

“AMERICA’S MANDELA”: SOUTH AFRICAN RESPONSES TO THE RISE OF BARACK OBAMA

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Abstract

In this article reactions in the South African media to the emergence of Barack Obama as contender in the 2008 US presidential election, then as official Democratic Party presidential candidate and then as US President-elect are analysed. The context of US-SA relations is sketched first to highlight the type of issues of US-SA relations that would be important for South Africans. Then the opinions of politicians, economists, editors, academics and letter-writers representing the public, which were published in South African newspapers in 2008 and 2009 at the crucial moments in the US presidential election campaign, are analysed in terms of perceptions about Obama’s role in international affairs, US relations with Africa and bilateral USA-RSA relations. The evaluation of these South African opinions is done with a view to testing some conclusions reached in the literature on the process of globalisation and local responses to it. Our argument is that the analysis of South African responses to Obama published in the newspapers confirms that globalisation³ and glocalisation⁴ are simultaneous processes in the contemporary world. On the one hand a set of liberal moral values have emerged in the post-Cold War world which unites the majority of moderate citizens of countries across the globe in their evaluation of important events. On the other hand these generic values only assume real significance for people when their implications for the local situation become clear.

Keywords: Barack Obama; USA presidential election 2008; SA Media; newspapers; opinions; globalisation; glocalisation; USA-RSA relations.

Sleutelwoorde: Barack Obama; VSA-presidentsverkiesing 2008; SA Media; koerante; menings; globalisering; glokalisering; VSA-RSA-betrekkings.

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3 Globalisation is here defined as the trend that different cultures and societies in the contemporary world are becoming increasingly interconnected, which results in them becoming similar to each other.

4 Glocalisation refers to the adaptation of global ideas, products or services to local needs. It has been termed “internalised globalisation”, meaning that global pressures are being tempered by local conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

After a very successful election campaign Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States of America (USA) in November 2008 and inaugurated on January 20, 2009. His inauguration, with the theme “A new birth of freedom”, set an attendance record for any event in Washington, D.C.⁵

The progressive growth in the support for Obama during the presidential election campaign can be ascribed partly to the disillusionment among US citizens with the Bush administration and partly to the public image of Obama as a fresh breeze in American politics. Although Obama was rated as one of the most liberal senators, his perceived combination of political savvy, calm and even temperament secured support for him even in more conservative circles. Polls showed that not only in the USA, but also in countries around the globe, Obama received strong and increasing support in the run-up to his election and inauguration as President of the United States. Towards the end of the presidential election support for Obama in countries on all continents was overwhelming, on average four times that of his Republican opponent, John McCain, with the most favourable scores for Obama coming from Asian, European and a few African countries.⁶

It is the purpose of this article to investigate the reaction in South Africa to Barack Obama’s nomination by the Democratic Party as its presidential candidate, his election and inauguration as President of the USA. The objective of the investigation of South African responses to these events of global importance is to establish whether these responses reveal something about the results of the process of globalisation in the contemporary world which may confirm findings in the literature on globalisation.

This is mainly a newspaper study, focusing on the South African media during the periods 3-15 June 2008 (when Obama secured the Democratic Party’s presidential candidacy), 4-16 November 2008 (when he was elected President), and 20 January-1 February 2009 (after his inauguration as President). In these periods the media coverage of Obama’s rise to power reached its zenith. Media coverage in South Africa, including editorials, regular columns, articles and reports, was selected on the basis of its availability in the SA Media database used by us and then analysed in a qualitative way. Special attention was given to responses to

5 Robert Barnes and Michael D Shear, “Obama makes history”, *Washington Post*, 5 November 2008; Carl Hulse, “Obama is sworn in as the 44th President”, *New York Times*, 20 January 2009. See also Kenneth T Walsh, “Barack Obama’s inauguration is one for the history books”, *U.S. News and World Report*, 20 January 2009. A video of the inauguration ceremony is available at <<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/283479-1>>.

6 “World citizens prefer Obama to McCain by more than 3-to-1”, *Gallup World*, 28 October 2008, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/111253/world-citizens-prefer-obama-mccain-more-than3to1.aspx>>, accessed 27 October 2009.

Obama by politicians, economists, editors, academics and letters representing the general public. The main focus was on the expectations of Obama by South African citizens in terms of the implications of his economic and foreign relations policies for Africa and South Africa. Background information on the foreign relations context involving South Africa and the USA was obtained from a literature study in order to provide the historical context which may have had a bearing on South African attitudes towards Obama.

We have completed a similar study of responses to the rise of Obama in South Korea.⁷ The findings of the two case studies will be compared to establish whether they point towards the confirmation of findings in previous research in the published literature on the relationship between globalisation and glocalisation.

2. BEFORE OBAMA: ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USA IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 The need for close ties with the USA

Good relations with the USA as superpower with enormous political and economic power have been of great importance to South Africa (the Republic of South Africa, RSA). The USA developed a strategic relationship with this country during the Cold War period (1945-1989). At the heart of this relationship was anticommunism.

During the apartheid period (1948-1994) and Cold War era strategic and economic interests drew the RSA and USA together. Most white South Africans regarded themselves as an integral part of the Western world led by the USA. The official foreign policy stance of the National Party government was to maintain the closest possible relations with the USA. The backing of the USA in international forums was crucial to the government and its supporters in weathering the storms of the growing anti-apartheid campaigns. Many American citizens felt uneasy about apartheid in South Africa, but the overriding objective of the US government's foreign policy towards South Africa was to enlist Pretoria's assistance in containing communism in the Southern African subcontinent. For this reason the USA was described as "apartheid's reluctant uncle".⁸

As a result of mounting anti-apartheid pressure and the weakening of white rule in Southern Africa US foreign policy towards Pretoria started changing. In the late 1970s the Carter administration pressurised the South African government to accept the inevitability of black majority rule. In the 1980s the Reagan-Crocker

7 Jacobus A du Pisani & Kwangsu Kim, "The Obama factor: Responses in South Korea (2008-2009)", *New Contree* 65, December 2012, pp. 139-162.

8 See Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid's reluctant uncle: the United States and Southern Africa in the early Cold War* (New York, Oxford University Press).

policy of constructive engagement in Southern Africa aimed to allow Washington to continue its strategically important relationship with Pretoria without the appearance of endorsing apartheid.⁹

Apart from anticommunism economic considerations was another key element of US relations with South Africa. Imports, exports and cash flows between the USA and South Africa were increasing and the USA became a major trading partner of South Africa.¹⁰ From the 1970s anti-apartheid pressure prevented the further expansion of USA-RSA economic relations. In 1986 Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which facilitated disinvestment by American investors from South Africa.¹¹ By the end of the Cold War the USA had started relinquishing its diplomatic and economic backing of the apartheid state.

In the post-Cold War period democratisation brought political change to the RSA. These changes did not seriously threaten bilateral relations, but altered their nature.

Relations between the United States and South Africa underwent changes from the 1990s. Negotiations for a new democratic political dispensation in South Africa culminated in 1994 in a switch of power from the pro-US National Party to the African National Congress (ANC) and its alliance partners Cosatu (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) and the SACP (South African Communist Party). The demise of apartheid had removed the obstacles to normal interstate relations between the USA and South Africa, but there was some uncertainty about what the attitude of the new ruling alliance, known for its strong links with the former Soviet Union, towards the USA would be.¹²

9 Kenneth Grundy, "Stasis in transition: United States-South African relations" in Walter Carlsnaes and Marie Muller (eds), *Change and South African external relations* (Johannesburg, International Thomson Publishers), p. 132.

10 PH Kapp, "From friendship to frustration: 1948-1976" in PH Kapp and GC Olivier (eds), *United States/South Africa relations: past, present, and future* (Cape Town, Tafelberg), p. 115. See also GL de Wet and N Schoeman, "Economic relations between South Africa and the United States of America" in Kapp and Olivier, pp. 96-115. In 1989 the USA exported goods to the value of \$1,7 billion to and imported goods to the value of \$1,5 billion from South Africa. See US Foreign Trade Department statistics, "Trade with South Africa: 1989", <<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c7910.html#1989>>, accessed 6 October 2010.

11 GC Olivier, "The United States and South Africa: discord or collaboration?" in Kapp and Olivier, p. 164; PW Liebenberg, "The Reagan policy of constructive engagement" in Kapp and Olivier, p. 95; Percy Qoboza, John Barratt and Ton Vosloo, *The United States and South Africa: three South African perspectives* (Braamfontein, South African Institute of International Affairs), p. 1; Grundy, p. 134; Paul Rich, "Changing relations with the United States" in Greg Mills (ed), *From pariah to participant: South Africa's evolving foreign relations, 1990-1994* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of International Affairs), p. 96; Joanne E Davies, "South Africa and constructive engagement: lessons learned?", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34(1), March 2008, p. 5.

12 See James Barber, *Mandela's world: the international dimension of South Africa's political revolution 1990-99* (Cape Town, David Philip), p. 167; Grundy, p. 136.

The government of President Nelson Mandela (1994-1999) did not swear unqualified allegiance to “the West” and the USA. Aspiring to a leadership role in emerging coalitions of the global South, the “new” South Africa adopted multilateralism as a central plank of its diplomacy.¹³ This did not prove to be an obstacle in the strengthening of US-South African relations. The Clinton administration regarded post-apartheid South Africa as a pivotal player in US relations with the African continent and was keen on strengthening ties with Pretoria. Mandela’s government decided to retain the best possible relations with Washington and to promote US investment in South Africa. Reciprocal state visits between the two countries were undertaken by Mandela and Clinton. Despite occasional differences in their foreign policy approaches, relations between Washington and Pretoria were correct, positive and improving. A binational commission was created and an annual SA-USA bilateral forum was instituted, with the aim to consult on matters of mutual interest and to promote bilateral co-operation.¹⁴

During Thabo Mbeki’s presidency (1999-2008) ties with the USA, regarded as a “strategic partnership”, were strengthened. Mbeki is credited for being the “prime architect in reconfiguring South Africa’s relations with the United States”.¹⁵ State visits between the two countries were undertaken by Mbeki and his American counterpart, George W Bush. To realise his foreign policy objective of negotiating a better deal for Africa through his African renaissance and NEPAD projects, Mbeki needed G-8 and particularly US assistance. Economic links between the two states were consolidated. After 1994 the USA became the largest single foreign investor and the largest donor of official development assistance in the South African economy. With over 500 American companies actively involved in South Africa the USA became one of the country’s largest trading partners.¹⁶ During the Mbeki era US exports to South Africa exceeded US exports to any other country in Sub-Sahara Africa and after Nigeria South Africa was the second largest African exporter to the USA.¹⁷

13 Donna Lee, Ian Taylor and Paul D Williams (eds), *The new multilateralism in South African diplomacy* (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 205-206; Chris Alden and Garth le Pere, *South Africa’s post-apartheid foreign policy: from reconciliation to revival?* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p. 9.

14 Grundy, pp. 136, 139, 145; Rich, p. 106; Barber, pp. 61, 91, 143, 166, 167, 168, 169. See Bill Clinton: Essential speeches, Address of the President to the Parliament of South Africa, 26 March 1998 (Great Neck Publishing).

15 Alden and Le Pere, p. 16.

16 Republic of South Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, Annual reports 2003/04, pp. 90, 92; 2004/05, p. 151; 2007/08, p. 55. See also Grundy, pp. 136, 139, 145; Rich, p. 106; Barber, pp. 61, 91, 143, 166, 167.

17 Republic of South Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, Annual report 2006/07, p. 117.

In 2006 the South African Department of Foreign Affairs reported: “The bilateral relationship with the United States of America (US) remains strong, with co-operation expanding on matters of common interest and mutual benefit. Since 1994, business, civilian and government links with the USA have expanded exponentially and a strong and long-term SA-US working partnership has been established. High-level government-to-government interaction has intensified significantly.”¹⁸

2.2 Increasing anti-Americanism

The official foreign policy stance of the South African government of maintaining good relations with the USA disguised the fact that a variety of attitudes towards the USA existed among different sections of the population. Anti-Americanism¹⁹ was emerging.

In South Africa, strong anti-American sentiments already existed in the apartheid period. Black and white South Africans who supported the liberation movements and anti-apartheid organisations were disgusted with what they regarded as the propping up of apartheid by the US government. Not only did they support United Nations (UN) resolutions in which appeals were made upon the USA to refrain from supporting the apartheid regime through trade and other relations, but they also maintained links with groups that fought racial discrimination in the USA. Black consciousness movements in South Africa, which were prominent during the 1970s, had links with the civil rights and black power movements in the USA. In the 1970s and 1980s South African anti-apartheid activists added their voices to those of the American anti-apartheid activists who put increasing pressure on the US government and the American corporate sector to sever their ties with the apartheid regime. US disinvestment was a crucial component of international pressure on Pretoria, which contributed to FW de Klerk’s decision to opt for a negotiated settlement.²⁰

When apartheid came to an end, resulting in the flourishing of diplomatic and economic relations between South Africa and the USA, anti-Americanism in South Africa did not die with it. In more radical political circles anti-Americanism was linked to anticapitalism and misgivings about neoliberal objectives. It was a setback for the anticapitalists that the Mandela government chose not to convert South

18 Republic of South Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, Annual report 2005/06, p. 76.

19 The term “anti-Americanism” refers to opposition or hostility to the policies, culture, society, economics or international role of the United States of America. Manifestations of anti-Americanism have varied in different places at different times, which makes precise definition of its meaning and conceptual clarity problematic.

20 See Kapp, Qoboza, Barratt and Vosloo.

Africa into a socialist state. In radical circles the ANC government was accused of selling out to the dominant capitalist power.²¹

When George W Bush launched his “war on terrorism” by attacking the Taliban in Afghanistan and later invading Iraq, relations between the USA and Africa, particularly Muslims on the continent, were strained. Thabo Mbeki, who was just beginning to build relations with Bush, responded cautiously to Bush’s actions, but other South Africans were more outspoken. Fundamentalist Muslims in South Africa joined other African Muslims in condemning Bush. Even non-Muslim religious leaders, among them Archbishop Desmond Tutu, cautioned against military retaliation by US forces.²²

Solidarity with the USA after September 11, 2001 and support by most South Africans for the use of force against the Taliban in Afghanistan soon made way for growing anti-American feelings because of what was increasingly being regarded as an unlawful war in Iraq. When the maltreatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and the Abu Ghraib prison became known the lack of human rights compliance by the USA was highlighted in the South African press. A growing number of South Africans resented the bullying tactics used by the Bush administration. The vocal Muslim community, consisting mostly of mixed-race and Indian South Africans and strongly opposed to what it perceived as coercive US policies toward the Middle East, was joined by non-Muslim black and white South Africans in the expression of anti-American sentiments.²³ Among the broad South African public, like in many other parts of the world, scepticism and disillusionment with US foreign policy mounted during Bush’s last four-year term in office, not only because of what happened in Iraq, but also because of Bush’s stance on issues such as anti-racism and global warming.²⁴ By the end of his term anti-Bush sentiments in South Africa reached a peak.

Thus, in South Africa anti-Americanism has existed in significant sections of the population. A survey conducted in 2002 found that in South Africa 64,9 percent of the respondents held favourable attitudes towards the USA and 24,9 percent unfavourable attitudes. Of the 44 countries included in the survey South Africa ranked 17th in the index of unfavourable attitudes towards the USA.²⁵

21 Barber, pp. 168, 169.

22 Kobus du Pisani, “Africa’s relations with the United States: developments after September 11, 2001”, *Journal of the Korean Association of African Studies* 16, December 2002, pp. 117-119.

23 Richard Goldstone, “Ambiguity and America: South Africa and US foreign policy”, *Social Research* 72(4), Winter 2005, pp. 821-822.

24 Bantubonke Holomisa, “American leadership in global crises: a South African perspective”, *International Journal on World Peace* 24(3), September 2007, pp. 84-85.

25 Pew Global Attitudes Survey 2002, cited in Byong-kuenJhee, “Anti-Americanism and electoral politics in Korea”, *Political Science Quarterly* 123(2), 2008, p. 306.

Anti-Americanism in South Africa was part of a broader pattern of anti-Americanism that reached a climax during the second term of the Bush administration. It was reported in 2005 by the Pew Global Attitudes Project Survey that anti-Americanism was “deeper and broader now than at any time in modern history”.²⁶ Strong anti-Bush sentiments did not necessarily seriously imperil the traditionally strong USA-RSA relations. Jhee argues that anti-Americanism should be viewed as an expression of “democratic maturity” and that increasing anti-Americanism will not lead to fundamental changes in a traditionally pro-American foreign policy.²⁷ This conclusion can be made applicable to USA-South African relations.

3. SOUTH AFRICAN RESPONSES TO BARACK OBAMA

Most South Africans joined the rest of the world in hailing Barack Obama’s ascendancy as a moment of hope for positive change in the world. In this article responses to Obama in South Africa, as reflected in the media, are analysed in terms of perceptions about his role in international, regional and bilateral (i.e USA-RSA) relations.

3.1 Expectations of improved international relations

During the nomination and election process in the USA strong anti-Bush sentiments were expressed in the South African media. Newspapers reflected a sense of relief that the rule of Bush was finally nearing its end. Bush was accused of “folly” and “expediency” and his eight-year term described as a “nightmare”. Disapproval was expressed of American arrogance under Bush, who divided the world according to America’s standard of good and evil and attempted to force America’s will onto other countries. It was stated that the Bush era was marked by the US pursuit of global hegemony based on military superiority and self-righteous ideology. Newspapers agreed that because of the blunders of Bush, especially the war in Iraq, the image of the USA abroad was at an all-time low. Bush was also blamed for having allowed conditions to develop that plunged the USA and the whole world into an economic crisis. Obama’s election was interpreted as a judgement on the eight years of the Bush administration.²⁸

26 Cited in Jhee, p. 301.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 317.

28 See e.g. “Now Obama must change the way the world sees US” (editorial), *The Times*, 5 November 2008, p. 18; “Obama hailed by an adoring world tired of bungles of the Bush-era” (editorial), *The Herald*, 6 November 2008, p. 6; “Giving the lead” (editorial), *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 8 November 2008, p. 32; “Obama inspires us as a ray of hope – and it feels good” (editorial), *City Press*, 9 November 2008, p. 26.

In contrast to the anti-Bush attitudes strong pro-Obama sentiments dominated coverage of the election campaign. After Bush's two terms there was a perception that the time was ripe for change. Barack Obama fought his nomination and election campaigns on a ticket of change. He was portrayed as a symbol and personification of change. When he was nominated as presidential candidate the possibility of Obama becoming president was regarded as a prospect harbouring hope for welcome change from the staleness of the Bush presidency, that would be good for America and the world.²⁹ When he won the presidential election it was stated that the mere fact of his election had already made the world a better place and reversed the trend of anti-Americanism. Obama's image as a citizen of the world would improve the USA's international relations. His election had also changed the global geopolitical game, because it would no longer be possible for other powers to hide their belligerence behind America's unpopularity.³⁰

Expectations were that Obama's election would change the whole world. There was agreement among commentators that Obama's nomination and election heralded a "brave new world". He was regarded as a visionary leader who could guide the USA and the world into a more humane and prosperous era of global peace. Hope was expressed in the media that under his leadership the USA would be less self-centred and arrogant and that he would lead the USA away from the unilateralism of the Bush administration.³¹

In newspapers Obama was compared to great leaders of the past. In the South African press Obama's name was linked to other great Americans, particularly Martin Luther King. It was said that his idealism opened up a "second chance" for the USA to revive the politics of hope and positive change that had prevailed in the time of Kennedy and King. It was up to him to capitalise on his popularity and to turn his promise of change into reality. As "man of the hour" Obama was also compared to Winston Churchill in wartime Britain and Nelson Mandela during South Africa's transition to democracy. It was stated in almost every editorial

29 See e.g. "Obama clears a big hurdle" (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 June 2008, p. 12; "Obama, McCain" (editorial), *Rapport*, 15 June 2008, p. 16.

30 See e.g. "Now Obama must change the way the world sees US" (editorial), *The Times*, 5 November 2008, p. 18; "Obama" (editorial), *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 16; "Colour and character" (editorial), *The Cape Argus*, 6 November 2008, p. 18; "Can Africa be like that? Yes we can" (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; "Obama's first loyalty will be to the US" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13; "New era of hope" (editorial), *Business Day*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; "Giving the lead" (editorial), *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 8 November 2008, p. 32; "Obama inspires us as a ray of hope – and it feels good" (editorial), *City Press*, 9 November 2008, p. 26; Philip Stephens, "Obama's victory – a change the world should believe in", *Business Day*, 10 November 2008, p. 11.

31 "Obama's first loyalty will be to the US" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13; "Obama must shed US arrogance" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 20 January 2009, p. 7.

comment dealing with Obama that the world was waiting for him to provide the type of inspirational leadership that was needed in troubled times.³²

When the Obama campaign was gathering momentum, occasional warnings against unrealistically high expectations of Obama and “o-phoria” were sounded in the South African media. Editors acknowledged that Obama possessed excellent leadership qualities, but pointed out that he was only human and that there were many obstacles which would make it difficult for him to meet the impossibly high expectations of him that had been created. It was expected that his honeymoon would be over before it could even begin.³³ After the euphoria of the election campaign Obama himself tried to manage the exaggerated expectations when he delivered his inaugural speech as President and started by emphasising the scale of the challenges facing the USA and the world, and stating that it would be unrealistic to expect all of those challenges to be met in a short time-span. There was still a strong element of hope in what he said - he gave the assurance that the American people would meet the challenges - but it was balanced by a sense of realism. He emphasised that Americans should not solely rely on the state, but should take personal and collective responsibility for their own destiny. In the media analysts regarded Obama’s speech as appropriate for the occasion.³⁴

Editors and political analysts in South Africa identified priorities for Obama’s agenda. They accepted that Obama’s first loyalty would be to the USA and his first priority to try and save the American economy. In the context of the global financial crisis Obama’s first priority would be to put policies and programmes in place to salvage the American and global economy from the existing turmoil. It was noted that in the global economy things were bound to get worse before they would start getting better and that there was little Obama could do about it. His proposed \$800 billion stimulus package to boost the failing American economy would be crucial,

32 “Now Obama must change the way the world sees US” (editorial), *The Times*, 5 November 2008, p. 18; “Obama” (editorial), *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 16; “Obama clears a big hurdle” (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 June 2008, p. 12; “Colour and character” (editorial), *The Cape Argus*, 6 November 2008, p. 18; “Can Africa be like that? Yes we can” (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; “Obama’s first loyalty will be to the US” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13; “New era of hope” (editorial), *Business Day*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; “Giving the lead” (editorial), *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 8 November 2008, p. 32; “Obama inspires us as a ray of hope – and it feels good” (editorial), *City Press*, 9 November 2008, p. 26; Philip Stephens, “Obama’s victory – a change the world should believe in”, *Business Day*, 10 November 2008, p. 11; “Obama, McCain” (editorial), *Rapport*, 15 June 2008, p. 16; “America’s Mandela” (editorial), *Daily Dispatch*, 20 January 2009, p. 6; “Obama must shed US arrogance” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 20 January 2009, p. 7.

33 “Honeymoon’s over before it can begin” (editorial), *Business Day*, 20 January 2009, p. 8; “Obama must shed US arrogance” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 20 January 2009, p. 7.

34 Eusebius McKaiser, “Hope without the sugary bits”, *Business Day*, 22 January 2009, p. 8; “What can South Africa learn from the Obama story?” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 22 January 2009, p. 11.

but its success was not guaranteed. Hope was expressed that in the longer term Obama would investigate the underlying causes of the economic crisis and that he would be capable of coping rationally with unregulated greed and that America would set the example of replacing words like “greed”, “excess” and “speculative gains” with “generosity”, “moderation” and “honest labour”.³⁵ South African editors emphasised the problem of global inequality and alleviation of poverty in the developing world.³⁶

In foreign policy it would be Obama’s task to change the bellicose image of the USA, to restore respect for the USA as a guardian of freedom and human rights, and to switch to “a flexible form of diplomacy that utilizes both the dynamics of alliances and soft power”. Obama was advised, in his efforts to resolve international issues, to resort to dialogue and cooperation with both the allies and adversaries of the USA.³⁷

Thus an overriding sense was expressed in the South African media that Obama’s rise to the most powerful office in the world was a momentous occasion that would have an impact on the entire world. One South African editor articulated this expectation by stating that Obama’s election would “herald a sea change in global politics”.³⁸ Although Obama himself cautioned that global change could not be effected overnight, there was, nevertheless, a sense of optimism about the prospects of positive change.

Our analysis of the South Korean media revealed that, although anti-Bush sentiments were less pronounced than in the South African media, the pro-Obama attitudes among the moderate elite in the two countries, expressed by amongst others editors, politicians and businesspeople, were very similar, almost interchangeable.³⁹ The shared liberal values among moderates in the two countries were evident.

However, extreme right- and left-wingers did not endorse these values. Anti-American groups in South Africa, including fundamentalist and extremist minorities, did not share the euphoria about Obama’s election and the prospects for a better world so boldly expressed in the media.

35 “Honeymoon’s over before it can begin” (editorial), *Business Day*, 20 January 2009, p. 8; “Obama must shed US arrogance” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 20 January 2009, p. 7.

36 “Obama” (editorial), *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 16; “Obama hailed by an adoring world tired of bungles of the Bush-era” (editorial), *The Herald*, 6 November 2008, p. 6; “Can Africa be like that? Yes we can” (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; “Groen held” (editorial), *Beeld*, 8 November 2008, p. 8.

37 “Honeymoon’s over before it can begin” (editorial), *Business Day*, 20 January 2009, p. 8; “Obama must shed US arrogance” (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 20 January 2009, p. 7.

38 “A time of change” (editorial), *Daily Dispatch*, 6 November 2008, p. 7.

39 Du Pisani & Kim, “The Obama factor ...”, pp. 149-152.

Although Obama seemed to try and reach out to Muslims some Muslims in South Africa were sceptic. One letter-writer stated that the Western world had betrayed Muslims on several occasions. He wrote: “The Americans and their allies have now become my enemies by illegally invading Muslim lands and causing great harm and suffering to Muslims all over the world. I will not forgive them unless they are tried for war crimes and justice is done.” In his view Obama was no better than Kofi Annan, Colin Powell and Condi Rice, whom he regarded as “puppets of the White House”.⁴⁰ Another Muslim letter-writer agreed that Obama’s foreign policy towards the Muslim world would not deviate much from that of Bush. Because Obama would also be subjected to powerful special interests such as the military-industrial complex, the Zionist-Israeli lobby, the American auto industry and farm lobby groups the global community should brace itself for disappointment.⁴¹ Yet another letter-writer questioned the euphoria about an expected better world order after Obama’s election. It was doubted whether Obama would be able to break with the pattern laid down by his predecessors of violating international law and UN resolutions, supporting tyrannical regimes and dictatorships, and supplying arms to countries to oppress and kill opponents of Western-backed hegemonies.⁴²

A spokesperson for a black consciousness political party credited Obama with being a good orator. However, he was no more than a “useful lackey” of “America’s ruling class” and a “powerful propaganda weapon for US imperialism”, who would not make the radical changes needed to stop the oppression of the masses. Obama had surrounded himself with “neo-conservatives and foreign policy hawks” such as Robert Gates, Rahm Emanuel and Joe Biden. “Having a black person at the helm of an oppressive and manipulative regime”, concluded the spokesperson, “should not let us automatically believe that fundamental change will be ushered in.”⁴³

Our study of the South Korean media showed that the association of Obama with general anti-American sentiments featured less prominently than in the South African media. The Muslim population in South Korea is very small⁴⁴ and religious preferences play a negligible role in anti-Americanism in that country.

40 AK Sayed, “Obama and America continue to betray Muslims everywhere” (letter), *The Star*, 4 February 2009, p. 15.

41 Samaoen Osman, “Obama’s reign will be a global disappointment” (letter), *Sunday Independent*, 23 November 2008, p. 9.

42 Firoz Osman, “Obama victory welcome but will we see change?” (letter), *Sunday Independent*, 16 November 2008, p. 9.

43 Thembinkosi Josopu (Azayo – Azapo’s youth wing), “Obama administration will be nothing special”, *The Herald*, 9 December 2008, p. 8.

44 It was estimated that there were 75 000 Muslims or 0,2% of the total population in South Korea in 2010 compared to 737 000 or 1,5% of the total population in South Africa. See The Pew Research Center, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The future of the global Muslim population”, 2011, <<http://features.pewforum.org/grl/population-number.php>>, accessed 20 February 2013.

Also, whereas anticapitalist sentiments are sometimes forcefully expressed in the South African media⁴⁵, the views of the anticapitalist lobby in South Korea seldom feature prominently in the mainstream media. Ideology does play a major role in South Korean anti-Americanism, but it is based on Pan-Korean nationalistic rather than anticapitalist orientations. Scepticism about Obama's rise thus in large part had completely different roots and manifestations in the two countries.

These divergent nuances in anti-American views in South Africa and South Korea point to glocalisation, centering around specific religious or ideological orientations among certain minority groups in the two countries. This glocalisation occurred simultaneously with the globalisation that accentuated the shared liberal values amongst the moderate elites.

3.2 Regional considerations

As far as Obama's potential role in regional affairs was concerned, the South African media tended to take a broad view of the prospects for the entire African continent. "Will Obama be good for Africa?", was a prominent question in the South African media during the nomination and election campaign.

Generally the news of Obama's nomination and election was received by most South Africans as something that would undoubtedly be beneficial to Africa. The fact that a black person, a "son of Africa", a "half-African" could make it to the White House was regarded as a symbolic boost for Africa, giving hope to "hundreds of millions of Africans throughout the world".⁴⁶ Obama's pronouncement that one of his aims was "making certain that Africa is on the radar screen" was welcomed.⁴⁷ Obama was regarded as "an African", with whom Africans could identify. He was described as "a living symbol of the new Africa", a reminder to Africans of the "enormous potential" of their continent. His success would raise the expectations of Africa. Once in the White House one of his greatest challenges would be "to shape an expansive and sustainable policy towards Africa that encourages trade,

45 The reasons for the strength of anti-capitalist movements in poorer countries are discussed in Don Milligan "The rational faith of anti-capitalists", lecture, Department of Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2011, p. 7, <http://www.studiesinanti-capitalism.net/Course_Materials_files/LECTURE1811.pdf>, accessed 20 February 2013. Anti-capitalist trends in Africa, including South Africa, are discussed in Patrick Bond, "Cultivating African AntiCapitalism", *Z Magazine*, February 2003, <<http://www.zcommunications.org/cultivating-african-anti-capitalism-by-patrick-bond>>, accessed 20 February 2013.

46 "Obama – a new dawn for US and for us" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 4 November 2008, p. 11; "Now all can dream of a fairer world" (editorial), *The Sowetan*, 6 November 2008, p. 12.

47 Maureen Isaacson, "How the son of a Kenyan goatherd got to be a US presidential candidate", *Sunday Independent*, 15 June 2008, p. 17.

sustainable development and good governance in a real partnership with African leaders”.⁴⁸

In liberal circles in South Africa Obama’s nomination was hailed as a hopeful sign. “Here at home” wrote the influential weekly paper *Mail & Guardian*, “we are happy that, finally, the US has a presidential candidate who knows that Africa is a continent and South Africa is a country. He is a liberal, which means that his policy options for the continent may even pull away from the fundamentalist notions of abstinence and the raw free-market policies that have defined so much of Bush’s Africa policy.”⁴⁹ The editor of *The Herald* wrote: “From Africa’s perspective, Obama would also bring fresh hope that a man whose father was Kenyan would understand the political and economic challenges of this continent, and be prepared to engage with its leaders and people in seeking solutions.”⁵⁰

There were exceptions in fringe groups in South Africa, who did not support Obama. Extreme right-wing Afrikaners viewed him as just another servant of international finance capital. In *Die Afrikaner*, the organ of the HNP (*Herstigste Nasionale Party*), a party spokesperson stated that the *geldmag* (money power) would use Obama’s African links to lure mineral rich African countries away from China and into the American camp. Through BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) blacks were gaining a bigger stake in the South African mining industry, which according to the HNP Obama would exploit to help achieve American foreign policy objectives on the African continent. Obama was expected to try and foster closer relations with South Africa in order to try and limit China’s influence in Africa and gain the upper hand for the USA in its economic and political rivalry with China and Russia.⁵¹

Even some moderate South Africans were cautious and warned fellow Africans not to pin all their hopes on Obama. His relationship with Africa up to that point was described as “tough love”, because Obama had also said: “Africa is responsible for helping itself. The international community can’t help Africa if its own leaders are undermining the possibilities of progress.” Obama, it was said, claimed the right to speak truth to African power by virtue of the fact that his father was an African.⁵²

Business Day, a newspaper aimed at the business sector in South Africa, was quite bland in pointing out that it would be wrong to take for granted that Obama “would understand us better, empathise more, give us more”. This paper pointed

48 “Obama a symbol of hope” (editorial), *Weekend Post*, 7 June 2008, p. 8.

49 “Go Obama!” (editorial), *Mail & Guardian*, 12 June 2008, p. 24.

50 “Obama the candidate best able to lead US” (editorial), *The Herald*, 4 November 2008, p. 4.

51 “Amerika se nuwe president Obama is geldmag se troefkaart”, *Die Afrikaner*, 13 November 2008, p. 1.

52 Maureen Isaacson, “How the son of a Kenyan goatherd got to be a US presidential candidate”, *Sunday Independent*, 15 June 2008, p. 17.

out that often in the past it had been conservative rather than liberal leaders in the developed world that contributed more to progress in the developing world. It was not expected that Obama would play up his African parentage too much in the months that lay ahead.⁵³ In another newspaper it was speculated whether Obama would have the resources to expand or even continue the trade opportunities created under the African Growth and Opportunities Act by previous US administrations.⁵⁴

Newspaper editors and reporters agreed that, realistically, it was unlikely that the needs of Africa would be high on Obama's agenda. His first priority would be to lead the United States out of the economic crisis, not to play Father Christmas around the world.⁵⁵ The biggest favour Obama could do to Africa, the editor of a newspaper for businesspeople wrote, was to keep the US economy functioning and consuming.⁵⁶

Some editors expressed doubts whether Obama's election would necessarily be better for Africa. It was stated that the continent could suffer from greater trade protectionism by Obama. Whereas McCain opposed the huge subsidies which rich governments were paying their farmers, thereby undercutting agricultural exports from Africa, Obama and the Democrats were in favour of farm-produce subsidies and some restrictive import and export practices. This might be a disadvantage to developing countries hoping to improve their trade with the USA. Also the pressure to increase social spending in the USA in a tough economic climate might restrict the amount of money available for foreign aid in Africa.⁵⁷

There was also some scepticism as to Obama's ability to implement the changes he was preaching. It was said that he first would have to overcome the ingrained conservatism of a large section of the American people, which was so influential in Washington lobbies.⁵⁸

An African letter-writer regarded Obama as an inspirational leader as far as Africans were concerned, but cautioned that those who had once supported black consciousness should not hail foreign leaders as a lifeline for South Africa. Africa needed its own Obamas in the form of black people working constructively in various fields towards meeting the continent's needs.⁵⁹ Another letter-writer

53 "Waiting for Barack" (editorial), *Business Day*, 11 June 2008, p. 10.

54 "Vote for a leader centred on a set of core values" (editorial), *The Times*, 21 January 2009, p. 18.

55 "Historic result" (editorial), *The Witness*, 6 November 2008, p. 8; "Can Africa be like that? Yes we can" (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; "Obama's first loyalty will be to the US" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13; Thami Dixon, "Obama – have a fair expectation", *Daily Dispatch*, 14 November 2008, p. 9.

56 "Honeymoon's over before it can begin" (editorial), *Business Day*, 20 January 2009, p. 8.

57 "Obama – a new dawn for US and for us" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 4 November 2008, p. 11; "Obama's first loyalty will be to the US" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13.

58 "Obama clears a big hurdle" (editorial), *The Citizen*, 6 June 2008, p. 12.

59 Mayihlome Tshwete, "Africa needs its own Obamas" (letter), *The Weekender*, 14 June 2008, p. 8.

compared Obama to African leaders. According to him people like Obama were being silenced, imprisoned or killed in Africa. He found it nauseating that African leaders who were undermining democracy and human rights were hailing Obama as their hero. Leadership in Africa was “a function of colour, tribalism and patronage”. He hoped that the Obama moment would serve as a wake-up call to Africa: “It is within us to create an Africa that respects democracy, good governance, human rights, liberty and freedom for all.”⁶⁰

This type of continental focus in post-apartheid South African society, especially in the Mbeki era, has been analysed in academic studies.⁶¹ The findings of these studies provide an explanation for the focus in the South African media on the implications of Obama’s rise for Africa. Such a continental focus was largely absent from the South Korean media. There was some reflection whether an Obama administration would be beneficial to the cause of East Asia reclaiming its historical share in international affairs.⁶² However, the regional focus of the South Korean media was much narrower on inter-Korean relations and how these relations would be influenced by the USA’s policy toward North Korea and particularly the North Korean nuclear issue.⁶³ These divergent regional focuses in the South African and South Korean media in their coverage of Obama’s rise illustrate how perceptions of the national interest exert a glocalising influence on reporting about global events.

3.3 Bilateral relations

At the time when Obama was running his nomination and election campaigns the infighting in the ruling ANC dominated South African politics. Since the end of 2007, when supporters of Jacob Zuma had ousted Thabo Mbeki as ANC leader at Polokwane and later managed to get Mbeki removed as president and replaced by Kgalema Motlanthe as caretaker president, the power struggle between the Zuma and Mbeki factions in the ANC had overshadowed everything else. It was described as “the dirty, dank squabbling of the Mbeki-Zuma internecine guerrilla warfare”⁶⁴ and “a fight among thieves over power, control and spoils at the trough”.⁶⁵

60 Lucas Ntyintyane, “Africa must learn from Obama” (letter), *Business Day*, 10 November 2008, p. 10.

61 See e.g. Chris Alden & Garth le Pere, “South Africa in Africa: Bound to lead?”, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 36(1), April 2009, pp. 145-169.

62 “Swiftly adapting to America’s transformation” (editorial), *Mail Business News*, 4 November 2008; Joseph Nye (former US Assistant Secretary of Defense), “Barack Obama and American power”, *The ChosunIlbo*, 7 November 2008.

63 Du Pisani & Kim, “The Obama factor ...”, pp. 153-156.

64 Toby Shapshak, “After Obama anything is possible”, *The Times*, 10 November 2008, p. 15.

65 Rhoda Kadalie cited by Xolela Mangcu, “Urban legend”, *The Weekender*, 8 November 2008, p. 8.

No wonder that South African newspapers devoted much space to the lessons that South African politicians could learn from the Obama campaign. The South African media compared the smooth leadership change in the USA to the messy power struggle in South Africa. It was as if every political observer in South Africa had the same wish: "If only we could have a leader such as Obama at this point in time." In this context it is not surprising that the responses in the South African media to Obama's nomination, election and inauguration focused on what South Africa could learn from Obama rather than on what Obama could do for South Africa.

Obama was compared to that greatest of South African icons, Nelson Mandela, and he was even called "America's Mandela".⁶⁶ Desmond Tutu articulated the feelings of many South Africans when he compared Obama's election as President to that of Mandela fourteen years earlier.⁶⁷ The notion that Obama's nomination and election constituted a "Mandela moment" was echoed by many. The well-known South African phrase "Mandela magic" or "Madiba magic" was adapted to "Obama magic". A South African magazine editor captured this spirit when he wrote that Obama's words "yes, we can" echoed around Johannesburg "as if they had been spoken by one of us". Not since Mandela's election as South African president had there been such euphoria and "a sense of something so right".⁶⁸

The two leaders communicated their shared vision to each other. In July 2008 Obama sent a birthday message to Mandela. In this message he stated: "Your principles will continue to guide me as I work to realise a vision of positive change for America, and for our relations with the world."⁶⁹ In a video message he said that when he had visited Mandela's cell on Robben Island he had reflected on Mandela's "fundamental belief that we do not have to accept the world as it is; that we can remake the world as it should be". In November 2008 Mandela, in his message to congratulate Obama with his election, wrote: "Your victory has demonstrated that no person anywhere in the world should not dare to dream of wanting to change the world for a better place."⁷⁰

Political analysts in South Africa tried to extract lessons for South Africa from what was happening across the Atlantic Ocean. Compared to the distasteful leadership change in South Africa the election of Obama was viewed as a "bright"

66 "Obama's first loyalty will be to the US" (editorial), *The Pretoria News*, 6 November 2008, p. 13; "A dream comes true" (editorial), *The Star*, 6 November 2008, p. 18; "America's Mandela" (editorial), *Daily Dispatch*, 20 January 2009, p. 6.

67 K Foss, "Achieve your dream urges Mandela" (report), *The Star*, 6 November 2008, p. 1.

68 Toby Shapshak, "After Obama anything is possible", *The Times*, 10 November 2008, p. 15; "This historic day" (editorial), *The Citizen*, 20 January 2009, p. 11.

69 Barack Obama's birthday message to Mandela in "Paying tribute to our birthday hero", *The Cape Argus*, 21 July 2008, p. 11.

70 K Foss, "Achieve your dream urges Mandela" (report), *The Star*, 6 November 2008, p. 1.

occasion. “Just by his sheer majesty”, wrote Xolela Mangcu, “Obama has become a counterpoint to how cursed we have been with the post-Mandela cast.” She regarded all South African political leaders as “leaders of factions, with none of the transcendent Obama-esquevooma”.⁷¹ Hope was expressed that the new ANC leadership would fare better than Bush: “If only Jacob Zuma was man enough to walk away and not plunge the country in the kind of self-serving, corporate greed-filled and generally insufferable leadership that the US has had to live with for the past eight years.”⁷² A *Mail & Guardian* editorial about Obama’s nomination was ended with a snub at the besieged Mbeki presidency in South Africa: “We hope ... for an Obama of our own as our country goes through its toughest years of freedom yet.”⁷³

With reference to Obama’s “moral authority” an editor stated that South Africa was in “urgent need of moral regeneration”. He called upon Jacob Zuma and other political leaders to heed Obama’s example of “finely tuned moral positions” and concluded: “Our political leaders need to place issues of morality at the centre of their election campaigns if we are to advance as a nation.”⁷⁴ Another editor wrote that the most important lesson that South Africa should learn from Obama’s rise was that it was the right thing to vote for a leader who opposes the arrogance of power and who stands by a core set of values, especially at a time in South African history when the values of the Constitution were being threatened.⁷⁵

A columnist was impressed by the gracious words of sincere respect that McCain and Obama had addressed to each other after the election. This was how it should be between political opponents in a democracy. In the light of the approaching elections he made an appeal, especially to the ANC and Cope, the new breakaway party, to heed this lesson of mutual respect and accepting the rules of the game of election politics.⁷⁶

There were black South Africans who felt uneasy about the negative way in which South African politicians were compared to Obama in the media. In response to a white letter-writer’s remarks that there was not a single politician in South Africa or the whole of Africa that could lace up Obama’s shoes⁷⁷, a black writer objected to such expressions of superiority and Afro-pessimism. He wrote:

71 Xolela Mangcu, “Urban legend”, *The Weekender*, 8 November 2008, p. 8.

72 Toby Shapshak, “After Obama anything is possible”, *The Times*, 10 November 2008, p. 15.

73 “Go Obama!” (editorial), *Mail & Guardian*, 12 June 2008, p. 24.

74 “Giving the lead” (editorial), *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 8 November 2008, p. 32.

75 “Vote for a leader centred on a set of core values” (editorial), *The Times*, 21 January 2009, p. 18.

76 Colin Gardner, “Democratic grace”, *The Witness*, 13 November 2008, p. 8. See also “Historic result” (editorial), *The Witness*, 6 November 2008, p. 8; “New era of hope” (editorial), *Business Day*, 6 November 2008, p. 12; Cliff Saunders, “US election an example to us” (letter), *The Star*, 6 November 2008, p. 13.

77 Doug Cattin, “Our politicians’ shabby comparison to Obama” (letter), *The Star*, 26 January 2009, p. 8.

“There are many brilliant sons and daughters of Africa who would match Barack Obama.”⁷⁸

In South Africa, where the obsession with race in society is reflected on a daily basis in the media, it was not surprising that Obama’s “blackness” received special attention. Of course, the fact that Obama had an African father was particularly meaningful to black South Africans. For black people here, as in the rest of Africa, Obama’s election was a moment of pride. Desmond Tutu regarded it as an epoch-making event which sent a signal to people of colour “that for them, the sky is the limit”.⁷⁹ Fondly remembering Jesse Jackson’s candidacy in 1984 Xolela Mangcu praised the way in which Obama had succeeded in maximizing the strategic opportunities available to African Americans in the US political system. She described Obama as comfortable in his own skin and, referring to the ease with which he seemed to handle large audiences, concluded: “Black, proud, and completely unfazed. Now is that not the way to be.”⁸⁰ Thami Dixon hailed Obama’s election as a sign that “black people have finally taken their rightful place among the other races of the world”. Obama’s election had restored the pride of blacks and shattered the ceiling that determined how high black people could go in political hierarchies.⁸¹

South African editors agreed that Obama’s election would not leave South Africa untouched. They hoped that his idealism would “infect” South Africa’s political life.⁸² Lessons applicable to South African politics could be learnt from the events in the USA. During the presidential election groups outside the vested elite that had controlled power in the USA for long, including young people, black people, women and social minorities, believed for the first time in decades that their votes would count. This fact should make South Africans excited about their ability to hold their leaders to account and to bring change.⁸³ There was speculation that the fact that so many young South Africans were registering as voters for the forthcoming South African general election could partly be attributed to the impact of Obama’s election campaign that targeted the American youth.⁸⁴

One of the most prominent “coloured” politicians in South Africa, Patricia de Lille, leader of the Independent Democrats, stated that Obama’s election was a sign to black people, particularly children, that “yes we can” was also applicable to

78 Victor Maleeme, “Africa does not need thinly veiled superiority” (letter), *The Star*, 2 February 2009, p. 9.

79 K Foss, “Achieve your dream urges Mandela” (report), *The Star*, 6 November 2008, p. 1.

80 Xolela Mangcu, “Urban legend”, *TheWeekender*, 8 November 2008, p. 8.

81 Thami Dixon, “Obama – have a fair expectation”, *Daily Dispatch*, 14 November 2008, p. 9.

82 “A time of change” (editorial), *Daily Dispatch*, 6 November 2008, p. 7.

83 “Obama shows it can be a new dawn for us, too” (editorial), *Sunday Times*, 9 November 2008, p. 18.

84 “Young voters gear up for poll” (editorial), *The Herald (EP Herald)*, 14 November 2008, p. 6.

them.⁸⁵ A letter-writer to a Cape Town newspaper expressed the hope that Obama’s victory would contribute to stopping the “mixed race” stigma in South Africa.⁸⁶

Obama had said before that the South African liberation struggle had shaped his political career. However, not much was known about his attitude towards South Africa. What was common knowledge was that he and Thabo Mbeki did not see eye to eye on how the AIDS pandemic should be handled.⁸⁷ But at the moment of Obama’s election Mbeki was already out of power. Nevertheless, it was expected that South Africa’s “abysmal record in the United Nations” and “the government’s Mugabe myopia” would impact negatively on Obama’s assessment of the country.⁸⁸

Obama’s election was welcomed by the South African government. President Kgalema Motlanthe, on behalf of the South African nation, officially congratulated the president-elect. Motlanthe, who was also chairperson of the Southern African Development Community at the time, expressed the hope that Obama’s election would make a significant contribution toward change on the African continent and that the new administration in the USA would give special attention to the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. He stated that South Africa was looking forward to working with Obama.⁸⁹

On behalf of the ruling ANC its spokesperson, Jessie Duarte, said that South Africa would continue its strong relationship of mutual respect and co-operation with the new US administration. She echoed president Motlanthe’s sentiments by expressing the trust of the ANC that the Obama administration would work towards strengthening ties with Africa, would build on existing development initiatives, and would forge a genuine partnership to address the challenges facing the continent.⁹⁰

The response to Obama’s election by the most prominent white politician in South Africa, Helen Zille, the leader of the Democratic Alliance, the Official Opposition in the National Assembly, was quite interesting. She said that Obama’s election sent out a strong message that the politics of race was on its way out.⁹¹ Of course she referred to the fact that Obama had made it to the White House despite his racial origins. For the South African situation this was an interesting remark, because even more unlikely than Obama’s election it would be for a white South African politician to reach the top position in the country under an ANC government.

85 Philda Essop, “SA se politici wens hom saam geluk”, *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 4.

86 CB Jantjies, “Obama’s victory will stop the ‘mixed race’ stigma” (letter), *The Cape Argus*, 11 November 2008, p. 10.

87 Maureen Isaacson, “How the son of a Kenyan goatherd got to be a US presidential candidate”, *Sunday Independent*, 15 June 2008, p. 17.

88 “Obama and South Africa: worlds apart”, *The Citizen*, 22 January 2009, p. 12.

89 Philda Essop, “SA se politici wens hom saam geluk”, *Beeld*, 6 November 2008: p. 4.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*

The editor of an English-language newspaper also referred to this, stating that Obama's election, despite the fact that he belonged to a minority group, could serve as an example to the rest of the world. However, in South Africa, given its past, voters still predominantly voted by colour. The ruling elite had a "fixation with race" and it was still inconceivable that a white president would be elected. Hope was expressed that one day Martin Luther King's dream of people being judged by character rather than skin colour would also be realised here.⁹² An Afrikaans letter-writer stated that Obama's success held out hope to the Afrikaner minority of South Africa that racial prejudice in the country could, like in the USA, one day be overcome.⁹³ A black letter-writer agreed that US voters had transcended racial politics. This raised hopes among white South Africans that the country would one day have a white president again. However, the political dynamics in the country made it highly unlikely: "If black South Africans are to elect a white President in future, then the candidate must be exceptional. He or she must be a Nelson Mandela."⁹⁴ A white letter-writer wrote that South Africa was still at a stage where Jacob Zuma, despite his dubious record, was the candidate of choice for the presidency because he belonged to the largest ethnic group.⁹⁵

From an Afrikaner nationalist perspective a senior reporter, Leopold Scholtz, interpreted Obama's election in terms of identity politics. He pointed out that 95% of black Americans had voted for Obama, thus practicing identity politics. But he had also received the votes of 43% of the white population in the USA who regarded him as the best man for the job and thus managed to move away from identity politics. Obama was the first member of an ethnic minority to be democratically elected to the highest office in a country. Martin Luther King's dream of a society where people are not judged by the colour of their skin, but by their character had come closer to being realised. That is why black Americans, after Obama's election, could express pride in being American, not only in being black. South Africa as an ethnically divided country had far to go to reach the same level of patriotism. Neither in the apartheid period nor after 1994 had South Africa been able to move away from identity politics to the more desirable situation of politics based on principles. Scholtz's view was that a broader South African nationalism among white Afrikaners could only be achieved by recognising their identity and allowing them to realise themselves as Afrikaners.⁹⁶

92 "Colour and character" (editorial), *The Cape Argus*, 6 November 2008, p. 18.

93 JB du Toit, "Nog ligte soos dié van Obama nodig", *Die Burger*, 22 November 2008, p. 17.

94 Thabile Mange, "SA's political dynamics will keep our leader black" (e-mail letter), *The Citizen*, 15 November 2008, p. 8.

95 Jacques van der Merwe, "VSA kies eendelik beste kandidaat ongeag kleur" (letter), *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 16.

96 Leopold Scholtz, "Beginselpolitiek werk nie altyd", *Beeld*, 15 November 2008, p. 8.

From the above analysis it is clear that moral values in politics constituted the dominant theme in the South African media’s assessment of the implications of Obama’s rise for South Africa. Obama was showcased as a role model of political integrity. He was regarded as a symbol of hope for black and white South Africans that racism and racial politics could be transcended.

In the South Korean media the focus was on trade relations rather than politics. The overriding issue in the assessment of the meaning of the rise of Obama for US-Korean bilateral relations was the question how Obama would deal with the pending Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) and how it would impact on the South Korean economy.⁹⁷

The difference in dominant themes in the South African and South Korean media in their coverage of Obama’s rise clearly illustrate how the media are very much involved in processes of glocalisation.⁹⁸ In the media events of global significance are made relevant to domestic publics by linking them to current affairs in the local society. The demand of consumers of the media to know how events on other continents are going to affect their daily lives has to be met.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of responses in South Africa to Barack Obama’s ascendance to the American presidency is revealing of the impact of contemporary globalising processes. It confirms some of the findings of studies of globalisation.

On the one hand the similarities in the fundamental moral response to major international events among elites in many different countries are remarkable. This is borne out by our other study on responses to Obama in South Korea. South Africa and South Korea are located in regions and spheres of influence which are very far apart, with populations that are culturally very different. Yet, the anti-Bush and

97 Du Pisani & Kim, “The Obama factor ...”, pp. 157-161.

98 On the role of the media in glocalisation, see e.g. Roland Robertson, “Globalisation or glocalisation?”, *Journal of International Communication* 1(1), 1994, pp. 33-52; Marwan M Kraidy, “The global, the local, and the hybrid: A native ethnography of glocalization”, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16(4), 1999, pp. 456-476; Marwan M Kraidy, “Glocalisation”, *Journal of International Communication* 9(2), 2003, pp. 29-49; David Machin, Theo van Leeuwen, “Global media: generic homogeneity and discursive diversity”, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 18(1), 2004, pp. 99-120; Glen Creeber, “‘Hideously white’: British television, glocalization, and national identity”, *Television & News Media* 5, 2004, pp. 27-39; Anthony Fung, “‘Think globally, act locally’: China’s rendezvous with MTV”, *Global Media and Communication* 2(1), 2006, pp. 71-88; Herman Wasserman and Shakuntala Rao, “The glocalization of journalism ethics”, *Journalism* 9, 2008, pp. 163-181 Anna Roosvall, “Sweden: between domestication and glocalisation” in Elisabet Eide, Risto Kunelius, Ville Kumpu (eds), *Global climate-local journalisms: a transnational study of how media make sense of climate summits*, Projekt Verlag, Bochum/Freiburg, 2010, pp. 309-324.

pro-Obama sentiments expressed in the media in the two countries agree to such an extent that they are almost totally interchangeable. Globalisation has caused such a convergence of liberal democratic values, associated with post-Cold War political culture, that media coverage provides evidence of remarkable homogenisation of thinking across cultures.⁹⁹ The international media and global information networks have played a crucial role in this regard. Editors, political analysts and commentators seem to speak exactly the same language, an easily discernable type of global speak. However, this homogenisation is restricted to the moderate sections of populations represented by the mainstream media. In both countries fringe groups of religious fundamentalists, nationalist extremists and anticapitalists exist, who do not subscribe to the majority viewpoint.

On the other hand it is evident from the way in which the media in South Africa reflected the expectations of Obama in South African society, that events of global import are clearly linked to the hopes of local people. Writers of reports, editorials and columns are assessing events on the global stage primarily in terms of their significance and relevance for the local audience. To the same measure that responses in the media of South Africa and South Korea converged with regard to the universal moral values inherent in the process of Obama's election, they diverged with regard to the application of what was happening in the USA to the local situation in the two countries.

The South African media focused on how Obama's dream campaign revealed the shortcomings in South African politics. In South Africa, during a process of transition from the Mbeki to the Zuma period, involving much infighting in the ANC/Cosatu/SACP Alliance and disturbing revelations of corruption, Obama was portrayed in the media as an example of the type of morally sound political leadership for which politicians in the country should strive. The fact that an African-American had risen to the most powerful position in the world was interpreted as a sign of hope and inspiration for Africa as a continent struggling to realise its potential.

This linking in the media of a major global event to local aspirations and needs shows that globalisation and glocalisation are simultaneous processes in the contemporary world.¹⁰⁰ A set of liberal moral values have emerged in the post-Cold

99 The perception of the emergence of one homogenised culture as global extension of Western culture is discussed by John Tomlinson, "Globalised culture: the triumph of the West?" in Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen (eds), *Culture and global change* (London: Routledge).

100 The idea that a globalising culture is essentially a hybrid culture receives attention in many post-1990 studies, e.g. Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial transformation* (London: Routledge); John Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Robert J Lieber and Ruth E Weisberg, "Globalization, culture, and identities in crisis", *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 16(2), Winter 2002; David Birch, "Transnational cultural studies: what price globalisation?", *Social Semiotics* 10(2), 2000.

War world to which the majority of moderate citizens in countries, that may be very far removed from one another in terms of location and culture, are prepared to subscribe. However, these generic values only assume real significance when they are made applicable to the local situation with its unique features.