thomson, 2006, 2007). It is clouded by the xenophobic attacks by South African citizens against our fellow-Africans.

But it is still there. While the election by the African National Congress of a man ethically (and possibly legally) as compromised as Jacob Zuma to be its president and its candidate in waiting for Tuynhuys is an affront to liberal values, the fact that the presidency of the ANC could change by democratic process is not only a sign of hope in itself. It is also a healthy reminder to Zuma and to future Presidents that their continuance in office is dependent on the will of the people. In the mean time, it must be recognised that the ANC does not necessarily subscribe to liberal values. Those who wish to promote such values have a democratic dispensation that enables them to do so.

While the National Conventional Arms Control Committee, which is fatally compromised by its regulatory capture by the military-industrial complex,¹ ineptly issued a permit for a Chinese arms shipment to go to Zimbabwe across South African soil, the people decided otherwise. The people won.

Many such instances could be cited. The underlying source of hope must continue to be in the people of South Africa. As long as the rains of life continue to fall on this people, the rainbow will continue to surprise and delight us from time to time. In the mean time, though, the romanticism of the permanent rainbow image is best left behind.

Contextual commitment to Africa

The subject of contextual commitment was discussed in Thomson (2007). In that editorial it was argued that the African actuarial research effort needs to relate the global frontiers of actuarial research to the African context. Perhaps our new jacket is more about global frontiers than about African context. But there does seem to me to be a dusty sort of sunrise at the back of it, which makes me feel at home.

And after all, as pointed out in another editorial (Thomson, 2005), African philosophy is eclectic: it challenges us to draw on the best of other cultures and integrate them into African-ness. Whether the topic be AIDS interventions, pensions and social-security reform, consumer issues, healthcare or decision theory, our context is both the wave across our bows and the wind in our sails.

1 RJ Thomson (2008). Arms watchdog turns on its owner. *Mail & Guardian Online*, 16/7/2008

But it's not just about jackets ...

Publication, however, does not end with the design of a good jacket. During the past year the Actuarial Society has agreed to two important changes in this regard. First, we have gone open access. This means that not only members of the Actuarial Society, but any member of the public may download articles published in this Journal free of charge. Secondly, we have moved from copyright, with all rights reserved to the Actuarial Society as publisher, to creative commons, under which only certain rights are reserved. The creative-commons licence under which the Journal is now being published is an attribution-only licence. This means that any person, including the authors, may use or reproduce any article published in the Journal, whether for their own profit or not, as long as they attribute it to the authors and the Journal.

In the end, of course, it is neither the jacket nor the methods of publication that count, but the contents. While we can muse on the subtext of a change in branding, and while we can improve our publication methods to make our research effort more widely accessed, it is first and foremost the quality of the articles that appear inside it that makes or breaks a scholarly journal. For that we are indebted to our Editorial Advisory Panel, our scrutineers and most of all, our authors.

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