PUTTING UP SCREENS:
A HISTORY OF TELEVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA,
1929-1976

by

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For my grandfather,

François Jacobus Grobler (1912-2002),

from whom I inherited a great passion for history

and my love for animals.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	African Broadcasting Company
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
Bop-TV	Bophuthatswana Television
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CCV-TV	Contemporary Community Values Television
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
EMI	Electric and Musical Ltd
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
HNP	*Herstigde Nasionale Party* (Reformed National Party)
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
M-NET	Electronic Media Network
MP	Member of Parliament
NNTV	National Network Television
NP	National Party
NTSC	National Television Systems Committee
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PAL	Phase Alternation Line
PP	Progressive Party
RCA	Radio Corporation of America
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAB	National Archives Repository
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SABS	South African Bureau of Standards
SECAM	Sequential colour with memory
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TSS	Topsport Surplus
UP	United Party
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)

INTRODUCTION

Background

The year 2006 marked the thirtieth anniversary of South Africa's television service. It would seem like the ideal opportunity to reflect on the history of the service, to consider its major transformation in the 1990s, and to examine how television broadcasting came to be as it is. Yet, in the media and especially on television, there was surprisingly little celebration of this landmark. On the anniversary of the opening day, 5 January, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) did screen a documentary on the history of South African television. But instead of exploring the nature, structure, programmes and personalities of television broadcasting, the documentary was really a history of South Africa as depicted on television. Television became the medium through which to tell the stories of the country and its people, rather than a topic worthy of historical exploration itself.

The documentary was not the only example of how the history of South African television has often been used to create context for other histories. Although aspects of television have been discussed in academic studies, it has rarely been done from a historical perspective, and even more rarely as the main focus. In the international historiography of broadcasting, South African television has yet to fill its space.

Existing academic studies

In the past three decades, South African television has indeed been the subject of academic studies. However, the focus tended (and still tends) to be on television's sociological and psychological effects, particularly on children[1]; on ideology in South African broadcast media[2]; and on television as part of media or communications studies[3]. Masters and doctoral theses that look at television are usually done in the field of Communication Studies and focus on the analysis of television content or

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[1] J. B. du Toit (red.), *Televisie – Skyn en Werklikheid. Die Omstrede Medium* (Kaapstad, 1994).
[2] R. Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli & J. Muller (eds), *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Bellville, 1989).
[3] A. S. de Beer (ed.), *Mass Media. The South African Handbook of Mass Communication* (Pretoria, 1998); P. J. Fourie (ed.), *Introduction to Communication. Course Book 6: Film and Television Studies* (Kenwyn, 1997).

specific programmes.[4] The history of television is then outlined in a paragraph, a few pages or a chapter to provide background and context for the analysis or theoretical discussion. These histories are mostly very brief, chronological looks at the major events and developments in the establishment of South African television – for example when it started, when new channels were introduced, when and how advertising was introduced, and when viewing hours were extended.[5]

A useful resource on international television is the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Television*, produced in association with the Museum of Broadcasting Communications in Chicago and edited by television critic Horace Newcomb. Unfortunately, even though the second edition was published in 2004, the entry on South African television was not revised. As a result, the entry still reflects South African television as it was in the early 1990s.[6]

In cultural and social history, certain aspects of South African television have been discussed. Three examples are Ron Krabill's *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill Cosby: Television, Identity, and the End of Apartheid* (2002)[7]; Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond.* (1994)[8]; and Jonathan Hyslop's article 'Why did Apartheid's Supporters Capitulate? "Whiteness", Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995'[9]. All three works use television broadcasting to explain aspects of culture and identity.

From a historical perspective, however, South African television has been greatly neglected. To date, no narrative history tracing and analysing the development of the

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[4] G. M. Mersham, *Political Discourse and Historical Television Drama: A Case Study of Shaka Zulu*, D.Litt & Phil. Thesis, University of South Africa, 1989; M. E. Crous, *An Analysis of Local Content in South African Broadcasting*, M.A. Dissertation, University of South Africa, 2002.

[5] See for example: G. Mersham, Television. A Fascinating Window on an Unfolding World, *in* A. S. de Beer (ed.), *Mass Media. Towards the Millennium* (Pretoria, 1998); M. Botha, The History and Development of Film and Television, *in* P. J. Fourie (ed.), *Introduction to Communication. Course Book 6: Film and Television Studies*, pp.48-49; P. B. Orlik, Southern Africa, *in* S. Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa. A Continental Survey of Radio and Television*, pp.139-140..

[6] N. K. Karithi, South Africa, *in* H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, pp.2138-2139.

[7] R. Krabill, *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill Cosby: Television, Identity and the End of Apartheid*. PhD Dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 2002.

[8] R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York & London, 1994).

[9] J. Hyslop, Why did Apartheid's Supporters Capitulate? 'Whiteness', Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995, *Society in Transition* 31(1), 2000, pp.36-43.

medium and service has been published. In terms of international trends in historiography, this is a glaring oversight. Historical, narrative accounts have been published on the television services of Britain, Ireland, the USA, and Canada, to name a few. Prominent examples are Asa Brigg's five-volume *History of Broadcasting In the United Kingdom* (1995)[10], Anthony Smith's *Television. An International History* (1995)[11] and Andrew Crisell's *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (1997)[12]. The latter is often cited in academic articles or used as material for university courses in Television Studies across the world.

With no authoritative, academic work on the history of South African television, the topic is in danger of remaining confined to the anecdotal, even mythical level – a loose body of nostalgic stories that exists mainly in people's memories and that is reproduced orally, with very little scope for corroboration and a high possibility of simply being forgotten over time.[13] The question may arise as to how closely television and its effects on society can be studied if it cannot be put into context with the medium's history.

Focus

The history of South African television can be divided into different phases: firstly, the pre-history (1929-1976), when television became a possibility but was not yet introduced in South Africa. Secondly, the period from 1976 to 1993, when the South African television service was established and controlled by the state. In 1993, the 1976 Broadcasting Act was replaced by a new Act that brought democratic transformations into South African television. It can be argued that the third phase of South African television started in 1993 and still continues. This study focuses on the first phase of South African television, namely 1929-1976: from the first demonstration of television in South Africa to the introduction of the first official television service.

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[10] A. Briggs, *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1995).
[11] A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History* (Oxford & New York, 1995).
[1212] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).
[13] An example of an anecdote that might lose its significance if it is not put in its proper context revolves around the British children's programme *Rupert the Bear.* See Chapter VII, p.167.

The aim of this study is to examine the history of television in South Africa before the actual introduction of a television service, and it focuses on the relationship between television and the South African public, and between television and the South African government. The purpose is to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive study on the history of South African television broadcasting after 1976 – a topic that has *not* been explored comprehensively nor satisfactorily, and that cannot be undertaken responsibly without departing from the base provided in this study.

To fully understand the content on South African television, one has to grasp the legislation, policies and structures underwriting the content. Without studying the reasons behind government's arguments against television, as well as the reasons for their change in policy when they eventually *did* decide to establish a television service, any understanding of South African television after 1976 can only be superficial.

From a historiographical point of view, this dissertation will rectify a great oversight in South African historiography by providing a historical narrative on one of the most important media of mass communication in the modern world. It will also serve as a valuable tool for anybody studying South African television, including students in Media Studies and Journalism.

Title

The title of this dissertation is *Putting up Screens: Television in South Africa, 1929-1976*. The word 'screens' has a number of meanings. Firstly, it refers to the 'small screen', which is a synonym for television. Secondly, a screen can be a shield used to cover or protect something, or a partition that keeps things separate. As a verb it can also mean different things: on the one hand, 'to screen a show' means to broadcast a programme. On the other hand, it refers to the action of protecting or concealing.

'Putting up screens' therefore denotes the struggle between those who *did* want television, and those who did *not*. The medium's supporters wanted to put up television screens in South African homes. However, its opponents – particularly the government – wanted to put up proverbial screens to protect the public from

television's harmful effects. The government also endeavoured to keep the races of South Africa apart, and one of their objections to television was that it promoted multi-racialism.[14] In this sense, they wanted to put up a screen to divide South Africans.

Then, after the government had agreed to introduce television, they attempted to use television itself as a screen between South Africans of different racial categorisations. Even before the medium was introduced, in the planning phase, it was clear that television would be a racially divided service, and that it would be used to further the goals of apartheid.[15]

The dissertation title is related to the research question: Why did South Africa get its first official television service as late as 1976? By exploring the opposing attitudes to television and the government's refusal to establish a television service, the above question is explored, together with a number of other issues, namely: why did South Africa *not* get television before 1976? Why was it then introduced in 1976?[16] What was the nature of South African television broadcasting when it was introduced in 1976, and how was this influenced by the political, social and cultural context in which it developed?

The dissertation therefore aims to be an introductory history, with the greater purpose of enabling future historians to develop a body of work on the history of South African television: to serve as a foundation for subsequent, more in-depth studies on particular aspects, and to provide the historical frame of reference needed for a responsible and accountable point of departure for a post-1976 history of the service.

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[14] See for example Republic of South Africa (RSA), *House of Assembly Debates (Hansard) 17*, 1966-09-19, column 2407.

[15] See Chapter VI, p.142.

[16] Television was actually introduced in 1975, in the form of test transmissions. The official television service opened in January 1976. For the purpose of this dissertation, 1976 will be cited as the starting date of South African television.

Methodology

a. Primary sources

The study is based on qualitative research. Because there is so little literature on the history of South African television, it relies greatly on primary sources. This includes archival documents such as government memoranda, letters and reports (often marked as confidential), which are available in the National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria. To formulate the argument in Chapter III, an invaluable source was the transcriptions from the House of Assembly debates (*Hansard*). The debates from 1950 to 1971 were very closely examined to determine the official reasons for the NP government's reluctance to introduce television in the 1950s and 1960s. The debates also contain the opposition's arguments *for* television, as well as what many opposition members believed to be the government's real reasons for not introducing the medium. Through these transcriptions, a new argument for the reasons behind television's absence has been formulated. The *Hansard* volumes were accessed at the National Library in Cape Town.

Another important source is the annual reports of the SABC. These were accessed at the SABC's library in Johannesburg and the National Library in Cape Town. These reports are annual accounts of what happened year by year, and were therefore very valuable for determining specific facts and dates and for creating a timeline of South African television.

Many newspaper, magazine and journal articles were used. Such articles give a good overview of the development of South African television *as it happened*. These include commentary and concerns, and sometimes even projections for the future of South African television. This particular category of sources comes from a variety of publications: international[17] as well as local[18], and while some display an anti-NP or anti-SABC perspective (for example the *Rand Daily Mail*), others were written by

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[17] See for example T. Philpott's four-part series on South African television in the British journal *The Listener* 96(2465)- 96(2469), 1976-07-08-1976-07-29.

[18] See for example Anonym, Television for South Africa. *The Star (City Late)*, 1928-09-07; Eie Beriggewer, FM-senders is Reg vir Beeldradio, *Die Volksblad*, 1971-02-04; K. Campbell, TV: Turn on in 1974 – for Test Programmes, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1972-11-09.

people with an obvious pro-NP or pro-SABC stance (for example *Die Burger*). The aim is to present as many different perspectives as possible on the development of the television broadcasting industry and the agendas behind these developments.

With these primary documents, it was essential to verify the information, because many are bound to contain a large amount of personal opinions and facts that might not be presented accurately, and may be strongly biased.[19]

b. Secondary Sources

As mentioned before, this study taps into a worldwide body of studies on television history. The approach of one book in particular was used as a guide, namely that of media scholar and historian Andrew Crisell. *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* combines historical narrative with analysis by looking at the key events, structures and developments in British broadcasting and analysing it in its social and political context.

Although Crisell traces British broadcasting from the birth of radio to the coming of digital broadcasting, his framework is very useful for a history of South African television. In this dissertation, just as in Crisell's book, the policies, structures and development of television are put in their proper contexts. This dissertation examines these aspects to explain what the nature of South African television was by 1976.

Books on general South African history were consulted to sketch the historical context in which South African television developed. In this study the history of television is related to specific events and trends in South Africa. Political, social and cultural contexts are outlined with the help of such sources, particularly William Beinart's *Twentieth Century South Africa*[20]; Dan O'Meara's *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994*[21]; F. A. van Jaarsveld's *Van Van Riebeeck to P. W. Botha: 'n Inleiding tot die Geskiedenis van*

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[19] L. Gottschalk, *Understanding History* (New York, 1969), pp.139-170.
[20] W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Cape Town, 1994).
[21] D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Randburg, 1996).

die Republiek van Suid-Afrika[22]; B. J. Liebenberg and S. B. Spies's *South Africa in the 20th century*[23]; and Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves's *South Africa's 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities* [24] . Other sources consulted for background included Rodney Davenport and Chris Saunders' *South Africa: A Modern History*[25]; Giliomee and L. Schlemmer's *From Apartheid to Nation-building*[26]; *The Making of Apartheid* by Deborah Posel[27]; L. Thompson's *A History of South Africa*[28]; and *Op die Vooraand van Apartheid: die Rassevraagstuk en die Blanke Politiek in Suid-Afrika, 1939-1948*[29] by J. P. Brits.

c. Internet Sources

A number of Internet resources have been used. Online information was taken from official and reputable sources, such as the SABC, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). A number of the online sources are also available in print form, such as *Time Magazine.*[30] Other sources come from news websites, such as *Mail & Guardian Online.*[31] With all the Internet sources used here, care has been taken to ensure that the information is reliable and accurate.

d. Approach

The sources were used to develop a narrative history of South African television. According to cultural historian Peter Burke, there has been a revival in recent years of

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[22] F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck to P. W. Botha: 'n Inleiding tot die Geskiedenis van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika* (Johannesburg, 1982).

[23] B. J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century* (Pretoria, 1993).

[24] S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town, 2005).

[25] T. R. H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London, 2000).

[26] H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (Cape Town, 1990).

[27] D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948 – 1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1997).

[28] L. M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, 2001).

[29] J. P. Brits, *Op die Vooraand van Apartheid: die Rassevraagstuk en die Blanke Politiek in Suid-Afrika, 1939-1948* (Pretoria, 1994).

[30] M. Carsey & T. Werner, 'The Time 100: Builders & Titans. Father of Broadcasting'. Internet: http://www.time.com/time/time100/builder/profile/sarnoff.html, 1998-12-07. Accessed: 2006-12-13.

[31] F. Haffajee, 'Mail and Guardian Online: Inside the SABC Blacklist Report'. Internet: http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=286556&area=/insight/insight__national/, 2006-10-13. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

the historical narrative.[32] Writing a narrative history does not mean the historian merely recounts a series of events. Instead, the narrative should deal 'not only with the sequence of events and the conscious intentions of the actors in these events, but also with structures, institutions, modes of thought, whether these structures act as a break on the events or as an accelerator.'[33] This means that a narrative contains events, personalities, organisations and ideologies, all of which should be analysed critically. In two of his recent books, *What is Cultural History?* (2004)[34] and *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (2001)[35], Burke discusses the revival of historical narrative and how, together with critical analysis, historical narrative forms an invaluable tool with which to uncover and interpret the past.

In *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (1997)[36], Andrew Crisell makes his argument for using a narrative approach to broadcasting history:

> There are, of course, many perspectives from which a history of broadcasting may be written – the social, the political, the technological, the anecdotal – and from time to time I adopt one or other of them throughout this book. But what moved me to write it was a belief that there was a crucial element which other histories had insufficiently considered. They had offered searching analyses of media institutions, their cultural contexts, their ownership and social structure, their programming policies, and their relations with the state and with dominant ideologies; but what they had largely omitted, perhaps as being too elementary or self-evident, was an account of the broadcasting process itself and the way in which audiences experience it.[37]

In other words, Crisell lets the events in broadcasting history tell the story of *what* happened and *how* it happened, and combines this narrative with social and political analysis to interpret this story. It is therefore not just an account of events, or what Crisell calls 'a mere chronological succession'.[38] Interspersed as it is with analysis,

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[32] P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2001), p.283.

[33] P, Burke, quoted in J. Lepore, Writing for History: Historical Writing and the Revival of Narrative. *Nieman Reports: Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference*, Spring 2002, pp.51-53.

[34] P. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004).

[35] P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2001).

[36] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).

[37] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.xix.

[38] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.xxi.

Crisell's book becomes a 'continuous narrative, a matter of themes and of logical or causal connections.'[39]

As part of such a narrative approach, this dissertation uses content analysis to discuss and interpret documents, particularly the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television (also known as the Meyer Commission) [40]. By analysing this document critically, it has been put into context with socio-political developments, and the ideologies underpinning (or developing from) it could be determined.

A particular statement from the Meyer Commission report serves as an illustration of how content analysis will be used. According to the report, the commission consulted organisations that were 'representative of all sectors of public opinion and all experts and interested groups in the country'.[41] These 125 organisations included churches, cultural organisations, women's organisations, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns[42] and the English Academy. There is no mention of, for example, black, Islamic, Jewish or Hindu organisations. This reveals an interesting assumption of the commission regarding South African society, namely which 'sectors of public opinion' they considered to be representative of society at that time, and which sectors they did in fact *not* consider to be part of South African society at all. Not only does this conclusion reveal the values of the commission, but ultimately also of the government that appointed the commission. Furthermore, it helps to uncover the ideologies determining the commission's and government's decision-making, and the ideologies eventually underpinning South African television.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, there is already a global body of literature on the history of television. Two important books from this body of literature have been used to outline the international development of television, which serves as background.

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[39] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.xxi.
[40] P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television* (Pretoria, 1971).
[41] P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.
[42] The South African Academy for Science and Arts.

The first book is Andrew Crisell's *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (2002). [43] Crisell's *History* is a historical narrative that traces and analyses the development of British broadcasting – including radio, television and the Internet. The approach of his study is of particular importance for this dissertation, as discussed above[44].

The second book is Anthony Smith's *Television. An International History* (1995).[45] Smith's study takes a rather different approach than Crisell in that it is not structured chronologically, but instead is a collection of essays on different topics about worldwide television, sorted into the broader themes of 'Origins and Institutions', 'Forms and Genres', 'Television and Society' and 'Television across the World'. Although it claims to be an international history, the emphasis is largely on America. The rest of the world is dealt with in four chapters, all under Part Four, 'Television across the World'. These chapters deal with Australia, Japan, the Third World and Africa in less than one hundred out of a total of four hundred pages. Furthermore, it decidedly does not discuss South Africa, as Smith explains in the introduction: 'Finally, Charles Okogbo takes the continent of Africa (apart from the Republic of South Africa, which has special and exceptional problems)...'[46].

Although the book's claim of being an impartial international history is debatable, it is valuable for the dissertation in terms of its information on the international development of television.

With regards to studies on South African television, two works from cultural studies have used the 1960s television debates in Parliament to support their arguments. These are Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood. South African Culture*

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[43] A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).
[44] See above, p.10.
[45] A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History*. (Oxford & New York, 1995).
[46] A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History*, p.6.

and the World Beyond (1994)[47] and Ron Krabill's *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill Cosby: Television, Identity, and the End of Apartheid* (2002)[48].

Nixon argues that the South African government's refusal to introduce television was fuelled by the fear that television would destroy the national identity of white South Africans.[49] It is an important argument, as it is one of a handful of studies that attempt to give reasons for the government's attitude. But the study is not without its shortcomings. It gives the South African government's ideology of the nurturing and protection of separate identities as the only reason for the official stance on television. It does not discuss any of the other reasons offered by the government – arguments such as the high cost of television, the lack of manpower in South Africa, and the fact that television technology was still developing and that South Africa would have to wait until the medium had sufficiently improved. In this dissertation, all the official reasons given by the government are studied in order to provide a broader examination of the television debates, and to explore explanations for television's absence apart from the issue of identity.

Furthermore, even though Nixon engages with the parliamentary debates on television in an informative and very well-written way, his facts are not always trustworthy. One example is the mention of the 1936 Empire Exhibition as the 'first Johannesburg sighting' of television.[50] The Empire Exhibition was, however, *not* the first time that television was demonstrated in Johannesburg.[51] This and other discrepancies meant that the facts used in Nixon had to be corroborated before they were used in this dissertation. Nevertheless, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* is a valuable source that contributed to the arguments in this dissertation.

In *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill Cosby: Television, Identity, and the End of Apartheid*, one chapter in particular is of importance for this dissertation. In 'The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to

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[47] R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York & London, 1994).
[48] R. Krabill, *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill Cosby: Television, Identity and the End of Apartheid.* PhD Dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 2002.
[49] R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.44-76.
[50] R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.45.
[51] See Chapter II, p.50.

1976', Krabill, like Nixon, argues that television's absence was shaped by the government's attempts to construct ethnic identities. Although it is informative and insightful, Krabill bases much of his argument on Nixon's thesis and he did not seem to look at the original parliamentary debates himself. His argument is therefore not a re-evaluation of the reasons for television's absence, but an extension of Nixon's argument.

Both Nixon and Krabill explained television's absence under the rule of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, Post and Telegraphs Minister Albert Hertzog and SABC Chairman Piet Meyer. However, they do not attempt to account for television's absence during the tenancy of Prime Ministers D. F. Malan (1948-1954) and J. G. Strijdom (1954-1958), even though television was already spreading to other countries during their time in power. Even after B. J. Vorster had taken over as Prime Minister in 1966 and Albert Hertzog was dropped from the cabinet in 1969, it took another seven to ten years before South Africa got a television service.

The studies of both Nixon and Krabill were therefore used for the information and analysis they provide. They were, however, explored in conjunction with the original documents in order to arrive at a proper evaluation of television's absence in South Africa before 1976.

While Krabill's analysis of television's absence may have been oversimplified, his interpretation of the government's decision to introduce television is very insightful. According to Krabill, there were three main factors that led to the government's decision, namely political divisions within the National Party; technological advances that would enable satellites to transmit television signals directly into South African homes; and the increasing resentment that South Africans, including white Afrikaners, felt against their exclusion from international events. This argument forms the foundation of the discussion in Chapter IV.

Information on the 1929 television demonstrations, as well as the early history of South African radio broadcasting, was gathered from popular historian Eric Rosenthal's book, *You Have Been Listening: The Early History of Radio in South*

Africa.[52] The source was published by the SABC to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of broadcasting in South Africa, and was useful in pointing researchers to primary sources regarding the 1929 demonstration. However, factual errors bring the book's reliability into question. One rather blatant error is the description of the demonstration in Johannesburg. From the original newspaper article, which is an eyewitness account, it is clear that the performing artist who took part in these demonstrations was Miss Gwyneth Nelson Keys. Rosenthal refers to her as a man, Nelson Keys.[53] Another error Rosenthal makes, is to refer to a letter written by H. E. Ives from New York that was published in the *South African Wireless Weekly* on 1 January 1930. This letter, however, was actually sent by W. C. Fox, and was written *about* an article by H. E. Ives that was published on 30 October 1929.[54]

Another problem with Rosenthal's book is a lack of proper referencing. Rosenthal uses a number of newspaper articles, but often does not include the specific dates on which these articles appeared. Instead, he uses vague references such as 'early in September 1928'[55] and 'not long afterwards, *The Star* reported…'[56]. These examples are not supplemented with footnotes, and the book does not include a bibliography. This made it difficult to find the original articles that, together with other accounts of the demonstrations, form the basis of the narrative in Chapter II.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I ('The International Development of Television') gives a brief outline of the international development of the medium of television – the technology, the first broadcasts, the worldwide spread after the Second World War and the issue of control over television that arose during the early years. This chapter focuses on aspects that later became important for the development of television in South Africa, for example

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[52] E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening: The Early History of Radio in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1974).
[53] E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.142; Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition. *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.
[54] E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.144; W. C. Fox, Letter to the Editor, *South African Wireless Weekly*, 1930-01-01.
[55] E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.140.
[56] E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.142.

the technical regulations and developments and the types of control used in other countries.

Chapter II ('Broadcasting in South Africa before the Second World War') gives a brief background on the development of broadcasting in South Africa, from Edward Alfred Jennings's work on wireless telegraphy at the turn of the twentieth century, to the establishment of the SABC in 1936. The chapter also traces South Africa's relationship with television since the 1920s, starting with the demonstrations of television in 1929, by Lord Angus Kennedy of the Royal Television Society of England. The chapter then continues with the television display at the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. Both these events sparked great excitement and speculation in the press: would South Africa follow other countries in developing and broadcasting television? However, the medium was very expensive, and only a handful of countries experimented with television broadcasts before the Second World War. Like most of the world, South Africa did not join the ranks of television nations.

Chapter III ('Putting up Screens: The Absence of Television in South Africa, 1951-1969') forms a central part of the dissertation as a whole. It asks the question: *What were the reasons for the absence of television before 1969?* To answer the question, this chapter looks at the official reasons given by the NP government. These reasons are put into context with the government's policies on apartheid and on broadcasting and the media, as well as with other aspects of South African history. The chapter also explores the opposition parties' arguments for television, and what they claimed the real reasons behind the government's reluctance to introduce television were. 'Putting up Screens' provides a new analysis on the reasons for television's absence.

In **Chapter IV** ('Seeing Stars: Television Satellites and the Moon Landing'), the NP government's change of policy regarding television is traced. *What were the reasons for the government's change of heart, and which factors led to the introduction of television in South Africa?* Three main factors are explored: firstly, divisions within the ruling party, which also led to a rift in the policy on television; technological advances that threatened the NP government's control over South African broadcasting; and thirdly, the moon landing that could be seen live on television in

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most parts of the world, though not in South Africa. The impact of the moon landing and the shift in identity that contributed to the event's significance are discussed.

The chapter's title refers to some of the reasons for the government's decision to introduce television, namely satellites, which could beam television signals right into the homes of South Africans (and particularly the more affluent, white voters), as well as the moon landing. The title is also a reference to being able to see local stars performing on television, and the excitement – or stars in the eyes – with which the majority of white South Africans regarded television by the end of the 1960s.

Chapter V ('Launching an Investigation: The Meyer Commission of Inquiry') investigates the appointment, recommendations and significance of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television.

Chapter VI ('Preparing for Television, 1971-1975') begins with the government's formal announcement in April 1971 that television would be introduced, and ends with the launch of South Africa's first official television service. The chapter traces the planning and preparations made in government and the SABC. This was an important phase in the introduction of television, as it determined the nature of South African television for many years to come: programme policies and guidelines were drawn up, staff were trained according to specific policies and ideologies, and the groundwork for the racial and ethnic segregation of South African television was laid. In this chapter, the test broadcasts of 1975 are also discussed as a build up to the opening of the official service.

As an epilogue, **Chapter VII** ('Television comes to South Africa') looks at the culmination of the opposition parties' efforts to bring television to South Africa, as well as of many years of planning and preparation. On 5 January 1976, the television service officially opened and regular programming finally began. South Africans had a glimpse of what it was that they had been missing out on, and of what they could expect in the years to come.

The discussion of the opening night is followed by a short overview of South African television after 1976. Although such overviews have been included in other studies[57], these tend to be cursory and sometimes even factually incorrect. This overview was written in consultation with a number of sources, both secondary and primary, in order to ensure that the facts are reliable. The discussion includes a number of aspects that are worthy of further study and that have either not been done before, or have not been done satisfactorily. In this way, the overview creates context in which further research is suggested in the conclusion.[58]

Definition of Concepts

Generally, the term **'broadcasting'** refers to the transmission of programmes over both radio and television.[59]

The **'state broadcaster'** is the official, state controlled broadcaster, appointed and regulated by the government.[60] It is therefore not autonomous and can be seen as part of the government's Information Department, and its employees as civil servants. It therefore projects the views of the government. A **'public broadcaster'** (or public service broadcaster), on the other hand, receives a government charter or licence to broadcast, but is otherwise autonomous. It receives revenue from the public through licence fees, donations or government subsidies (originating in tax paid by the public). A public broadcaster puts emphasis on freedom of expression.[61]

Before 1993, the SABC was defined as a state controlled broadcaster, and it is often argued that the Corporation was used for government propaganda. It did, however, show characteristics of a public broadcaster, as it received revenue from both advertisements and licence fees. In 1993, the Independent Broadcasting Act[62] provided for the transformation of the SABC from a state broadcaster to a public

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[57] See 'Existing academic studies', p.2.
[58] See 'Conclusion', p.177.
[59] P.J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.7.
[60] K. Williams, *Understanding Media Theory* (London, 2003), p.231.
[61] G. Ramadi, 'Is Your National Broadcaster a Public Service Broadcaster? Transforming State Broadcasters in Southern Africa to Public Service Broadcasters'. Internet: http://www.misa.org/broadcasting/resource-otw/POSITION%20PAPER%20.doc, 2006. Accessed: 2006-07-28.
[62] President's Office, No. 153 of 1993: *Independent Broadcasting Authority Act*, 1993-10-18.

broadcaster, which meant that the SABC would be answerable not to the government, but to the public and a number of independent, democratic organisations such as the Independent Communications Association of South Africa (ICASA).[63] At the same time, it has aspects of commercial broadcasting and, some would controversially argue, a state broadcaster. To avoid confusion, this dissertation will refer to the SABC prior to 1993 as a state broadcaster, and after 1993 as a public broadcaster.

A third type of broadcaster is the '**commercial**' or '**private broadcaster**', which is totally autonomous and receives revenue solely from advertising.[64] A South African example of a commercial broadcaster is e.tv[65].

The abbreviation '**TV**' is often used as a synonym for television. For the sake of consistency, however, only the term '**television**' is used in this dissertation.

'**Television station**' is often both a broadcasting company and the place from which it broadcasts. '**Television channel**' refers to the frequency over which a television station broadcasts.[66] It can also mean a 'single defined television programming service'[67] – in other words, a set of programmes broadcast on one position on the television set frequency dial. In spoken language, these two terms tend to be used synonymously, because a broadcast company often transmits from one location, and over one frequency. This dissertation does not, however, use them to mean the same. '**Channel**' means programmes broadcast over one frequency, while '**station**' refers to the broadcast company and its premises.

'**Television service**' is used to mean the service of delivering television programmes to people with television sets. The concept includes the broadcasting institutions (the 'television station'), channels over which programmes are transmitted (the 'television channel'), the production of programmes, and the programmes themselves. It is

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[63] South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), 'Departmental Profile 2005: Policy and Regulatory Affairs'. Internet: http://vcmstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/StaticDocument/About%20SABC/polreg.doc, s.a. Accessed: 2006-07-28.

[64] National Archives Depot (SAB), Pretoria: MNO T9 vol. 1, p.3: Lecture by G. J. Yssel, University of Cape Town Summer School: 'The Organisation and Control of Television in South Africa', 1971.

[65] In this dissertation, this free-to-air channel is written as 'e.tv', which is the official form. See e.tv, 'About Us'. Internet: http://www.etv.co.za/, s.a. Accessed: 2008-01-03.

[66] W. R. Abbot & R. L. Rider, *Handbook of Broadcasting*, p.463.

[67] President's Office, No. 4 of 1999: *Broadcasting Act*, 1999-04-23.

interchangeable with **'television broadcasting'**, which can carry the same connotations.

A term often used in television studies is **'lines and frames'**. It is a technical term that refers to the speed at which television images are transmitted and received. Television images consist of a number of frames shown in such rapid succession that the human eye sees them as moving pictures. Each frame consists of a specific number of lines: in South Africa, where the Phase Alternation Line (PAL) system is used, there are 625 lines per frame. These lines are scanned individually and transformed into signals that can be transmitted electronically. To avoid flicker, frames are scanned through a technique called interlacing. First, all the even-numbered lines in a frame are scanned from top to bottom – this is called a field. Then the scanning beam returns to the top to scan all the odd-numbered lines to create another field. Each frame is therefore scanned twice and consists of two fields.[68]

'Colour television system' refers to an official standard set for colour analogue transmissions. The most prominent colour systems are PAL, which originated in Germany and is used in most countries of the world, including South Africa. SECAM (*Sequential Couleur avec Mémoire*) originated in France. Both the PAL and SECAM systems use 625 lines per frame and transmit 25 frames (or 50 fields) per second. The National Television Systems Committee (NTSC), which comes from the United States, prescribes a standard of 525 lines and 60 fields per second.

'AM' and **'FM'** (amplitude modulation and frequency modulation respectively) are two different methods of transmitting and receiving radio waves. Signals sent through AM are susceptible to interference from stray waves created by, for example, lightning, electrical motors and telephones. This can cause static on the receiving end. Broadcasting through FM solves this problem, because the stray waves do not affect FM signals in the same way. FM broadcasts are thus clearer than AM transmissions. There is also a difference in how far broadcasts can be sent. Through AM, programmes can be transmitted on long-, medium- or short wave. Long wave can be received from up to about 400km of the transmitter tower; medium wave can be

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[68] W. R. Abbot & R. L. Rider, *Handbook of Broadcasting,* p.34.

received from 150km away, and short wave can be received from anywhere in the world. FM waves can only travel in straight lines, and can therefore not be transmitted beyond the Earth's curve. Because of this, FM radio broadcasts can only be received near the transmitter.[69]

'Bantu Radio' and **'Bantu Television'** were official terms used for the South African broadcasting services aimed at black people.[70] Before and during apartheid, the term 'Bantu' was used to refer to black people, but it is now considered to be derogatory. In this dissertation, the term is only used to refer to official government policies, particularly broadcasting services aimed at black people.

Under apartheid legislation, the South African black population was divided into distinct ethnic groups, each with its own self-governing homeland. The homeland system was designed to eventually remove black people from designated 'white' areas. By giving black people citizenship of the independent homelands, the NP government could also justify why Africans were not considered to be citizens of South Africa. Of the ten homelands, four accepted 'independence', namely Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana. However, the independence of these four 'states' was not internationally recognised. The system was abolished in 1993. Under the NP government, these areas were officially called **'Bantustans'**.[71] But in this dissertation, as in many historical accounts, the term **'homeland'** is preferred.

In this dissertation, and particularly in Chapter III, the term **'opposition'** is used to mean the official parliamentary opposition. After the NP victory in the 1948 general elections, the United Party (UP), the former ruling party, became the NP's strongest opposition party. However, within a few years, it had become clear that internal divisions in the UP were rife. In 1953, a number of far-left UP members broke away to form the Liberal Party. Margaret Ballinger and Alan Paton were among the founder members and leaders. The Liberal Party propagated a multiracial democracy and had

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[69] W. R.. Abbot & R. L. Rider, *Handbook of Broadcasting*, pp.23-24; BBC, 'Help Receiving BBC TV and radio – Analogue Radio Factsheet'. Internet: http://www.bbc.co.uk/reception/info/pdf/factsheet analogueradio.html, s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-28.

[70] P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.22.

[71] J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.110.

ties with the African National Congress (ANC). For this and other reasons, the party attracted very little white support, and ceased to exist in 1968.[72]

By 1959, the UP's internal problems had not abated. A group of liberals had expressed opposition to the leadership of party leader Sir David De Villiers Graaff and the Natal leader Douglas Mitchell, and were insisting on bigger black representation in Parliament. In that year, twelve liberal members broke away from the UP to form the Progressive Party (PP). The PP did not enjoy much success among voters: during the 1960s, the PP had only one seat in Parliament, which was held by Helen Suzman. Another opposition party was the National Union (NU), formed in 1960 by former NP Member of Parliament J. P. du P. Basson and former Chief Justice H. A. Fagan. In the 1961 election, the NU won one seat, and in 1962 the NU joined the UP.[73]

Therefore, despite its problems, the UP remained the biggest opposition party throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the television debates[74], support for television came mainly from the UP, who even used the television issue as part of their platform in the 1966 general elections.[75] Some of the loudest voices for television were the UP's Sir David De Villiers Graaff, P. A. Moore, U. M. Weiss, M. L. Mitchell, L. E. D. Winchester and especially E. G. Malan, who was the party spokesperson for Post and Telegraphs matters. PP member Helen Suzman was also a strong supporter of television.

Where the term **'opposition'** is used, it is meant to refer to mainly UP members of parliament, as well as the PP's Helen Suzman.

In 1969, the government appointed a commission to investigate television. The official name was **'The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television'**, but it was also known as the **'Meyer Commission'** after the chairman, P. J. Meyer. In this dissertation, the two names are used interchangeably.

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[72] J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.141.
[73] J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.199.
[74] See Chapter III, p.64.
[75] RSA, *House of Assembly Debates (Hansard) 17*, 1966-09-19, col. 2406.

According to political scientist Kenneth Minogue, '[a]n **ideology** is a comprehensive diagnosis of the fundamental evil of the modern world, which further explains how that evil is to be cured'[76]. Political scientist Ian Liebenberg identifies four characteristics of such a 'comprehensive diagnosis': firstly, a justification element that vindicates the ruling order (or the *overthrowing* of the existing order). This element is linked to the preservation or obtaining of interests – that is, rare social, economic and political goods in society. Secondly, this justification element contains an clarification framework that explains the existing (or new) order to potential supporters. Thirdly, an ideology contains a programme of action that provides supporters with practical guidelines for the establishment of the order. Liebenberg calls this the 'programmatic component of ideology'[77]. The fourth characteristic is the result of the programmatic component, namely the establishment of political structures and institutions aimed at implementing the plan of action, and at the creation and maintenance of the social order. This characteristic can be called the 'institutional outcome' of ideology.[78]

In this dissertation, the term **'NP ideology'** refers to apartheid and the policies that arose from it (the programmatic component). Examples of these policies are racial segregation, separate development and white (Afrikaner) supremacy. According to historians Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer, apartheid implied a vertical division between ethnic groups in which white, particularly Afrikaans, people held political control. It was argued that it was the 'God-given *responsibility'* of white Afrikaners to rule and guide the other peoples of South Africa. Furthermore, separate development was justified as the only means in which each ethnic group could reach its full potential of development. The NP argued that it 'granted others that which one group (the Afrikaner) demanded for itself.'[79] These explanations can be seen as the justification element of apartheid ideology, according to which the NP was *justified* to rule and racial segregation was indeed inevitable.

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[76] Quoted in I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.15.
[77] I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.
[78] I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.
[79] H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, p.54.

The term **'NP ideology'** in this dissertation also refers to the ruling party's Christian outlook and policy that South Africa was an exclusively Christian country in which that faith's values should be upheld.

In the television debates, the NP often used ideology as an excuse for not introducing the medium. Christian values, ethnic identities and the 'South African way of life' – including racial segregation – would be undermined by television. When the government decided to introduce television after all, it was not because the NP had changed its ideology. Instead, the NP recognised that in order to uphold that same ideology (and in order to maintain the same interests that they had fought for during the television debates), the television policy would have to change. This is consistent with Liebenberg's definition of ideology: ruling ideologies and their supporters do not want to acknowledge contradictions. If there is an inconsistency in society or within the ideology itself, the fault must lie elsewhere (perhaps the 'fundamental evil of the modern world'). The NP's decision to establish television was not an about-turn, and not a contradiction in their ideology. Instead, it was television's desirability and its role in maintaining the status quo that changed. The NP's programme of action remained the same.

Ideology is therefore a justification of political activity, and this activity is geared towards obtaining and maintaining certain interests.[80] In Chapter III, it is argued that the NP's television policy was formulated to suit their programme of action, and to ensure the maintenance of their political and economic interests.

A **'racial group'** can be defined as a group of people who share distinct physical characteristics.[81] Under the apartheid government, the term was used to describe, for example, white, black or coloured people. The expression does not differentiate between specific language groups (for example Afrikaans- and English-speaking white people, or Zulu-, Xhosa- or Sotho speaking black people). **'Ethnic groups'**, on the other hand, refers to groups of people with a shared national or cultural tradition, history and geographical orientation.[82] In South Africa, segregation policies were

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[80] I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.
[81] D. Thompson (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English,* p.1128.
[82] D. Thompson (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English,* p.463.

largely based on racial differences, while the apartheid ideology focused on ethnicity as the foundation of separate development. In this dissertation, the above terms are used as they were under apartheid, namely **'racial groups'** for black, white or coloured people, and **'ethnic groups'** for different linguistically and culturally constructed categories such as 'Afrikaans', 'Xhosa' or 'Sotho' people.

In this dissertation, **African languages** are refered to without the prefixes used in the translations: for example 'Zulu' instead of isiZulu, 'Sotho' instead of Sesotho. Northern Sotho is referred to by its English name, instead of 'Sesotho sa Leboa' or 'Sepedi', which is one of the most common dialects of Northern Sotho and is sometimes used to refer to the language itself.

The term **'identity'** denotes 'the quality or condition of being a specified person or thing'[83]. In this dissertation, it is used mean 'ethnic identity': in other words, the characteristics and traditions that are used (and often constructed) to recognise and define a particular ethnic group.

Between 1948 and 1994, the National Party (NP) was the ruling party of South Africa. As a big part of the time frame of this dissertation falls within this period, the terms **'NP'** and **'government'** are used interchangeably.

Conclusion

The years between 1929 and 1976 were an interesting and very important period for South African television, even though the medium was absent. It is during this time that the nature and possibilities of television became known, and television's many faces became apparent. For many years, while the rest of the world was starting to use television as a window onto a large and fascinating world, the South African government refused to put the small screen in South African homes. Instead, the issue of television was used as a shield to protect and a separator to divide South Africans.

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[83] D. Thompson (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English,* p.674.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces and analyses television in South Africa *before* the introduction of the first official television service in 1976. It provides a narrative history set against a background of the worldwide development of broadcasting, and begins with the first demonstration of television in South Africa in 1929. It continues with the exhibit at the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg; the political debates on television in the 1950s and 1960s; the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television; the government's decision to introduce television; the planning and preparations made for South Africa's first television service; and finally, the launch of SABC-TV. An epilogue gives a short overview of South African television after 1976. Arguments of historians such as Rob Nixon and Ron Krabill have been built on to analyse the attitude of the South African government, opposition and public towards television. However, the dissertation offers a new analysis on the reasons for television's absence during the 1950s and 1960s: while previous studies focus on the cultural and moral aspects of the television debates, this dissertation argues that the NP's stance against television was fuelled by their own political and economic interests more than a concern for the public's moral well-being. The dissertation title, *Putting up Screens*, refers to the different meanings of the word 'screen', and the different ways in which television (and its absence in the 1950s and 1960s) was used as a screen. Firstly, television provided a window through which viewers could experience the wider world. Secondly, television was used as a shield to 'protect' South Africans from foreign, anti-apartheid ideologies. Thirdly, it was a screen used to keep different South African groups separate. By analysing South African television within this framework, the ideologies behind television's absence and its introduction is underlined. The study lays the groundwork for a comprehensive study on the history of South African broadcasting after 1976. This topic has not been explored comprehensively nor satisfactorily, which creates a space in the international historiography of broadcasting. This dissertation is based on qualitative research.

Key terms: South Africa; Broadcasting; History of Television; Empire Exhibition; SABC; Parliamentary debates; National Party; Albert Hertzog; Moon landing; Meyer Commission