

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

by

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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	<i>Herstigde Nasionale Party</i> (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<sup>1</sup>; on ideology in South African broadcast media<sup>2</sup>; and on television as part of media or communications studies<sup>3</sup>. 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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<sup>1</sup> J. B. du Toit (red.), *Telesie – Skyn en Werklikheid. Die Omstrede Medium* (Kaapstad, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> R. Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli & J. Muller (eds), *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Bellville, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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)<sup>7</sup>; Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond* (1994)<sup>8</sup>; and Jonathan Hyslop's article 'Why did Apartheid's Supporters Capitulate? "Whiteness", Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995'<sup>9</sup>. 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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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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..

<sup>6</sup> N. K. Karithi, South Africa, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, pp.2138-2139.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York & London, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> 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 Briggs's five-volume *History of Broadcasting In the United Kingdom* (1995)<sup>10</sup>, Anthony Smith's *Television. An International History* (1995)<sup>11</sup> and Andrew Crisell's *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (1997)<sup>12</sup>. 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.<sup>13</sup> 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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<sup>10</sup> A. Briggs, *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History* (Oxford & New York, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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?<sup>16</sup> 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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<sup>14</sup> See for example Republic of South Africa (RSA), *House of Assembly Debates (Hansard) 17*, 1966-09-19, column 2407.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter VI, p.142.

<sup>16</sup> 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<sup>17</sup> as well as local<sup>18</sup>, 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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<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

## **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*<sup>20</sup>; Dan O'Meara's *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994*<sup>21</sup>; F. A. van Jaarsveld's *Van Van Riebeeck to P. W. Botha: 'n Inleiding tot die Geskiedenis van*

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<sup>19</sup> L. Gottschalk, *Understanding History* (New York, 1969), pp.139-170.

<sup>20</sup> W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Cape Town, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> 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*<sup>22</sup>; B. J. Liebenberg and S. B. Spies's *South Africa in the 20th century*<sup>23</sup>; and Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves's *South Africa's 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities*<sup>24</sup>. Other sources consulted for background included Rodney Davenport and Chris Saunders' *South Africa: A Modern History*<sup>25</sup>; Giliomee and L. Schlemmer's *From Apartheid to Nation-building*<sup>26</sup>; *The Making of Apartheid* by Deborah Posel<sup>27</sup>; L. Thompson's *A History of South Africa*<sup>28</sup>; and *Op die Vooraand van Apartheid: die Rassevraagstuk en die Blanke Politiek in Suid-Afrika, 1939-1948*<sup>29</sup> 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*.<sup>30</sup> Other sources come from news websites, such as *Mail & Guardian Online*.<sup>31</sup> 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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<sup>22</sup> F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck to P. W. Botha: 'n Inleiding tot die Geskiedenis van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika* (Johannesburg, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> B. J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century* (Pretoria, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> T. R. H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (Cape Town, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948 – 1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> L. M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, 2001).

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

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=286556&area=/insight/insight_national/), 2006-10-13. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

the historical narrative.<sup>32</sup> 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.’<sup>33</sup> 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)<sup>34</sup> and *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (2001)<sup>35</sup>, 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)<sup>36</sup>, 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.<sup>37</sup>

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’.<sup>38</sup> Interspersed as it is with analysis,

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<sup>32</sup> P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2001), p.283.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> P. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.xix.

<sup>38</sup> 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.'<sup>39</sup>

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)<sup>40</sup>. 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'.<sup>41</sup> These 125 organisations included churches, cultural organisations, women's organisations, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns<sup>42</sup> 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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<sup>39</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.xxi.

<sup>40</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television* (Pretoria, 1971).

<sup>41</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>42</sup> The South African Academy for Science and Arts.

The first book is Andrew Crisell's *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (2002).<sup>43</sup> 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<sup>44</sup>.

The second book is Anthony Smith's *Television. An International History* (1995).<sup>45</sup> 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)...'<sup>46</sup>.

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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<sup>43</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London & New York, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> See above, p.10.

<sup>45</sup> A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History*. (Oxford & New York, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History*, p.6.

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

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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> The Empire Exhibition was, however, *not* the first time that television was demonstrated in Johannesburg.<sup>51</sup> 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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<sup>47</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York & London, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> 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.

<sup>49</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.44-76.

<sup>50</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.45.

<sup>51</sup> 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*.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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'<sup>55</sup> and 'not long afterwards, *The Star* reported...'<sup>56</sup>. 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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<sup>52</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening: The Early History of Radio in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1974).

<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.144; W. C. Fox, Letter to the Editor, *South African Wireless Weekly*, 1930-01-01.

<sup>55</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.140.

<sup>56</sup> 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

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<sup>57</sup>, 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.<sup>58</sup>

### **Definition of Concepts**

Generally, the term ‘**broadcasting**’ refers to the transmission of programmes over both radio and television.<sup>59</sup>

The ‘**state broadcaster**’ is the official, state controlled broadcaster, appointed and regulated by the government.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> provided for the transformation of the SABC from a state broadcaster to a public

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<sup>57</sup> See ‘Existing academic studies’, p.2.

<sup>58</sup> See ‘Conclusion’, p.177.

<sup>59</sup> P.J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.7.

<sup>60</sup> K. Williams, *Understanding Media Theory* (London, 2003), p.231.

<sup>61</sup> 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.

<sup>62</sup> 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).<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> A South African example of a commercial broadcaster is e.tv<sup>65</sup>.

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.<sup>66</sup> It can also mean a ‘single defined television programming service’<sup>67</sup> – 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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<sup>63</sup> South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), ‘Departmental Profile 2005: Policy and Regulatory Affairs’. Internet: <http://vcnstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/StaticDocument/About%20SABC/polreg.doc>, s.a. Accessed: 2006-07-28.

<sup>64</sup> 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.

<sup>65</sup> 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.

<sup>66</sup> W. R. Abbot & R. L. Rider, *Handbook of Broadcasting*, p.463.

<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

**‘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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<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

**'Bantu Radio'** and **'Bantu Television'** were official terms used for the South African broadcasting services aimed at black people.<sup>70</sup> 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'**.<sup>71</sup> 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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<sup>69</sup> 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\\_analogueaudio.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/reception/info/pdf/factsheet_analogueaudio.html), s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-28.

<sup>70</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.22.

<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup>

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.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, despite its problems, the UP remained the biggest opposition party throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the television debates<sup>74</sup>, support for television came mainly from the UP, who even used the television issue as part of their platform in the 1966 general elections.<sup>75</sup> 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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<sup>72</sup> J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.141.

<sup>73</sup> J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.199.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter III, p.64.

<sup>75</sup> 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'<sup>76</sup>. 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 'programmatically component of ideology'<sup>77</sup>. 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.<sup>78</sup>

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.'<sup>79</sup> 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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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.15.

<sup>77</sup> I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.

<sup>78</sup> I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.

<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> In South Africa, segregation policies were

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<sup>80</sup> I. Liebenberg, *Ideologie in Konflik*, p.14.

<sup>81</sup> D. Thompson (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, p.1128.

<sup>82</sup> 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 referred 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’<sup>83</sup>. In this dissertation, it is used to 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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<sup>83</sup> 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

**I**  
**THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF**  
**TELEVISION**

‘Go down to reception and get rid of a lunatic who’s down there. He says he’s got a machine for seeing by wireless!’

*- A Daily News editor on John Logie Baird, 1925<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in P. Joyce, *Suid-Afrika in die 20ste Eeu. Een Honderd Jaar in Oënskou*, p.68.

## **1. Introduction**

Television was one of the most important and powerful media of the twentieth century. It has the ability to speak to ordinary people right in their living rooms, and one message can reach millions of viewers simultaneously. The medium developed over many decades, starting with the desire to transmit pictures and sound over long distances. From the early experiments with electricity and instant communication devices to colour broadcasts, television grasped the imagination of audiences all over the world. Yet South Africa's government refused to introduce the medium until the mid-1970s, when more than half of the world's countries had already launched their own services.

As with many new developments, television was not without its initial problems. Technology, quality, affordability and control were only some of the issues that had to be resolved. What were these issues, how were they addressed, and what was the state of television by the time it was introduced in South Africa?

## **2. The invention of television**

The credit for television's invention cannot be given to one person, nor can it be linked to one particular event. Instead, it came about after centuries of experiments with ways to communicate further, faster and more effectively.

Attempts to communicate over distances can be traced as far back as our ancestors' use of smoke signals. But it was really the discovery of electric currents and electromagnetism that opened the door for electric, instant and mass communication that culminated in television in the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

The era of instant communication was set in motion when Samuel Morse developed his telegraph machine in 1843. Now, messages could travel through electric currents at nearly the speed of light. Unlike Morse, however, other inventors weren't happy to transmit just the dots and dashes of Morse code. They developed devices that could

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<sup>2</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television. An International History*, p.13.

send symbols to look the same at the receiving end as it did at the sender's point – in other words, what we today call facsimile. Then, Alexander Graham Bell found a way to transmit the sound of a voice over an electric wire.<sup>3</sup>

After Bell's contribution, the next step towards developing television was to send not only the still images of facsimile machines, or the sound of a voice – but indeed to transmit *moving* (or motion) pictures with sound. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, plans to build such machines were plentiful, and their names varied as much as the methods that they employed: there were Thomas Edison's *telephonoscope* (1878), Paul Nipkow's *Elektrisches Teleskop* (1884), as well as the *hear-seeing*, *audiovision*, *telephot*, *distant electric vision*, *phototelegraphy*, *farscope* and *telectroscope*. The one thing that most of these names had in common, was the idea that they enabled one to see and hear further than ever before (*tele* means 'far'). It was only in 1900, at the International Electricity Congress in Paris, that the term *television* was coined. It was the title of Constantin Perskyi's paper, and in time the term would replace all others.<sup>4</sup>

In 1909, three television systems were built and operated. One of these, by Georges Rignoux and A. Fournier, transformed light into electricity and sent it to a receiver through a wire. With Rignoux and Fournier's device, it was also possible to synchronise the transmitter and receiver – a hereto seemingly impossible task. This was the basic technology that would later be used in television. As such, Rignoux and Fournier's machine is considered to be the first 'real' television system ever built and operated.<sup>5</sup>

Advancements continued until the First World War broke out in 1914, when interest in the new medium waned. But the war brought great developments in wire and radio communication, which gave television development a new boost. Soon, the pre-war curiosity in television resumed. In eleven different countries, a number of inventors made it their life's work to design practical television systems – most notably John

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<sup>3</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.13-15.

<sup>4</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.14-15; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. How It All Began'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/index.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>5</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.17.

Logie Baird in Britain, Édouard Belin in France, Kenjiro Takayanagi in Japan, and Charles Francis Jenkins, Vladimir Zworykin and Philo T. Farnsworth in the United States of America.<sup>6</sup>

Many of these people, like Baird, were independent inventors. However valuable their contributions to television's development were, it became somewhat obscured by the involvement – and big budgets – of large companies. During the 1920s, major communications companies like the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company in England, Electric and Musical Ltd (EMI), also from England, and the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) began to show significant interest in television. These companies invested millions of dollars in television research and became embroiled in the race to develop the first and best television system for mass broadcasting.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. The first regular television services**

#### **a. The United Kingdom**

In the UK, the race was most heated between two rival companies, Baird Television Ltd and EMI. Baird Television had been delivering an experimental television service for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London since 1929. It involved a low-definition system, with 30 lines at 12.5 frames per second.<sup>8</sup> In 1933, EMI suggested to the General Post Office (who was responsible for the licensing and regulation of transmitters) that their company start their own, high-definition, television service. This infuriated Baird Television, who demanded that the General Post Office should have a formal contest to determine which company should run the television service. To settle the issue, the General Post Office appointed a committee, led by Lord Seldon. The Seldon Committee was asked to investigate the possibility of replacing the current low-definition service with that of a higher definition.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.17-29; BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. How It All Began'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/index.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>7</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.17-29.

<sup>8</sup> This refers to the speed at which television signals are transmitted and received. For a definition of lines and frame frequency, refer to 'Definition of concepts', p.20.

<sup>9</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.28; BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. The Contest'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/contest.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/contest.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

In 1935, the Seldon Committee made its recommendations. A high-definition service should indeed be started in London, and both companies would get the opportunity to broadcast, on alternate weeks for a trial period of six months. The premises would be built and operated by the BBC.<sup>10</sup>

On 2 November the world's first official, regularly scheduled, high-definition television service – namely BBC Television – opened in London (see Figure 1). It immediately became clear that the Marconi-EMI<sup>11</sup> system was superior to Baird's: whereas the Baird company had adhered to the government's minimum requirement of 240 lines per picture, Marconi-EMI's transmitted at 405 lines per picture. After only three of the six trial months, the Marconi-EMI system was chosen above that of the Baird company.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1:** The BBC television service opening ceremony, 2 November 1936, transmitted over the Marconi-EMI system.

**Source:** [http://www.transdiffusion.org/emc/baird/opening\\_day.php](http://www.transdiffusion.org/emc/baird/opening_day.php)

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<sup>10</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.28-29; BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. The Contest'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/contest.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/contest.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>11</sup> In 1934, the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company and EMI Ltd merged to form Marconi-EMI Ltd. A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.28.

<sup>12</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. The Contest'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/contest.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/contest.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05; A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.30.

At first, the London service was troubled by the fact that television sets were very expensive. At between £35 and £100, few families could afford this new luxury and by 1937, only three thousand sets had been sold. But for those who could afford it, the London television service provided a wide range of entertainment. For two hours a day, audiences could marvel at game shows, music, light comedies and dramas by authors such as Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw. ‘Outside broadcasts’ brought sport matches, exhibitions and important events into the living room. The first such outside broadcast was the coronation procession of George VI in May 1937, watched by ten- to fifty thousand television viewers. The next year, another event created an even bigger stir: on 30 September 1938, on his arrival from Munich, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain delivered his historic ‘Peace in our time’ speech. It was broadcast live, and became the first live television broadcast of a major news event.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the high price, more and more Londoners became intrigued by the new medium. By 1939, they were buying five hundred sets a week. At the end of August 1939, an estimated twenty thousand sets were in use.<sup>14</sup>

However, television’s rise was soon dealt a major blow. On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland. War was now imminent and the television service was shut down without public notice. One reason was to save resources for the pending war. Another was to prevent the BBC transmitter from becoming a landmark for enemy bombers.<sup>15</sup> Television historian Russ J. Graham explains: ‘We were expecting death to rain from the skies, and Ally Pally<sup>16</sup> would have been the target for it. It was the strongest and clearest signal in Europe.’<sup>17</sup>

Although the shutdown was unannounced, it was not unexpected. When the television service was launched, the threat of Nazi Germany was already foreseen, and plans to close the service in case of war were made long before September 1939. And even

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<sup>13</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, pp.78-79; A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.30.

<sup>14</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.30.

<sup>15</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.30; BBC, ‘The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Closedown’. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/tvaswe/closedown.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/tvaswe/closedown.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>16</sup> Alexandra Palace, the BBC’s main transmitting centre until 1956.

<sup>17</sup> F. Rohrer, ‘BBC News Magazine: Back After the Break’. Internet: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/5054802.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/5054802.stm), 2006-06-07. Accessed: 2006-12-13.

though the service shut down, television technology would play a role in the war. Lord Swinton, a government minister during the 1920s, later revealed that the government had given television the go-ahead to foster the development of technology that was essential not only for television, but also for radar. When the war broke out, many television engineers worked as radar operators. The transmitting tower was also used: broadcast signals were sent out to confuse enemy navigation systems.<sup>18</sup>

## **b. Germany**

Like Britain, Germany started with test television transmissions in 1929. However, these transmissions consisted of pictures without sound. The test broadcasts resulted in the first made-for-television movie, called *Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund* (1930). It was only in 1934 that programmes with pictures *and* sound were produced, and on 22 March 1935 the first regular television service opened in Berlin. It was medium-definition, at 180 lines and 25 frames per second.<sup>19</sup>

When the test transmissions began in 1929, Germany was ruled by the democratic Weimar government. But in 1933 the National Socialist Party, or Nazis, won the election and began their rule over Germany. When the television service was introduced two years later, it was used as a propaganda tool. To ensure strict control over the medium, a number of public television rooms were made available in Berlin. These were the only places where television could be viewed, and programmes were broadcast three nights a week.<sup>20</sup>

In 1936, the Olympic Games were hosted in Berlin. The German television service broadcast live coverage of the Games in 28 television rooms and in the Olympic Village. Unfortunately, the picture quality was low and unstable, as it could not show great detail and was prone to flickering.<sup>21</sup> (See Figure 2.)

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<sup>18</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Closedown'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/tvaswe/closedown.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/tvaswe/closedown.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>19</sup> J. Bleicher, Germany, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.981; A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.29.

<sup>20</sup> J. Bleicher, Germany, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.981.

<sup>21</sup> J. Bleicher, Germany, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.981; A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.29.



**Figure 2:** A television camera captures the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany.  
**Source:** <http://www.tvhistory.tv/1936%20German%20Olympics%20TV%20Program.htm>

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the German television service did not go off the air as it did in Britain. Instead, the service adapted to the war situation by broadcasting a series of variety shows for injured soldiers in Berlin. Programmes were also broadcast in Hamburg and in occupied Paris between 1942 and 1944. It was only after the war that the German propaganda television service was closed. From 1948, new television stations were established in the different areas of occupation, and each was based on the television systems of the occupiers' home countries. In West Germany, the Western Allies wanted to bring an end to the abuse of television for political means. In Eastern Germany, however, television remained a propaganda instrument – this time it was wielded not by the Nazis, but by socialists.<sup>22</sup>

### **c. The United States of America**

In 1938, RCA president David Sarnoff decided to start an American television service. It was launched at the opening of the New York World's Fair on 30 April 1939. Ten days before the opening, Sarnoff opened the RCA exhibit pavilion at the Fair with a televised speech (see Figure 3). His address, 'The birth of an industry', was transmitted to the RCA building eight miles away, where members of the press had gathered to watch the telecast. 'Today we are on the eve of launching a new

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<sup>22</sup> J. Bleicher, Germany, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.983.

industry, based on imagination, research and accomplishment,' Sarnoff announced. He continued:

It is with a feeling of humbleness that I come to this moment of announcing the birth in this country of a new art so important in its implications that it is bound to affect all society. It is an art which shines like a torch of hope in the troubled world. It is a creative force which we must learn to utilize for the benefit of all mankind.<sup>23</sup>

But it soon became apparent that the picture and programme quality was not as high as that of the London television service. The American public showed little interest: television sets were very expensive and only a few were sold.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 3:** RCA President David Sarnoff.

**Source:** [http://www.davidsarnoff.org/gallery-tv-bw/DS\\_WF\\_39-4.html](http://www.davidsarnoff.org/gallery-tv-bw/DS_WF_39-4.html)

When BBC Television packed away their equipment at the start of the Second World War, the struggling American service carried on. In an attempt to transform the American service and to perk the public's interest, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decided to launch a commercial television service. Furthermore, in July 1940, the National Television Systems Committee (NTSC) was formed with the purpose of standardising transmissions and receiver quality. The NTSC proposed

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<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.30.

that a definition of 525 lines per picture should become the standard for all American transmissions.<sup>25</sup>

Commercial television programming started on 1 July 1941, but the new service did not fare much better than its predecessor. Programmes were inadequate and technical problems were still rife. Although twenty-two broadcasting licences had been awarded, only seven of these licensees were actually broadcasting.<sup>26</sup>

Five months after the start of commercial television broadcasts, Japan attacked the USA. The Pearl Harbour bombing led the Americans to enter the Second World War and, like Britain, they put their television service aside.<sup>27</sup>

#### **d. Other countries**

Britain, Germany and the USA were not the only countries to introduce television before the Second World War. Japan made its first experimental television broadcast in 1939, before the Second World War forced a halt to television research.<sup>28</sup> The USSR had similar developments: although regular television broadcasts began in 1939, they were cut short by the coming of the War.<sup>29</sup> France also began regular broadcasts in 1939. These were conducted from the Eiffel Tower, to a few sets in Paris. During the German occupation (1942-1944), television programmes were broadcast to entertain soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

However, it was really only after the Second World War came to an end in 1945 that television became the wide-spread and popular medium that it is today.

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<sup>25</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.31.

<sup>26</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.31.

<sup>27</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.31.

<sup>28</sup> J. Fox, Japan, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.1210.

<sup>29</sup> J. A. Dunn, Russia, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 3*, p.1983.

<sup>30</sup> S. Emmanuel, France, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.910; J. Bleicher, Germany, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.981.

#### 4. Returning to air: television after the Second World War

##### a. The United Kingdom

The BBC's television service returned to air on 7 June 1946. The schedule was extended from the pre-war two hours to three hours a day. Even though the BBC at first continued with their 405-line standard, plans were already underway to raise the definition significantly. Other plans included the building of four new transmitters, so that the London service could be expanded to major population centres outside the capital.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, television did not enjoy great popularity. When the service reopened, it struggled to gain ground against radio, which the BBC's management still saw as the superior medium. Television sets were also very expensive. When Britain experienced a fuel crisis in 1946-1947, the service was closed for a month.<sup>32</sup>

Slowly, however, the television service gained status. In 1948, after years of refusal, the BBC management finally allowed the television service to broadcast news, which was bound to be very popular. Initially, the BBC management did not want the television service to broadcast news, because 'the slightest facial movement on the part of the newsreader would be interpreted as comment', which would make television news 'inappropriate'<sup>33</sup>. But after the broadcast of Neville Chamberlain's speech, pressure from BBC staff, as well as from the public, led to the introduction of television news.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television Returns.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/index.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05; A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.32.

<sup>32</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television's Crowning Moment.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>33</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. The "Cinderella" Service'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/cinderella.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/cinderella.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>34</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. The "Cinderella" Service'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/cinderella.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/cinderella.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

When the new transmitters were installed in 1952, BBC Television finally became a national service.<sup>35</sup> Everything was in place for television's 'crowning moment'<sup>36</sup>, which came in 1953.

When King George VI died in February 1952, the BBC immediately started planning for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Initially it was not sure whether television cameras would actually be allowed to film the ceremony, but after negotiations with both the Church and State, the BBC got permission to televise. The medium was given a further boost when the new queen gave her approval.<sup>37</sup>

The coronation took place on 2 June 1953. It was a turning point for the struggling television service: on that day, nearly twenty million people watched the ceremony on television in England, and millions more watched in Canada, America, Germany and France. For the first time in the medium's history, the number of viewers surpassed the number of radio listeners. In the same year, more television sets than radios were manufactured – another first for television. By 1954, 3.2 million British homes had television sets. The service grew enough for the BBC to expand their premises. Britain's first commercial television service, ITV (Independent Television), opened in 1955. At last, in Britain, television had risen to the top of the mass communication media.<sup>38</sup>

### **b. The United States of America and the problems of colour television**

During the Second World War, television technology was further developed, because it was very useful for war activities such as radar, guiding missiles and long-range reconnaissance. In America, a television tube was developed that was far more advanced than its predecessors. When interest in television broadcasts resumed after

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<sup>35</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television's Crowning Moment.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>36</sup> BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television's Crowning Moment.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>37</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.81; BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television's Crowning Moment.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

<sup>38</sup> A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p.81; BBC, 'The BBC Story – Sound On, Vision On. Television's Crowning Moment.' Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/afterwar/coronation.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2006-12-05.

the war, this piece of equipment (called the ‘image orthicon’) gave RCA the upper hand in developing worldwide post-war television services.<sup>39</sup>

After the war, fifteen television stations went on air in the USA. Gradually, the old equipment was replaced by the new image orthicon. Interest was now far greater than before the war, and in the 1950s television experienced a rapid growth period.<sup>40</sup> Broadcasts were still in black-and-white. Soon, however, broadcasters turned their attention to colour transmissions.

On 25 June 1951, colour television was introduced by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) station in New York. It was not the first time that images were transmitted in colour: John Logie Baird had demonstrated the technology as far back as 1928. In 1940, CBS publicly demonstrated colour television, but the Second World War soon interrupted research. When research resumed after the War, a number of colour television systems<sup>41</sup> were developed. However, none of these systems were fully compatible with black-and-white television systems, and only those who bought new television sets were able to receive colour broadcasts. Nevertheless, the FCC decided to introduce the CBS system, since *not* doing so might curtail further technological advancements. This would mean that an inferior, non-compatible system would eventually have to be used, and monochrome television sets would later have to be modified at great cost.<sup>42</sup>

But the CBS colour broadcasts were rather short-lived. Once again, transmissions were interrupted by war. The Korean War effort demanded many resources that would otherwise have gone into the production of colour television sets. By October 1951, there was only a very limited number of colour sets, and CBS halted their colour broadcasts.<sup>43</sup>

In the same year, the National Television System Committee (NTSC) was revived to set the standards for colour television, just as it had for monochrome broadcasts in

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<sup>39</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.31-32.

<sup>40</sup> A. Abramson, *The Invention of Television*, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.32.

<sup>41</sup> For a definition of ‘colour television system’, see ‘Definition of concepts’, p.20.

<sup>42</sup> D. F. Donnelly, *Color Television*, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.554.

<sup>43</sup> D. F. Donnelly, *Color Television*, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.554.

1940. In 1953, after two years of investigation, the second NTSC approved a colour system that was compatible with black-and-white television sets. The picture standard was the same as for monochrome sets, namely 525 lines and 60 fields per second.<sup>44</sup>

Television stations quickly adapted to these new standards. Many upgraded their broadcasting facilities, and by 1957, 106 of the 158 major stations had adopted colour television. It would take some years before colour programmes enticed the public to buy colour television sets – in 1965, a mere 10% of the American population had such sets. But as the 1960s drew to a close, more and more people decided to upgrade to colour.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. The worldwide spread of television

Soon after the war, interest in television spread quickly. By 1946, four countries already had television services, namely Britain, America, France and the USSR. During the late 1940s and 1950s, television experienced a great boom. Services were introduced in about ninety countries, including Switzerland (1949), Mexico (1950), Canada (1952), Venezuela (1952), Italy (1954), Australia (1956), Iran (1958) and China (1958).<sup>46</sup>

In 1970, on the eve of South Africa's decision to introduce television, 118 countries worldwide had television.<sup>47</sup>

## 6. Television in Africa

When television spread throughout the world, many African countries adopted the medium. During the 1950s and 1960s, television services were introduced by colonial powers in, among others, Morocco (1954), Algeria (1956), Nigeria (1956), Angola

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<sup>44</sup> D. F. Donnelly, Color Television, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, pp.554-555.

<sup>45</sup> D. F. Donnelly, Color Television, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.555.

<sup>46</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.2-5; C. Okigbo, Africa, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.358; J. Hong, China, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.510; A. Moran, Australia, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.173; M. Raboy, Canada, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.407; G. Bechelloni & M. Buonanna, Italy, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 2*, p.1191; U. Ganz-Blaettler, Switzerland, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, p.2243.

<sup>47</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.5

(1962), and Kenya (1962). Media scholar Dietrich Berwanger draws a clear link between these new television services and the period of African decolonisation: ‘it was the time when most of the colonies in Africa were becoming independent, and quite often a television station found its way into the colonial powers’ farewell gifts’<sup>48</sup>. Media scholar Charles Okigbo is not too convinced that these stations were intended as benevolent ‘gifts’. He argues that Berwanger’s point is only relevant to *some* African countries. In many others, television was meant as a political tool for mass mobilisation. Unlike the printed media, television could reach educated as well as illiterate audiences. However, despite the fact that television could be transmitted to rural and urban homes, the price of television sets and lack of electricity in many homes meant that only a handful of Africans could enjoy the new medium.<sup>49</sup>

When countries with television services became independent, the medium was often used to entrench the new African governments. Between 1960 and the 1980s, African television stations were mainly government-controlled, with very little input from the private sector.<sup>50</sup>

By 1969, more than twenty African states had television. This means that more than half of the continent’s countries were still without it. Indeed, some countries had to wait until well after independence and only received television in the 1980s, even the 1990s. Niger introduced the medium in 1980, a few years before Lesotho (1985), Cameroon (1985) and Chad (1987). Tanzania’s first television service, a private station, was launched in 1994. However, its first state controlled television station went on air in 2001.<sup>51</sup>

## 7. The question of control

One issue that stalled the growth of television in many countries was that of control. At first, many assumed that television should be under strict government control. But by 1956, only a few of the ninety countries that had television had non-commercial,

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<sup>48</sup> D. Berwanger, quoted in C. Okigbo, Africa, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.359

<sup>49</sup> C. Okigbo, Africa, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, pp.359-360.

<sup>50</sup> N. K. Karithi, Africa, Sub-Saharan, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, pp.45-47.

<sup>51</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to Television*, p.5; C. Okigbo, Africa, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.363; BBC, ‘Country Profile: Tanzania’. Internet: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country\\_profiles/1072330.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072330.stm), s.a. Accessed: 2007-03-21.

government-controlled systems. Examples of such countries were the USSR and the Eastern Bloc states. In these countries, television served as an important state information – and propaganda – tool.<sup>52</sup>

By 1970, four systems of control could be discerned, including the total government control described above. A second system was where public utility corporations broadcasted under government licence or charter, but otherwise had autonomy. Examples were Britain's BBC, the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). This system was also followed by the SABC with regards to radio broadcasting.<sup>53</sup>

A third system was where private corporations' shares were held solely or partially by the government, for example Italy's RAI (*Radio Audizioni Italiane*).<sup>54</sup>

In the fourth system, private companies ran commercial television services and the government had little or no control over broadcasting. The United States is an example. Here, government influence was limited to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which licensed television stations and laid down certain procedures and technical standards for broadcasting.<sup>55</sup>

These systems determined how television services were financed.<sup>56</sup> Government-controlled services usually operated on government subsidies: no licence fees were charged and no advertisements were broadcast. Where corporations held government charters (like the BBC), the services were funded by television licences and no advertisements were allowed. In systems where government held corporation shares, the television service was financed partially by advertising. The rest of the funding came from licensing. In the fourth system, namely private, commercial services,

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<sup>52</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.2-5; 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.

<sup>53</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.6.

<sup>54</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.6.

<sup>55</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.4, 6.

<sup>56</sup> South Africa was to adopt a combination of these systems of control and financing. See Chapter VI, p.153.

funding came from advertising and sponsorships alone. No license fees were charged.<sup>57</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

When South Africa introduced television in 1976, the medium was already more than sixty years old. By this time, inventors, broadcasters and governments had grappled with and resolved the initial problems of television. Firstly, there was the technical problem of transforming television from theories and dreams to a practical means of transmitting pictures and sounds. Then, broadcasting companies competed in the race to bring the first regular, high quality programmes to the public. But their efforts in promoting television as a popular medium were impeded by the high prices of television sets. When black-and-white television had become affordable and attractive, colour television entered the scene, bringing a new set of issues regarding picture quality, affordability and compatibility with existing monochrome sets.

Another important issue was the question of control. Of one thing governments and broadcasters were certain: television is an extremely powerful medium that can reach millions of homes and speak directly to adults, children, the educated and the illiterate. It can be used to educate, inform and entertain. For some governments, having strict state control was imperative. Others were content with entrusting it to private commercial enterprises.

By the time South Africa introduced television, technology had become more advanced, television sets were affordable, colour television had become a practical and adequately regulated system, and several systems of financing and control had developed. This gave South Africa the opportunity to do in-depth research on the medium, and to choose the best and most suitable aspects for the South African television service.

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<sup>57</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.2-6; 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.

**II**  
**BROADCASTING IN SOUTH AFRICA**  
**BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

‘Well, sir, television at the Empire Exhibition is going to be the real thing  
and no bamboozling the public.’<sup>1</sup>

*- R. Holland, the manager and engineer of the  
Empire Exhibition television demonstration, 1936.*

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<sup>1</sup> Anonym, You Can Be Televised at the Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.13.

## 1. Introduction

Before the Second World War, broadcasting was a fairly new concept in South Africa. Although wireless amateurs had been experimenting with the technology since the early twentieth century, it was initially not an integral part of the public's everyday life. When regular radio broadcasts were introduced, they were mostly limited to the major urban centres. To the general public, television was still a foreign and rather fanciful concept.

However, two demonstrations changed the way many South Africans perceived television. In 1929, the Television Society from Britain arranged a presentation of the Baird television technology. The demonstration was given to a handful of television enthusiasts and notable persons only, but it received considerable press coverage. At the time, the idea was still so unfamiliar that a Cape Town journalist had to explain that 'television' really meant 'seeing at a distance'. He continued to explain that although one could not yet transmit a sport match taking place in Manchester all the way to South Africa, one would be able to see and hear somebody transmitting from another room.<sup>2</sup>

A second exhibit was given in 1936, at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. It was the first time that the South African public could experience television for themselves. Even here, people were not too sure what to expect of this new technological marvel, and some could not believe their eyes. Sceptics thought that it was a magic trick with mirrors and hidden projectors. Others were afraid that television, with which you could see what a person was doing in another room, would enable voyeurs to peep into your home.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, South African interest was piqued. By the time the Second World War broke out, radio had become a more regular feature in South Africa, and television seemed like an excellent addition to radio broadcasting. These developments in terms of radio and television not only influenced the way the public perceived the two

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<sup>2</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.138.

<sup>3</sup> Anonym, 25,000 People Televised at Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1937-01-01, p.6.

media, but would also to a large extent determine the way in which the government would approach South African broadcasting after the War.

## **2. The development of broadcasting in South Africa**

### **a. Wireless telegraphy**

The development of wireless telegraphy is often ascribed to Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi. However, a young telegraph engineer developed the technique simultaneously and independently in South Africa. Edward Alfred Jennings was born in England. After working in Cape Town, he arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1896 to work at the Telephone Exchange. Jennings began experimenting with ways to transmit wirelessly, and soon his instruments worked so well that he linked it to a Morse code tape machine printer to form a wireless telegraph machine. Public demonstrations of his wireless system were very successful, and a formal request was made in the Cape Parliament to give Jennings funding for further research. However, the responsible Cabinet Minister, J. X. Merriman, was not convinced that wireless telegraphy was a good idea: ‘Life is troublesome enough with ordinary telegrams. With wireless telegraphy it will be unbearable,’ Merriman claimed.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, Jennings remained positive. At a public appearance in May 1899, a prominent businessman, M. M. Laubser, praised his work: ‘Mr Jennings has been silently pursuing his studies for several years, on the same important scientific subject, and has arrived at results almost as satisfactory as those by Professor Marconi. All the more credit is due to Mr Jennings, as his pursuits have been carried on in his spare hours.’<sup>5</sup> The press was equally positive about Jennings’s work. One newspaper hoped that, with an inventor of its own, South Africa would not fall behind the rest of the world in terms of wireless technology. Although Jennings’s work was interrupted by the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), it did spark an interest in wireless in South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.5-6.

## **b. The wireless amateurs**

In 1902, the Cape Parliament amended the 1861 Electric Telegraph Act. In its definition of ‘electric telegraph’, the amendment included transmissions made wirelessly. This was the world’s first legislation that covered the subject of radio. The law inspired other countries to pass similar laws, and soon the first international agreement on fixed wavelengths was reached.<sup>7</sup>

A decade later, amateur wireless operators (the so-called ‘hams’) started to build their own wireless sets. One of the earliest hams was a schoolboy from Durban, Frank Kuttel, who built a working set in 1912. By 1914, wireless transmission experiments had successfully been made between Johannesburg and Durban. During the First World War (1914-1918), unofficial wireless transmissions were not allowed – a regulation that interrupted amateur broadcasts. But when the war was over, hams across the world resumed their activities. In South Africa, a number of amateurs established broadcasting services. In Cape Town, amateurs such as John Samuel Streeter and Reginald Hopkins began experimental broadcasts, which included regular gramophone concerts. These transmissions received considerable press coverage, which inspired more amateurs to build receiver sets. Soon these two private radio stations could be heard in as far as the Karoo.<sup>8</sup>

In the Transvaal, radio amateur Arthur Sydney (‘Toby’) Innes ran one of the busiest and most successful amateur transmitters. Innes also had his own radio station, but his broadcasts did not stop at gramophone concerts. He gave personal interpretations of the music, made fun of his friends and even incorporated live performances by local artists. His broadcasts were so popular that not only radio amateurs tuned in, but even members of the general public who managed to obtain receiver sets.<sup>9</sup>

In 1920, radio broadcasting could be seen in action at a number of public demonstrations, for example at the Western Province Agricultural Show in Cape Town, and the Rand Show at Milner Park in Johannesburg. Thousands of curious

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<sup>7</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.6-11.

<sup>8</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.6-11, 18.

<sup>9</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.20.

people saw these exhibitions. Many, however, thought that the wireless broadcasts were the result of clever tricks. Nevertheless, public interest in the new technology grew immensely, and more and more amateurs became involved.<sup>10</sup>

### **c. The first regular broadcasting stations**

By the early 1920s, the number of radio amateurs had grown so much that the government introduced measures to regulate the increasing transmissions, stating that while they ‘recognised the value of the work being done by the amateurs, it would probably be more circumspect in issuing license [*sic*] in future.’<sup>11</sup> In 1923, the government called for licence applications. Only three licenses were awarded, one in each of South Africa’s major urban centres. In Cape Town, the license was given to the Cape Peninsular Publicity Association; in Durban, the Durban Corporation; and in Johannesburg the Association of Scientific and Technical Societies.<sup>12</sup>

On 1 July 1924, the new Johannesburg-based radio station, JB Calling, went on air. It was followed by the Cape Town station in September 1924 and the Durban station in December of the same year. Soon after their inception, however, these radio stations found themselves in financial trouble. One of the main problems was that, although listeners had to pay licence fees, the law did not make adequate provision for enforcing payment. The Johannesburg station stopped broadcasting at the end of January 1927. The Postmaster-General, who was responsible for broadcasting regulations such as awarding licenses, believed that the Johannesburg stations should be managed by the government, but he was unable to persuade the Cabinet. Instead, entrepreneur Isidore William Schlesinger, who had already had success in the insurance business and had practically established the South African cinema industry, was approached to manage the radio concern. Schlesinger agreed, and it was stipulated that his new African Broadcasting Company (ABC) would hold the

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<sup>10</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.21.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, *Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971*, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, p.24.

<sup>12</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, *Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971*, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, pp.24-26.

broadcasting licence for an initial five years<sup>13</sup>. Later in 1927, when the licenses for Cape Town and Durban expired, they were also awarded to the ABC.<sup>14</sup>

#### **d. The African Broadcasting Company**

Although popular with many listeners, the Company continued to be hampered by financial difficulties. By 1929 the ABC's finances had reached a crisis point. Plans aimed at generating more public interest (and payment of licence fees) were introduced – including a spruced up programme line-up that provided more entertainment, an early-morning physical exercise programme, higher quality news broadcasts and open-air actuality transmissions.<sup>15</sup>

These measures were quite successful. Yet the ABC came under a great amount of criticism, especially for the disproportion between English and Afrikaans programmes. As a commercial enterprise backed by mostly English dominated businesses, the language of South African radio was predominantly English and even though the ABC introduced limited Afrikaans broadcasts in 1931, it was not enough to satisfy Afrikaans listeners.<sup>16</sup> The commercial, English-orientated nature of the ABC radio services would inspire the government to bring radio under state control, and was bound to fuel the future fears of commercial television and its possible effect on Afrikaans culture.

#### **e. John Reith and the South African Broadcasting Corporation**

The ABC's license was due to expire in 1937. Before renewing the concession, Prime Minister J. B. M. Hertzog personally invited the head of the BBC, Sir John Reith, to visit South Africa. Reith was asked to investigate South African broadcasting, and to make recommendations for its future. In his autobiography, Reith explained the

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<sup>13</sup> In 1932, the ABC's licence was renewed for another five years.

<sup>14</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.1, 88, 96; G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, pp.26-27; P. B. Orlik, Southern Africa, in S. Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa*, pp.139-140.

<sup>15</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, pp.141-143.

<sup>16</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, p.29.

reason for his visit: ‘The South Africans were unhappy about their broadcasting organisation. General Hertzog, the Prime Minister, invited me to visit them that they might consult me as to their policy in the future development of broadcasting in the Union.’<sup>17</sup>

Reith visited the country from 6 September to 19 November 1934. In his report, Reith first stressed the importance of the broadcasting industry, as he believed that the South Africans did not understand the potential power and influence of broadcasting. Moreover, because of its power, it was important to manage the industry properly: ‘As the assegai to the naked hand, as the rifle to the assegai, so and more is broadcasting rightly institutionalized, rightly inspired and rightly controlled, to any other instrument or power – but in the service of wisdom and beauty and peace.’<sup>18</sup> Reith strongly recommended that the South African broadcasting service be brought under the auspices of a public corporation like the BBC. The corporation should be an autonomous statutory body, and under no circumstances could it function as a government controlled organisation or a state department. The corporation would have to be controlled by a Board, and the corporation would have the sole right to manage the country’s broadcasting.<sup>19</sup>

On 25 March 1935, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, C. F. Clarkson, announced that, in following with Reith’s report, the government would not renew the ABC’s licence when it expired in 1937. The new Broadcasting Act, No. 22 of 1936, was passed in June 1936 and came into action on 1 August 1936. The act resembled the concept act that Reith included in his report to Hertzog very closely. Provision was made for the establishment of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and all broadcasting rights were assigned to the new Corporation. The SABC Board members would be appointed by the Governor General.<sup>20</sup>

The new law even provided for television: should South Africa get a television service, it would also be controlled by the SABC. However, television was still

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in P. J. Meyer, *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzog-Gedenklesing 11: Genl J. B. M. Hertzog, Sir John Reith en die Uitsaaiwet van 1936*, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in P. J. Meyer, *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzog-Gedenklesing 11*, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzog-Gedenklesing 11*, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzog-Gedenklesing 11*, pp.17-18.

financially unviable, and it was clear that the government and the SABC were not yet considering establishing such a service.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Early television demonstrations**

#### **a. Baird and the Television Society demonstrations, August 1929**

The development of television was a culmination of many different inventors' efforts<sup>22</sup> and in the early years, the television pioneers often demonstrated their technological inventions to fellow scientists and members of the public. Scottish inventor John Logie Baird was one of the most prominent pioneers of television. In the 1920s, Baird was actively involved in developing and exhibiting his television apparatus in Britain and abroad.

After a series of unsuccessful and ineffective inventions – including the air-soled shoe and a homemade haemorrhoid cream – Baird turned his attention to television in the early 1920s. With limited funds, he used scrap materials to build his equipment. By 1924 Baird had succeeded in transmitting a flickering image across a few feet. In 1925 he made a simple public demonstration in the Selfridges department store in London's Oxford Street. However, the image quality was nothing like the clear pictures we see today. The television system used only five scanning lines (as opposed to today's 625 lines), and was called a 'shadowgraph', as it only showed a silhouette outline image. For Baird, this was not true television. He wanted his system to produce shades of grey and enough detail to form a recognisable picture.<sup>23</sup>

In October 1925 Baird had a breakthrough when he managed to transmit a recognisable image with shades of grey. This time, the image consisted of 30 lines. The development paved the way for the world's first public demonstration of television, on 26 January 1926. By 1928, Baird had established a transmitter station in London, from which private demonstrations of television were conducted almost

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<sup>21</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzog-Gedenklesing 11*, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter I, p.27.

<sup>23</sup> BBC, 'John Logie Baird'. Internet: [http://www.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/baird.shtml](http://www.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/baird.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2007-05-11; BBC, 'John Logie Baird (1888-1946)'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/baird\\_logie.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/baird_logie.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2007-05-11.

daily. He also succeeded in making the first transatlantic television transmission, between London and New York. This led to an experimental television service in London, delivered by Baird Television Ltd, which began in 1929.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Baird had turned his eyes towards South Africa with the intention of promoting amateur broadcasts. The Baird Company was aware of an interest in television in South Africa, because the company had received a number of enquiries from South African wireless amateurs. Baird hoped that with more amateurs and inventors focussing on television, the technology would develop even further and faster. In September 1928, South African newspaper *The Star* reported that television would soon come to South Africa:

A cable received from London to-day [*sic*] announces that the Baird Television Company has either come to an agreement or is negotiating an agreement for the marketing of Mr. Baird's invention in South Africa through the Schlesinger organisation.<sup>25</sup>

The article continued that these negotiations followed repeated requests by the Baird Company for the exploitation of television in South Africa. As the organisation in charge of radio stations in South Africa, the Schlesinger organisation was the obvious group to approach. *The Star's* report was confirmed by the *Rand Daily Mail* when it carried the big news: 'Television to start soon on the Rand'<sup>26</sup>. The Baird Company had reportedly decided to send a group of engineers with the necessary equipment to South Africa to start a television service. The service would start in Johannesburg before the end of 1928, and subsequently expand to other centres in the country.<sup>27</sup>

The report was too optimistic. It would be another year before television came to South Africa – and then it was not as a broadcast service, but merely as a demonstration of the technology.<sup>28</sup> In August 1929, the Vice President of the

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<sup>24</sup> BBC, 'John Logie Baird'. Internet: [http://www.co.uk/heritage/in\\_depth/70tv/baird.shtml](http://www.co.uk/heritage/in_depth/70tv/baird.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2007-05-11; BBC, 'John Logie Baird (1888-1946)'. Internet: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/baird\\_logie.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/baird_logie.shtml), s.a. Accessed: 2007-05-11; Anonym, Television for South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*, 1928-09-07, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> Anonym, Television for South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*, 1928-09-07, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.136.

<sup>27</sup> Anonym, Television for South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*, 1928-09-07, p.11; E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.136.

<sup>28</sup> Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

Television Society, Lord Angus Kennedy, landed in South Africa for the promised demonstrations. The first exhibit was held for members of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science at the engineering laboratory of the South African College in Cape Town.

The images were not very crisp, and were distorted by electrical interference. Yet the demonstrator's face was easily recognisable, and his voice was clear. Through the loudspeakers, Kennedy explained that what he was demonstrating was not entertainment yet, but a scientific experiment. Television technology was still being developed. Kennedy continued by giving his audience a taste of what would come: 'Experiments now being made show that Colour Television will be a fact of the future. It has also been discovered that a scene can be 'televised' even in complete darkness.'<sup>29</sup>

Another demonstration was given in Cape Town, at the top of Government Avenue. A number of dignitaries, including the mayor of Cape Town, the Town Clerk, and the principal of the University of Cape Town, Sir Carruthers Beattie (who would later serve on the first board of the SABC) attended. Next, Kennedy departed for Johannesburg, where he gave even more impressive demonstrations at the Witwatersrand University grounds. The first demonstration, on 22 August 1929, was specially arranged for a group from *The Star* and featured theatre personality Gwyneth Nelson Keys.<sup>30</sup>

Lord Kennedy himself made an appearance. Although the pictures lacked a 'quality of sharpness'<sup>31</sup> and faces seemed 'unnaturally daubed'<sup>32</sup>, they were nevertheless well defined and easily recognisable:

The onlookers clearly saw Lord Kennedy's hand conveying a lighted cigarette to his lips. They saw the cinder on the cigarette glow – though it appeared to glow white and hot red – when he took a 'pull', and they saw the stream of smoke afterwards issue from his mouth. He displayed the

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<sup>29</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.138.

<sup>30</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.138.

<sup>31</sup> Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

<sup>32</sup> Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

ring on his finger and called attention to the whites of his eyes as a test of the detail visible in the image, and as a test they afforded fairly convincing evidence.<sup>33</sup>

For the next few days, newspapers explained how television worked and why it would be useful. Both *The Star* and the *Sunday Times* remarked on the usefulness of television in instantaneously transmitting stock exchange prices:

Instead of the comparatively slow reporting of prices by the present-day tape machines, it would be possible to televise the actual price board at a stock exchange so that brokers and others possessing a small receiving set...could watch changes the instant they are posted up.<sup>34</sup>

Another use listed by the *Sunday Times* was the ability to broadcast pictures of wanted criminals to police stations across the country.<sup>35</sup> The potential of television news was mentioned by *The Star*, who claimed that the display of current events as they happened could serve as competition to the bioscope.<sup>36</sup> Although the emphasis was not on television as a source of recreation, the entertainment possibilities were indeed suggested by the appearance of the entertainer, Miss Keys.<sup>37</sup>

After the Johannesburg demonstrations, another exhibit was held in Pretoria's city hall.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the demonstrations, Lord Kennedy emphasised the reason behind his visit to South Africa, namely to get more and more people interested in the medium to ensure the medium's rapid development.<sup>39</sup> But the press was well aware of the stumbling blocks in establishing a television service in South Africa, of which the biggest was the setting up of equipment. Television would require its own transmitter station, as well as expensive receiver sets. According to *The Star*, the latter created a paradoxical situation, as it would be futile to establish a television service before the

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<sup>33</sup> Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

<sup>34</sup> R. F. S. Dewdney, Seeing through Walls. Television Comes to the Rand, *Sunday Times*, 1929-08-25, p.19. See also Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Dewdney, R.F.S., Seeing through walls. Television comes to the Rand. *Sunday Times (Johannesburg)*, 1929-08-25, p.19.

<sup>36</sup> Anonym, Television in South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-23, p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Anonym, Television. Further Experiments To-Day, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-26, p.10.

<sup>38</sup> E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.140.

<sup>39</sup> R. F. S. Dewdney, Seeing through Walls. Television Comes to the Rand, *Sunday Times*, 1929-08-25, p.19; Anonym, Television in South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-23, p.10; Anonym, Television Tested. To-day's Remarkable Exhibition, *The Star (City Late)*, 1929-08-22, p.11.

intended audience had receivers, but at the same time people would not buy receivers if they had no certain prospects of actually using them.<sup>40</sup>

Another significant problem was funding. A few years before the demonstrations, South Africa's three radio stations had been buckling under financial difficulties, and the ABC was not faring much better. It could scarcely be expected that there would now be enough money to set up the very expensive enterprise of television. After the demonstrations, ABC head I. W. Schlesinger declared: 'Wait and see – the time [for television] is not yet ripe.'<sup>41</sup>

By now, public interest was stirred, but it would take another seven years before they would be able to glimpse the new medium for themselves.

### **b. The 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg**

In 1929, television was demonstrated to a handful of enthusiastic viewers. The general public, however, could only read about the new marvel in their daily newspapers. But in 1936, television once again came to South Africa. This time, anybody who bought a 2-shilling entrance ticket for the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg could experience the new medium in action. What was more, not only could they see images transmitted over several small screens, but they could have *themselves* televised.<sup>42</sup>

The Empire Exhibition was held at Milner Park in Johannesburg and encompassed more than 100 acres. Preparations began two years before the opening on 15 September 1936, and the organisers aimed to host an Exhibition that would be nothing less than spectacular. The grounds were adorned with an artificial lake, fed by an artificial waterfall and surrounded by a unique South African rock garden with rare specimens of Cape flora. Jacarandas were planted all over Milner Park. A long main avenue, called Prosperity Avenue, was illuminated at night and led to the central point of the Exhibition, a 200-foot (±61-metre) high tower. The tower would be visible

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<sup>40</sup> Anonym, Television for South Africa, *The Star (City Late)*. 1929-08-23, p.10.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in E. Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening*, p.140.

<sup>42</sup> Anonym, You Can Be Televised at the Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.13.

from all over Johannesburg, and at night its searchlights would be seen from miles away. A 6-metre high bubble fountain was also illuminated at night.<sup>43</sup>

Several members of the British Commonwealth, as well as some mandated territories, had their own pavilions or exhibitions, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Nigeria, Nyasaland (now Malawi), Uganda, Palestine<sup>44</sup> and Zanzibar.<sup>45</sup>

Some of the most remarkable displays were a scale-model of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, a 50-metre long working model of the Victoria Falls, a miniature of the entire Witwatersrand goldfields from Randfontein to Springs, and a deep-sea aquarium. The aquarium, with its butterfly fish and sea horses, was indeed a magnificent sight and in fact an experiment in science: before the Exhibition, it was not sure whether deep-sea fish could survive at an altitude of 1500 metres. The exhibits from Palestine included full-scale models of several Biblical buildings, such as the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon.<sup>46</sup>

The Johannesburg Exhibition was part of a series of world's fairs held across the globe. The first true World's Fair was the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, commonly known as the Great Exhibition or the Crystal Palace Exhibition. The purpose of these fairs was, as declared at the 1851 Exhibition, 'to forward the progress of industrial civilization'<sup>47</sup>. It also served as a showcase of national lifestyles and a comparison between the development stages of different countries. Indeed, in 1936 exhibitors from across the world came to Johannesburg to show their wares. It was a wonderful opportunity for South Africa to display its

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<sup>43</sup> *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Bulletin 4*, s.a.; *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Overseas Bulletin 3*, s.a.

<sup>44</sup> At the end of the First World War, Britain received a League of Nations mandate over Palestine. In 1948, Britain withdrew from Palestine, and the region became the State of Israel. See UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Middle East Peace Process: Historical Background'. Internet: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394644>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-12-13.

<sup>45</sup> *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Overseas Bulletin 1-7*, s.a.

<sup>46</sup> *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Overseas Bulletin 1-7*, s.a.

<sup>47</sup> J. E. Findling (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988*, pp.xvii-xviii.

economic prowess to the rest of the world. As the *Rand Daily Mail*<sup>48</sup> explained: ‘The intention of the Exhibition is to show the whole of South Africa to the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth to the world, and thus it is a symbol of a national as well as a wider unity.’<sup>49</sup> The Exhibition gave overseas exhibitors the chance to ‘come and see what they can buy from us, as well as what they can sell’<sup>50</sup>, which would serve to further trade relations between South Africa and other countries. Furthermore, the Exhibition would benefit the tourism industry as well as trade and other industries, as tourists would come from across the globe to visit the Exhibition. Those who did not come would read about South Africa and, particularly, Johannesburg. According to the *Rand Daily Mail*, this publicity would ‘give a permanent stimulus to our tourist trade.’<sup>51</sup>

As an example of modern technological development, television often had a special place at these Fairs. In fact, the medium’s name was coined at the International Electricity Congress, which was held as part of the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.<sup>52</sup> In 1939, American television made its official debut when it was launched at the New York World’s Fair.<sup>53</sup> Television was also demonstrated at a number of other fairs,

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<sup>48</sup> For the discussion on the Empire Exhibition and particularly the television demonstrations, the *Rand Daily Mail* was used as the main source. In 1936, there were only a few Afrikaans newspapers and magazines and although some of them did report on the Exhibition, it was to a much lesser extent than the *Rand Daily Mail*. The focus was also different: while the *Rand Daily Mail* reported widely on technological wonders and international displays, *Die Burger*’s reports were concentrated on the cultural fare. In a series of articles on the Exhibition, renowned Afrikaans author M. E. R. (the writer’s name of M. E. Rothmann) wrote about the Khoisan exhibition, and used this as background for her musings on South Africa’s different ethnic groups. See M. E. R., By die Rykskou: Ou Abram en sy Mense, *Die Burger*, 1936-10-31, p.14; M. E. R., By die Rykskou. Bantoe, Boesman ... en Witman, *Die Burger*, 1936-11-07, p.14. The television demonstration was mentioned in one article that was practically identical to a *Rand Daily Mail* article. Compare Anoniem, Televisie op die Rykskou, *Die Burger*, 1936-09-23, p.2; Anonym, Television comes to S. Africa, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-23, p.18.

<sup>49</sup> Anonym, Empire Spot-Light on Johannesburg, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.8.

<sup>50</sup> Anonym, Empire Spot-Light on Johannesburg, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> Anonym, Empire Spot-Light on Johannesburg, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.8.

<sup>52</sup> A. Abramson, The Invention of Television, in A. Smith (ed.), *Television*, p.16; R. W. Brown, Paris 1900: Exposition Universelle, in J. E. Findling (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988*, pp.235-238.

<sup>53</sup> 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; D. G. Larson, New York 1939-1940: New York World’s Fair, in J. E. Findling (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988*, pp.291-303.

including the 1937 French International Exposition in Paris and the 1933-1934 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, which attracted three million visitors.<sup>54</sup>

When television came to the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, the technology had advanced significantly since the Baird demonstration in 1929.<sup>55</sup> And this time, it was not an overseas company that brought television to South Africa, but a South African radio and television amateur, Lennox Rhind. He was assisted by a number of engineers and specialists, including F. R. Milsom; V. K. Krause, a local radio expert; M Reiner<sup>56</sup>, a British television engineer; and Robert Holland, an American television specialist who ran the equipment at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition's television exhibit.<sup>57</sup> The system used was also not the *Iconoscope* developed by the Baird company, but rather that of the Edison Swan Electric Company of London.<sup>58</sup>

The television exhibit was eagerly awaited. Having heard of the new technology for a number of years, the public showed a great interest in seeing what the medium was about, how it worked, and how far it had developed. Some were sceptical, however, and would 'smile politely when television is mentioned'<sup>59</sup>. According to a *Rand Daily Mail* reporter, this scepticism was understandable, because 'television has been coming for so long that they are more than justified'<sup>60</sup>.

When the Exhibition opened on 15 September 1936, visitors queued up to finally get a glimpse of television. But the ship transporting the equipment from London was held up for a number of days, and the apparatus could only be ready a week after the

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<sup>54</sup> J. Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, pp.140, 144; *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Bulletin 60*, 1936-08-08; J. E. Findling, Chicago 1933-1934: A Century of Progress Exposition, in J. E. Findling (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988*, pp.266-274.

<sup>55</sup> Anonym, You Can Be Televised at the Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.13; Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

<sup>56</sup> According to the *Rand Daily Mail* of 16 September 1936, it was H. J. Reiner; the *Rand Daily Mail* of 1 January 1937 reports that it was J. H. Reiner. The official Empire Exhibition Bulletin calls him M. Reiner, and this is the name used here. See *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Bulletin 60*, 1936-08-08, p.1; Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8; Anonym, 25,000 People Televised at Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1937-01-01, p.6.

<sup>57</sup> *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Bulletin 60*, 1936-08-08; Airfarer (pseud.), Television demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

<sup>58</sup> *Empire Exhibition: South Africa: 1936, Bulletin 60*, 1936-08-08.

<sup>59</sup> Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

<sup>60</sup> Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

opening. When the equipment was finally set up, a private demonstration was given to invited guests, including a Reuter's representative. The next day, the *Rand Daily Mail* described the first screening: 'Thousands of green streaks of lightning chased each other across a screen, the continuous buzz of a revolving wheel, a blaze of light from behind black curtains and, in a few seconds, all these consolidated into the picture of a laughing little girl – it was South Africa's first picture transmitted by television.'<sup>61</sup>

It was in fact *not* the first time that television was transmitted in the country, and it is unclear whether the reporter was aware of the Baird demonstrations in 1929. This exhibit was definitely different, however, in that it was much more accessible than the 1929 demonstrations. Not only would thousands of visitors have a chance to see television broadcasting in action, but members of the public would be able to appear on television: 'For the first time in South Africa anyone may have himself televised. All he has to do is to walk on to a stage and sit before a television transmitter.'<sup>62</sup> The person on the stage would then appear simultaneously on six television screens. By the end of 1936, after three and a half months of the Exhibition, 25 000 people had had themselves televised.<sup>63</sup>

Milsom added to the excitement by predicting that it would not be long before television would be a commonplace form of great entertainment that would bring the masses a lot of joy. He also foresaw the use of television as a news medium: 'Possibly, the important day's happenings would be flashed on the screens in a thousand homes and the people would see the news while it happened as well as read about it afterwards in the papers.'<sup>64</sup>

Despite the great excitement with which South Africans welcomed television at the Exhibition, the press was aware that the successful transmissions would not lead to a television service once the Exhibition was over. At the start of the Exhibition, already, a *Rand Daily Mail* columnist predicted: 'It would seem, however, that even given every success, South Africa will have to wait a long time before there is any

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<sup>61</sup> Anonym, Television Comes to S. Africa, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-23.

<sup>62</sup> Anonym, You Can Be Televised at the Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.13.

<sup>63</sup> Anonym, You Can Be Televised at the Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-15, p.13; Anonym, 25,000 People Televised at Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1937-01-01, p.6.

<sup>64</sup> Anonym, 25,000 People Televised at Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1937-01-01, p.6.

likelihood of having its own television service.’<sup>65</sup> The main obstacle was the high costs involved: ‘none but a wealthy and long-established company could even think of inaugurating such a service.’<sup>66</sup>

Near the end of the Exhibition, another *Rand Daily Mail* contributor echoed the sentiment: ‘Unfortunately, South Africa will not be in the happy position of seeing a television service established for a long time to come.’<sup>67</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

Before the Second World War, broadcasting had developed from a brand new technology to a service enjoyed by many ordinary South Africans. Initially, many were convinced that both radio and television were the result of clever illusions, and that wireless transmissions were not a reality. Then, as radio spread through the rest of the world and became more common in South Africa, it was soon regarded as one of the most important communication media of the twentieth century.

But even though South African wireless pioneers were often at the forefront of their science, it took a while before its value was recognised by the government. As interest in radio grew, however, the government began to realise the need to regulate the broadcasts. Furthermore, it became clear that licensing was not enough. The experience of commercial broadcasting through the ABC demonstrated that, if the government wanted to regulate the quality of the broadcasts and the equal treatment of English and Afrikaans, the whole broadcasting industry would have to be controlled by a state corporation that was responsible to Parliament. The early television exhibitions also demonstrated the possibilities of audio-visual broadcasting, as well as the popularity such a medium would probably enjoy among the public.

When the Second World War broke out, broadcasting legislation was already in place to control not only radio, but also a possible future television service. All radio and

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<sup>65</sup> Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

<sup>66</sup> Airfarer (pseud.), Television Demonstrations at Empire Exhibition, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1936-09-16, p.8.

<sup>67</sup> E.M.B. (pseud.), Dancing and Television, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1937-01-09, p.4.

television broadcasting services in South Africa could only be introduced by the SABC, and only with the government's permission.

The experiences with pre-war radio and television broadcasts played a very important role in the government's approach to television after the Second World War. It had taught them valuable lessons about commercial services, government control, licensing and the dangers to especially the Afrikaans language if broadcasting was not efficiently regulated. For decades after the war, the government would refuse to introduce television in South Africa, and the medium became the subject of a heated debate in Parliament.

**III**  
**PUTTING UP SCREENS:**  
**THE ABSENCE OF TELEVISION IN**  
**SOUTH AFRICA,**  
**1945-1969**

The most important thing we've learned,  
So far as children are concerned,  
Is never, NEVER, NEVER let  
Them near your television set —  
Or better still, just don't install  
The idiotic thing at all.  
In almost every house we've been,  
We've watched them gaping at the screen.  
They loll and slop and lounge about,  
And stare until their eyes pop out.  
(Last week in someone's place we saw  
A dozen eyeballs on the floor.)  
They sit and stare and stare and sit  
Until they're hypnotised by it,  
Until they're absolutely drunk  
With all that shocking ghastly junk.  
Oh yes, we know it keeps them still,  
They don't climb out the window sill,  
They never fight or kick or punch,  
They leave you free to cook the lunch  
And wash the dishes in the sink —  
But did you ever stop to think,  
To wonder just exactly what  
This does to your beloved tot?  
IT ROTTS THE SENSES IN THE HEAD!  
IT KILLS IMAGINATION DEAD!  
IT CLOGS AND CLUTTERS UP THE MIND!  
IT MAKES A CHILD SO DULL AND BLIND  
HE CAN NO LONGER UNDERSTAND  
A FANTASY, A FAIRYLAND!  
HIS BRAIN BECOMES AS SOFT AS CHEESE!  
HIS POWERS OF THINKING RUST AND FREEZE!  
HE CANNOT THINK — HE ONLY SEES!

- Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Dahl. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p.156.

## 1. Introduction

After the Second World War, television spread through most of the world. In South Africa, however, the medium remained conspicuously absent. Even when it became technically and economically possible for South Africa to introduce television, it was kept out of the country through what is often referred to as the NP government's 'ban on television'<sup>2</sup>. It was only in 1969 that the government decided to launch an official investigation into television, and South Africa's first television service followed in 1976.

What were the reasons for television's absence in South Africa before 1969? In popular literature, it is ascribed to one man, J. A. M. (Albert) Hertzog, who hated this modern invention so much that he stubbornly refused to allow a television service in South Africa. As part of his portfolio as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, broadcasting matters fell under Hertzog's jurisdiction. His influence, according to many writers, was so strong that as soon as he was replaced as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, the South African government agreed to introduce television. Journalist Matthew Hattingh wrote: 'It was not until John Vorster dropped Hertzog from the cabinet in 1968 that plans for television went through.'<sup>3</sup> Hattingh was echoed in a speech at the 2006 Golden Plumes Awards<sup>4</sup> by Prof. Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, the first post-apartheid Vice Chancellor and Rector at the University of Fort Hare and a member of the SABC Board and the Heraldry Council.<sup>5</sup>

This view, although popular, is much too simplistic. Television had in fact been a topic of parliamentary debate for years before Hertzog became minister. In 1951, seven years before Hertzog took over the portfolio, one of his predecessors, J. F. Naudé, stated that there were no plans to introduce television in the near future.<sup>6</sup> Besides Hertzog, there were three other Ministers of Posts and Telegraphs during the

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<sup>2</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond*, p.75.

<sup>3</sup> M. Hattingh, A Cracked Mirror for a Fractured Land, *Dispatch*, 1999-12-24.

<sup>4</sup> The Golden Plumes Awards were launched in 2006 to commemorate the pioneers in television broadcasting in South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> M. V. Mzamane, 'Celebrating Thirty Years of Television in South Africa'. Internet: <http://www.tvsa.co.za/default.asp?blogname=shugasblogiwood&ArticleID=3920>, 2006-12-20. Accessed: 2007-06-07.

<sup>6</sup> Union of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates (Hansard)* 75, 1951-04-06, col. 3882.

1950s and 1960s: Naudé (1950-1954), J. J. Serfontein (1954-1958), Hertzog (1958-1968) and M. C. G. J. (Basie) van Rensburg (1968-1970). None of them were eager to introduce television until Basie van Rensburg appointed the Meyer Commission in December 1969.

Furthermore, the statement that Hertzog's departure from the Posts and Telegraphs portfolio removed the main stumbling block in the way of television, is incorrect. Hertzog lost the portfolio in 1968, and it was only in December 1969 that the government appointed the Meyer Commission to investigate the desirability of television. There were many reasons for the Commission's appointment that were not directly caused by Hertzog's departure from Cabinet.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although Hertzog was a staunch enemy of television and he had considerable say in whether or not his department would undertake such a project, it is doubtful that his opposition alone was the actual reason for television's absence in South Africa.

For media scholars, Hertzog was merely the mouthpiece for the government, who opposed television on the grounds that it would destroy South African (and particularly white Afrikaans) identity and culture. In his book *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (1994), media scholar Rob Nixon devoted a chapter, 'The Devil in the Black Box. The Idea of America and the Outlawing of TV', to the relationship between identity and the government's television ban. According to Nixon, the government repeatedly argued that 'TV would simultaneously further the aims of communism and American-style monopoly capitalism, both inimical to ethnic nationalist identities.'<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the NP opposed television because it would become an uncontrollable channel for these foreign ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Nixon's argument is upheld by media scholar Ron Krabill: '[T]he absence of television was the result of the ruling National Party's ideology of cultural purity combined with the appropriation of cultural imperialism discourses from leftist critiques in the West.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter IV, p.104.

<sup>8</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.46.

<sup>9</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.43-76.

<sup>10</sup> R. Krabill, 'The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to 1976'. Internet: [www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf), s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-06. This source is an extract from Krabill's Phd Dissertation: see R. Krabill, *Starring Nelson Mandela and Bill*

The preservation of identity and the government's fear of foreign ideologies were indeed an important argument, especially during the 1960s. To argue that it was the main or only reason, however, is to disregard the multiple other explanations offered for television's absence, both from the government and from television's advocates. In fact, the moral danger of television was really only highlighted from the 1960s, and even then it was not often cited as the main reason for television's absence.

Nixon and Krabill's argument also does not really account for the issue of government censorship. In the 1960s, the Publications Control Board (PCB) had the power to censor any form of public entertainment that offended the religion of any section of the South African public, brought South Africans into ridicule, harmed relations between South Africans or promoted communism.<sup>11</sup> Under the NP's rule, dozens of books and films were banned, and several undesirable scenes were cut from movies.<sup>12</sup> If the NP government were able to control the existing media, surely the material broadcast over South African television could be censored as well, and the effect of foreign ideologies could be curtailed.

A more satisfactory explanation for television's absence in South Africa can only be found after a thorough investigation and re-evaluation of the arguments for and against television. The one place where this subject was probably most heatedly debated was in the House of Assembly.

## **2. The television debates**

On 6 April 1951, opposition member K. Ueckermann posted an official question to the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, J. F. Naudé. He wanted to know whether 'consideration is being given to the adoption of television by the SABC.'<sup>13</sup> Naudé replied that the SABC did not propose to introduce television in the near future, but assured the House of Assembly that the SABC was keeping abreast with

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*Cosby: Television, Identity and the End of Apartheid*, PhD dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> President's Office, No. 26 of 1963: *The Publications and Entertainments Act*, 1963-03-28.

<sup>12</sup> K. Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid. Race and Class in South African Film*, pp.14-15, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 75, 1951-04-06, col. 3882.

developments in television in other countries. Ueckermann's question was not unexpected: at the time, television was experiencing a period of rapid expansion across the world, and in 1944 the SABC had stated that television was one of its post-war goals.<sup>14</sup> But nor was the government's answer surprising, because television was still a new medium in most countries. The costs were high, the technology was still developing and the consequences on public life were not yet fully understood. The SABC was also still busy developing its radio services.

Furthermore, between 1944 and 1951, the political climate in South Africa had changed significantly. In 1944, the Second World War was drawing to a close and South Africans were starting to look towards their post-war future. Historian Saul Dubow argues that there were a number of distinct 'worlds of possibilities' in 1940s South Africa – in other words, different visions for the post-war future. One of these visions was held by the ruling United Party of Jan Smuts. According to Dubow, the United Party (UP) and their 'liberal and social-democratic' supporters envisioned a future South Africa built through modern, progressive ideas and socially and economically integrated with the rest of the modern world. In the years immediately following the war, the UP endeavoured to develop South Africa into a scientifically, industrially and socially progressive state, and they established organisations like the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).<sup>15</sup> According to historian Shirley Brooks, the UP government was strongly influenced by British ideas of post-war reconstruction and modernity.<sup>16</sup> Although television was probably not a top priority on the UP's agenda for post-war developments, it was part of the progressive society represented by Britain and sought after by Smuts's government.

Another 'world of possibility' was the Afrikaner nationalist hopes of a future of white supremacy. This was a future where white, particularly Afrikaner, cultural and economic interests were a priority, and in which white poverty had been eradicated. In 1948, the general election brought the National Party to power, and these Afrikaner

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<sup>14</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1944, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> S. Dubow, Introduction, in S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities*, pp.2-9.

<sup>16</sup> S. Brooks, Planning for Leisure in 1940s Natal: Post-War Reconstruction and Parks as 'Public' Amenities, in S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s*, pp.129-130.

nationalist hopes were realised.<sup>17</sup> By 1951, the NP had already begun to entrench white supremacy and to implement apartheid. If television had been a goal under the Smuts government, it was definitely not even on the NP's list of priorities.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, for the next two decades, Ueckermann's question would be repeated many times, and television became the subject of an emotive debate in the House of Assembly. These debates contain the key arguments for and against television: on the one side of the debate, the NP government was adamant that the time was not ripe to introduce television. It would be unwise to do so, as television had many negative consequences. On the other side, the political opposition<sup>19</sup> refuted the NP's arguments against television, accused them of sinister prejudices, and advocated television as a great boon to society that would bring South Africans together and enable them to share in the world's great developments and events.

#### **a. Putting up divisions and shields: the government's explanations**

The government cited many different reasons for their position against television. These explanations can be divided into two groups: those that pointed out the many obstacles that made television improbable, such as high costs and inadequate resources, and those that detailed the adverse effects that made television undesirable. According to the opposition, all of these obstacles were surmountable. Nevertheless, although the NP repeatedly admitted that television could not be kept out of the country forever, they maintained that because of these obstacles, television's introduction should be postponed for as long as possible.

##### **i. The economic cost and consequences**

One of the first arguments against television was its very high cost. In 1952 J. F. Naudé officially declared that television was a matter for the future, because it was still too expensive.<sup>20</sup> At the time, the television stations in many countries were younger than six years and although the technology had begun to spread through the

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<sup>17</sup> S. Dubow, Introduction, in S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s*, pp.2-7.

<sup>18</sup> See below, pp.76-83.

<sup>19</sup> See 'Definition of concepts', p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 78, 1952-05-09, col. 5539.

world, it was still a new medium that cost large amounts to establish. The SABC stated that it was improbable that South Africa would get a television service in the near future, because it would cost millions of pounds to put the necessary equipment in place, to import television sets and to produce high-quality programmes in large quantities.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, by 1960, the SABC's financial position was desperate. Operational costs increased after the SABC bought the land for its new headquarters in Auckland Park, expanded the 'Bantu services', and raised salaries, all without a corresponding income increase. The government had to assist, and gave subsidies for the production of programmes for the black population, as well as a loan to help with the installations of the FM radio services.<sup>22</sup> It was clear that, on its own, the SABC would not be able to introduce television at that stage.

The opposition did not dispute the high costs. But, they argued, there was a very simple solution to the problem: to approach private businesses.<sup>23</sup> Through advertising, a private company would get the capital to set up equipment, produce programmes and maintain television stations. However, the government insisted that this was out of the question. According to the existing broadcasting legislation<sup>24</sup>, only the SABC could establish a television service and to do so, it would need the approval of the Governor General.<sup>25</sup> In other words, should television come to South Africa, it could only be run by the SABC and under government control. And as the government would not want television *not* to fall under the state's direction, they saw no reason to amend the act to provide for any other means of control.

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<sup>21</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 83, 1953-09-11, col. 3334; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, col. 4983.

<sup>22</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa*, pp.60-61.

<sup>23</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 92, 1956-05-29, col. 6443.

<sup>24</sup> President's Office, No. 14 of 1949, *Broadcasting Amendment Act*, 1949-04-05; President's Office, No. 3 of 1952, *Radio Act*, 1952-03-05.

<sup>25</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 83, 1953-09-11, col. 3352; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, cols. 4982-4983.

By the end of the 1950s, UP member B. Wilson argued that the cost of establishing television was no longer of ‘astronomical proportions’<sup>26</sup>, and during the 1960s the NP’s argument shifted. Instead of claiming that television was simply too expensive, the government now argued that the benefits of television did not justify the high expenses.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the government had to consider not only the cost, but the ‘economic burden’<sup>28</sup> (as Minister of Posts & Telegraphs Albert Hertzog called it) faced by small businesses, the press, and the public of South Africa. *That*, Hertzog argued, was the real problem with television.<sup>29</sup>

The high cost of advertising meant that only big companies could advertise on television. This would enable the big companies to squeeze out small enterprises, and would mean that companies who spent their money on television advertising had nothing left for newspaper advertising. As a result, many newspapers would lose revenue and close down.<sup>30</sup> This was a big concern for the NP, and remained an issue even after the government had finally decided to consider television.<sup>31</sup>

But one of the worst economic consequences of television, argued Hertzog, was the effect on the poor. ‘The man who watches television is the one who will have to bear the costs of television, and he is the poor man.’<sup>32</sup> People who could barely afford to feed their families would feel compelled to buy television sets at great cost. Eight to ten years later, those sets would be technically obsolete, and the viewers would have to buy newer and better sets. Together with the licence fee, television would become a very expensive commodity for those who already struggled to afford basic living expenses. What is more, in order to afford the expensive advertising slots on television, businesses would be compelled to raise the prices of advertised products

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<sup>26</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 101*, 1959-06-01, col. 7059.

<sup>27</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, cols. 3649-3650.

<sup>28</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3660.

<sup>29</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, cols. 3660-3665.

<sup>30</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3664.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter V, p.123 and Chapter VI, p.153.

<sup>32</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1960-03-24, col. 3665.

by between 10% and 25%. By advocating television, the opposition therefore wanted to ‘lay a tremendous burden on the shoulders of the worker’<sup>33</sup>, reasoned Hertzog.

In 1965, NP Member of Parliament (MP) C. P. Mulder confirmed this argument. Mulder reckoned that television was a luxury item that would have to be paid from the pocket of the taxpayer. ‘This means that an additional amount of R5,000,000 will have to come from the pocket of the poor man annually in order to subsidize the rich man and enable him to acquire more luxury articles.’<sup>34</sup>

The opposition was not convinced. South Africa had a budget surplus of R128,000,000 in 1964 – how then could it not afford television, when even poorer countries such as Southern Rhodesia<sup>35</sup> could? In fact, as opposition member U. M. Weiss pointed out, Rhodesia’s commercial television service was even making a profit.<sup>36</sup> And how could the NP maintain that there was no money, when Parliament had just approved R84,000,000 for ‘unforeseen items’?<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the government was able to afford thousands of rands per year to produce television films for overseas propaganda. Despite the NP government’s numerous objections to television, the Department of Information had its own Television Section that produced a large number of television films for overseas broadcasts. Between 1958 and 1963, this Television Section had produced more than two hundred films for overseas consumption, particularly in the United States, Canada, Australia, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, Rhodesia, France and the United Kingdom. Millions of viewers saw these broadcasts, which included news, interviews, documentary programmes and topical items. The costs of these films amounted to tens of thousands of rands every year. Although the opposition did not in principle disapprove of these films, it did raise questions about the government’s argument.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1960-03-24, col. 3665.

<sup>34</sup> RSA, *Hansard 13*, 1965-02-19, col. 1491.

<sup>35</sup> In 1978, Southern Rhodesia’s name changed to Rhodesia Zimbabwe, and since 1980 it has been Zimbabwe.

<sup>36</sup> RSA, *Hansard 11*, 1964-05-25, cols. 6600-6601.

<sup>37</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1620.

<sup>38</sup> RSA, *Hansard 8*, 1963-06-14, cols. 7884-7891; RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1619; RSA, *Hansard 23*, 1968-04-26, cols. 4149-4150.

In the 1960s, South Africa could most probably have afforded television. However, the government maintained that the money they had, had to be spent on other projects that deserved greater priority. The high cost of television was an obstacle that could have been dealt with, but the NP believed that television was so inessential that it was not worth the money and effort.

## ii. Geographical coverage

South Africa's vast distances and mountainous terrain created major financial and technical obstacles in the establishment of television. But this could easily be solved, according to the opposition. In many countries, television was first established in the main population centres before it spread to the rest of the country. The same could be done in South Africa. Opposition members claimed that it would only be fair to introduce television on the Witwatersrand first, since it was South Africa's most populated area and the largest source of income tax.<sup>39</sup>

The government did not agree. In 1954, Minister J. F. Naudé declared: 'There would be great dissatisfaction if we provided this service on the Rand only and not to the rest of the country. There would be an outcry immediately. I sincerely hope that it will not be undertaken unless it is provided on a Union-wide basis.'<sup>40</sup> In 1960, the Prime Minister himself spoke about it. In a seminal speech on the introduction of television, H. F. Verwoerd stated: 'it is quite clear that we must proceed from the standpoint that we must have a national service or no service at all.'<sup>41</sup> The next year Minister Albert Hertzog confirmed this when he called it unfair to serve only a few cities with television.<sup>42</sup>

The argument that a television service would have to be established countrywide became a basic assumption among the National Party members, and for the rest of the

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<sup>39</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 78, 1952-05-09, col. 5539; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 83, 1953-09-11, col. 3353; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, cols. 4984, 5000.

<sup>40</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, col. 4984.

<sup>41</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, col. 3006.

<sup>42</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3661. The government had good reasons for not wanting to ignore the rural areas, since the rural Afrikaners made up an important proportion of their support base. See H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, p.438.

1960s it was maintained that such a national service would be much too expensive to introduce.<sup>43</sup>

### iii. Programme resources

One very expensive aspect of television was the programmes. In 1953, Minister J. F. Naudé told the House of Assembly that the SABC was reluctant to introduce television until it was certain of a steady supply of good programmes.<sup>44</sup> This argument was also often used in the 1960s. The problem, according to the National Party, was not that there were no programmes to buy from overseas television stations. The issue was that the more affordable programmes were cheap ‘cowboy’ films, which had no real cultural value and were filled with crime and ‘immoral behaviour’.<sup>45</sup>

Another problem was the equal treatment of Afrikaans and English, the two official languages at the time. The NP feared that, because English programmes were so readily available, a South African television service would either neglect the Afrikaans language, or Afrikaans programmes would have to be produced at a very high cost. The latter, reckoned Albert Hertzog, would be ‘prohibitively expensive’<sup>46</sup>. The opposition recognised the fear that English would dominate over Afrikaans, but debated that television would actually give Afrikaans the opportunity to grow, as it would bring the best of Afrikaans culture into the homes of millions.<sup>47</sup> And if the Department of Information could afford to produce a large amount of television films for overseas propaganda, reasoned opposition leader Sir David De Villiers Graaff (see Figure 4), why could South Africa not make its own, Afrikaans programmes?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> When television was finally introduced in 1976, it was launched in the major urban centres after all. See Chapter V, p.130 and Figure 19, p.165.

<sup>44</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 83, 1953-09-11, col. 3353.

<sup>45</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, cols. 3660-3661; RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6532.

<sup>46</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3667.

<sup>47</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3648.

<sup>48</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 10, 1964-04-27, col. 4959.



**Figure 4:** Sir David De Villiers Graaff.

**Source:** T. Cameron & S. B. Spies (eds), *An Illustrated History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), p.276.

But bilingualism was not the only problem: the many African languages and Indian dialects would have to be served as well.<sup>49</sup> It would not be as simple as buying overseas programmes and translating them into the different languages of South Africa, because, as NP member J. J. Rall explained, you could translate the language, but not the images.<sup>50</sup> According to the NP, special care would have to be taken in what was shown to the black population, because cheap programmes would teach them how to commit crime and how to elude the police.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he continued, you could not show the same programmes to the different cultural groups in South Africa at all. In keeping with its policy of separate development, the NP believed that each cultural group had its different ‘cultural requirements’, and should therefore be served with its own, separate television service.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, it was not that the government could not secure any good material for television. Programme resources did create an obstacle, but it was one that the NP would have been able to overcome. However, because of their concern for the Afrikaans language and culture and the potential decline of morality among South

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<sup>49</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3667; RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6511.

<sup>50</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2464.

<sup>51</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1960-03-24, col. 3659; RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6526.

<sup>52</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2858.

Africans<sup>53</sup>, the NP would not go through the trouble of solving a problem in order to get a medium that they did not want.

#### **iv. Manpower**

South Africa's rapid economic expansion in the beginning of the 1960s involved an increase in technological production and created a great demand for technical labour. Initially, South Africa was not able to fulfil this requirement, and the country experienced shortages in manpower, especially regarding technicians.<sup>54</sup>

Television would demand a lot of technical staff. Before a country launched the medium, NP member J. C. Otto pointed out in 1963, it should determine whether it had the manpower to do so. Not only did South Africa's industries already have a shortage of artisans, engineers and technicians; if television were to be introduced, these technical workers would be attracted to work in this new industry, which would leave other sectors with an even greater shortage. South Africa could not even think of introducing television: just like its financial resources, the country needed its skilled technicians, engineers and scientists for projects of national importance.<sup>55</sup>

For the opposition, this was not really an obstacle. In countries like the USA, the United Kingdom, the USSR, France and Sweden, explained opposition member U. M. Weiss, television was actually used as a training tool to turn unskilled workers into skilled technicians. Therefore, instead of *draining* the existing skilled labour pool, television could *combat* the manpower shortage. In fact, Weiss challenged, if the government really was serious about promoting technical training, it would immediately introduce television.<sup>56</sup> Another solution was to import television technicians from abroad. Indeed, the latter would be in line with the government's immigration scheme, with which they tried to solve the manpower shortage by

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<sup>53</sup> See below, p.84.

<sup>54</sup> W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.163; F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck tot P. W. Botha*, p.543; J. Muller, Cacophony of Consent: The Press in the Struggle for Educational Reform, in K. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Narrating the Crisis: Hegemony and the South African Press*, p.143.

<sup>55</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, cols. 6516-6517; RSA, *Hansard* 13, 1965-02-19, col. 1513.

<sup>56</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 11, 1964-05-25, col. 6601.

inviting technicians from Britain and Europe to settle in South Africa.<sup>57</sup> Weiss believed that television would be an ideal attraction for these immigrants.<sup>58</sup>

However, until the end of the 1960s, the government argued that there was not enough manpower for a television service. This reasoning lost all credibility for the opposition when, in late 1967, SABC technicians visited Malawi to provide technical and programming aid. If there were enough technicians to use in Malawi, surely there was sufficient manpower to operate a television station in South Africa.



**Figure 5:** Prime Minister B. J. Vorster and Malawian President Hastings Banda.  
**Source:** T. Cameron & S. B. Spies (eds), *An Illustrated History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), p.295.

The support for Malawi was part of B. J. Vorster's Outward Policy, in which he attempted to forge diplomatic and economic ties with other African states in order to counter South Africa's growing isolation. Apart from South Africa's immediate neighbours, who were economically reliant on South Africa, initially only Malawi responded favourably. Malawi's president, Hastings Banda (see Figure 5), was a pragmatist who realised that diplomatic ties with South Africa would be very advantageous to his country, especially since thousands of migrant Malawian mineworkers brought much needed South African valuta into Malawi.<sup>59</sup> In 1967, diplomatic ties and a trade agreement were formed between Malawi and South Africa. Assistance in Malawi included an US\$8,4 million loan for the establishment of a sugar refinery and an US\$11,2 million loan to help with the building of a new capital

<sup>57</sup> Between 1961 and 1966, about 200 000 immigrants settled in South Africa under this government scheme. See F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck tot P. W. Botha*, p.543.

<sup>58</sup> RSA, *Hansard 13*, 1965-02-19, col. 1517.

<sup>59</sup> F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck tot P. W. Botha*, pp.527-528; T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p.539.

at Lilongwe. And, together with countries like the United Kingdom, the USA, Israel and West Germany, South Africa gave support to the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>60</sup> As part of a policy that was created to better South Africa's image among and relations with other African countries<sup>61</sup>, the mission to Malawi was therefore an important diplomatic move, while television in South Africa was, politically, not deemed essential at all.

#### v. Changing technology

'We do not know what science may discover to-morrow [*sic*] or the day after,'<sup>62</sup> declared Naudé's successor as Posts and Telegraphs Minister, J. J. Serfontein, in 1957. For many years afterward, the NP would maintain that to establish television right then would be foolish, as the technology was still developing. If South Africa introduced television and the technology changed, the expensive infrastructure would have to be updated at even greater cost. By waiting, South Africa could let the richer countries bear the experimental costs. And the longer South Africa waited, the cheaper television would become.<sup>63</sup>

An important aspect of this argument was the development of colour television. The USA had made its first colour broadcasts in 1951, and had established the first approved colour system, NTSC, by 1953. However, colour television was still beset with technical problems, and it took the majority of the American public more than ten years to subscribe to the new technique.<sup>64</sup> In his important 1960 speech on television, H. F. Verwoerd explained that only a foolish country would import black and white television at vast expense, when colour television would certainly take its place – at even greater cost – within a year or two.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> W. E. Mackie, South Central Africa: Malawi, in S. Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa*, p.138; W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.226; T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p.324; B. J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, pp.428-429; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1967, pp.8, 68.

<sup>61</sup> The SABC also gave assistance to other African countries, such as Rhodesia, Mozambique and Madagascar. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.9.

<sup>62</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 97*, 1957-06-10, col. 7709.

<sup>63</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, cols. 3004-3005; RSA, *Hansard 7*, 1963-05-22, col. 6511

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter I, p.37 .

<sup>65</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, col. 3005.

De Villiers Graaff described Verwoerd's argument as 'one of the poorest arguments I have ever heard.'<sup>66</sup> If waiting for colour television was a valid reason, he contended, surely South Africa should never have introduced silent or black and white movies, when films with sound and in colour were due to follow? Nevertheless, the government maintained its position until the end of the 1960s.<sup>67</sup>

The NP never really explained what it considered to be sufficient development in television to warrant its introduction, because even after colour television spread to the rest of the world, it insisted that television technology was still maturing.<sup>68</sup> However, it did give the NP a convenient justification for keeping television at bay indefinitely. And their argument was not without merit: by waiting as long as it did, South Africa was able to evaluate different colour systems and to choose the most appropriate.<sup>69</sup> Today, thirty years later, South African television still uses the same colour system (PAL).

#### **vi. Other priorities: a countrywide, multilingual radio service**

Before the government and the SABC could consider a countrywide television service (and, as the government insisted, television would have to start on a countrywide basis or not at all), they had to ensure that the whole country was covered by a good radio service.<sup>70</sup> In 1960 Hertzog announced the installation of an FM system, which would bring South Africans a high quality radio service. FM (frequency modulation) towers would be erected across South Africa at an estimated cost of R25,000,000.<sup>71</sup>

FM radio was already in the offing since the end of the Second World War, when the SABC announced that its post-war plans included the introduction of FM (as well as television).<sup>72</sup> The SABC conducted numerous experiments with FM broadcasting, but although FM was already technically viable in the 1950s, it was not yet considered

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<sup>66</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, col. 3024.

<sup>67</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, col. 3024.

<sup>68</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1627.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter VI, p.140.

<sup>70</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 83*, 1953-09-11, col. 3353.

<sup>71</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, *Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African broadcasting, 1924-1971*, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, pp.61-67; Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3644.

<sup>72</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1944, p.6

economically feasible. Black listeners, which would be a large part of the target audience, could not afford FM receivers. At the time, radio stations were broadcast over short- and medium wave through AM (amplitude modulation), and the AM receivers were very cheap. By the end of the decade, however, a new transistor that would make FM radio more affordable was developed, and the government decided to install the new system as soon as they could. In 1961, work on the first FM tower began.<sup>73</sup>

For the opposition, the FM installations contradicted two of the government's main objections to television. The first objection was the high costs: while the government maintained that television would cost too much, they were now prepared to spend millions of rands on FM radio. The second objection was that television technology was still developing and, if South Africans had to buy expensive televisions, they would soon be forced to replace their sets with more advance models. It would therefore be very unfair towards the public to introduce television at that stage.<sup>74</sup> But, the opposition contended, the government was now prepared to allow a similar situation by forcing South Africans to buy new radio sets that were able to receive FM transmissions. Furthermore, the opposition pointed out that the new FM facilities, at a little extra cost, could be modified to transmit television, which would make television much more affordable.<sup>75</sup>

Albert Hertzog retorted that one of the main reasons for the FM facilities was to provide a service for the black population. A television service, on the other hand, would only serve the white population, since black people would not be able to afford television. For Hertzog, the opposition's attitude towards FM radio and television was proof that they only cared about the interests of the rich, white people, despite claiming otherwise. But whereas television would be a luxury for white people, it was very important to provide the black people of South Africa with FM radio. These broadcasts could serve as an educational and civilising tool that would promote

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<sup>73</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1946, pp.8-9; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1947, p.10; P. B. Orlik, Southern Africa, in S. Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa*, p.143; G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, pp.65-67.

<sup>74</sup> See above, p.75.

<sup>75</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, cols. 3644, 3650.

goodwill and understanding between people.<sup>76</sup> More specifically, it would educate black *and* white people about the merits and the necessity of separate development.<sup>77</sup>

FM radio could also be used to further the segregation between the different black ethnic groups that the government was trying to forge. Because one FM transmitter can only broadcast in its close vicinity<sup>78</sup>, the same bands could be used in different parts of the country to transmit different radio services. For example, in one part of the country, a radio channel could broadcast in Xhosa, while in a different part the same channel could broadcast a Northern Sotho station. By providing ‘each black language group’ with its own radio service, and by broadcasting each language only in the area designated for that specific language group (in other words, in the homeland areas), the government was able to promote their policy of separate development. This policy supported the idea that South Africa was really a country of many minorities (of which there were ten black ‘national minorities’), instead of a country where a white minority ruled over a black majority.<sup>79</sup>

There was another, even more urgent reason for the FM service. In 1966, NP member M. S. F. Grobler stated that radio was of ‘utmost importance to the non-White population,’ because ‘if we do not provide them with the best programmes they will tune in their radios to the alien and sometimes hostile programmes that are at present flooding our country from abroad.’<sup>80</sup> These foreign broadcasts were a very real concern for the government. With cheap short wave radios, black people could receive broadcasts from Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire), Egypt, and a number of other recently independent states. The Ghanaian station purposefully set out to liberate and unify the entire African continent, and in 1958 a radio transmitter was erected in Ghana that was able to penetrate the South African airwaves. The threat to the NP increased after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, when the newly banned liberation movements were forced into exile. By 1968, Radio

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<sup>76</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3655. See also Union of South Africa, *Hansard 108*, 1961-05-02, col. 5735.

<sup>77</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971 in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, p.63; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1967, p.10.

<sup>78</sup> See ‘Definition of concepts’, p.20.

<sup>79</sup> D. O’Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.73; G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, p.66.

<sup>80</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 17*, 1966-09-20, col. 2475.

Tanzania was hosting broadcasts by a number of liberation movements, including the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). These broadcasts were filled with liberation propaganda and, from Moscow and Peking, communist ideologies.<sup>81</sup> As NP member B. Coetzee explained in 1961:

[T]here are more and more broadcasts from Africa to our border areas. We have Radio Accra, we have Radio Leopoldville, we have Radio Cairo and I understand there is a host of others who are continually inundating the Bantu of South Africa with propaganda from outside. We can expect those broadcasts to become more numerous; we can expect that flood of propaganda which flows over the radio from abroad to our Bantu to increase tremendously and that we should counter it.<sup>82</sup>

The FM broadcasts would be clearer, and therefore more satisfactory and attractive than AM. By making Bantu Radio available over cheap FM radios that were unable to receive short wave broadcasts, the government hoped to counter the lure of the ‘hostile propaganda’ from abroad.<sup>83</sup>

What the opposition failed to understand was that, for the NP, installing FM towers was not a luxury, but indeed a top priority. By *not* installing an FM service, the government faced a threat to their political position. By not establishing television, however, the government at that stage did not stand to lose anything. It was therefore not in the NP’s interests to overcome the obstacles to television. By the end of the 1960s, the government would face a similar outside threat in terms of television, namely satellite broadcasts. When it became clear that their position was once again threatened from outside, the government finally decided to launch television.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.64.

<sup>82</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 108*, 1961-05-02, col. 5734.

<sup>83</sup> G. Hayman & R. Tomaselli, Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971, in R. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Currents of Power*, p.66; R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.64-65.

<sup>84</sup> See Chapter IV, p.109.

### **vii. Other priorities: urgent works of national importance**

Throughout the television debates, the government maintained that there were urgent works of national importance that needed precedence over a luxury item like television.<sup>85</sup>

A very big priority since the NP came to power in 1948 was to put apartheid into action. During the 1950s and 1960s, the NP government would spend millions of rands to implement apartheid legislation such as the 1950 Group Areas Act<sup>86</sup>, which divided the country into separate areas for different racial groups, and the 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act<sup>87</sup>, which divided the black population into distinct ethnic groups, each with its own independent Bantustan (homeland)<sup>88</sup>.

For the NP government, these acts were important to ensure the supremacy of white people in South Africa.<sup>89</sup> For the opposition, the implementation of apartheid was a waste of money – money that could have been put to better use by establishing television. In 1960 De Villiers Graaff claimed that the estimate for a television service in the country's main centres, £4,000,000 was the same estimate for the realisation of the Group Areas Act in Paarl alone.<sup>90</sup>

Opposition member Helen Suzman (see Figure 6) was very outspoken about this matter: '[W]e can afford these things [television]. It is only necessary to cut out all these millions of rand which are spent on these ridiculous apartheid measures. Then we will have plenty of money to spend on television'<sup>91</sup>, she argued in 1966, and again in 1969: 'there is wasteful expenditure in other directions which could easily pay for television'<sup>92</sup>. In this instance, she was referring to the quadruplication of civil services, one each for white, coloured, black and Indian people. All these services had

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<sup>85</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, col. 4983; RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6511; RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2874.

<sup>86</sup> President's Office, No. 41 of 1950: *The Group Areas Act*, 1950-06-24

<sup>87</sup> President's Office, No. 46 of 1959: *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act*, 1959-06-17.

<sup>88</sup> See 'Definition of concepts', p.21.

<sup>89</sup> T. R. H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p.350.

<sup>90</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, col. 3024.

<sup>91</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2467.

<sup>92</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2876.

their own departments, budgets, buildings and staff, and Suzman believed that it was a waste of money and manpower that could have been used for television.<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 6:** Helen Suzman.

**Source:** T. Cameron & S. B. Spies (eds), *An Illustrated History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), p.276.

However, these apartheid measures formed the cornerstone of the NP government's policy. The NP would implement apartheid, which was essential to their vision for South Africa (and essential to their political position), no matter what the cost.<sup>94</sup> Television, on the contrary, was an inessential service as far as the NP was concerned, and not worth the money or manpower.

Apartheid was not the government's only priority. South Africa had to develop economically in order to lift the living standards of the 'masses of our people'<sup>95</sup> who lived on the breadline. It was the government's duty, asserted Albert Hertzog, to give those people an income and a decent and pleasurable way of life. C. P. Mulder estimated that, with the annual cost of one television channel, 11,000 houses could be built for white people. Furthermore, the government had to develop South Africa so that it could produce riches. The industries needed to be developed not only for South Africa's sake, but also for the benefit of the West. If the Cold War hostilities between the East and the West led to a direct clash, reckoned Verwoerd, South Africa would have to increase its manufacturing capacity to provide essential goods for the West.

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<sup>93</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2876.

<sup>94</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1620.

<sup>95</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 10, 1964-04-27, col. 1512.

For that eventuality, the country had to use its money and manpower to develop its industries, and not waste it on a luxury such as television.<sup>96</sup> The possibility that television could stimulate skills development, business and trade – as the opposition continuously suggested – was not even contemplated.<sup>97</sup>

Other priorities mentioned in the House of Assembly were to build up crude oil reserves, and to compensate for the country's periodic droughts by developing water resources.<sup>98</sup> Both these priorities were major preoccupations during the 1960s. Although South Africa had large and relatively cheap coal supplies, it had no natural oil, and the NP was anxious about oil supplies from abroad.<sup>99</sup> Water reserves was another area in which South Africa was vulnerable, and during the NP's rule many dams and water tunnels were constructed, including the Hendrik Verwoerd Dam (now called the Gariep Dam), which was completed in 1971.<sup>100</sup>

But one of the most important projects, according to Basie van Rensburg, was to guarantee South Africa's 'white future'<sup>101</sup>, and to ensure the peaceful co-existence between the white and black inhabitants. In order to do that, millions had to be spent on South Africa's defence, as this would 'guarantee peace and safety for its inhabitants here in South Africa in a threatening world and a hostile world constellation.'<sup>102</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, a number of events contributed to the NP government's concern for South Africa's 'white future'. News from the civil rights movement in the United States had reached South Africa, fuelling fears that similar fights for social and political rights could ignite among South African black people.<sup>103</sup> These fears were further aggravated after the attempt on Prime Minister Verwoerd's life in 1960,

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<sup>96</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1626; RSA, *Hansard* 13, 1965-02-19, col. 1512; RSA, *Hansard* 10, 1964-04-27, cols. 5018-5019.

<sup>97</sup> See above, p.73.

<sup>98</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, cols. 1627, 1653.

<sup>99</sup> These anxieties proved justified in 1973, when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) raised oil prices and banned trade with South Africa. Even though the country was able to circumvent the ban through trade with refiners and distributors such as Caltex, BP, Mobil and Shell, and through its local oil-from-coal plant Sasol, South Africa remained vulnerable in terms of oil. See W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.169.

<sup>100</sup> W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.170.

<sup>101</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1653.

<sup>102</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1653.

<sup>103</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.45.

the Sharpeville shootings in 1960, the rise of militant opposition to apartheid from liberation movements like Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and Poqo, and the spread of independence through Africa. In some countries, such as Algeria, independence was preceded by bloody wars. In the Belgian Congo<sup>104</sup>, freedom came very abruptly. Political parties were unprepared, and soon the newly independent state collapsed, which led to civil unrest.<sup>105</sup> In other cases, most notably Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika<sup>106</sup> and Northern Rhodesia<sup>107</sup>, white communities were attacked, and many white people from former colonies came to live in South Africa, bringing with them the tales of terror from the rest of Africa. Furthermore, Communism threatened to take a foothold in Africa. In this threatening climate, Britain turned its back on white minority rule and promoted African nationalism, and the United Nations and Western countries became increasingly critical of apartheid. The NP realised that it could not rely on Western support to retain its power, and would have to ensure its own survival and supremacy on an increasingly hostile continent.<sup>108</sup>

According to historian William Beinart, politicians stressed that there were only two alternatives: to give in to integration and the submersion of white people, or apartheid.<sup>109</sup> In other words, as Afrikaans newspaper editor Piet Cillie explained, apartheid was a ‘pragmatic and tortuous process aimed at consolidating the leadership of a nationalist movement in order to safeguard the self-determination of the Afrikaner’<sup>110</sup>. The implementation and consolidation of the apartheid system was therefore, for those who were opposed to integration, a very urgent priority. This was confirmed by NP member M. W. de Wet in 1969 when he stated that many millions of rands had to be spent to ensure the future of the white people in South Africa. When the very existence of white South Africans was at stake, argued the NP, how could they even consider using millions of rands for a luxury like television? ‘[O]ne really cannot mention this and television in the same breath’<sup>111</sup>, De Wet admonished television’s advocates in 1969.

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<sup>104</sup> Now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

<sup>105</sup> K. Shillington, *History of Africa*, pp.390-394.

<sup>106</sup> In 1964 Tanganyika and Zanzibar joined to form the Republic of Tanzania.

<sup>107</sup> Upon its independence in 1964, Northern Rhodesia’s name changed to Zambia.

<sup>108</sup> F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck tot P. W. Botha*, p.541; B. J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, p.372.

<sup>109</sup> W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.142.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, p.63.

<sup>111</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2874.

### **viii. The effect on sport, cinema, theatre and the press**

Television is a powerful medium that would, it was argued, have an adverse effect on other forms of entertainment, particularly sport, theatres and cinemas. If sport matches were broadcast over television, people would stay at home to watch instead of going to the actual sport venues, and consequently promoters would lose revenue and would not be able to sustain their sports. A similar fate would befall cinemas, theatres and newspapers. In order to protect South Africa from these and other effects of television, Verwoerd stated that television should be kept away from the country for as long as possible. According to the opposition, however, this was not a reasonable excuse. ‘We are not here to look after the interests of the cinemas and the theatres; we are here to look after the interests of the public,’<sup>112</sup> countered opposition member S. J. Tighy. Moreover, opposition member E. G. Malan dismissed Verwoerd’s concerns as unfounded, because experience in Australia had shown that the broadcasting of sport events had in fact *not* led to a decrease in attendance.<sup>113</sup>

The possible effects of television on the press, cinemas and theatres, however, could not be denied. And although Tighy stated that this should not be the government’s concern, there may have been a good reason for the government’s interest: namely that a number of prominent NP members had private concerns in some of these enterprises.<sup>114</sup>

### **ix. Spiritual effects**

The NP’s regard of television as an evil medium that would destroy families, morals, law and order and finally Western civilisation, has received considerable emphasis.<sup>115</sup> In the twenty years of the television debates, this aspect was indeed important, especially under Albert Hertzog as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. It is also very

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<sup>112</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 85, 1954-05-11, col. 4952.

<sup>113</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1961-03-09, cols. 3003-3004, 3086; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3664; RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2470; RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1631.

<sup>114</sup> See below, p.93.

<sup>115</sup> See for example R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.43-76; R. Krabill, ‘The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to 1976’. Internet: [www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf), s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-06.

significant when seen in context with the government's ideologies of apartheid and Afrikaner Nationalism. However, it should not be over-emphasised, but be seen as one of many obstacles and undesirable consequences that the NP was not prepared to address in order to establish television.

The idea of television as an 'evil' was first raised in Parliament by NP member W. C. du Plessis in 1953. He was referring to the effect television would have on children: instead of playing outside, doing schoolwork or taking part in afternoon sport, they and their families would become slaves to television: 'The children, father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, and all their guests sit crowded together around the television set and stare at the little square screen.'<sup>116</sup>

However, despite Du Plessis's strong views, it was only in the early 1960s that television's possible spiritual dangers became a real consideration. In 1960, H. F. Verwoerd explained the government's position on television. Not all modern innovations were beneficial, he argued, and no sensible government would import a new innovation without knowing first what the associated dangers were, and how they could be countered.

It is true that where a physical danger threatens a country, the Government of that country will try to keep such an invention permanently out of the country. That applies to poison gas, for example; it applies to the atom bomb for example...however wonderful and modern the invention may be, the physical danger attached to it makes it perfectly clear that you cannot use it. A similar attitude must be adopted when there are spiritual dangers or, when there is a possibility of harm to the community's social life.<sup>117</sup>

Although Verwoerd did not outright categorise television with dangerous inventions like poison gas and the atom bomb, he did argue that television was a new invention with possible social and moral consequences, and should therefore be regarded with circumspection until the effects were fully known and controllable.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 83, 1953-09-11, col. 3340.

<sup>117</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, col. 3002.

<sup>118</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, cols. 3002-3003.

For the next decade, certain NP members, especially Albert Hertzog, would use the spiritual dangers of television as justification for its absence in South Africa, despite the opposition's scepticism.

One of the immediate consequences of television was that, in the first few years after its introduction, families would become such slaves to it that family relationships and household chores would suffer. Indeed, according to Albert Hertzog, television was the 'greatest destroyer of the family'<sup>119</sup>. When children came home from school, they would not be able to get away from the television. If their parents reprimanded them, the relation between parent and child would become strained, and the whole family would break up. Parents would not have time to talk to children, and children would not have time to think.<sup>120</sup>

A further consequence, according to the NP government, was that television, more than any other medium, was responsible for increases in crime and the decline of morals.<sup>121</sup> Television showed crime, violence, sadism, deceit and sexual immorality. What is more, according to Hertzog, the conditions in which people would watch television would increase the impact of the images. '[W]e know that in the circumstances in which one is watching them, one is in a very susceptible state; it is twilight, and one is with one's family...'<sup>122</sup> It was not only children who were vulnerable to these images, but also the black population. In 1963, Hertzog blamed a

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<sup>119</sup> RSA, *Hansard 11*, 1964-04-25, col. 6611.

<sup>120</sup> RSA, *Hansard 11*, 1964-04-25, col. 6611. These arguments of Hertzog and his colleagues were neither unique, nor unacademic. Research on television's impact on children and families has been done for more than five decades. Although there is rarely any disagreement about the fact that television *does*, in some way or another, have an influence on children's development, there are many differing views on whether these influences are positive or negative. According to educationalists Marie Evans Schmidt and Daniel R. Anderson, there have been two opposing trends: on the one hand, there is the belief that television *viewing* has detrimental effects on children's cognitive development, regardless of the actual television *content*. Researchers such as Marie Winn (*The Plug-in Drug*, 1977) and Jane Healy (*Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It*, 1990), for example, wrote that even an educational programme like *Sesame Street* reduces children's interest in reading and shortens their attention spans. Other educationalists, however, support the use of television as an educational tool. See M. Evans Schmidt & D. R. Anderson, The Impact of Television on Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement, in N. O. Pecora, J. P. Murray & E. Wartella (eds.), *Children and Television. Fifty Years of Research*, pp.65-66; J. M. Healy, Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attention Problems in Children, *Pediatrics* 13(4), April 2004, pp.917-918.

<sup>121</sup> RSA, *Hansard 17*, 1966-09-20, col. 2466.

<sup>122</sup> RSA, *Hansard 11*, 1964-05-25, col. 6611.

wave of crime among black people on films that were ‘training schools for crime’.<sup>123</sup> If they were to see crimes on television, with its hypnotic power<sup>124</sup>, it would have an even greater effect, he argued.

For the NP, there was an even worse consequence to television. The opposition saw television as a wonderful means of bringing South Africans together, as it would bring home to each group the reality of the others, and so create a better understanding.<sup>125</sup> The NP government, however, saw this in a different light. Not only did television aggravate social problems like broken families and crime, but it also aimed at breaking down the divisions between languages, religions, and races. This was fuelled by liberalist and communist propaganda and would ultimately lead to the fall of Western civilisation.<sup>126</sup>

Infused as it was with these foreign ideologies, television did not allow for differences, which was an integral part of the NP’s policy. Instead, the medium treated viewers as if they were all from the same community, without regional and cultural divisions. NP member J. A. Marais argued that ‘television strengthens and confirms the conception of mass’<sup>127</sup>. This was part of the ‘iniquitous propaganda’ of communists, liberalists and leftists, who had taken hold of the media after the Second World War. This propaganda, as several NP members explained, presented the white man as the villain: the oppressor of the black man and the bringer of misery. The black man, on the other hand, was portrayed as the innocent victim of white crimes and was, ultimately, the hero.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, television would raze individual thought, spiritual individuality and Western morals to the point where Westerners would gladly hand over their rule. Hertzog illustrated this point through the example of European countries in Africa:

Is it not sad that the Belgians, influenced by this propaganda, morally collapsed to such an extent that they handed the Congo over at a totally undesirable time to the Bantu who were not ready for it? ... Was it not

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<sup>123</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6526.

<sup>124</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6517.

<sup>125</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2472.

<sup>126</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6530.

<sup>127</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 13, 1965-05-19, col. 1501.

<sup>128</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 5617, 5630; RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-19, col. 2408.

pitiful to see how England, who has built up an Empire for 500 years, relinquished it without firing a shot?<sup>129</sup>

Leftist propaganda would have the same effect in South Africa: it would undermine the position of the white population and make the black man an even greater enemy. For the sake of white rule in South Africa, therefore, the government could not introduce television. White children had to be trained to become leaders, otherwise the white people would lose power – and if South Africa got television, children could not be leaders.<sup>130</sup>

There is no doubt that many Afrikaner Nationalists were truly concerned with the preservation of white Afrikaner identity and political power. But these arguments made little sense to the opposition. They did not dispute the hypnotic effect television would initially have, but they saw no reason why the content would have such an adverse effect on South Africans. Firstly, they contended, there was no evidence that television led to a moral collapse in the rest of the Western world.<sup>131</sup> Secondly, television would certainly be controlled by the SABC and the government, who would make sure that no harmful programmes were shown.<sup>132</sup> Thirdly, as opposition member Helen Suzman stated, ‘it is a very brittle moral fibre if it can so easily be influenced by television programmes’<sup>133</sup>. Sir De Villiers Graaff believed that children were very unlikely to be corrupted by something like television if they had a proper home influence.<sup>134</sup> Finally, the opposition argued, if the government really believed that television was such an evil poison that would destroy Western civilisation, why would they willingly give this toxin to South Africa’s friends in the Western World?<sup>135</sup>

The most important counterargument is that the government would surely be able to control what was seen on television, especially as the NP had clearly stated that any South African television service would be overseen by the government and would not

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<sup>129</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6531.

<sup>130</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, cols. 6525-6526, 6530.

<sup>131</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3646.

<sup>132</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, col. 3024; RSA, *Hansard* 7, 1963-05-22, col. 6513.

<sup>133</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2467.

<sup>134</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 10, 1964-04-27, col. 4959.

<sup>135</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 20, 1967-05-02, col. 5276.

be under the control of private enterprise. That does not mean that the NP's argument held no weight. No matter how strictly the government censored what was and what was not transmitted over television, they would not be able to predict and control how the viewers received the images. Different viewers can interpret the same television programme in varied, even opposing, ways, depending on factors such as their cultural background, age, ability to observe detail, level of understanding, existing knowledge and emotional state.<sup>136</sup>

Through the realisation that they could not control the reception of television, the NP revealed considerable insight into the new medium and its possible dangers to apartheid ideology. Two decades later, when television had finally come to South Africa, and when apartheid was already in decline, one programme in particular would illustrate how television content could be received differently, and how it could impact a whole society's perceptions.<sup>137</sup>

*The Cosby Show* (see Figure 7) was an immensely popular television series from the mid-1980s. This American sitcom depicted the fictional life of the Huxtables, a middle-class African-American family in their suburban home. The programme was first aired on South African television in 1985, and by 1987 it was the most popular programme on local television – even among staunch supporters of racial segregation and apartheid. There were people who complained about the show. The Conservative Party, for example, argued that a popular show about a black family would undermine belief in racial segregation. One MP went further to say that the show's star, Bill Cosby, brought the ANC's anti-apartheid message straight into South African homes. But most viewers, even supporters of the white right wing, enjoyed *The Cosby Show*:

I like watching these American sitcoms ... take for instance the Bill Cosby Show, I mean there's a lot of family lessons to be learned out of it ... I utilize that you know, when I sit and watch it with the children, the children enjoy it

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<sup>136</sup> P. J. Fourie *et al.*, Television Theory, in P. J. Fourie (ed), *Introduction to Communication*, pp.154-158; H. Newcomb & P. M. Hirsch, Television as a Cultural Forum, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Television. The Critical View*, p.511.

<sup>137</sup> By this time, it was not just television that was changing perceptions in South African society. The political climate was undergoing significant changes, and the NP had begun to steer in a new direction. This factor, together with a shifting social and cultural South African identity, meant that a programme like the *Cosby Show* was allowed to be shown on South African television in the first place, and it contributed to the impact of television. See Chapter IV, p.104.

and I laugh and I say ‘Darling, you see how that is now a very interesting little lesson’.<sup>138</sup>

According to historian Jonathan Hyslop, this and other similar American programmes helped to convince apartheid supporters that apartheid was not necessarily the only or right way, and that desegregation was not necessarily a threat. On television one could see white and black families living side by side, without a threat to the middle-class whites’ way of life. And if it is possible on television, who was to say that it couldn’t be in real life?<sup>139</sup>



**Figure 7:** The Cosby family from *The Cosby Show*.  
**Source:** [www.tripletsandus.com/80s/shows/cosby.htm](http://www.tripletsandus.com/80s/shows/cosby.htm)

Therefore, even with government control, messages of racial equality could still reach and influence South African viewers. However, there was an even more significant point to the NP’s argument that television would break down Western civilisation: it revealed one of their biggest concerns, namely the preservation of power. During the 1960s, the NP government devoted themselves to retain white power in South Africa.<sup>140</sup> According to the opposition, however, the NP did not just fear the breakdown of the West’s power, or the decline of white rule in South Africa – what they were really concerned with, was maintaining their *own* position as the ruling party.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in J. Hyslop, Why Did Apartheid’s Supporters Capitulate? ‘Whiteness’, Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995, *Society in Transition* 31(1), 2000, p.40.

<sup>139</sup> J. Hyslop, Why Did Apartheid’s Supporters Capitulate? ‘Whiteness’, Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995, *Society in Transition* 31(1), 2000, p.40.

<sup>140</sup> B. J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, p.399.

#### **x. The little bioscope**

One of Hertzog's first arguments against television was that it was nothing more than a miniature bioscope.<sup>141</sup> In terms of content, it offered little more than films, radio and magazines. So what, Hertzog and Verwoerd asked, did South Africa miss out on by not introducing television? No hardship was caused by its absence. As a little bioscope, it had no value other than entertainment, and there was no need to spend millions of rands on such a luxury.<sup>142</sup>

In other words, South Africa did not need television. This was a very important argument. In 1969, shortly before the government appointed the Meyer Commission to investigate television, Basie van Rensburg added a new dimension to this argument: 'the Government is not prepared to introduce a television service *unless technological development or other circumstances make it inevitable*.'<sup>143</sup> This is precisely what had happened in terms of FM radio: certain circumstances had made it inevitable to introduce the expensive radio technology. And it is also what would later happen with television: when satellite technology threatened the government's control over television, they decided to introduce the medium.

Although this argument did not receive as much prominence as certain others, it is definitely one of the key reasons for television's absence: the government did not need television to maintain their position, and therefore, as C. P. Mulder admitted, *they did not want it*.<sup>144</sup> Before the coming of satellite television, the government had nothing to lose by *not* introducing television.

#### **b. Putting up a shroud: the opposition's accusations**

Throughout the television debates, the opposition accused the NP of concealing its real objections to television. According to opposition members, the government was not really concerned about television's effects on the South African economy and

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<sup>141</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 101*, 1959-06-03, col. 7224.

<sup>142</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, col. 3001; Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3658; RSA, *Hansard 7*, 1963-05-22, col. 6524; RSA, *Hansard 13*, 1965-02-19, cols. 1492-1493.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in RSA, *Hansard 25*, 1969-03-19, col. 2838 (*My emphasis*).

<sup>144</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1630.

public. In reality, the opposition claimed, the NP was fearful of how television would affect its *own* political and economic position.

### **i. Television's political effect**

According to the opposition, one of the real reasons why the NP was afraid of television was that the medium would 'open people's eyes to certain things'<sup>145</sup>. Television would bring the opinions of leading overseas politicians into the homes of South Africans. As South Africa increasingly came under attack for its apartheid policies from other countries, and the Western world distanced itself from colonialism and apartheid, chances were good that the opinions of leading overseas politicians would be in conflict with the NP's views.<sup>146</sup> Bringing these anti-apartheid views right into the living rooms of voters, reasoned the opposition, would be detrimental to the NP's political position.<sup>147</sup>

The NP was therefore not afraid of the moral impact of television, but really of the political effect. The issue was not about the moral collapse of Western civilisation, but about the possible adverse effects of television on the NP's power in South Africa.

With her characteristic humour, Helen Suzman identified another possible political consequence of television, when NP supporters realised who it really was that they had been voting for:

Can you imagine what would happen to the National Party if these hon. members were put on the television screen? How long would they last in power? Imagine the shock to the unsuspecting electorate of South Africa if they were suddenly confronted with the hon. members on the opposite side appearing in their drawing rooms, at close quarters. What a terrifying thought!<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 101*, 1959-06-01, col. 7058.

<sup>146</sup> T. R. H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p.318.

<sup>147</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1633.

<sup>148</sup> RSA, *Hansard 25*, 1969-03-19, col. 2877.

## ii. Personal financial interests

It was feared that the press could lose a lot of revenue to television advertising. Many newspapers would have to close down, and the government would lose an important support base in the Afrikaans press, as most Afrikaans newspapers were politically sympathetic towards the government.<sup>149</sup> But there was an even more personal reason. As the opposition pointed out, certain prominent NP members had personal interests in Afrikaans newspapers.<sup>150</sup> For example, during the 1950s, a prominent Afrikaans press company, Dagbreekpers, counted among its board members H. F. Verwoerd and Ben Schoeman, an NP Cabinet Minister. In the 1960s, Albert Hertzog himself was the director of a newspaper company called *Afrikaans Pers Bpk* (Afrikaans Press Ltd).<sup>151</sup>

Another sphere in which NP members had personal interests was the cinema industry. According to opposition member L. E. D. Winchester, a ‘certain concern’ had entered the industry in the mid-1960s and controlled many cinemas in the country. This concern, Winchester alleged, was ‘favourably disposed’ towards the NP government.<sup>152</sup> Winchester was referring to Ster Films, one of two major cinema companies in South Africa during the 1960s. In 1962 the Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Lewens Assuransie Maatskappy (South African National Life Insurance Company, SANLAM) acquired 90% ownership of Ster Films. As one of the cornerstones of Afrikaner capital, SANLAM was a strong supporter of the NP.<sup>153</sup>

Winchester raised another, very interesting, argument. He accused NP members of having personal interests in certain popular picture magazines. These magazines provided a visual form of entertainment and had a circulation of 75,000 a week. ‘Not long ago,’ Winchester told the House of Assembly, ‘a leading personality told me that he was in favour of television, but that he could not advocate its introduction, as he was a publisher of this sort of magazine. I want to add that that leading personality

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<sup>149</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 89, 1955-06-10, col. 7478; Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 101, 1959-06-01, col. 7058.

<sup>150</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 104, 1960-03-09, col. 3063.

<sup>151</sup> J. Muller, Press Houses at War: A Brief History of Nasionale Pers and Perskor, in K. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Narrating the Crisis*, pp.130-131; P. J. Gibson (ed.), *Who's Who of Southern Africa*, 1968, p.447.

<sup>152</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1631.

<sup>153</sup> K. Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, pp.160-171. In 1969, SANLAM also took over Ster Film's rival company, Fox. In 1977, Fox (now called Kinekor) and Ster Films merged to form Ster-Kinekor.

happens to be a public representative of that party sitting on the other side of the House [the NP].<sup>154</sup> The idea that the NP was more concerned about the personal financial implications of television than the moral effect on South Africans, was illustrated through these magazines. Winchester cited previous debates in which NP members argued that television would show too many crimes, and refuted these claims by referring to the large amount of murders, rapes and robberies depicted in these picture magazines.

Therefore, by introducing television, the NP government had much to lose: if viewers saw perspectives other than that of the NP on television, they could withdraw their support from the NP and its apartheid policies. Also, the personal financial interests of several members of the NP and their allies could be adversely affected by television.

### **c. Putting up a window to the world: the opposition's arguments for television**

For the opposition, television's advantages far outweighed its drawbacks. Despite all the obstacles and negative consequences of television, there were great benefits that few other media could equal. By launching a television service, South Africa could reap the rewards of a powerful audio-visual tool and share in the magnificent developments of the twentieth century. If South Africa did not get television, however, she would be the laughing stock of the world.

The opposition's arguments for television created balance in the parliamentary debates: for all the NP's misgivings about the new medium, there were many positive outcomes to introducing television. Furthermore, the fact that these arguments could not sway the NP, gives even more prominence to the NP's position against television: they must have been very concerned about television if they were not prepared to overcome the obstacles, even in return for television's many benefits.

The arguments also shed light on the eventual introduction of television. When the government decided to establish television, they did so because of factors that could

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<sup>154</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1632.

already be perceived or predicted in the 1960s. The opposition's arguments contain some of the seeds for the NP's change towards television that would, by the end of the 1960s, fulfil the NP's prediction that they would not introduce the medium unless circumstances had made it inevitable.

### **i. A matter of prestige: South Africa and the rest of the world**

By the mid 1960s, almost a hundred countries had already introduced television. Not only was South Africa virtually the only Western country not to have television, but it was also behind African countries such as Ghana, Egypt, Nigeria and Northern and Southern Rhodesia. This was a great embarrassment for the opposition, who argued that South Africa could not consider itself as a leading nation if it lagged so far behind in modern technology. Instead of setting the tone for the African continent, the opposition maintained, South Africa was too backward to get television.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the opposition was convinced that the rest of the world was fully aware of this backwardness: 'The fact remains that we are making our country look ridiculous in the eyes of the rest of the world by this refusal to introduce television.'<sup>156</sup>

In his reply, Albert Hertzog likened the opposition's argument to their stance with regards to apartheid. In the matter of television, the opposition argued that the rest of the world had television, why not South Africa? In terms of apartheid, according to Hertzog, the opposition would say that the rest of the world did *not* have apartheid, so why should South Africa? For the NP, the opposition's standpoint on television *and* apartheid revealed a callousness towards South Africa: the opposition merely wanted what the rest of the world had, regardless of whether it was in the interests of South Africa.<sup>157</sup>

The argument reveals the opposing views on national pride of the UP and NP. For the UP, national pride was about standing tall among the world's nations and their new

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<sup>155</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 101*, 1959-06-01, cols. 7058-7059; Union of South Africa, *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, col. 3026; Union of South Africa, *Hansard 107*, 1961-03-24, col. 3646; Union of South Africa, *Hansard 108*, 1961-05-02, col. 5730; RSA, *Hansard 7*, 1963-05-22, col. 6510.

<sup>156</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-02-07, col. 166.

<sup>157</sup> RSA, *Hansard 7*, 1963-05-22, col. 6524.

inventions and technologies. Because the NP would not allow one of the most modern technologies and symbols of technological progress, the UP accused them of being backward. For the NP, on the other hand, national pride was proven by being patriotic, self-reliant and independent of outside interference. The fact that the opposition wanted television, which the NP argued would compromise South Africa's cultural and ideological independence, proved to the NP that the UP was unpatriotic and did not have South Africa's best interests at heart.

## **ii. A great boon**

The opposition was not completely blind to television's possible negative consequences, such as the high expense and its potential to be abused. However, they were convinced that the benefits of television far surpassed its disadvantages. Television, they regularly argued, was an invaluable instrument in education, and could be used as an aid in classrooms or as an informal teaching tool at home. The medium could be used, for example, to teach viewers about hygiene, child welfare and economic thinking, and could even be employed to combat illiteracy. In other parts of the world, television was especially valuable in teaching farmers in remote areas about soil conservation and farming methods. In the mines, they argued, it could be used to teach Fanagalo to miners within six weeks.<sup>158</sup>

Furthermore, television was a great boon to the elderly, the sick and those who could not leave their homes to go to sport events, the theatre or the cinema. For families who liked to enjoy their entertainment at home, television would be a great medium. In fact, in contradiction to the NP's argument that television destroyed family life, opposition member U. S. Weiss contended that 'nothing has helped so much as television to re-create family life.'<sup>159</sup> It also provided a great outlet for artists and writers of all language groups – especially Afrikaans. While the government feared that television would favour English above Afrikaans, the opposition believed that

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<sup>158</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 107, 1961-03-24, col. 3647; RSA, *Hansard* 13, 1965-02-19, col. 1507.

<sup>159</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard* 108, 1961-05-02, col. 5731.

television would stimulate Afrikaans to the point where it would soon be on equal footing to English.<sup>160</sup>

Among its many advantages were the possibility that television would attract foreign capital, immigrant technicians and other experts, and the opportunity to use it to better South Africa's image among the country's people.<sup>161</sup>

At first, the NP would not admit that television's advantages were significant enough to warrant its introduction. But in 1968, when he replaced Hertzog as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Van Rensburg conceded that television was indeed a great boon in the fields of education, commerce and industry, medicine, science and entertainment. Van Rensburg pointed out that, with the appropriate permit, institutions could use closed-circuit television for all of the above, except for entertainment. For Van Rensburg, this meant that the opposition's plea for television could only be based on its entertainment value.<sup>162</sup> And although Van Rensburg did not believe that television was evil, like his predecessor did, he maintained that television would not be introduced until it became absolutely inevitable in South Africa.

One benefit of television that Van Rensburg did not mention was the impact of seeing important global events on television. For the opposition this became increasingly important as the first moon landing drew near.

### **iii. Taking part in international events**

In 1962, John Glenn became the first American astronaut to orbit Earth. Opposition member U. S. Weiss complained that while most of the world shared in this magnificent feat through television, South Africa was left in the dark.<sup>163</sup> Not only was television a great tool for education, science and entertainment, but it could include South Africa in some of the greatest triumphs of the twentieth century. During the

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<sup>160</sup> Union of South Africa, *Hansard 108*, 1961-05-02, col. 5731; RSA, *Hansard 4*, 1962-06-07, col. 7361; RSA, *Hansard 7*, 1963-05-22, cols. 6514-6515; RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, col. 1616.

<sup>161</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, cols. 1616, 1633.

<sup>162</sup> RSA, *Hansard 22*, 1968-03-05, cols. 1646-1651.

<sup>163</sup> RSA, *Hansard 4*, 1962-06-07, col. 7362.

1960s, many important events were televised throughout the world, such as the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill (1965) and the Olympic Games in Tokyo (1964) and Mexico (1968). South Africans also enjoyed the spotlight, particularly record-breaking swimmer Karen Muir and heart transplant pioneer Chris Barnard. But ordinary South Africans could not share in any of these events as television viewers, and for this the opposition blamed the ‘infinite *verkramptheid*’ of the NP and especially Hertzog.<sup>164</sup>

The NP argued that these events were indeed screened in South Africa: not on television, but in movie theatres. Moreover, radio was an excellent medium for conveying important events to a great number of listeners, and there was little that television could add.<sup>165</sup> The opposition disagreed. According to opposition member E. G. Malan, ‘[l]istening to a concert or to a theatre production over the radio to-day [*sic*] is like going to a concert hall or a theatre blindfolded’<sup>166</sup>.

It was especially in terms of space travel that the opposition felt left out from the rest of the world. It is no wonder, because since the end of the Second World War and the launch of the first missiles, the USA and the USSR had been engaged in a race to send the first humans to the moon. The result was a series of ‘firsts’ during the 1950s and 1960s: the first manmade satellite (1957), the first spacecraft sent around the moon (1959), the first human in space (1961), the first woman in space (1963), the first spacewalk (1965) and finally, in July 1969, the first humans on the moon.<sup>167</sup>

The moon landing would become very significant in the television debates. According to media scholar Rob Nixon, it was a turning point that contributed very strongly to the government’s decision to introduce television after all.<sup>168</sup> The impact of the moon landing had already been predicted in 1964, when U. S. Weiss stated: ‘We are told that within the next 10 years the Americans or the Russians will have landed on the moon. Eighty-one countries will be viewing this on television but not South Africa

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<sup>164</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-02-07, col. 167.

<sup>165</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 17, 1966-09-20, col. 2474.

<sup>166</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1616.

<sup>167</sup> CNN, ‘Cold War Experience: Technology. The Space Race: An Interactive Timeline.’ Internet: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/experience/technology/space.timeline/frameset.html>, 1998. Accessed: 2007-06-25.

<sup>168</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.71-75.

unless the hon. the Minister is going to install it.’<sup>169</sup> When Apollo 11 did land on the moon in 1969, hundreds of millions of people did indeed witness it on television. Of course, the South Africans were not among them. But by then it had already become clear that television could not be kept out of the country for too long, and in March 1969 Helen Suzman prophesied that: ‘it will not be very long before we in South Africa will be watching sports programmes, documentaries, Apollo trips to the moon, all these wonderful things that are happening in this day and age.’<sup>170</sup>

### 3. The role of the Broederbond

According to media scholar Ron Krabill, Albert Hertzog and Hendrik Verwoerd formed part of an ‘ultra-right troika’ that were vehemently opposed to television. The third member of the trio was P. J. Meyer, an influential and outspoken Afrikaner Nationalist. During the 1960s, Meyer simultaneously held the positions of SABC Chairman and the Chairman of the Afrikaner Broederbond.<sup>171</sup>

The Broederbond was established in 1918 to promote the Afrikaans language and culture. By the 1930s, it was a secret organisation that allowed only white, Afrikaans speaking, Protestant Christian men as members. Historians and journalists<sup>172</sup> have written much about the Broederbond and their all-pervasive influence in the establishment of apartheid, the control of Afrikaner culture and even in decision-making in Cabinet. However, according to historian Hermann Giliomee, this was not the case, especially before Verwoerd came to power. The Bond could not succeed in unifying Afrikaners during the Second World War. Nor did it play a significant role in the development of apartheid policy. Instead, the NP leaders used the Broederbond as a sounding board and instrument to implement apartheid, and its influence was never

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<sup>169</sup> RSA, *Hansard 11*, 1964-05-25, col. 6602.

<sup>170</sup> RSA, *Hansard 25*, 1969-03-19, col. 2878.

<sup>171</sup> R. Krabill, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.56-58.

<sup>172</sup> See for example P. W. Coetzer, *Die Afrikaner-Broederbond en die Algemene Verkiesing van 1948*, *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December 2002; C. Bloomberg & S. Dubow, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa, 1918-48* (London, 1990); I. Wilkins & H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaner* (Johannesburg, 1978); D. O’Meara, *The Afrikaner Broederbond, 1927-1948: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3(2), April 1977; Time Magazine, ‘Broederbond’s Big Brother Act’. Internet: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915731,00.html>, 1977-11-21. Accessed: 2007-12-27.

as strong as that of the Cabinet.<sup>173</sup> When the NP came to power in 1948, senior positions in the civil service were largely held by English-speaking people who did not support the NP. One of the ways in which the NP sought to consolidate its power was to appoint white Afrikaners to these positions. The Broederbond was entrusted with this task, and senior civil service posts were reserved for Broederbond members.<sup>174</sup>

But in 1956, Bond members complained that the NP had sidelined the organisation. The NP executive council retorted that the Bond's strength lay in promoting ideas, not in action. When Verwoerd came to power in 1958, however, he saw the Bond as an ideal instrument for unifying Afrikaners and so entrenching his apartheid ideology. Broederbond members came to play a significant part in South Africa's cultural development and the propagating of apartheid ideals. Among its thousands of members counted most Afrikaans newspaper editors, as well as church leaders, university lecturers and schoolteachers. By supporting and advocating the NP's policies and ideologies, the ideas of apartheid and Afrikaner Christian nationalism were able to reach South Africans in their homes, churches and schools.<sup>175</sup>

Broederbond members were therefore able to bring home to South Africans the anti-Afrikaner, anti-Christian and anti-apartheid qualities of television, of which the Broederbond's own chairman, Meyer, was a great enemy. It is ironic that, when the other two members of the 'ultra-right troika' were no longer in power and the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television was appointed in December 1969, Meyer was asked to be its chairman. In 1971, one of television's greatest former enemies would recommend that South Africa did, at last, get television.

#### **4. Conclusion**

There were many obstacles to the introduction of television in South Africa. Some of these obstacles, such as the high cost of launching and maintaining television, the

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<sup>173</sup> H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, pp.372-373, 396.

<sup>174</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.61; H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, pp.352-353.

<sup>175</sup> H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, pp.475-476.

country's large and mountainous terrain, a scarcity of manpower, South Africa's many languages and the constant developments made in television technology, would have made it difficult to introduce a service. Other obstacles affected the desirability of television on moral grounds, as it could adversely influence viewers, and would bring unwanted competition for other forms of news and entertainment. Although the opposition continued to refute these claims, the NP maintained that these obstacles were too numerous and too difficult to overcome. In truth, had the NP had the desire to establish television, these hurdles would not have stood between South Africa and a television service. Just as the NP government spared no resources in the implementation of apartheid, the production of propaganda for overseas consumption and the establishment of a high frequency radio station to counter propaganda from outside, they would probably have used whatever it took to establish television – had they *wanted* the medium.

But the NP did not want television, because they did not need it. There was therefore no reason to overcome any obstacles in establishing television, no matter how small some of these hindrances were. The NP repeatedly made their position clear: television was not an essential medium. It was merely a luxury that offered nothing that the existent media did not. What television did offer, the government either did not want, or could do without. The NP did not care for television's ability to bring people together, as the opposition argued. In fact, it was against the government's policy of separate development and would break down the screens the NP endeavoured to put up between South Africa's cultural and language groups. Furthermore, exposure to the rest of the world and its anti-apartheid ideologies might influence the way the government's supporters felt about apartheid, and could suggest to its enemies how racial discrimination could be fought. And through the implementation of apartheid, the NP had already shown that they would not yield to outside pressure.

As for the benefits of television in terms of education, science and medicine, the NP had managed to sidestep television by making these benefits available to permit-holders of closed-circuit television. Therefore, the NP did not stand to lose their power or position by *not* introducing television, like they did with FM radio in the early 1960s. On the other hand, if the NP *did* launch television, there would be a new

threat: to their political position, as television could open South Africans' eyes to outside influences, as well as to their financial position, as many NP members had personal interests in the forms of entertainment that would be hardest hit by the coming of television.

The reason that South Africa did not get television in the 1950s and 1960s is therefore simple: the NP government did not want television, because they did not need it to stay in power. They had nothing to lose by *not* introducing television, but they had something to lose if they *did*.

The television debates were also about more than just a new medium of communication. Television became the rope in a tug-of-war between two political opponents. The debates highlighted each side's different ideologies, ideals and visions for South Africa. While the opposition was world-orientated and wished for South Africa to be part of the global village, the NP was more insular and wanted South Africa to be completely independent and self-sufficient. For the opposition, national pride was very important, and the fact that South Africa did not have television embarrassed them. But the NP had a different view on national pride, and saw no reason to admit television into its existing media landscape. Furthermore, where the opposition stood for free enterprise, the NP believed in more central government control over the economy.

And while the opposition could afford to be more idealistic about South Africa and its future, the NP was faced with the practical responsibilities that power brought. For example, the opposition saw no difficulty in finding the money to establish television. The NP, on the other hand, had more important projects in mind that would cost millions of rands, but that would serve a more important purpose, they believed, than television. This purpose was to remain in power. By spending millions on local FM radio and large apartheid projects, the NP believed they could entrench their political position. But whereas the UP saw television as a possible way to get into power, the NP feared that the medium would damage the power they already had, and were working so hard to keep.

For each side, the other's attitude towards television came to embody what they most criticised in each other. According to the opposition, the government's refusal to introduce television flowed from the NP's backwardness. For the NP, the opposition's insistence on television, that carrier of foreign ideals, showed just how disloyal and unpatriotic the UP and PP were.

By 1969, however, the government felt compelled to take the first steps towards establishing a South African television service, and appointed the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television.

**IV**  
**SEEING STARS:**  
**TELEVISION SATELLITES AND THE MOON LANDING**



**Figure 8:** Television becomes a status symbol among South Africans, 1969.  
**Source:** *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-31, p.14.

## 1. Introduction

Despite the NP's attempts to keep television at bay during the 1950s and 1960s, the ruling party did understand that the invention could not be kept out of the country forever. Already in 1960, Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd maintained that television would, one day, come to South Africa.<sup>1</sup> In 1969, Posts and Telegraphs Minister Basie van Rensburg also recognised the possibility that television could become essential and even inevitable in South Africa. But until that possibility actually arose, he stated, the country would not get television.<sup>2</sup> Yet, two years later, the NP government decided that it would be more prudent to introduce television than to continue the medium's absence, and the introduction of South African television was formally announced.

What happened to change the government's mind in two years? Media scholar Ron Krabill identifies three main factors that led to the government's change of heart: political divisions within the ruling party, the threat posed by satellite television, and South Africans' growing discontent at being excluded from international media events, most notably the 1969 moon landing.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A split in the Party

During the 1950s and the 1960s, the issue of television became the subject of heated debate. On the one hand stood television's advocates, who came mostly from the UP. For them, the government's refusal to introduce television was proof of the NP's backwardness and misplaced priorities. On the other hand stood the NP, who argued that television's advocates were unpatriotic and supportive of foreign ideologies that would harm the South African way of life. As the 1960s progressed, however, the unity with which NP party members opposed television lessened as a rift in the ruling party became more acute.

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<sup>1</sup> Union of South Africa *Hansard 104*, 1960-03-09, cols. 3000-3008.

<sup>2</sup> RSA, *Hansard 25*, 1969-03-19, col. 2838.

<sup>3</sup> R. Krabill, 'The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to 1976'. Internet: [www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf). s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-06.

**a. *Verkrampes vs. verligtes***

In the 1960s, prominent NP members developed different ideas about the country's political, economic and cultural policies. In 1967, academic Willem de Klerk coined the terms *verligtes* (enlightened ones) and *verkrampes* (narrow-minded or ultra-conservative ones). The *verligtes* were more liberal in their outlook, abandoned certain traditions and promoted openness, inclusiveness and freedom, even in terms of apartheid policy and race relations. One of the most prominent *verligtes* was Prime Minister B. J. Vorster. The *verkrampes*, on the other hand, condemned anything that was not traditional. Albert Hertzog led the *verkrampes*, who were also known as Hertzogites.<sup>4</sup>

While Hertzog was Minister of Posts and Telegraphs (1958-1968), television was strongly opposed. In Parliament, different members of the ruling party gave the same arguments against television. But as the split in the NP became more apparent, so did different views within the party on television. Some *verligte* members, such as Nico Malan, the NP administrator of the Cape Province, and Gert Claassen, an NP member of the Natal Provincial Council, openly supported television.<sup>5</sup>

**b. The fall of the anti-television troika**

For most of the 1960s, the NP policy against television was led by what Ron Krabill calls the ultra-right (*verkrampete*) troika of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, Albert Hertzog, and SABC and Broederbond chairman Piet Meyer. (See Figures 9-11.) These three figures were very prominent in South Africa's political and cultural life, and as head of government, the minister of the broadcasting portfolio and the SABC chairman respectively, they were the decision makers in terms of television. But by the end of the decade, the troika no longer existed. Under Prime Minister Vorster, the *verligtes* became more prominent than the *verkrampes*, and although the NP

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<sup>4</sup> J. P. Brits, *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*, p.269.

<sup>5</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, cols. 1616-1617.

continued to refuse to introduce television until the end of the 1960s, the fervour with which the *verkrampes* condemned the medium abated.<sup>6</sup>



**Figures 9-10:** From left to right: H. F. Verwoerd; Albert Hertzog; P. J. Meyer.

**Sources:** <http://www.britannica.com/eb/art/print?id=34230&articleTypeId=0>; Wootton & Gibson, *Who's Who in Southern Africa 1961* (Johannesburg 1961), p.363; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1978, p.4.

The fall of the anti-television troika happened quickly, and began with the murder of Verwoerd in 1966. By this time, the rift in the party was already acute, and now the post of Prime Minister was left open to a *verligte*. B. J. Vorster succeeded him as Prime Minister, and although Vorster initially had the support of both factions within the NP, his policies were soon shown to be more liberal than Verwoerd's. First of all, Vorster relaxed Verwoerd's rigid policy against racially mixed sports teams by allowing foreign, multiracial teams to tour in South Africa. It also became clear that Vorster wanted the NP to abandon the exclusive Afrikaner nationalism and to embrace a more inclusive white South African nationalism – in other words, a nationalism that included white English-speaking South Africans. Furthermore, Vorster's outward looking policy led to diplomatic ties with African states and their black leaders.<sup>7</sup>

The *verkrampes* were outraged. But in reply to their criticism, Vorster strengthened the security forces and even used the security police against his nationalist opponents. As a result, Vorster and Albert Hertzog did not have a good relationship. In February

<sup>6</sup> R. Krabill, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, pp.56-58.

<sup>7</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.158; H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, pp.508-509; W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, p.226.

1968, Hertzog lost his portfolio of Posts and Telegraphs. Seven months later, in August, his other portfolio, Health, was also taken away and Hertzog was dropped from Vorster's cabinet altogether. In October 1969, Hertzog's NP membership was revoked, and he formed a new, very conservative party called the Herstigde Nasionale Party (Reformed National Party, HNP). While the HNP continued to oppose television, the new Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Basie van Rensburg, openly declared that he did not see television as evil.<sup>8</sup>

Vorster also turned his attention to the Broederbond, who was still led by Piet Meyer. In 1967, Meyer stated that the Bond's most important task was to get rid of the evidently *verligte* Vorster. But the new Prime Minister, himself a member of the organisation, demanded the Broederbond's loyalty and even tried to get Meyer to resign as chairman. Meyer refused, and promised to openly confront Vorster at the next annual congress in 1968. Vorster pre-empted Meyer's confrontation by challenging him to choose his *verkrampste* principles over the NP. The Broederbond had for decades supported the NP, and Meyer would not take up Vorster's challenge. Instead, he pledged his loyalty to the NP and Vorster, and even went as far as abandoning his Hertzogite allies.<sup>9</sup>

By 1969, the anti-television troika of Verwoerd, Hertzog and Meyer had fallen. Verwoerd and Hertzog had been replaced by *verligtes* as Prime Minister and Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, and although Meyer was still the SABC chairman, he was now unwilling to challenge the *verligtes*.

The NP did not immediately decide to establish television. In early 1969, Minister Van Rensburg still maintained that South Africa did not need television. But an important shift in the NP's argument did occur: Van Rensburg made it clear that an open television service<sup>10</sup> would only be introduced when it became absolutely inevitable.<sup>11</sup> When satellite technology and the moon landing *did* make television

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<sup>8</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, col. 1644; D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, pp.159-160.

<sup>9</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, pp.161-162.

<sup>10</sup> As opposed to closed-circuit systems, which was already allowed under certain circumstances, see Chapter III, p.97.

<sup>11</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2838.

inevitable, the NP was quick to take the first step towards establishing television in South Africa.

### **3. Stars in orbit: television and satellite technology**

In the 1960s, the NP government felt threatened by outside AM radio broadcasts that carried anti-apartheid ideas. To counter the problem, they introduced Bantu Radio through FM transmissions. Then, in 1969, outside broadcasts again posed a threat – this time, through the medium of television.

#### **a. Sun activity and outside broadcasts**

In July 1969, the *Rand Daily Mail* claimed that, ‘despite official frowns’<sup>12</sup>, more than five hundred people had television sets in their homes, and that some had succeeded in picking up broadcasts from overseas. The reception was not through satellites, but through homemade aerials. In Johannesburg, according to the *Rand Daily Mail*, programmes were picked up from Madrid and Salisbury, while Cape Town experiments received programmes from the BBC. Although the images were not always clear and the sound often faded, the number of South Africans experimenting with television reception was on the increase.<sup>13</sup> However, according to electronics engineer B. Vuurman, this phenomenon could be termed as a freak occurrence caused by intense activity in the sun. In five years, Vuurman warned, the reception of outside broadcasts in this manner would not be possible anymore.<sup>14</sup>

#### **b. Television satellites**

A bigger threat to government control over broadcast media came from space. The world’s first artificial satellite, Sputnik, was launched by the USSR in 1957. The next year, the USA launched their first satellite, Explorer I. For the following few years, more satellites were sent into space by both the USSR and the USA, and the latter

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<sup>12</sup> Staff Reporter, The Ultimate in S.A. Status Symbols – A TV, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-24, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> Anonym, Clamour for TV Grows, *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, p.15; Staff Reporter, The Ultimate in S.A. Status Symbols – A TV, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-24, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Staff Reporter, The Ultimate in S.A. Status Symbols – A TV, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-24, p.4.

launched top secret spy satellites which managed to return with photos of Soviet territory.<sup>15</sup>

Television satellites were already in orbit by the mid-1960s. UP member and one of television's greatest advocates, E. G. Malan, mentioned these satellites in Parliament in 1965:

Too long we have had this Government on the issue of television groping in the twilight world of its own prejudices while, on the other hand around the world telears and T.V. satellites are circling, and man is reaching for the stars with his spirit, with his intellect and with his technique.<sup>16</sup>

Telstar was a network of satellites with which television material could be beamed from one country to another. A satellite was already in place to cover Africa, South America, Europe and parts of the United States. If a country in one of these areas had a base station, it could receive television programmes from other areas covered by the satellite. According to Malan, South Africa was a co-owner of this satellite, and as part of the Comsat communications network, would be allowed to use it for broadcasting.<sup>17</sup> This would make it cheaper and easier to get television programmes from overseas.

The ability to receive programmes from abroad did not necessarily interest the NP government. After all, even before the advent of satellites, the NP argued that foreign programmes would be filled with integration propaganda, and would not be suitable for South Africa's different cultural groups, each of which had its own cultural requirements. In the 1950s and 1960s the government kept these foreign ideologies at bay by censoring books and films, and by refusing to introduce television.

But in 1969, it became possible to receive satellite broadcasts *without* a base station, which started to pose a very real threat for government control over television. Now, any South African who had a television set and a satellite dish – a 'R150 rooftop

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<sup>15</sup> CNN, 'Cold War Experience: Technology. The Space Race: An Interactive Timeline'. Internet: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/experience/technology/space.timeline/frameset.html>, 1998. Accessed: 2007-06-25.

<sup>16</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 13, 1965-02-19, col. 1487.

<sup>17</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 22, 1968-03-05, cols. 1622-1623.

aluminium bowl<sup>18</sup>, as media scholar Rob Nixon calls it – could receive satellite broadcasts. Suddenly, Hertzog's feared 'little bioscope' might indeed find its way into South African living rooms, and the NP would have no control over what was broadcast, unless a South African television service was introduced and properly regulated.<sup>19</sup> Then, in the same year, another development threatened the NP. This time, as more and more voters demanded television, the ruling party risked losing support if they did not introduce the medium.

#### **4. Reaching for the stars: the 1969 moon landing**

In 1968, three American astronauts travelled to and around the moon in two days. It was the first manned orbit of the moon, and, as the SABC described it, 'an achievement of human daring'<sup>20</sup>. Footage of this marvellous feat was broadcast on television. In South Africa, where there was no television service, the material was transmitted over radio. The SABC reckoned that radio was the perfect means through which to experience the astronauts' accomplishment, as it brought the achievement into the homes of radio listeners across the globe. Indeed, according to the SABC, no other medium would have made such an intimate and communal participation in world events possible. The SABC continued: 'The role and value of radio in our times were once again underlined by this exceptional reflection of one of the most inspiring human achievements of 1968, perhaps of all time.'<sup>21</sup>

The next year, the American space programme achieved an even greater feat when it landed two astronauts on the moon on 20 July 1969.<sup>22</sup> This time, instead of seeing just interviews with astronauts and parts of the journey, an estimated six hundred million people across the world could see the entire journey: lift-off, the first human steps on

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<sup>18</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.75.

<sup>19</sup> R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.75; R. Krabill, 'The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to 1976'. Internet: [www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf), s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-06.

<sup>20</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1968, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1968, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> The astronauts landed on the moon at about an hour before midnight, Houston time. In South African time, however, this corresponds to 05h00 the next morning. Therefore the South African anniversary of the moon landing falls on 21 July, not 20 July. See Anonym, How Will It Be Dated?, *Cape Argus (Special Edition)*, 1969-07-21, p.11.

the moon, and the return to earth.<sup>23</sup> But, once again, South Africans had to trust the radio to relay the unfolding event. ‘How alarmingly distance has shrunk,’ wrote columnist Sebastiaan Brill in *Die Burger*, ‘one realised again on Sunday night, when you could listen how the space travellers’ delicate craft descended foot by foot to the surface of the moon.’<sup>24</sup>

The next day, newspapers were filled with news, photos, cartoons, special supplements and advertisements reporting or alluding to the moon landing. The South African public was well aware that the radio and the press were not the only media reporting the event: newspaper items included the fact that overseas audiences would be able to see a step-by-step account of the two-and-a-half-hour moon walk, *as it happened*, on their television sets.<sup>25</sup>

Some South Africans were not satisfied with listening to and reading about the moon landing. Around twenty people took a chartered plane for a special ‘moon tour’<sup>26</sup> to a London hotel, where they could watch the moon landing on television. Tickets cost R550, but some travellers paid R100 extra to insure themselves against any mishaps befalling Apollo 11 before the moon landing.<sup>27</sup> Of course, no mishaps occurred, and the television tourists were able to stay up throughout the night to experience the significant event. One woman from Johannesburg, Mrs Niven, explained that she and her husband, like their fellow tourists, were much too excited to sleep. ‘We stayed up throughout the night glued to the TV and we haven’t slept at all today ... It was all absolutely fantastic, super. I only hope South Africa will get TV soon after this.’<sup>28</sup> Apart from these tourists, a number of other South Africans were also able to see the

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<sup>23</sup> Anonym, They’re on the Moon. World Gets On-the-Spot Description of Surface, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-21, p.1; Anoniem, 600 Miljoen Sien hoe Mens Maan Betree, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-22, p.5; Anonym, 600m. Watched on Live Television, *Cape Argus (City Late)*, 1969-07-21, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> S. Brill, Leiding vir Luisteraars: Maanvlug Sorg toe vir Veel Opwinding, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-22, p.2 (*My translation*).

<sup>25</sup> Anonym, They’re on the Moon. World Gets On-the-Spot Description of Surface, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-21, p.1; Anoniem, 600 Miljoen Sien hoe Mens Maan Betree, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-22, p.5; Anonym, 600m. Watched on Live Television, *Cape Argus (City Late)*, 1969-07-21, p.4.

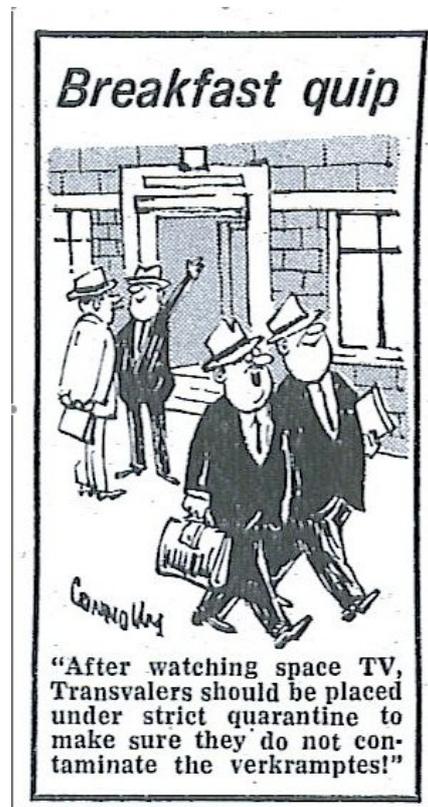
<sup>26</sup> Londense Verteenwoordiger, Baie uit S.A. Het Landing Aanskou, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-22, p.5 (*My translation*).

<sup>27</sup> Anonym, London Trip for TV ‘Worth It’, *Cape Argus (Special Edition)*, 1969-07-21, p.9; Randse Verteenwoordiger, Duisende in S.A. Sien Maanlanding op TV, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-23, p.15.

<sup>28</sup> Anonym, S. Africans ‘Glued to the Box’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-22, p.1.

moon landing live, including many working in London and those who were on overseas holidays at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Those who could not travel to other countries had to be content with seeing the footage a few days later. The *Rand Daily Mail*, in conjunction with the South African electronics company Tedelex, made special arrangements to screen the moon landing footage at selected locations. In Johannesburg, screenings were held at the Johannesburg Planetarium and Selborne Hall at the Johannesburg City Hall; in Pretoria, the footage could be seen at the Christian Brothers' College (CBC) hall. For about a week, these screenings took place every hour between 10am and 10pm. (See Figure 12.)



**Figure 12:** Bob Connolly on Moon Television.  
**Source:** *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-25, p.1.

Thousands of people visited the shows. The *Rand Daily Mail* estimated that, by the evening of 20 July, 'Moon Television', as it was popularly called, had already

<sup>29</sup> Londense Verteenwoordiger, Baie uit S.A. Het Landing Aanskou, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-22, p.5

attracted just over 21 000 people. Four days later, the figure had grown to 67 000.<sup>30</sup> The programme included the whole moon expedition: for the first two days, only the lift-off and Apollo 11's orbit around the moon was shown. From 22 July, the rest of the footage was screened: from the lunar module's touchdown and Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin's moon walk, to the module's take-off to rejoin the command ship.<sup>31</sup> According to a *Die Burger* reporter who saw one of these screenings, the image quality was not very high. Nevertheless, the reporter admitted, the television screenings were definitely worth it: 'It gives you the feeling that you were also involved in the historic event.'<sup>32</sup>

The shows were only for white people, but four two-hour screenings were scheduled for non-white people at the Johannesburg Planetarium on the afternoon of 24 July. On the day, six thousand people arrived for the first showing. The auditorium could only seat five hundred at a time, and when the doors opened, the crowd rushed forward, crushing those in front. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that, despite the organisers' appeals, the throng would not move back to form queues. After three futile warnings and several injuries, the shows were cancelled. 'It became obvious that the crowd would swell still further with the five o'clock rush and that a still more dangerous situation would arise'<sup>33</sup>, explained the *Rand Daily Mail*.

The screenings for white people continued until the end of July, and shows were also held in Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark.<sup>34</sup> In Cape Town, the Shell oil company sponsored screenings at the University of Cape Town's New Science Lecture Theatre, the Colosseum theatre in the city centre and the Gem Theatre in Woodstock.<sup>35</sup> Admission to all of the screenings was free, as this was the condition under which the

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<sup>30</sup> Anonym, The Great Event is Here Today – On TV, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-22, p.1; Staff Reporter, 67 000 See Moon Drama on TV, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-24, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> Staff Reporter, Moon Walk on TV Here Tomorrow, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-21, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Randse Verteenwoordiger, Duisende in S.A. Sien Maanlanding op TV, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-23, p.15 (*My translation*).

<sup>33</sup> Staff Reporter, Non-White Crowd Peril: TV Stopped, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-25, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> Staff Reporter, Vereeniging Crowds Spellbound, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-31, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> Anonym, 13 More Showings for Apollo TV Film, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-23, p.10; Anoniem, Reis na Maan op die Doek, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-25, p.2; Anonym, Moon Films at Week-end, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-31, p.4.

Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Basie van Rensburg, gave his permission for ‘Moon Television’ to be shown in South Africa.<sup>36</sup>

The implications of these screenings were very significant. The moon landing showcased not only the courage and daring of the Americans, but really of all mankind. It was the first time that a human being had set foot on the surface of another celestial body. In South Africa, where there was no television service, the images of the moon landing had further and even more far-reaching implications. It was not only the feat of putting men on the moon that grabbed the imagination of thousands of South Africans, but especially the achievement of broadcasting the whole event live on television. Indeed, some viewers of Moon Television laid bigger emphasis on the fact that they could see it on television than on the moon landing itself. As a *Cape Argus* reader, M. L. Shrimpton of Kenridge, exclaimed: ‘Man on the moon seen by millions around the world. What an achievement!’<sup>37</sup> Shrimpton was echoed by a reporter from *Die Burger*: ‘One cannot help but feel a little overwhelmed by the technical ingenuity of science: to be able to not only hold a conversation over such an immense distance in space, but even to see how the astronauts move around on the moon, is an impressive achievement.’<sup>38</sup>

For South Africans, the feat of the moon landing and the achievement of broadcasting it on television became part of the same accomplishment, namely that of humanity’s scientific progress in the twentieth century. Being able to see the moon landing on television made thousands of South Africans realise that television was *not* necessarily the evil that many NP members had wanted them to believe. For many years television’s opponents had insisted that the medium would lead to the nation’s moral and educational downfall. But, argued UP member D. J. Marais, the USA was in 1969 still the most powerful country in the world, even though they had been exposed to television since the 1930s. Since the introduction of television in the USA, the Americans had had a number of great accomplishments in many fields, including space exploration and especially the moon landing. These successes proved American

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<sup>36</sup> M. F. Preller, Letter to the Editor: Moonshot Film is Outstanding (Editor’s Note), *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-21, p.12.

<sup>37</sup> M. L. Shrimpton, Letter to the Editor: We Need TV, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-23, p.14.

<sup>38</sup> Anoniem, Reis na Maan op die Doek, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-25, p.2 (*My translation*).

power and progress, untainted by television and its alleged destructive ideologies.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, television was a powerful medium that not only connected countries with each other, but indeed the earth to its moon. Many South Africans were confronted with the fact that in most parts of the world, television was an integral part of people's lives. Even in poorer households, television had become part of the furniture, and, according to UP member C. J. S. Wainwright, the number of televisions in the world had already surpassed the number of telephones.<sup>40</sup>

Together with the realisation that television was an integral part of modern life came a strong feeling of isolation. And it was not only followers of the UP, who had been lobbying for television for twenty years, but also many NP supporters who felt left out. According to media scholar Ron Krabill, this feeling of isolation demonstrated a shift in white South African identity, away from the former isolationist identities that saw South Africa leave the Commonwealth, towards a sense of being part of a bigger Western world.<sup>41</sup> Those who were able to see the moon landing on television became conscious of what South Africa was missing. A journalist from *Die Burger*<sup>42</sup> expressed the exclusion that many South Africans were now feeling: 'It is only when you see the image that you realise what we had missed by not being able to follow it on the television screen as it happened. People cannot help but feel a little backward.'<sup>43</sup> If those South Africans who *did* see the moon landing felt isolated, how secluded would those who could only read about the wonders of Moon Television in the newspapers feel?

Almost as soon as the lunar module landed on the moon, television became an important topic in the newspapers. Together with the headlines covering the moon landing appeared articles on television's absence in South Africa: 'S.A deprived of seeing on TV 'greatest human event'', reported the *Sunday Times* hours before the

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<sup>39</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2853; R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p.74.

<sup>40</sup> B. Trew, Television is Drawcard for S.A. Tourists, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-21, p.11; RSA, *Hansard* 25, 1969-03-19, col. 2869.

<sup>41</sup> R. Krabill, 'The Structured Absence of Television within the South African Mediascape prior to 1976'. Internet: [www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/tcds/Ron%20Krabill.pdf), s.a. Accessed: 2007-06-06.

<sup>42</sup> *Die Burger*, published by Nasionale Pers, was a supporter of verligte NP policy. See J. Muller, Press Houses at War: A Brief History of Nasionale Pers and Perskor, in K. Tomaselli *et al.* (eds), *Narrating the Crisis: Hegemony and the South African Press*, pp.118-131.

<sup>43</sup> Anoniem, Reis na Maan op die Doek, *Die Burger*, 1969-07-25, p.2.

landing.<sup>44</sup> ‘South Africa demands TV’<sup>45</sup>; ‘The people want TV’<sup>46</sup> and ‘We need TV Now’<sup>47</sup>, echoed other headlines.

A front-page article of the *Rand Daily Mail*<sup>48</sup> argued that, through television, the moon landing had drawn the world closer together than ever before. The fact that South Africa was left out of this close knit community, was due to the ‘deprivation which people of South Africa have suffered and must still suffer because we have a Government which cannot adapt itself to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in this and many other ways.’<sup>49</sup> The article added that, while the government continued to pretend that the public did not want television, the public *did*, in fact, mind about television’s conspicuous absence in South Africa.

Even worse: television’s absence in the South African public’s modern, industrialised home country had become acutely embarrassing. According to the *Sunday Times*, a Cape Town newspaper had telephoned the wife of Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins for an interview. During the conversation, it was mentioned that South Africa did not have television, to which Patricia Collins replied: ‘Now who would have thought of that?’<sup>50</sup> South Africa’s isolation and humiliation at not being part of the progressive television nations were thus carried right into the home of one of the Western world’s greatest heroes: a person who embodied that very scientific progress that South Africans felt they couldn’t be a part of without television.

In the weeks following the moon landing, the South African public like never before became very vocal about television’s absence. Numerous letters from the public were printed in newspapers. While some did uphold the view that television would be harmful<sup>51</sup>, most lauded the medium as a great invention. In his letter to the *Cape*

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<sup>44</sup> M. Smith, S.A. Deprived of Seeing on TV ‘Greatest Human Event’, *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-20, p.3.

<sup>45</sup> Anonym, South Africa Demands TV, *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> Anonym, The People Want TV, *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, p.16.

<sup>47</sup> Anonym, We Need TV Now, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-26, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> The *Rand Daily Mail* was an open supporter of UP policy and of television.

<sup>49</sup> Anonym, We Need TV Now, *Rand Daily Mail*, 1969-07-26, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Anonym, South Africa Demands TV, *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> See for example H. V. Becker, Letter to the Editor: Better off without Television, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-23, p.14.

*Argus*<sup>52</sup>, Shrimpton summarised the growing feeling of seclusion and resentment among South Africans:

Sir – Man on the moon seen by millions around the world. What an achievement! Yet unfortunately we in South Africa were denied the privilege of fully participating in those historic moments. Surely it is of regret to the majority of South Africans that in our own and the world's development the introduction of television here is still a pie in the sky. What have we missed, what are we missing, what will we miss?<sup>53</sup>

Polls were conducted in the streets. Some people were not convinced that television would not contain 'rubbish'<sup>54</sup>, but others were more enthusiastic: 'Television is essential to keep up with world events', argued Miss Hillary Wilson, and 'We are entitled to have television', demanded Mr Dudley Johnson.<sup>55</sup>

Two days after the moon landing, *Cape Argus* columnist The Wanderer launched a poll: 'Television, Yes or No?'<sup>56</sup> Readers were invited to post or deliver their replies to the *Cape Argus* offices, and for two weeks, thousands of replies poured in. The Wanderer announced the results on 7 August 1969: of the 9642 votes received, only 327 (4%) said 'no' to television. Although the poll only represented those *Cape Argus* readers in the Cape Province (particularly Cape Town) who actually partook in the survey, it did give some indication of public interest in television.<sup>57</sup>

The government, however, did not seem to bow to the pressure, and Minister Basie van Rensburg declared that the government had not changed its official position on television. He did add that television might be introduced within a few years, if it would be in the best interests of South Africa and it could be done in such a way that the disadvantages were restricted.<sup>58</sup> But despite his seeming reluctance to introduce television, Van Rensburg had already requested the SABC's expert information on all aspects of a possible South African television service soon after he became Minister of Posts and Telegraphs in 1968. In 1969 he gave the SABC a comprehensive

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<sup>52</sup> Like most English newspapers in the 1960s, the *Cape Argus* supported the NP's opposition.

<sup>53</sup> M. L. Shrimpton, Letter to the Editor: We Need TV, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-23, p.14.

<sup>54</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, p.18.

<sup>55</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1969-07-27, pp.18-19.

<sup>56</sup> The Wanderer (pseud.), Talk at the Tavern of the Seas, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-23, p.11.

<sup>57</sup> The Wanderer (pseud.), Talk at the Tavern of the Seas, *Cape Argus*, 1969-08-07, p.17.

<sup>58</sup> The Argus Correspondent, Standpoint on TV Unchanged, *Cape Argus*, 1969-07-29, p.2.

questionnaire on television. Soon afterwards, Van Rensburg and State President J. J. Fouché appointed an official commission to investigate television.<sup>59</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The government's decision to establish television was not a complete turnabout of policy. Even as the parliamentary television debates reached a climax in the 1960s, the seeds that would make television essential and inevitable in South Africa were already being sown. Firstly, a rift in the ruling party affected its former united front against television. Secondly, a shift in identity among white South Africans made the isolation brought about by television's absence more poignant and humiliating than it had been in previous years. These two factors created the socio-political atmosphere in which television would become more acceptable to both the public and the ruling party by the end of the 1960s.

Within this atmosphere, two factors served to necessitate television in South Africa. Television satellites made it possible to receive overseas broadcasts directly, without the approval of the government. This threatened the NP's control over the broadcast media and urged the consideration, at least, of a state controlled South African television service. The second factor served as the catalyst for public debate and the government's investigation into television. When 600 million viewers worldwide shared simultaneously in the moon landing through television, South Africans were acutely aware that they were excluded from this modern community. Like never before, the public made its voice for television heard, and the arguments *for* the medium outweighed those *against*.

These factors did not immediately lead to the introduction of television. But the government, faced with the possibilities of losing control over broadcast media and support over television, made a significant step towards television. In December 1969, the NP appointed the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television. It was the first official investigation into television, and would directly lead to the government's announcement that television would be introduced.

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<sup>59</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.1.

V

**THE MEYER COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

‘Is there any reason why a highly developed country like South Africa should decide in advance to keep a new technical development of any kind out of the country?’<sup>1</sup>

*- Meyer Commission Report, 1971*

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<sup>1</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

## 1. Introduction

Five months after the moon landing, on 15 December 1969, the South African government appointed the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television, which would be chaired by television's erstwhile enemy, SABC and Broederbond chairman Piet Meyer. The Commission was asked to make recommendations about the desirability and nature of a television service for South Africa.

Although this was a welcome step towards the possible introduction of television, not everybody applauded the appointment. According to opposition members from the UP and the PP, the fact that the Commission had to decide whether or not South Africa should get television was a waste of time and taxpayers' money. UP member E. G. Malan accused the NP of being so internally divided that they could not make a decision themselves, even though television was clearly a desirable medium. Opposition members were furthermore not impressed by the Commission's points of reference and composition, and complained about its slowness, methods and secrecy.<sup>2</sup>

Resistance also came from Albert Hertzog and his newly formed HNP, who had not changed their position on television's undesirability. Hertzog suggested that the NP had already decided to introduce the 'little bioscope' and that the Commission was merely a formality.<sup>3</sup>

The two opposition sides – the UP and PP on the one, and the HNP on the other – therefore had different reasons to criticise the Commission. While the one thought the Commission was meant to advise and influence the government on a subject that actually needed no further discussion, the other believed that the Commission was just a matter of red tape, and a mouthpiece of the government. Both sides agreed, however, that the Meyer Commission was a waste of time and money. Historian Saul Dubow echoes some of these concerns about commissions of inquiry: 'Governments often appoint commissions as a way of testing the political climate or, more cynically,

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<sup>2</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, cols. 818-822; RSA, *Hansard* 29, 1970-08-10, cols. 1381-1417.

<sup>3</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, cols. 828-829.

to defer action on tricky problems.’<sup>4</sup> In other words, according to Dubow, commissions give government a chance to ‘gain time’, even though the commission might tell them what they already know, or would like to hear.

Nevertheless, the NP government insisted that the matter of television should be thoroughly investigated by a body of experts so that South Africa could, if it did get television, decide on the best technology and structures right from the start. A commission, they argued, would prevent South Africa from making the same mistakes other countries had made when they introduced television.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television**

### **a. Composition**

The Commission consisted of thirteen prominent figures in South African cultural life. Among the commission members were H. B. Thom, Chairman of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies, FAK); P. J. Riekert, advisor to the Prime Minister; S. M. Naudé, president of the CSIR; N. Sieberhagen, rector of the University College of the Western Cape and former chair of the South African Teachers’ Union; O. P. F. Horwood, the president of the University of Natal Athletic Union and principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Natal; Bishop R. W. F. Cowdry, Anglican Assistant Bishop of Grahamstown; and G. J. Beukes, member of the Board for Art and Humanities of the South African Academy.<sup>6</sup>

The opposition was critical of the commission’s make-up: of the thirteen members, only four were English-speaking. This, argued UP member E. G. Malan, was not representative of and thus not fair to both sections of the (white) South African population. What is more, a number of the Afrikaans members were also members of the Broederbond, and Horwood, although English-speaking, was an NP senator. Far

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<sup>4</sup> S. Dubow, Introduction, in S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa’s 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities*, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-09, col. 554.

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Meyer, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television, p.v; P. J. Gibson (ed.), *Who’s Who in South Africa*, 1969, pp.659, 936, 793, 699, 866, 478; T. Roberts (ed.), *Who’s Who in South Africa*, 1971, pp.153, 699.

from being an objective body, Malan contended, the Commission was simply appointed from the ranks of the NP's close supporters.<sup>7</sup> Instead of independent and authoritative recommendations, these supporters would therefore merely say what the government already knew and wanted to hear. Malan's argument mirrored Hertzog's remark that the Commission was just a formality that would reflect views that the government had already formed for itself. But according to Hertzog, the NP had already made up its mind about television. The UP, on the other hand, suggested that the NP was too weak to make up its own mind and therefore needed guidance. By appointing the Commission from within its own ranks, however, the NP ensured that the Commission's recommendations would fall within the framework of NP ideology and policies.

Malan continued: not only was the English population and the opposition misrepresented, but the commission had no members to represent the industries that would be most affected by television, namely the press, the advertising industry, and the entertainment and sports industries. Nor were there any women on the commission. Malan believed this was a great oversight: 'Surely the mothers of South Africa are the people really to decide on the effect of television on family life.'<sup>8</sup>

### **b. Points of reference**

President J. J. Fouché's mandate to the commission included nine points of reference to guide the research and recommendations, namely the composition of the population; television's potential harmful influence on the public; its consequences for the press, film and entertainment industries; the cost of a country-wide service and its influence on the national economy; television's effects on manpower; the effects of technological advancements (particularly satellite broadcasts) if a television service were or were *not* introduced; technical standards for television sets; the most appropriate type of service (technically and economically); and whether the service would be able to provide enough high-quality television programmes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, col. 819.

<sup>8</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, col. 819.

<sup>9</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.v-vi.

The government gave the commission full authority to decide whom to interview, as well as unlimited access to government documents needed to conduct the research. Nevertheless, the state president's mandate stipulated a very specific framework for a possible television service. If television was introduced, it would have to be under the state's control. Furthermore, the service would have to be bilingual for white people and multilingual for black people. It could not supplant the press and film industry – in other words, it could not take over the functions of these industries. Instead, it had to complement these roles of informing, educating and entertaining. It could also not be independent from radio, but had to be integrated with the existing radio service. Lastly, South African television would have to be a cultural service with strict control over television programmes. In other words, television programmes would have to contribute to the cultural life of South Africans, and not just provide cheap entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

The points of reference reflected the fears and concerns about the effects on television on South African society. In the television debates, these concerns were some of the main reasons given by the NP government for television's absence in the country.<sup>11</sup> The appointment of the commission was the first attempt at an official investigation into these concerns.

### **c. Research**

The commission's first meeting took place on 10 February 1970 – two months after its appointment. Here, the members compiled a comprehensive questionnaire that they then sent out to experts in fields related to and influenced by television, including education, performance arts, the press, film and advertising industries and the electronics and manufacturing industries. The questionnaire was sent out with an invitation to submit a memorandum covering the issues on the questionnaire, as well as any other aspects *not* dealt with on the survey. This invitation also went out to 125 organisations representing public opinion, such as churches, cultural organisations,

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<sup>10</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vi.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter III, pp.66-91.

women's organisations, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns<sup>12</sup> and the English Academy.<sup>13</sup>

According to the commission, the organisations approached were 'representative of all sectors of public opinion and all experts and interested groups in the country'<sup>14</sup>. This 'public', however, was meant to consist of the white Christian population, just as Malan spoke of the 'two sectors of South African society' to be Afrikaans- and English-speaking white people. No mention was made of other cultural or religious groups.

After receiving 95 memoranda and a few additional interviews, the commission made their recommendations. Their report was a comprehensive, nine-chapter document that detailed the worldwide development of television, the medium's role in society, and recommendations for a South African television service – all within the framework of the government's terms of reference.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the questionnaires, Commission members made their own investigations. Chairman P. J. Meyer travelled to Australia, Japan, the USA, Canada, Brazil and Argentina to discuss issues such as management, administration and finances with leading television experts. Commission secretary J. H. T. Schutte, who was also the SABC Director of Programmes, researched programme aspects, particularly with regard to colour broadcasts.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. The Commission's report and recommendations**

#### **a. Television or not?**

The commission found that a South African television service had not only become technically possible, but indeed a necessity. To reach this conclusion, the commission

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<sup>12</sup> The South African Academy for Science and Culture

<sup>13</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>14</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>15</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>16</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7.

asked the question: ‘Does South Africa need an additional medium of communication?’<sup>17</sup>

The question may rightly be asked ... whether South Africa with its modern postal, telegraph and telephone systems, with its extensive land, sea and air transport system, with its highly developed school system, with its extensive press, film and radio industries, and with its first-rate theatre and entertainment industry, has any justifiable need for an additional medium of communication, namely television. There can be no doubt that, without any one of the above-mentioned systems, no developed country or society would be able to take its place and play its part with any distinction in the modern world.<sup>18</sup>

But in 1969 it had become clear that none of these modern, extensive and first-rate communication systems had been able to bring the miracle of the moon landing into South African living rooms. The best South Africans could do was to listen on the radio, fly overseas to watch it on television, or wait to see recorded footage afterwards.<sup>19</sup>

The commission was aware of this. They proposed another question: ‘Is there any reason why a highly developed country like South Africa should decide in advance to keep a new technical development of any kind out of the country?’<sup>20</sup> The implied answer was ‘no’. Since its early development, television technology had evolved into a medium that was not merely an extension of other media like radio and the cinema, but a unique form of communication in its own right. The development of colour television also meant that the television of the 1970s was light years away from the experimental medium of the 1930s.

South Africa, the commission argued, was actually in a very good position to introduce television in the 1970s. Unlike countries that had launched television services in previous decades, South Africa would be able to conduct thorough scientific research into the problems of television, as experienced in other countries, *before* its introduction.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>18</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter IV, pp.111-119.

<sup>20</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>21</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.15.

Technically, South Africa also had an advantage. In other countries, the television service had to experience the growing pains of a very young medium and adapt to its technical limitations and developments. This aspect was perhaps most visible in terms of colour television. Countries that had introduced television when only black-and-white broadcasts were possible, had television sets that could only receive monochrome transmissions. When colour television was developed, these sets had to be replaced to receive colour broadcasts. This was one of the reasons offered by the NP for television's absence in the 1950s and 1960s: that television technology was still developing, and that it would cost large amounts to keep up with the developments.<sup>22</sup> By introducing television long after colour television had become a reality, the Commission pointed out, South Africa would be able to manufacture and trade colour-compatible sets right from the start.

This was a very valid point. Nevertheless, it would seem that the Commission was trying to vindicate the NP's long delay in introducing television and also their seemingly sudden decision to change their policy on television. The NP was neither neglectful nor fickle, as its critics had suggested. In truth, the Commission implied, the NP had been sensible to wait so long for television, and by considering television at that point, was wise to recognise that the time for television had become ripe.<sup>23</sup>

The Commission was also aware of the fact that government control over broadcasting was in jeopardy from outside influences:

In a world rapidly approaching a stage where direct reception of television transmissions from overseas sources via satellites will become a reality ... South Africa must have its own television service in order to nurture and strengthen its own spiritual roots, to foster respect and love for its own spiritual heritage and to protect and project the South African way of life, as it has developed here in its historical context.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter III, p.75.

<sup>23</sup> This reasoning is consistent with the definition of ideology, according to which the ruling ideology does not recognise inconsistencies, but rather finds the fault somewhere else: in this case, it was not inconsistent of the NP to change their policy on television. Instead, it was television's role in NP ideology that changed. See 'Definition of concepts', p.23.

<sup>24</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

Television could therefore play a positive role in the country's religious, spiritual, cultural, social and economic life, provided that the television service was of a high quality. The commission felt strongly that television could, and should, be used for education. In a formal sense, it would make a useful teaching tool in schools and other education institutions. But it would also serve as an informal teaching tool by fostering pride in the identities and cultures of the different cultural groups in South Africa.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from education, television would also have a good impact on recreation. According to the commission, the fact that South Africa was becoming a technological society meant that people would have more free time on their hands. If people were then able to watch high-quality television programmes in their spare time, it could enrich them – or, as the commission put it, 'it could add tremendously to the fullness and variety of life'<sup>26</sup>.

In light of growing global criticism against South Africa's apartheid policies, the recommendation that television be used as a cultural and educational tool was very significant. For many years, NP members had been contesting television's benefits as a cultural and educational tool as exaggerated or untrue. But by the end of the 1960s, it had become clear that television was necessary and inevitable if the NP government wanted to keep control over South Africa's broadcast media. Just like the government had installed FM radio in the early 1960s to counter outside influences, it would now have to introduce television to ensure that anti-apartheid messages did not enter South African homes. A national television service could be used as a tool to support and propagate the NP's ideologies and policies in an attempt to counter the criticism from outside.

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<sup>25</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

### **b. The nature of a South African television service**

To ensure the high quality of a television service, the commission recommended specific requirements. Firstly, in line with the government's mandate, the commission proposed a state controlled television service for South Africa.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the introduction of the service should be entrusted to the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). This would be in line with the 1936 Broadcasting Act, which authorised the SABC to use the radio airwaves for broadcasting purposes – not only for radio, but also for television.<sup>28</sup> The SABC would introduce the new medium as an integrated radio and television service, which meant that a large proportion of the existing radio infrastructure could also be used for television. As the SABC was a state controlled corporation, entrusting them with the television service would mean that the government could have more control over the medium. It would also mean that television would not be run by companies or private individuals who 'would run the service for private gain'<sup>29</sup>.

Thirdly, the service should uphold and enrich the country's Christian values, its national identity and the culture and social structure of each community. This would be ensured through 'wholesome and edifying'<sup>30</sup> entertainment and reliable, objective information. It would also be done by encouraging local creative talent and by promoting different cultures and cooperation between cultural groups. To this effect, the Broadcasting Act would have to be amended to provide that the television service had a Christian character.<sup>31</sup>

To ensure that the above requirements were upheld, the television service should be subject to strict control exercised by the SABC, the viewer community and Parliament.

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<sup>27</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.48.

<sup>28</sup> President's Office, No. 22 of 1936: *The Broadcasting Act*, 1936-06-16, p.208.

<sup>29</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>31</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.16, 18-19.

The above recommendations could come as no surprise, as they merely reflected the framework specified in the State President's mandate: that the South African television service should be state controlled, that radio and television should be integrated and that the television service should be a strictly controlled service that offered wholesome cultural entertainment.

### **c. Implementation phases**

According to the commission, the South African television service had to be implemented in different phases. The first phase would see a combined Afrikaans and English service for white people in the main white population centres, namely the Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Rustenburg, Potchefstroom, Middelburg (Transvaal), Klerksdorp, Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, the Free State Goldfields, Kimberley, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, the Natal South Coast, the Cape Peninsula, the Boland, East London and Port Elizabeth. This would provide coverage for about 75% of the white population, 60% of the coloured population and 75% of the Asian population.<sup>32</sup>

As soon as that service was in place, a Sotho and Zulu service for black people would be launched in the Witwatersrand area. In the second phase, the white service would split into two equal services: one in English and one in Afrikaans. The black service would be extended to Durban (in Zulu) and the Eastern Cape (in Xhosa).<sup>33</sup>

In the television debates, the opposition argued that television would be affordable if it was introduced in the main urban centres first. However, the NP repeatedly stated that if television was to come to South Africa, it could be nothing less than a national service that covered the whole country. This would be much too expensive, the NP argued, and as such television could not even be considered.<sup>34</sup> But by the 1970s, television had become necessary, and the Commission's recommendation implied that it would be wise to introduce television only in the main centres after all. This turnabout strengthens the argument that the obstacles of cost and geographical consequences did not create insurmountable problems, but in the 1950s and 1960s

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<sup>32</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.19-22.

<sup>33</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.50-51.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter III, p.70.

really served as excuses for a government that had no desire to introduce a medium that held, at that stage, no value for them. When television *did* become a valuable and necessary tool, the Commission admitted that the above-mentioned obstacles were not, in fact, so big after all.

#### **d. Technical specifications**

One of the most important technical issues was the choice between a colour or a black-and-white television service. The Meyer Commission recommended that the South African service should be a colour service that can also be received on black-and-white sets. This was not merely a matter of adopting the latest technical developments, but was to a great extent also an economic consideration.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that introducing a colour system from the outset would be more expensive than starting with monochrome broadcasts, because colour television equipment and its maintenance were much more complicated and expensive. Furthermore, many people would not be able to afford colour television sets, while black-and-white sets were far cheaper. However, the Commission realised that black-and-white television would eventually be phased out worldwide, and it would cost far more to *upgrade* to a colour system after a few years of black-and-white television. It would cost an estimated R6 000 000 less to introduce and maintain black-and-white system. But then, after a few years, it would cost about R24 500 000 to upgrade to colour. The commission argued that it would be far more economical to introduce a colour system, but that it had to be receivable on monochrome sets without compromising picture quality. In this way, the public could choose whether to buy colour sets or cheaper, black-and-white sets.<sup>36</sup>

The specific colour system recommended was the Phase Alternating Line (PAL) System. The SABC, Council for Scientific Industrial Research (CSIR) and Post Office all found this system superior to the USA's National Television Standards

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<sup>35</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

<sup>36</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

Committee (NTSC) and France's Sequential Couleur Avec Memoire (Sequential Colour with memory, SECAM) systems.<sup>37</sup>

Other technical considerations were the building of studios and technical facilities. The commission proposed that these initially be provided in Johannesburg only, and that studios should later be built in Cape Town, Durban and the Eastern Cape. Mobile units would handle outside broadcasts in other parts of the country. To pick up satellite programmes from other countries, South Africa should erect a satellite ground station. The commission recommended that while the Department of Posts and Telegraphs turn their attention to the erection of such a station, the SABC should build its own station, so that it could link up with the Eurovision network on a 24-hour basis.<sup>38</sup>

#### **e. Financing**

Before the television service could be launched, a number of transmitter stations, studio facilities and mobile units had to be built and equipped. The commission foresaw the need for sixteen high-power and six low-power transmitter stations, each of which would have one transmitter for broadcasting a combined English and Afrikaans channel. Three of the stations would have transmitters for a black service. Studio facilities would be built in Johannesburg (for the white and black services) and Cape Town (for the white service). This would cost an estimated R32 256 000 for the white service and R16 500 000 for the black service. The erection of a satellite ground station would cost a further R1 500 000.<sup>39</sup>

After broadcasts began, more transmitter stations would have to be built. Although the use of existing radio equipment would save a lot of money, the capital outlay was still enormous. To reduce this, the commission proposed that sales tax on television sets, as well as excise and import taxes on sets and components, be paid over to the

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<sup>37</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.23.

<sup>38</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.23-24.

<sup>39</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

SABC. This should be done until the service showed a profit, but not for more than ten years.<sup>40</sup>

Further financing should be received from a yearly licence fee as well as from spot advertising. The commission made very specific recommendations regarding advertising to ensure that programmes would remain free from pressure by influential advertisers, and that the television service would maintain a high standard. Only spot advertisements before and after programmes should be allowed – that meant no advertisement breaks *during* programmes, and no sponsored programmes. Advertising time should only take up 10% of total broadcasting time, except on Sundays, when there would be no advertising at all. Furthermore, advertising spots should be allocated on a rotational basis: in other words, advertising spots and rates should not be determined by viewer ratings. This was to ensure that advertisers did not influence which programmes were shown when. Preference should be given to local products and advertising copy. Lastly, the commission recommended that the Association of Accredited Practitioners in Advertising should receive less advertising commission on spot advertisements, since these would be very limited.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the recommended revenue from the abovementioned sources, the television service would still make a loss in its first few years. The commission estimated this loss at R5 300 000 in the first year of the service for white people, but foresaw that this loss would be eradicated after five years.<sup>42</sup>

The black service would suffer a loss of R5 186 000 in the first year. However, it would take longer than the white service to break even, because only a small percentage of the black population would be able to buy television sets, and many did not have the electricity needed to use television sets.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the commission argued, the television service should not receive a yearly government grant. This grant would after all consist of taxpayers' money, and the commission felt that it would 'impose unduly heavy burdens on White taxpayers.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.30, 56.

<sup>41</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>42</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>43</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.31.

<sup>44</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.56.

#### **4. The government's announcement**

The Meyer Commission handed their report to the State President in early 1971. On 27 April 1971, Minister of National Education<sup>45</sup> J. van der Spuy announced: 'The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television has been accepted by the Cabinet in its essentials. The Cabinet has also approved in principle the introduction of state controlled television service for South Africa...'<sup>46</sup> After decades of debates, television was finally on its way.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Appointing the Meyer Commission was a significant step for the government, even if it was not yet a formal announcement that television would be introduced. The government recognised that, if it wanted to keep its political support as well as its control over the media, television could no longer be kept at bay. For official confirmation of this realisation, the government appointed the Meyer Commission.

The Meyer Commission was not only meant to confirm that television should indeed be introduced, but also to make further recommendations about the nature of a South African television service. It is unlikely that the NP would have accepted any suggestions that did not fall within their political, social and economic policies: although they realised that they would have to introduce television to maintain their position, they were still aware of the medium's possible impact on their position. Therefore, in order to get expert advice that fell within their ideology and which they could easily accept, the NP appointed a commission made up from their own ranks.

To further ensure that the Meyer Commission's recommendations were acceptable, the government gave them a specific framework for television. This framework

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<sup>45</sup> After the death of Minister M. C. G. J. van Rensburg at the end of 1970, it was decided that the SABC and all broadcasting matters should be administered by the Minister of National Education instead of the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. See SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7. Also see Chapter VII, p.172.

<sup>46</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 35, 1971-04-27, col. 5288.

precluded some of the main, possibly unacceptable suggestions, for example a commercial television service with little or no state control.

The framework, as well as the fact that the Commission members were NP supporters, raised valid questions about the body's independence. Indeed, as UP member E. G. Malan predicted, many of the Commission's recommendations confirmed NP views and supported government actions. By finding that television had at last become unavoidable, the Commission upheld the NP's dictum from the late 1960s that television would be introduced if and when it had become essential and inevitable.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Commission implied, the NP had actually been wise in postponing the introduction of television, and they were now even wiser in recognising that its time had finally arrived.

Apart from the specific framework given by the NP, there were also unspoken aspects of NP policy that were supported by the Meyer Commission's recommendations. This formed the basic ideology on which the Commission was based, and which would determine South African television once it was introduced. Firstly, the extent of the Commission's research showed which elements were considered to be part of South African society: mostly white Christians, especially Afrikaners. Secondly, in its recommendations there was a basic understanding that a South African television service would be segregated along racial lines, and that the service should have a Christian character. No other possibilities were contemplated.

It can be argued – as it was by the opposition – that the Meyer Commission was not necessary at all. The fact that the Commission was appointed in the first place showed that the NP had already made significant changes in its television policy. And by saying what the government wanted or already expected to hear, the Meyer Commission may well have been a formality. In fact, even though the government accepted the Commission's essential recommendations, it ordered a similar investigation once the planning for television got underway.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the Commission was the first formal investigation into television and followed the

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<sup>47</sup> See Chapter III, p.97 and Chapter IV, p.105.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter VI, p.139.

example of other countries that had appointed similar commissions and committees, including the United Kingdom and Australia.<sup>49</sup>

However, even if the government did not need to rely on the Commission to determine its television policy, the Commission and its mandate and recommendations reveal a lot about the ideology that would eventually determine South African television. If the Meyer Commission was not essential for its recommendations, it is definitely of value for the historian examining South African television.

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<sup>49</sup> See for example BBC, 'History of the BBC'. Internet: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/story/index.shtml>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-09-24; A. Moran, Australia, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.173.

VI  
PREPARING FOR TELEVISION,  
1971-1975



**Figure 13:** 'Progress' by Bob Connolly.  
**Source:** *Rand Daily Mail*, 1971-4-29, p.22.

## **1. Introduction**

Shortly after the announcement of television's introduction, the Television Project was launched. The project was aimed at getting South Africa ready for television and consisted of a number of planning and preparation stages. Firstly, the relevant bodies had to plan the South African service very carefully. Secondly, the actual preparations had to get underway: a television infrastructure had to be built, staff had to be trained and programmes had to be procured. Thirdly, as part of government policy, a local television manufacturing industry had to be created and efficiently managed. While the structures and policies were put into place, the South African public had to be informed of the different aspects that would directly influence their television experience: what to consider when buying sets and antennas, how and where to install them, and what to expect from the television service. Lastly, just before South African television officially began, the new service had to be tested with actual test transmissions.

By the time that South Africa started preparing for its first television service, many industrialised countries had had the medium for nearly twenty years. In the United Kingdom and the United States, television was already more than thirty years old. But in its report, the Meyer Commission justified South Africa's long wait: by only introducing television in the 1970s, South Africa would be able to use the best technology right from the beginning.

The government's two-decade-long reluctance to allow television would indeed have an impact on South African television, and this already became clear in the five years before the service was launched. While it is true that South Africa could choose the best technology for its television service, the long wait would also have its disadvantages: where many other countries had had the opportunity to experiment with television and adapt to new technology more gradually, South Africa would have to build most of its facilities within a few years. The preparation phase would therefore answer interesting questions about the government's long refusal: would the NP's hesitance benefit South Africa now that television was to be introduced, or did it actually create more obstacles?

The preparation phase also reveals many of the ideologies that underpinned South African government, society and the media during the 1970s. It is during this phase than many decisions were made that would influence South African television for many years.

## **2. Government involvement in the television project**

From the start of the planning phase, it was clear that the government would be closely involved. A Cabinet Committee consisting of a number of ministers, including Defence Minister P. W. Botha, would oversee and coordinate the planning phase. Furthermore, the government had already shown a new perspective on broadcasting by handing the portfolio to the Minister of National Education in 1970. Radio and especially television broadcasting was not seen as a mere technical invention and communications tool that fit under the wing of Posts and Telegraphs. Instead, it was now acknowledged as a cultural and educational institution with a powerful influence on the community.<sup>1</sup>

## **3. Planning for television**

### **a. The Technical Advisory Committee**

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was appointed to assist the SABC and the government in planning the general character of the television service, particularly on technical, scientific and financial aspects. Membership was made up of a number of organisations, including the SABC, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the Department of Education.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the most significant matters that enjoyed the TAC's attention were the decision on which colour television system South Africa should use; the socio-

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<sup>1</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.7.

cultural implications of television; the availability, recruitment and training of technical staff; and the economic and financial effects of television.<sup>3</sup>

Many of these topics had already been covered in the Meyer Commission's report. However, the Meyer Commission's report was intended as a research project through which the government could make an informed decision on whether or not to introduce television, and on how a South African service *could* and *should* look and operate. The TAC's research was an active planning process that laid the groundwork for how South African Television actually *would* look. Nevertheless, many of the TAC's investigations were repetitions of the Commission's research.

### **i. Television system**

In terms of the colour system, the government's hesitance to introduce television had an advantage. Whereas other countries had to experiment with technology and colour systems, South Africa was able to avoid the costs and mistakes of these experiments by choosing the most suitable system right from the start.

Although the Meyer Commission had already recommended the PAL system, the first matter on the TAC's agenda was to determine which colour system (PAL, SECAM or NTSC) would be the most suitable for South African television. First of all, the TAC eliminated the American NTSC system after finding its counterparts technically superior. And although the PAL and SECAM systems would both perform well under unstable technical circumstances, PAL was found to be more suitable for South Africa's mountainous terrain and sparse population distribution. Furthermore, more industrial countries were using PAL than SECAM, which meant that the PAL technique offered South Africa a bigger pool of manufacturers and experts. In fact, of all South Africa's major trade partners, France was the only one to use SECAM.<sup>4</sup> The TAC therefore upheld the Meyer Commission's recommendation, and on 28

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<sup>3</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, pp.7-8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.6; Suid-Afrikaanse Argiefbewaarplek (SAB), Pretoria: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, pp.1-6: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegniese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Televisiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

<sup>4</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, pp.1-2: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegniese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Televisiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

November 1971, the government announced the adoption of the PAL colour system for South African Television.<sup>5</sup>

## ii. The socio-cultural impact of television

In the 1960s, the possible adverse effects on society and South African culture were one of the government's main excuses for not establishing television. Even though television had become inevitable by the 1970s, the socio-cultural impact remained a big concern and the matter was referred to a special sub-committee consisting of three representatives, one each from the SABC, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Department of National Education. The sub-committee recommended that a comprehensive research project into television's influence on South Africa's socio-cultural life be launched as soon as possible.<sup>6</sup>

The research project would be entrusted to the HSRC, who would start their investigation with a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural life in South Africa. This would include a general study of specific values and habits of different social terrains, for example recreation, the use of existing mass media, daily habits, and attitudes towards authority, religion and education. When television was introduced, the study would be continued to determine whether, where and how changes occurred. Initially, the project would be limited to the white population, and once the black television service was launched, the research would be extended. The research would be conducted through questionnaires and other scientific measuring instruments.<sup>7</sup> Once again, this finding confirmed a recommendation by the Meyer Commission.<sup>8</sup>

South Africa was not the only country where the socio-cultural impacts of television were a concern. The effects of on-screen violence on audiences, for example, has for

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<sup>5</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.8.

<sup>6</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, p.3: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegnieese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Telesiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

<sup>7</sup> SAB, H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/1, pp.1-4: Memorandum vir die Kabinetskomitee vir Televisie (Bylaag F) 1972-02-15.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.16.

many decades been a field of study that includes a number of research techniques.<sup>9</sup> However, by waiting as long as it did to introduce television, South Africa had a unique advantage over the other television nations. With no precedent, other countries had to wait until the effects of television had become apparent before the socio-cultural influence could be studied. South Africa, on the other hand, was able to use the experiences of other countries to investigate the possible effects *before* its own television service was introduced.

### **b. A television service for the black population**

From the outset, it was clear that South African Television was to be segregated. A main recommendation of the Meyer Commission was that television should be introduced in two stages: Phase One would entail the introduction of a combined channel for Afrikaans and English programmes, followed by a single-channel service in Sotho and Zulu for the Witwatersrand area. There would thus be television for both the white and black populations right from the first phase. Phase Two would involve separate channels for English and Afrikaans, and the extension of the black service to Durban and the Eastern Cape. However, during the planning and preparation stage, the phases were interpreted differently, so that Phase One meant the introduction of an Afrikaans and English service for white South Africans, and Phase Two was the launch of a black television service.<sup>10</sup>

The SABC argued that Phase Two was a very distinct stage with its own considerations and problems. At the request of the Cabinet, the SABC conducted research into the matter of a black television service. The report, which was presented in August 1973, outlined the special considerations and problems of the service and made recommendations for the planning and introduction of Phase Two.<sup>11</sup>

According to the SABC, there were a number of reasons why the black service could not be launched simultaneously with the white service. One of the most important

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<sup>9</sup> M. Tulloch & J. Tulloch, Violence on Television, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, pp.2449-2453.

<sup>10</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-31: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>11</sup> SAB, Pretoria: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-31: SAUK ondersoek (onderneem op versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

obstacles was the scarcity of electrical power. Less than 40% of the black population would be covered by the initial eighteen transmitters planned for Phase One. But only 7% of the total black population in South Africa had electricity in their homes – including those that lived in rooms in white neighbourhoods. Furthermore, not all of those who did have electricity would buy television sets. This was a big hurdle. A black television service would cost nearly as much as the white service, but with very little planned income from black viewers' licenses, the SABC would suffer great financial losses from a black television service.<sup>12</sup> Having one service for all, or even the same programmes in different languages, was however out of the question.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the SABC maintained that Phase Two was neither impossible nor undesirable. It argued that a high percentage of the black viewing population would be the most influential and literate people among black South Africans. Through television, therefore, the messages and the uplifting cultural effect the government and SABC intended to convey could reach non-viewers indirectly. Moreover, there was a possibility that the introduction of black television would speed up the provision of electricity, if people who were eager to watch television applied and paid for electrical power.<sup>14</sup>

Another obstacle was the training of staff. For Phase One, training was taking place in a special studio and with foreign instructors. The amount of staff trained in this way was barely enough to provide for the white television service, and would not be able to accommodate the staff for Phase Two. A separate training studio would therefore have to be prepared for this phase, which would take at least two years. In addition, the black staff could not be trained by foreign experts. According to the SABC, black personnel had to be trained in more than just the techniques of programme production: they had to be instructed on the SABC's specific programme policy, which fit in with South Africa's policies on, among others, separate development. Foreign instructors would not understand these particular South African policies and circumstances and therefore the training of black staff could only be done by white

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<sup>12</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-2: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>13</sup> See below, p.144.

<sup>14</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-2: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

South Africans. Unfortunately, these potential white South African instructors were still undergoing training themselves. Furthermore, the black service would have to be planned out by white SABC personnel, but these staff members were occupied with planning and preparing for the white service.<sup>15</sup>

The manufacturing of television sets caused another problem. According to the SABC, manufacturers were already facing troubles with producing enough sets for the start of transmissions. If a black service was to start at the same time as the white service, there would be an even bigger demand, which would worsen the problem.<sup>16</sup>

‘Suitable’ programme material for Phase Two was very scarce. There had to be a different material for white and for black South Africans, because, argued the SABC, ‘the Bantu’s reception ability, and especially his interpretation of the things he sees, are different from that of the white man’s. Therefore, material that was made for white audiences would not necessarily be accepted by the Bantu.’<sup>17</sup> Apart from children’s programmes and travel programmes, little of the material that could be imported was deemed suitable for black viewers. Material that *was* readily available, like Westerns and international series such as *Sesame Street*, would be suitable for neither black nor white viewers, because in almost all these programmes ‘racial integration [was] deliberately and calculatedly propagated’<sup>18</sup>.

According to the SABC, producing local material for black people had its own problems, because there were not enough trained black artists. Dubbing imported material, even programmes judged to be suitable for black audiences, was also not seen as an ideal option. And as the SABC maintained that only the best quality service would be acceptable, it could therefore not just use white people speaking black languages, because the black audience would find it ridiculous and unrealistic. Even less suitable was the use of subtitles, as the process of simultaneously reading

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<sup>15</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.2-3: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>16</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.5: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>17</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.8: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973. (*My translation*).

<sup>18</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.8: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973. (*My translation*).

subtitles and interpreting the image on screen demanded a more advanced level of literacy, which the SABC reckoned black South African audiences did not yet possess.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the numerous obstacles, however, the SABC was adamant that a black television service should be introduced as soon as feasible, and not later than mid-1979. Initially, the service would be carried on one channel that was equally divided between the Nguni and Sotho language groups, but later, in about 1989, a second channel should be added. Each language group would then have its own channel. The service would initially broadcast for two hours daily, before viewing hours were extended to five hours per day. Because of the electricity shortage, the service would in the beginning be provided in the urban areas only.<sup>20</sup>

The SABC identified three requirements that a successful black service had to comply with. Firstly, it had to be in the black languages, and not English. Secondly, it had to carry the full spectrum of genres that any other television service had, and although educational and informative programmes had to receive special emphasis in South Africa's black television service, entertainment should not be left behind. Thirdly, the black service had to be of the same technical and programme quality as the white service, so that there would be 'no reason for anybody to believe that the black service was inferior to the white service'<sup>21</sup>. The Corporation also recommended that, unlike the white service, the black service should carry advertisements from the start, but that, like the white service, there should be no sponsored programmes. Furthermore, the SABC confirmed the Meyer Commission's recommendation that the black service should initially be equally divided between the Nguni and Sotho language groups.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.8-9: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>20</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.9-21, 31: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>21</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.10: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973 (*My translation*).

<sup>22</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.9-21: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

To make a start with programme production for the black service, the SABC recommended that the film production budgets of the Departments of Education, Bantu Administration, Information and others be supplemented to provide for black television programmes. In this way, television could further the information that each of these government departments produced anyway. The government could also help the black television project by doing everything in its power to hasten the provision of electrical power to black people.<sup>23</sup>

In 1974, the government announced its approval of Phase Two of the Television Project, and the SABC soon started its planning and preparation for a television service for black South Africans.<sup>24</sup>

The recommendations for a black television service are very revealing of state policy at the time. The NP propagated a policy of ‘separate but equal’, according to which, they argued, the different racial and ethnic groups of South Africa would receive separate services, but equal treatment. In reality, the treatment was often everything but equal. Creating different government services (for example education and health) for each racial group meant duplication of departments, staff and infrastructure, and it would cost millions of rands to ensure that all of these services were of an equal standard. This meant that, more often than not, services for white people received priority.<sup>25</sup> South African television would be no different. While the state was adamant that separate television services should be introduced for all the population groups, there was no question that white staff would be trained first, and the white television service would be introduced long before a service for black people.

The approach towards a black television service also reflected the apartheid state’s attitude towards the black population in general. It was often a paternalistic view according to which the white government could act for and on behalf of the black population. White people could determine what black peoples’ abilities and needs were, and based on that would decide what was best for the black population. In fact,

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<sup>23</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.21: SAUK Ondersoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>24</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> H. Giliomee, Die Ontwikkeling van Afrikaner-Identiteit, in H. Giliomee & H. Adam, *Afrikanermag. Opkoms & Toekoms*, pp.84-92.

this was part of the NP's fundamental apartheid ideology. Black South Africans – in fact, all Africans – were still 'cultural infants'<sup>26</sup> who needed guidance. White South Africans, on the other hand, were part of a mature nation whose responsibility it was to direct black South Africans.<sup>27</sup> This ideology was perhaps most evident in the Bantu Education Act. The Bantu Education system was introduced to teach black children the basic skills that they would need: as Prime Minister Verwoerd explained, 'to prepare Natives more effectively for their future occupations' rather than 'showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze.'<sup>28</sup> This meant that, instead of the mathematics and science taught in white schools, black children were trained in basic literacy and numeracy skills. In terms of television, the SABC determined what black people would be able to watch, what they would enjoy, and what kind of television programmes would be good and bad for them.

#### **4. Preparing for television**

The task of preparing and presenting South African television was ultimately entrusted to the SABC, who started by appointing a Television Project Committee that comprised a number of SABC directors. To help the Project Committee in planning the television service, the SABC Control Board appointed an expert team composed of local and international specialists, including programme production consultants, architects, engineers, acoustic consultants and quantity surveyors. Together, the Project Committee and the specialist team planned out the main features of the South African television service.<sup>29</sup>

Once the service was fully planned, further preparations had to be made, such as the establishment of a television infrastructure, the training and appointment of staff, and the preparation of programme material.

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<sup>26</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.71.

<sup>27</sup> H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, p.58.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.71.

<sup>29</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.7.

### **a. Building an infrastructure**

A television service would need an enormous amount of infrastructure, including studios, technical rooms, artists' facilities, décor production, outside-broadcast vehicles and electronic, electrical and mechanical equipment. By introducing television about twenty years later than most other countries, South Africa was at quite a disadvantage: while other countries had built up their television facilities over time, South Africa had given itself only five years to build a vast infrastructure. On the other hand, by waiting for technological developments to bring better equipment, South Africa was able to build a state-of-the-art infrastructure even before television broadcasting began.

Within less than five years, the SABC built the television headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg (see Figure 14), as well as additional regional facilities in Pietersburg (now Polokwane), Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. Existing facilities in Durban and Cape Town were adapted to accommodate television. Equipment to the value of millions of rands were brought from overseas, and an extensive transmitter network was erected on existing FM transmitter station sites. While the Meyer Commission had recommended that sixteen high-power transmitter stations be erected to serve the densely populated areas, the SABC built eighteen.<sup>30</sup> These stations were completed by 1974, and the next year, the SABC decided to erect a further seven high-power transmitters.<sup>31</sup> To supplement the high-power transmitters, a number of low-power transmitters<sup>32</sup>, or so-called gap-filling stations, were also erected in areas where topographical obstacles (such as mountains) created reception shadow areas.

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<sup>30</sup> These transmitter stations were erected in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Middelburg (Transvaal), Davel, Hartbeesfontein, Welverdiend, Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Theunissen, Kimberley, Alverston, Port Shepstone, Glencoe, East London, Port Elizabeth, George, Villiersdorp and Constantiaberg. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.74.

<sup>31</sup> These additional high-power stations were built in Piketberg, Grahamstown, Potgietersrust, Rustenburg, Oudtshoorn, Nelspruit and Volksrust. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

<sup>32</sup> These gap-filling transmissions were erected in Simonstown, Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Durbanville, Table Mountain, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Overport (Durban), Bluff (Durban), Newcastle, Port Elizabeth, Menlo Park (Pretoria), Suidrand (Kroonstad), Knysna, Hout Bay, Heidelberg, Sea Point, and Welgemoed. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.68; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

Most of these gap-filling stations were also completed by 1974. Together, the high- and low-power stations covered nearly 80% of the white South African population.<sup>33</sup>

In 1975, the television studios and facilities were ready to be put to use. This meant that the SABC could start in all earnest with productions for South African television.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 14:** Broadcasting Centre, Auckland Park, Johannesburg.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1981, p.115.

### **b. Training staff**

By the time the South African government decided to allow television, the medium had developed far beyond its amateur, experimental phase of the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, television staff had often been able to learn as they went along. But by the 1970s, it had become a sophisticated industry that would need thousands of experts. Because South Africa had waited so long to introduce television, potential television staff had to be trained in less than five years. In the few years before the introduction of television, the training of technical, administrative and programme personnel therefore enjoyed great priority at the SABC.

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<sup>33</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.64; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.6, 74-78; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

<sup>34</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.7.

In 1972, an already completed part of the new Broadcasting Centre was set up as a television training centre, and instructors were appointed from South Africa and abroad. Between 1973 and the end of 1975, training was provided to staff in four main areas, namely operations, programme production, engineering, and television news. By the end of 1975, on the eve of the launch of South African television, seven training courses for production and operations staff had yielded more than four hundred staff members. For training purposes, many programmes were produced, including drama, children's, magazine, variety, documentary and news programmes.<sup>35</sup>

### **c. Preparing programmes**

According to the SABC, one problem that other television nations had experienced in the past was a shortage in quality television scripts. South Africa faced an added challenge: because of the small population, there was a shortage of writers, artists, and technical staff. And because South Africa had waited so long to introduce television, it did not have a pool of trained television personnel like Western European countries and the USA. At the same time, the government's hesitance in introducing television created an advantage: South Africa would be able to learn from other countries' experience and prevent a programme shortage by building up a stockpile long before South African television went on air. The stockpile would consist of locally produced programmes, material bought from overseas and dubbed into Afrikaans or English, and co-productions.<sup>36</sup>

Since 1972, the SABC busied itself with the planning and production of programmes. The SABC appealed to South African writers to work in television and commissioned the first scripts for television plays and documentaries. A large number of documentaries were filmed, with subjects such as nature conservation and ecology, South African industries, South Africa's different ethnic cultures and relations between different groups, and South African pioneers. During 1974, production crews

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<sup>35</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, pp.7-8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.69-70; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.6, 62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.42, 77.

<sup>36</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.6-7;

ventured as far as Tristan da Cunha, Gough Island and the United Kingdom to collect programme material.<sup>37</sup>

In 1974, the focus was not only in building up programmes for the official television service, but also to collect material for the test transmissions, which would start in May 1975. A countrywide campaign to gather test material and participants was launched, and programme production increased significantly. These test programmes included documentaries, women's and children's journal programmes, quiz and variety shows, and drama series. Sports highlights were also filmed by the two outside-broadcast vehicles and included the Davis Cup tennis tournament, the six-hour Endurance Race at Kyalami and rugby and cricket matches.<sup>38</sup>

The first South African serial written for television, *Quest*, was recorded on videotape in the SABC Film Studios in 1974. The following year, a number of local series were recorded, including future favourites such as *Willem*, *Keertyd 11:30*, *The Villagers* and *Jordan*.<sup>39</sup>

To augment the programme stockpile, programmes were bought from abroad and dubbed into English and Afrikaans. Programmes were bought from Belgium, the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Austria, Spain, the United States, Australia and Canada, and included documentaries, plays, serials, opera, ballet and a number of children's programmes. Dubbing facilities were made available at an existing radio studio at Broadcasting House in Johannesburg, as well as at an existing building at the new Broadcasting Centre. By the end of 1974, 76 programmes had been dubbed into Afrikaans alone.<sup>40</sup>

In 1974, two co-productions were undertaken: *Reinaerd die Vos*, with both Belgische Radio en Televisie (Belgian Radio and Television, BRT) and the Nederlandse Christelike Radiovereniging (Dutch Christian Radio Association, NCRV), and a

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<sup>37</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, pp.8, 62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.72; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.64.

<sup>38</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.65; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.65; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.65.

<sup>40</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.63; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.65, 72; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8.

documentary, *Mafeking*, with French production company Pathé. *Mafeking* formed part of an internationally distributed documentary series on famous battlefields.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to collecting a supply of television programmes, the SABC began to build up its archive of film footage. These included interviews with prominent South Africans, recordings of important sporting events, news stories such as the visit of UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, the establishment of self-government in the Caprivi and the opening of the Sutherland Observatory.<sup>42</sup>

#### **d. Reporting the news**

In 1974, a core staff was appointed and trained to organise and establish the Television News Service, while senior news officials went abroad to study television news organisations in Britain and Europe, and particularly to investigate suppliers of television news material (namely film, colour, slides and still photographs), news policy, news handling, the nature and content of television news, staff requirements and utilisation, news presentation and the training of television news staff. After the overseas mission, a comprehensive training course was developed, and a news information centre was created and tasked with building up a stock of colour slides and photographs.<sup>43</sup>

#### **e. Preparing for Phase Two**

With the preparations for Phase One of South African Television well underway, the SABC started to plan and prepare for Phase Two in 1974. The first personnel, namely the head of the service, two programme managers and five organisers, all of whom were white, were appointed in 1975.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.7-8, 64.

<sup>42</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.72.

<sup>43</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.58.

<sup>44</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.8, 67; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68. For more on Phase Two, a television service for black South Africans, see above, p.142.

## **f. Financing television**

South African Television would be funded by viewers' licenses. To give the press time to adapt to the new television service, television advertisements would only be allowed from 1 January 1978. Before television started, however, the SABC had to procure foreign loans to finance the very expensive construction, planning and preparation stage of the television service. At the end of 1975, when South African Television was just about to start, the total cost of the white television service was estimated at R104-million. This included establishing the necessary infrastructure, staff training and salaries and producing and stockpiling television programmes.<sup>45</sup>

The first television licences were issued in 1975, at a cost of R36 per year. By the end of that year, 213 352 licences had been issued, which gave the SABC an income of more than R7 000 000. Before television was introduced, South African radio audiences had to buy listeners' licences. These were issued and administered by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs on behalf of the SABC. There was no system of proper record keeping, and no personal details of licence-holders were recorded. This meant that many radio listeners could get away with not paying their licenses at all. With the introduction of television, this problem had to be prevented, as the licences would play the main role in the financing of the new, very expensive, medium. The SABC recognised the need to create a proper register of issued licences. While the Department of Posts and Telegraphs would continue to issue licences as it had done in the past, the SABC would develop and administer the database. Although the task of developing the register was an enormous undertaking that demanded the appointment of additional staff, it proved to be successful even before television officially started: of the more than two hundred thousand sets that were sold by the end of 1975, very few were not licensed.<sup>46</sup>

By waiting such a long time to introduce television, South Africa had put itself in a position where it had to spend a lot of money in a very short time. If the medium had been introduced earlier, however, it might have cost more to continually upgrade and

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<sup>45</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.15-16.

<sup>46</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.16, 73.

maintain equipment, even though these costs would have been spread over a longer period. But by the time South Africa established a television service, it had learnt that a proper licence record system was imperative. Before television was introduced, therefore, the SABC could put in place sufficient records to keep track of licence-holders, and thus to ensure more income.

## **5. Creating a local manufacturing industry**

When Minister of National Education J. van der Spuy announced the introduction of television in South Africa, he instructed the Department of Industries to establish a local industry to manufacture television sets.<sup>47</sup> The television industry in South Africa had to be under local control, and not be determined by foreign companies.

Within two years of the announcement, the government's cabinet committee on television had appointed six local companies that would produce television sets: Barlows, ITT/Thorn Electrical, SA Philips, Electra, Tedelex and Perfectron. The television manufacturing industry was tightly controlled by government policies on, for example, standardisation and decentralisation.<sup>48</sup>

The government decided to allow only specific sizes for television sets: colour sets would be 66cm in size, and monochrome sets 61cm. The reasons for the standardisation were fourfold: firstly, it was to ensure that the manufacturing of television components was economically feasible; secondly, to pave the way for local production of standardised components; thirdly, to simplify maintenance; and lastly, to keep price differences to a minimum by not giving the consumer too much choice between large and small sets.<sup>49</sup>

Another way in which the government kept a close eye on the industry was by ordering the six television set manufacturers to decentralise their operations before they started with television production. This measure was part of the government's

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<sup>47</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 35, 1971-04-27, col, 5290.

<sup>48</sup> SAB, MES H5/2/3, 302, 1/1973, pp.1-28: Memorandum vir Voorlegging aan die Kabinetskomitee oor TV Aangeleenthede, deur Departement van Nywerheidswese, 1973; T. Koenderman, Television: Problems for Some Manufacturers, *Gazette*, 1973-09-28.

<sup>49</sup> SAB, MES H5/2/3, 302, 1/1973, pp.1-28: Memorandum vir Voorlegging aan die Kabinetskomitee oor TV Aangeleenthede, deur Departement van Nywerheidswese, 1973.

decentralising policy according to which companies had to move their operations, or parts thereof, outside of the main industrial areas. This meant that manufacturers could not simply adapt existing factories and staff, but had to build new factories and train new staff in other parts of the country. Not only did it raise manufacturing costs considerably, but the companies were also unable to get into full production soon enough to meet the very high demand from prospective television buyers. It was estimated that more than 85% of white South Africans would buy television sets. Even without the extra pressure of decentralisation, the initial rush of buyers would create a demand that local manufacturers could barely hope to meet in the first year.<sup>50</sup>

## 6. Informing the public

While the planning and preparations for television progressed, the South African public readied themselves for the great switch-on. To ensure that the public were properly prepared for the first broadcasts, the SABC in 1975 published a number of articles advising television set owners on what to look out for in a set, how to choose the right antenna, and how to ensure that their television equipment was ready for the first broadcasts. One article even advised prospective television set owners on the choice of a television room: ‘Give preference to a room where the family can comfortably sit and watch. Consider the visibility of the screen from different positions. The room must preferably be one that can be darkened somewhat. Bright light in the room will dim the image on the screen, and a room that is too dark will damage your eyes in the long run.’<sup>51</sup>

Another article gave buyers eleven points to consider before purchasing a television set, such as choosing between colour and monochrome sets, choosing the right set for your home, and checking the set’s sound quality.<sup>52</sup>

Before the test transmissions started in May 1975, television sets showed a colour test pattern (see Figure 15). This pattern, which would become a regular and well-known feature on television, was a static image that was designed to reveal faults in the

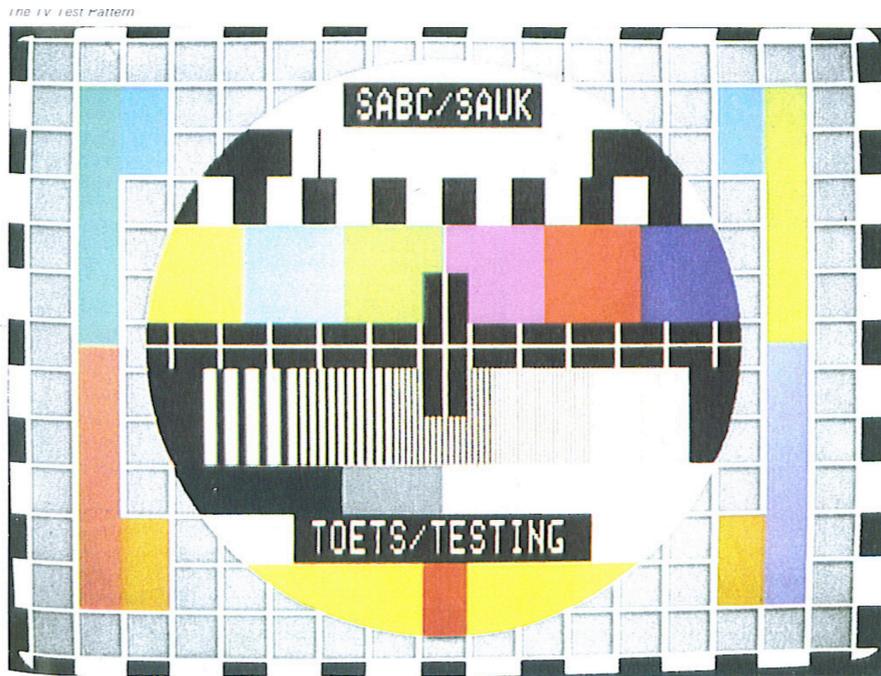
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<sup>50</sup> T. Koenderman, Television: Problems for Some Manufacturers, *Gazette*, 1973-09-28.

<sup>51</sup> Anoniem, Dié Patroon Verklik Foute, *Radio & TV* 20(41), 1975-03-17, p.2 (*My translation*).

<sup>52</sup> Anonym, You and Your TV Set, *Radio & TV* 20(51), 1975-05-19, pp.10-11.

television set and antenna. With regular broadcasts, these faults would not be picked up as easily as with the geometric shapes and bright colours of the test pattern. Each of these shapes and colours had a specific purpose, which a *Radio & TV* article explained in detail. For example, the white lines on the background were used to test the image geometry and should run straight and parallel. If this and other features did not display as it should, it meant that the set was either faulty, or that the set or the antenna had not been properly installed.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 15:** The SABC Television Test Pattern.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.7.

Another article was devoted to antennae types and installation. According to the article, the antenna was the cause of most reception problems, and television viewers had to decide whether they needed an indoors or an outdoors antenna. The correct choice would render an image without snow, ghost images, interference, colour faults and noise.<sup>54</sup>

As test transmissions and the opening of the official service drew closer, articles on programmes and behind-the-scenes looks were published. Set building, graphic

<sup>53</sup> Anoniem, Dié Patroon Verklik Foute, *Radio & TV* 20(41), 1975-03-17, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Anoniem, U en U Antenne, *Radio & TV* 20(50), 1975-05-12, pp.10-11.

design, dubbing and programme research were some of the glimpses offered to the public.<sup>55</sup> The publicity served to create enthusiasm among the South African viewing public, and, together with the test transmissions, paved the way for the official opening of South African television in January 1976.

Many of these topics may seem obvious to today's television buyer and viewer. But before television arrived in the country, South Africans had only heard about the medium, and what they had heard was probably mostly about the programmes and its effects, and not the more technical and practical aspects that television set owners would need and want to know. In the early 1970s, this was the kind of information that many South Africans sought eagerly.

## 7. Testing television

After months of seeing only the test pattern, television owners were finally rewarded with the first images and sounds on South African television. Test transmissions began on Monday, 5 May 1975 in the Johannesburg and Pretoria area, and eventually spread to other parts of the country. For the first five months, the test programme was transmitted for one hour each night, but on 1 October 1975 this was extended to two hours a day. The purpose of the test transmissions was to gradually acquaint viewers with the new medium, to promote the sale of television sets, and to enable television staff to gain good experience before the official service was launched.<sup>56</sup>

Initially, the test transmissions consisted only of pictures set to music. Visuals included a twenty-minute broadcast of university students during their rag celebrations; supermarkets; Saturday weddings; miniature trains; moving traffic; model boats; children playing at school and water fountains.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, however, full programmes and important events were broadcast. In August 1975, two weekly

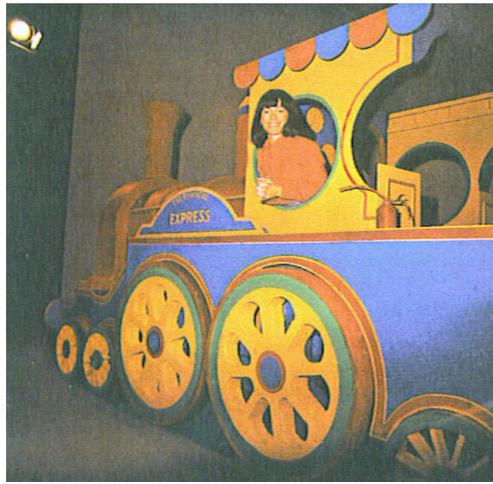
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<sup>55</sup> A. Johnson, It All Looks So Easy on the Box, *Radio & TV* 21(5), 1975-06-30, pp.4-6, 9; Anoniem, Die Grafiese Kunstenaar, *Radio & TV* 21(14), 1975-09-01, pp.10-11; H. van der Walt, En toe Praat die Franse Akteur Afrikaans, *Radio & TV* 21(6), 1975-09-15, pp.10-11; B. van Dyck, TV se 'Bloedhonde', *Radio & TV* 21(20), 1975-10-13, pp.10-11; L. Pannall, Setting the TV Scene, *Radio & TV* 21(29), 1975-12-15, pp.4-7.

<sup>56</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.7, 64; Anonym, Lifting the Lid on Test Television, *Radio & TV* 20 (49), 1975-05-05, pp.4-7.

<sup>57</sup> Anonym, Lifting the Lid on Test Television. *Radio & TV* 20 (49), 1975-05-05, p.7.

magazine programmes, *Looking In* and *Kamera I*, went on air. The programmes featured a number of prominent personalities such as the Rhodesian premier Ian Smith, film actor Peter Lawford and Prime Minister B. J. Vorster. Two weekly local interview programmes were also added to the Test Television line-up, namely *Profile* and *Kollig*. South Africa's first television children's programmes also debuted during the Test Television phase, namely *Die Kraaines* ('The Crow's Nest') and *The Everywhere Express* (see Figure 16), two variety shows filled with entertainment.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 16:** *The Everywhere Express*.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

Test Television programmes also included broadcasts of public events, including the inauguration of State President Nico Diederichs, the official opening of the Rand Afrikaans University, and the Christmas and New Year messages of the State President and Prime Minister respectively. Major sports events shown on Test Television included the French rugby tour and the World Title Boxing Match between Pierre Fourie and Victor Galindez.<sup>59</sup> South Africa's first television news bulletin was broadcast on 5 May, the day on which Test Television began. The bulletin showed the siege of the Israeli embassy in Johannesburg that had taken place a week before Test Television began.

For the first two months, there was one news cast per week, after which the news was extended to one Afrikaans and one English bulletin per week. From 1 October 1975,

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<sup>58</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.65-66.

<sup>59</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.64, 67.

news bulletins were broadcast daily, in Afrikaans and English alternately. From 6 October 1975, the news bulletins were broadcast live, after being pre-recorded for the first five months.<sup>60</sup>

Test Television was received with great enthusiasm. It was tangible evidence of the hard work put in by the SABC over four years, and created even more excitement for the official launch of South African television in January 1976.

## **8. Conclusion**

During the preparation phase, many ideologies that would underpin South African television were revealed. Firstly, by their close participation in the planning for television and their tight control over the manufacturing industry, the government showed that they intended to keep a close watch over the South African television service for many years. Secondly, it was clear that South African television, just like South African government and society, would be segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Thirdly, South African television programmes would uphold specific values, particularly those of the NP government. Programmes that did not conform to these values and which did not reflected the NP's apartheid ideology, would not be shown on South African television.

The preparation phase also provided interesting commentary on the government's two-decade refusal to introduce television. In many cases, the long wait was proven to be beneficial: South Africa could now choose the best, most modern and most suitable television technology, and set specific standards even before the launch of television. Since the rest of the industrialised world had had television for decades, South Africa could learn from other television countries' experiments and mistakes. In this way, the SABC knew long in advance that it would have to work very hard to build up programme reserves. Television staff were also able to get training from experts in the field, most notably from the BBC, who probably had more experience in television than any other broadcasting company in the world. South Africa was also in the unique position where they could do socio-cultural research on television

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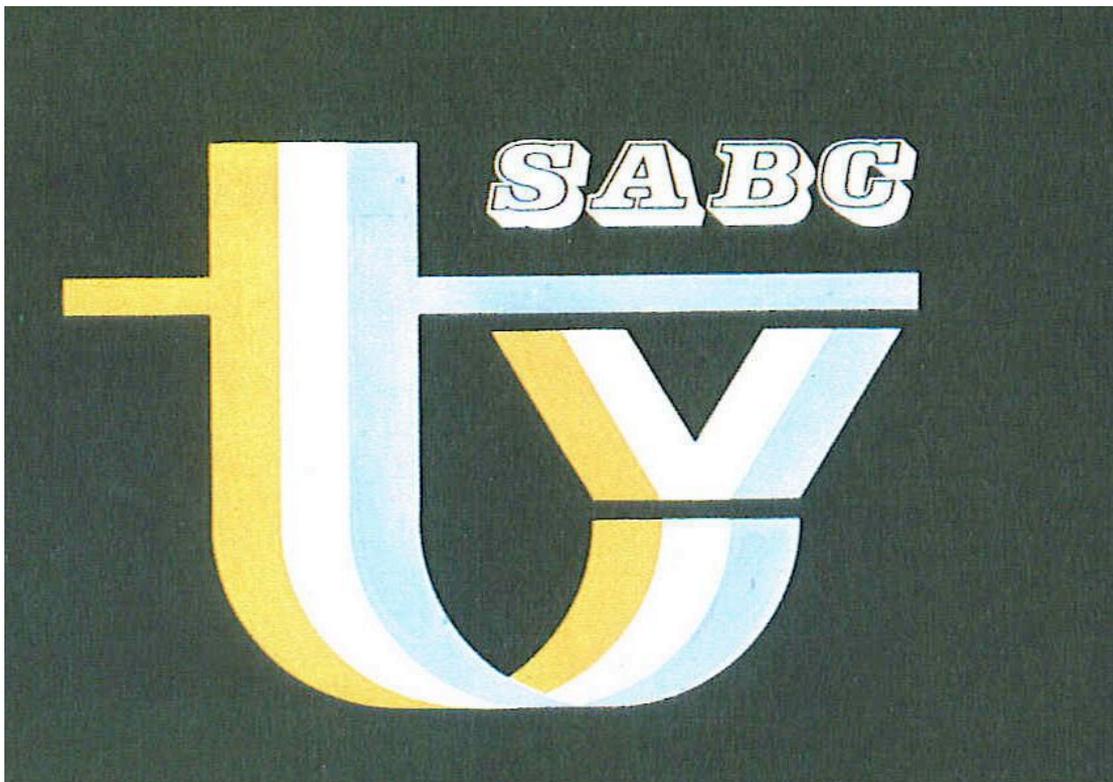
<sup>60</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.42-43.

before the service started, unlike the rest of the world, who had to learn of the medium's impact through their own experiments and experience. Finally, the SABC had learnt to keep adequate records of licence holders before the first television licences were even issued.

On the other hand, the long wait created a number of obstacles. Firstly, a complicated television infrastructure had to be established in less than five years. Secondly, enough television staff had to be properly trained so that television production could start well in advance of the official launch. Thirdly, establishing a television service in less than five years demanded an enormous capital outlay in a very short period.

Nevertheless, South Africa was able to overcome these hindrances in the given time. By May 1975, the television preparations had developed far enough to enable test transmissions. And by January 1976, South Africa was ready to enter its era of television.

**VII**  
**EPILOGUE:**  
**TELEVISION COMES TO SOUTH AFRICA**



**Figure 17:** SABC-TV logo, 1976.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1976.

## 1. Introduction

On 5 January 1976, South African television officially opened. Thousands of South Africans tuned in to see exactly what they had been missing for more than two decades. And after the opening night, television quickly developed to become a broadcasting service comparable to the older and more established services elsewhere in the world.

## 2. Opening night

At exactly six o'clock, the service was dramatically opened with a countdown, followed by a lively fanfare. Then, South African television's first continuity presenters, Heinrich Maritz and Dorianne Berry, welcomed viewers.<sup>1</sup>

'It is 5 January, 1976,' Maritz announced in Afrikaans. 'We welcome you to the opening night of the full television service of the SABC. For us, it is an exceptional event, and we are pleased to let you share, from tonight, in the results of the past five years' planning and preparations.'<sup>2</sup> Berry continued, in English: 'And because tonight is just that little bit special, we thought it might be appropriate to deviate slightly from our planned programme pattern – just to give you an idea of the variety and scope of our new service.'<sup>3</sup>

The first show on South African television was listed as *A Special Programme in the Wielie Walie Speelkamer*<sup>4</sup> in which Haas Das introduces the Characters and Co-workers of the Children and Youth Programmes.<sup>5</sup> Haas Das, a hare puppet, was the newsreader who brought news from *Diereland* ('Animal Land'). Within a few weeks, *Haas Das se Nuuskas* ('Haas Das's News Box', see Figure 18) became the most popular television programme in South Africa among children and adults.<sup>6</sup> The *Wielie*

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<sup>1</sup> Pumamouse Website, 'South African Television Soundfiles: Opening, SABC TV (5 January 1976)'. Internet: <http://pumamouse/quaksatsounds.html>, s.a. Accessed: 2006-09-02.

<sup>2</sup> Pumamouse Website, 'South African Television Soundfiles: Opening, SABC TV (5 January 1976)'. Internet: <http://pumamouse/quaksatsounds.html>, s.a. Accessed: 2006-09-02 (*My translation*).

<sup>3</sup> Pumamouse Website, 'South African Television Soundfiles: Opening, SABC TV (5 January 1976)'. Internet: <http://pumamouse/quaksatsounds.html>, s.a. Accessed: 2006-09-02.

<sup>4</sup> 'Playroom'

<sup>5</sup> *Radio en TV met NOU*, 1976-01-05 (TV Skedule), pp.42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Personal Information: Louise Smit, Producer of Children's Programmes, Pringle Bay, 2003-09-01.



**Figure 18:** *Haas Das se Nuuskas*.

**Source:** L. Smit, *Haas Das en Moeder Raaf* (Kaapstad & Pretoria, 1977), p.3.

*Walie Speelkamer* would also become the scene for a very popular Afrikaans children's programme, *Wielie Walie*. When it was taken off the air in 1996, it was the longest running television programme in South Africa's history. The presenters of the first special *Haas Das/Wielie Walie* programme were Carike Keuzenkamp, who had already appeared in *Kraaines* during the Test Television phase, as well as Estelle Rossouw and Gert van Tonder.<sup>7</sup>

The next programme was another children's show, namely *The Everywhere Express*, in which Andy Dillon and Kathy Kahn introduced the forthcoming children's programmes to the English audience. *The Everywhere Express* had already been aired during Test Television. After the children's programmes were introduced, viewers were given a glimpse of what they could expect on SABC Television (SABC-TV) in terms of documentary programmes and dramas.<sup>8</sup>

Other highlights of the evening's line-up included news, sport, music, comedy and drama. The first episode of *The Bob Newhart Show*, in which American comedian Bob Newhart played the role of a psychologist, Dr Robert Hartley, was aired. The documentary *Kamera I*, which was already known to audiences from the days of test television, featured an interview with SABC chairman P. J. Meyer. Newscasts in both English and Afrikaans were broadcast, presented by Michael de Morgan and Cor Nortjé respectively. There was also a variety show specially recorded for the opening

<sup>7</sup> *Radio en TV met NOU*, 1976-01-05 (TV Skedule), pp.42-43.

<sup>8</sup> *Radio en TV met NOU*, 1976-01-05 (TV Skedule), pp.42-43.

night, as well as a classical music concert performed by world-renowned pianist Arthur Rubinstein. The first Afrikaans drama was *Dubbele Alibi*, starring Nic de Jager and Sybil Coetzee.<sup>9</sup>

At eight o' clock, Prime Minister B. J. Vorster officially opened the service with a short bilingual address. 'After years of thorough preparations, we have now reached the stage where television becomes a part of our daily lives,' Vorster explained. '... It is still too early to say or even to predict what influence it is going to have on our daily lives. But what *is* clear, is that we are dealing with a medium that, as it has already been experienced by all other countries, can have a powerful influence, whether for good or for bad.'<sup>10</sup>

Vorster then outlined his vision for South African television:

The approach should still be that we want to use the medium to provide fresh and correct information, and healthy entertainment, and to be part of the education of the nation ... Objectivity and balance should still be our keyword. It is a big task, not only to bring the world to South Africa, but also (and perhaps especially) to show South Africa to the world as it is in its rich diversity and everything it has to offer.<sup>11</sup>

The possibility of using television as a government propaganda tool was thus clear from the beginning. But what grabbed the interest of South Africans on opening night was mainly the entertainment. While many viewers enjoyed the news, it was the variety show *Knicky Knacky Knoo* that stole the spotlight. When interviewed in the streets the morning after the opening, Mr H. J. Fischer stated: '*The Knicky Knacky Knoo Two show [sic] was equal to the best overseas television*'<sup>12</sup>. 'I like the Knicky Knacky Knoo show, because it had nice jokes'<sup>13</sup>, seven-year-old Desmond Clue agreed.

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<sup>9</sup> *Radio en TV met NOU*, 1976-01-05 (TV Skedule), pp.42-43.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in TV-Redaksie, Dis Deel van S.A. Lewe, sê Premier, *Die Burger*, 1976-01-06, p.4 (*My translation*).

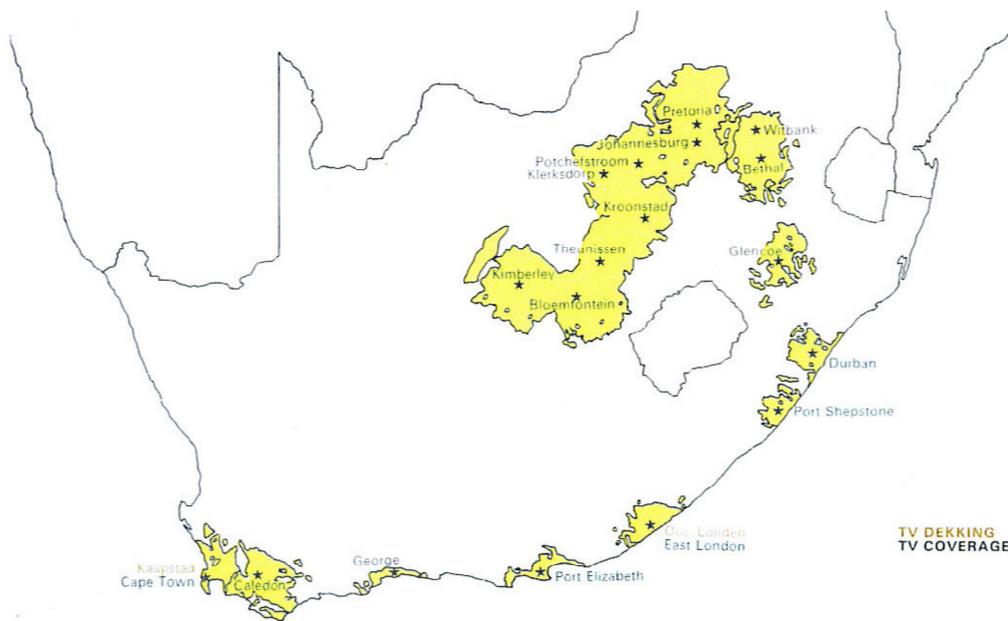
<sup>11</sup> Quoted in TV-Redaksie, Dis Deel van S.A. Lewe, sê Premier, *Die Burger*, 1976-01-06, p.4 (*My translation*).

<sup>12</sup> Anonym, Street Survey: What Readers Think of 'Full-time' TV, *Argus*, 1976-01-07, p.19.

<sup>13</sup> Anonym, Street Survey: What Readers Think of 'Full-time' TV, *Argus*, 1976-01-07, p.19.

And even more popular than real-life newsreaders Michael de Morgan and Cor Nortjé, was Diereland's newsreader. 'Haas Das! Is it necessary to say anything more? Basil Brush, his cute British friend, can forget about it'<sup>14</sup>, wrote *Die Burger*.

### 3. South African television: an overview



**Figure 19:** Television coverage map, 1976.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1976, p.103.

After the opening night, SABC-TV became very popular. By the end of the first year of television, 650 000 licences had been issued, and more than 1,5 million viewers tuned in every evening.<sup>15</sup> For the first four years of South African television, the service was broadcast for about 37 hours a week, with equal treatment of Afrikaans and English. In April 1980, transmission time was extended to 42 and a half hours per week.<sup>16</sup>

SABC-TV offered a great variety of television programmes, including locally produced programmes like *The Knicky Knacky Knoo show*, a variety show, and dramas like *The Villagers*. But it was often the children's programmes that became

<sup>14</sup> C. v. R., Haas Das Eerste Groot TV-Persoonlikheid, *Die Burger*, 1976-01-07, p.3 (*My translation*).

<sup>15</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1976, p.93.

<sup>16</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1980, p.11.

the most popular among both children and adults. It is also with the children's programmes that SABC-TV proved its craft and innovation in terms of new techniques. With the televising of *Liewe Heksie*, which had been popular for many years among readers and radio audiences, the producers developed a new technique with Latex-dolls. In *Wielie Walie*, the character Mol Majeur was used to refine the world-first technique of micro motion, which enabled thousands of fine movements. And in terms of animation, the children's programme *Uz Adibalz an Fings*<sup>17</sup> used an animation method that had been devised and developed by the SABC.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 20:** Scenes from popular children's series on South African television: *Liewe Heksie*, *Oscar*, Karel Kraai from *Wielie Walie*, and *Heidi*.

**Sources:** V. Vels, *Liewe Heksie en die Tent* (Kaapstad & Pretoria, 1978), p. 6; [http://www.shopasave.co.za/index.php?Type\\_Code=ProductInfo&Itemcode=D06293](http://www.shopasave.co.za/index.php?Type_Code=ProductInfo&Itemcode=D06293); SABC, *Annual Report*, 1976, p.94; <http://www.mangaitalia.it/board/viewarticle.php?articleid=37491>

For many years, local productions made up more than 60% of total television broadcasts. Nevertheless, imported programmes soon counted among the most popular shows. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Dallas* and *The Cosby Show*, for example, were some

<sup>17</sup> 'Us Animals and Things'

<sup>18</sup> Anonym, What Readers Think of 'Ful-Time' TV, *Argus*, 7 January 1976, p.19; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1979, p.71; Personal Information: Louise Smit, Producer of Children's Programmes, Pringle Bay, 2003-09-01; Personal Information: Verna Vels, Former Head of Youth and Children's Programmes, Safritel, Johannesburg, 2003-08-23.

of the most watched programmes on South African television.<sup>19</sup> Dubbed programmes like Heidi were also very popular, as were certain co-productions<sup>20</sup> like Casimir and Oscar.<sup>21</sup>

In 1978, the British Actors' Equity ban was extended to television programmes recorded on film. The ban had first been put on South Africa in the 1960s in protest against apartheid policies, and stated that Equity members would not perform in South Africa if they were not allowed to play to multi-racial audiences. When the boycott was extended to television, it meant that programmes using a performance by any Equity member could not be broadcast over South African television. This created difficulties in the procurement of shows from overseas, as Britain was an important source of material. However, the SABC managed to find their way around the ban by importing programmes from other countries and even by adapting British programmes, for example the animated children's programme, *Rupert the Bear*. To get around the ban, the SABC dubbed the programme *from English into English*, as it featured performances by Equity voice artists.<sup>22</sup>

By 1979, the broadcasts covered more than 80% of the white population, and 42% of the black population. However, there was still only one service and one channel, namely SABC-TV. It was only at the end of 1981, on 31 December, that the separate black services were introduced. The existing SABC-TV channel was now known as TV1, and the black television service consisted of two services: TV2 for Nguni languages (Zulu and Xhosa) and TV3 for Sotho languages (Sotho, Northern Sotho

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<sup>19</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1979, p.67; J. Hyslop, Why Did Apartheid's Supporters Capitulate? 'Whiteness', Class and Consumption in Urban South Africa, 1985-1995, *Society in Transition* 31(1), 2000, p.40.

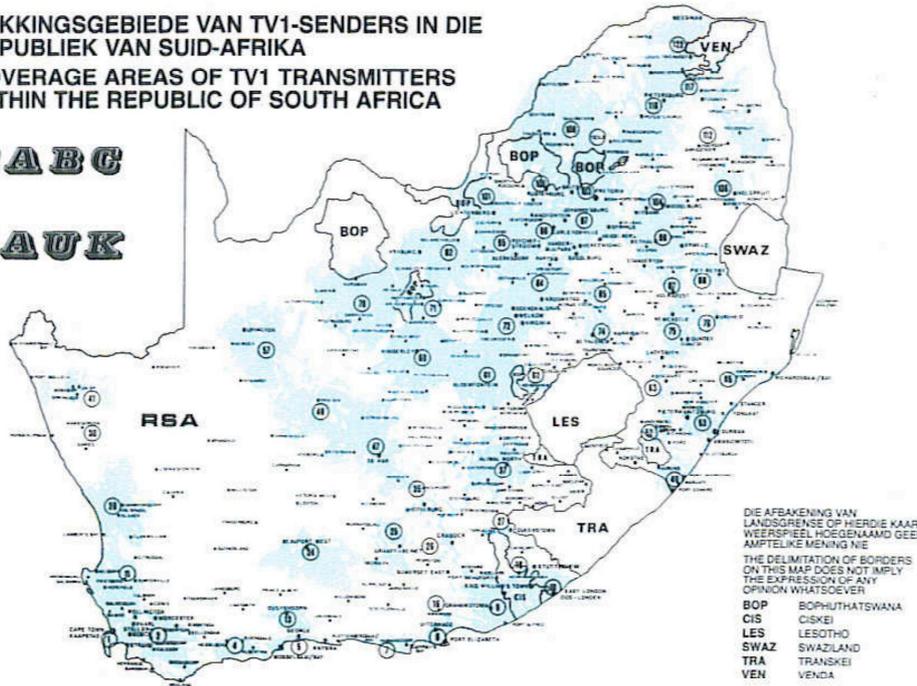
<sup>20</sup> A co-production is a television programme made in association with other broadcasting companies, in this case corporations from other countries.

<sup>21</sup> Personal Information: Verna Vels, Former Head of Youth and Children's Programmes, Safritel, Johannesburg, 2003-08-23; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1979, p.67.

<sup>22</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1978, p.57; Anonym, The Day Equity Pulled the Plug on Our Best of British.... *SABC Radio & TV*, Oct-Dec 1995, p.35; Equity, 'Equity History'. Internet: <http://www.equity.org.uk/AboutUs/PDF/EquityHistoryPanels.pdf>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-09-07.

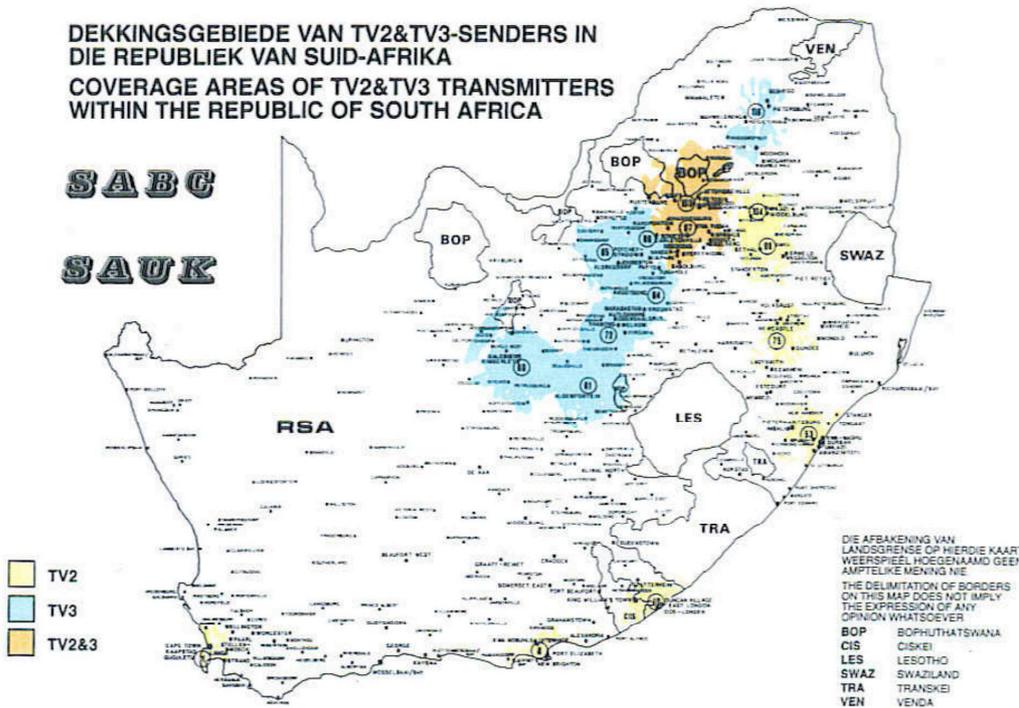
**DEKKINGSGBIEDE VAN TV1-SENDERS IN DIE REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA  
COVERAGE AREAS OF TV1 TRANSMITTERS WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SABC**  
**SAUK**



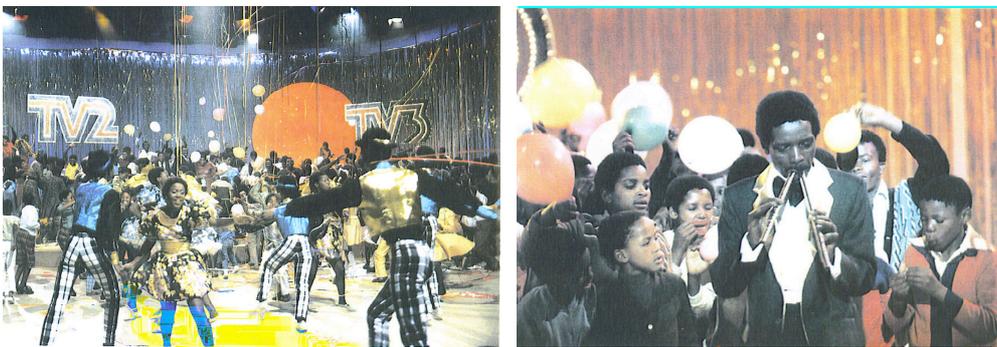
**DEKKINGSGBIEDE VAN TV2&TV3-SENDERS IN DIE REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA  
COVERAGE AREAS OF TV2&TV3 TRANSMITTERS WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SABC**  
**SAUK**



**Figure 21:** Coverage areas of TV1, TV2 and TV3, 1984.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1984, p.69.

and Tswana). For the first year, these services were broadcast over one channel, with equal distribution of the 27 hours of weekly transmission time. Unlike the first channel, which was opened with announcements and normal programmes, the black channel was launched with a grand gala opening (see Figure 22). The services were structured in such a way that it broadcast to areas where there were bigger concentrations of the different languages, and where there was electricity. On 31 December 1982, the two services were split into two separate regional channels, each broadcasting for 27 hours a week and covering the main Nguni regions (TV2) and Sotho regions (TV3).<sup>23</sup> (See Figure 21.)



**Figure 22:** The launch of TV2 and TV3 on 31 December 1981.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1981, p.56.

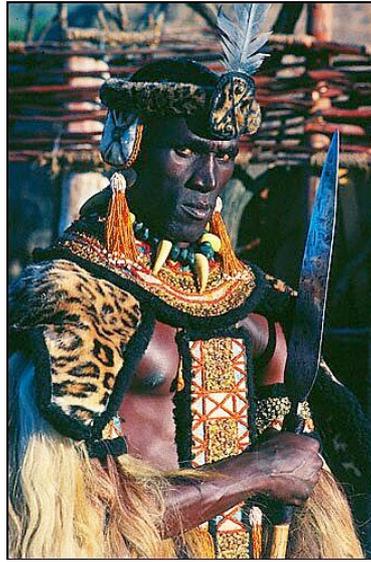
The official policy for TV2 and TV3 was ‘to act as a window on the national as well as the international scene, to entertain the black viewer to the best of its ability, to inform, enlighten and educate’<sup>24</sup>. According to the SABC, it was crucial to capture, through television, the ‘traditional’ cultures and usages of South Africa, as these were ‘quickly falling into disuse’<sup>25</sup>. As such, ‘traditional’ ways of life were an important subject on TV2 and TV3. An immensely popular programme that focused on ‘traditional’ culture was *Shaka* (see Figure 23), the epic story of the founder of the Zulu Kingdom. *Shaka* was received well among black *and* white South African viewers, and despite growing overseas criticism of South Africa and its racial

<sup>23</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1981, p.6; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1982, p.8; D. P. van Vuuren, Die SAUK se Televisiedienste, in J. B. du Toit (red.), *Televisie – Skyn en Werklikheid*, p.113; SAUK, *Dit is die SAUK*, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1980, p.13.

<sup>25</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1978, p.13.

policies, the show was sold in over fifty countries, including the USA and West Germany.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 23:** Actor Henry Cele in the internationally renowned series, *Shaka*.  
**Source:** <http://www.sohoblues.com/solidgoldportraits/previewpages/previewpage2.htm>

Children's programmes on the black services included TV3's *Mulwana la Mutla* ('Rabbit and Friends'), which told the story of Rabbit, who owned his own cinema. On TV2, another Rabbit moved to the city in *UMPungushe noNogwaja*. In the city, his new friend Jackal taught him about things like dentistry, making sweets, and disposing of one's garbage.<sup>27</sup> Many local and important shows were dubbed into the black languages, including *Spiderman* and *Thunderbirds*.<sup>28</sup>

In 1985 an extra entertainment service was introduced to accommodate growing audiences. The service, TV4, was broadcast after nine o'clock in the evening on the TV2 and TV3 channels. TV4's programme line-up included sport broadcasts (such as Wimbledon Tennis and Formula 1 motor racing), documentaries on for example George Washington and Marilyn Monroe, and popular series such as *Misdaad in*

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<sup>26</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1986, p.9. The series *Shaka Zulu* has been the subject of a number of academic studies, and has received criticism for its stereotyping and 'traditionalising' of Zulu culture. See for example G. M. Mersham, *Political Discourse and Historical Television Drama: A Case Study of Shaka Zulu*, D.Litt & Phil. Thesis, University of South Africa, 1989; C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Power of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, 1998); D. Wylie, Shaka and the Modern Zulu State, *History Today* 4, May 1994.

<sup>27</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1982, pp.56-58.

<sup>28</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1980, p.63. *Thunderbirds* had already been broadcast in Afrikaans, as *Redding Internasionaal*.

*Miami* (the dubbed version of *Miami Vice*), *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Family Ties* and *Dynasty*.<sup>29</sup> In 1986, South Africa's first commercial television station was launched: M-NET was a pay channel that could only be received through a decoder. For two hours per day, however, non-subscribers had a glimpse of the channel through Open Time. Another television channel in South Africa was Bop-TV, the service of the Bophuthatswana homeland.<sup>30</sup>

On 1 November 1985, the SABC launched what it considered to be its third broadcasting medium, after radio and television. Teledata was a series of electronic magazine pages, transmitted over television. Viewers needed decoders to tune into Teledata throughout the day, but an uncoded service was broadcast in the mornings. Teledata had several main categories, including news, business news, sport, weather forecasts, programme schedules for television and radio, travel and transport information, and leisure. Information included listings of current investment rates, the daily prices of meat, vegetables and fruit on all major markets, and sport schedules. Educational material was also developed for Teledata, and included a series on first aid and a Trivial Pursuit game. In 1988, *Teledossier* was added to help the police in fighting crime. By alerting the public to criminals wanted by the police, viewers could take an active role in accosting these perpetrators. According to the SABC, the police considered *Teledossier* to be very successful.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, the Teledata service came much closer to the predictions for television made in the 1920s than television itself: according to a number of South African journalists writing on television in 1929, the medium would be very useful in tracking stock exchange prices, and could be used as a tool against crime.<sup>32</sup>

In the early 1990s, the SABC restructured its channels. In October 1991 Topsport Surplus (TSS) was introduced as a supplementary channel to accommodate the sport programmes that could not be fit into TV1's schedule. In 1992, TV2, TV3 and TV4

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<sup>29</sup> D. P. van Vuuren, Die SAUK se Televisiedienste, in J. B. du Toit (red.), *Televisie – Skyn en Werklikheid*, p.113; *Huisgenoot*, 1987-07-02 (TV-Programme), pp.130-131; *Huisgenoot*, 1987-08-06 (TV-Programme), pp.153-154.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1985, p.70; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1986, p.74; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1988, p.50; D. P van Vuuren, Die SAUK se Televisiedienste, in J. B. du Toit (red.), *Televisie – Skyn en Werklikheid*, pp.113-114.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter II, p.53.

were consolidated into a multi-cultural channel called Contemporary Community Values Television (CCV-TV). In February 1994, National Network Television (NNTV) replaced TSS.<sup>33</sup>

An interesting aspect of South African television was the relationship between the state broadcaster and the government. Before 1970, broadcasting matters fell under the administration of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, and the SABC had to report to the Minister. But after 1970, and especially after the introduction of television, the broadcasting portfolio changed hands many times. In 1970, it was appointed to the Department of National Education.<sup>34</sup> In 1979, the portfolio was handed back to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, before falling under the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Information from 1980 to 1985. In 1986 broadcasting shifted position again: for the next two years, it was the responsibility of the Minister in the State President's office entrusted with administration and broadcasting services. Over the next decade, broadcasting changed hands several times, between the Ministers of Information, Broadcasting and Cinema Industry; Home Affairs; National Education; and the Interior and Environmental Affairs. From 1994, the portfolio was once again under the administration of the Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting.<sup>35</sup> In future studies of South African television, exploring this issue further may reveal a considerable amount about the place of television in the government's policy, and how the government viewed and perhaps attempted to use the medium. It raises a number of interesting questions: why did the portfolio change hands so frequently, and to such diverse departments? Did the government not know what to do with and how to properly control broadcasting (and particularly television)? What (if anything) do these changes say about the priority given to the administration of broadcasting?

From the start of South African television, the government had indeed attempted to keep tight control over the medium. According to Verna Vels, former Head of Youth

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<sup>33</sup> SABC, 'This is the SABC'. Internet: [http://vcmstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This\\_is\\_the\\_SABC\\_text.doc](http://vcmstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This_is_the_SABC_text.doc), s.a. Accessed: 2007-08-27.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter V, p.134, footnote 45.

<sup>35</sup> SABC, *Annual Reports*, 1970-2006.

and Children's Programmes at the SABC, the NP government kept a hawk's eye on especially news and actuality broadcasts.<sup>36</sup>

The SABC has been accused of being a direct propaganda tool of the NP government. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) inquest into the media and its role in supporting apartheid, it was found that the South African media had played a crucial part in reflecting and moulding public views. The SABC in particular, it was found, had shown a distinct bias towards the apartheid government, and its news bulletins had fostered the idea that apartheid was 'natural and inevitable'<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, according to the TRC, the SABC was an 'inciter of violence', had willingly co-operated with security forces, and had failed to report adequately on human rights violations committed during apartheid, most notably the death of Steve Biko in 1977.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of its programmes, the SABC for the first few years maintained a policy of using white people in white programmes.<sup>39</sup> But during the 1980s, this racial policy became more lenient. In fact, already in 1979, the SABC started using Indian and coloured Christian ministers as regular presenters on the religious broadcasts with which SABC-TV/TV1 closed every night.<sup>40</sup> In 1987, the children's programme *Pumpkin Patch* became one of the first TV1 productions to use a non-white presenter.<sup>41</sup>

However, it was only in 1993 that the SABC changed its policies and structures to such an extent that it reflected the country's changing socio-political climate. After much deliberation and fierce dispute, the SABC's first democratically elected board

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<sup>36</sup> Personal Information: Verna Vels, Former Head of Youth and Children's Programmes, Safritel, Johannesburg, 2003-08-23.

<sup>37</sup> TRC, 'Final Report, Volume 4, Chapter 6: Institutional Hearing: The Media'. Internet: <http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/4chap6.htm>, 1998-10-29. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

<sup>38</sup> TRC, 'Final Report, Volume 4, Chapter 6: Institutional Hearing: The Media'. Internet: <http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/4chap6.htm>, 1998-10-29. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

<sup>39</sup> Personal Information: Verna Vels, Former Head of Youth and Children's Programmes, Safritel, Johannesburg, 2003-08-23.

<sup>40</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1979, p.69.

<sup>41</sup> Personal Information: Louise Smit, Producer of Children's Programmes, Pringle Bay, 2003-09-01.

was announced in 1993.<sup>42</sup> This board consisted of men and women, and included members from different races. Initially, Dr van Zyl Slabbert was chosen as chairman of the board, but he resigned soon after taking office. In August 1993, acting chairperson Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri was elected to officially take over from Slabbert, and she became the first black *and* first female chairperson of the SABC.

For the next few years, the new SABC board strived to restructure the Corporation and to change it from a state broadcaster to a responsible, impartial public broadcaster.<sup>43</sup> TV1, the former white channel, changed its ‘white face’<sup>44</sup> in an attempt to become more representative of its viewers. New broadcasting policies were formulated to reflect and promote the cultural diversity of South Africa, particularly where language and religion were concerned. Where the SABC had formerly ascribed to policies of separate development and had only catered for Christian religious programming, the ‘new SABC’ would cater for all the major languages and religions in South Africa.<sup>45</sup> On 4 February 1996, the SABC launched its new channels, SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 to replace TV1, CCV-TV and NNTV. The racial bar between the services was lifted, and instead each channel had its own character and intended market.<sup>46</sup>

In 1993, new broadcasting legislation<sup>47</sup> provided for the creation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which was tasked with the regulating broadcasting activities and which would function independently from the State, the government and party politics. In this way, it was hoped that broadcasting would be regulated democratically, and not become a tool of state and government propaganda as it had in the past.<sup>48</sup> In the same year, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South

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<sup>42</sup> The first democratically elected SABC board consisted of: Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri (Chairperson), Colin Hickling (Vice-Chairperson), Herman Bailey, Brigalia Bam, Fikile Bam, Leon Bartel, Anna Boshoff, Dr Erra Cilliers, Prof. Arnold de Beer, Dr Antonie Gildenhuys, Tshepo Khumbane, Dr Enos Mabuze, Prof. Fatima Meer, Billy Modise, Prof. Njabulo Ndebele, Bishop Winston Ndungane, Prof. Abram Nkabinde, Prof. Pieter Potgieter, Dr Gordon Sibiyi, Sheila Sisulu, Dr van Zyl Slabbert (resigned), Franklin Sonn, Dr Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, Prof. Alex Thembela, and Prof. Christo Viljoen. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1992/1993, pp.4-5.

<sup>43</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1992/1993, pp.3-4.

<sup>44</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1992/1993, p.21.

<sup>45</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1994, pp.5-7.

<sup>46</sup> SABC, ‘This is the SABC’. Internet: [http://vcnstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This\\_is\\_the\\_SABC\\_text.doc](http://vcnstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This_is_the_SABC_text.doc), s.a. Accessed: 2007-08-27.

<sup>47</sup> President’s Office, No. 153 of 1993: *The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act*, 1993-10-18.

<sup>48</sup> President’s Office, No. 153 of 1993: *The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act*, 1993-10-18.

Africa (BCCSA) was founded as an independent judicial tribunal to which members of the public could direct complaints against broadcasters. The BCCSA established a code of conduct with which all broadcasters had to comply. Both the BCCSA and the IBA (which was later replaced by ICASA, the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa) were products of the steps taken to make broadcasters democratic and accountable to the public.<sup>49</sup>

New broadcasting legislation also provided for the creation of a free, independent broadcaster. In 1998 the channel was launched as e.tv. In the same year, Bop-TV was formally integrated with the SABC services after the former homelands were abolished. The channel ceased to exist in 2003. Also in 2003, the SABC became a commercial, limited liability enterprise, SABC Ltd, in which the state held 100% shares.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the transformation of South Africa and its media, however, South African television has not been free from criticism. In 2005, for example, an episode of e.tv's investigative journalism programme *Third Degree* was found to be imbalanced and in contravention of BCCSA's code of conduct.<sup>51</sup> And in 2006, the SABC once again came under attack for attempting to stifle opposition and freedom of speech, and for openly supporting the African Nationalist Congress (ANC) government.<sup>52</sup> But the democratic structures put in place to keep broadcasting in line have played an important role in exposing such transgressions and in allowing criticism.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the thirty years since its introduction in the country, South African television has developed from a feared and shunned 'little bioscope' to an accepted mass medium in

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<sup>49</sup> BCCSA, 'The BCCSA as an Independent Judicial Tribunal'. Internet: <http://www.bccsa.co.za/>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-09-03; ICASA, 'About ICASA – Overview'. Internet: <http://www.icasa.org.za/Content.aspx?Page=17>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

<sup>50</sup> SABC, 'This is the SABC'. Internet: [http://vcmmstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This\\_is\\_the\\_SABC\\_text.doc](http://vcmmstatic.sabc.co.za/VCMStaticProdStage/CORPORATE/SABC%20Corporate/Document/This_is_the_SABC_text.doc), s.a. Accessed: 2007-08-27.

<sup>51</sup> BCCSA, 'Case No: 2005/38 e.tv - 3rd Degree - Programme not Balanced'. Internet: [http://www.bccsa.co.za/templates/judgement\\_template\\_300.asp](http://www.bccsa.co.za/templates/judgement_template_300.asp), 2005. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

<sup>52</sup> See for example 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/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=286556&area=/insight/insight_national/), 2006-10-13. Accessed: 2007-09-03.

millions of homes. It has evolved from a state-controlled, racially-divided service to a diverse, multi-racial medium that, though not free of criticism, can be challenged and held accountable. It is a medium that has played an integral part in South Africa's social, cultural and political life. There are many aspects of South African television that still need to be explored further in order to fully comprehend its history, nature and role as a powerful mass medium.

**CONCLUSION:  
TELEVISION SCREENS –  
WINDOWS, SHIELDS AND SEPARATORS**

“Apartheid works [...] it has effectively managed to isolate the white man [...].  
[He] can only relate to the syndrome of his isolation. His windows are painted white  
to keep the night in.”

*-Breyten Breytenbach<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> B. Breytenbach, The Alienation of White South Africa, in A. la Guma (ed.), *Apartheid*, p.142.

### **Television as a window to the world**

When the theories and technology of television were being developed, the new invention had many forms and many names. But it was Constantin Perskyi's coining of the term 'television' (or 'seeing at a distance') in 1900 that signified the powerful character the medium would have in the century that followed.

It would take quite a few decades before television became a common medium throughout the world. When it did, it opened a fascinating window into faraway events, people and places. Like no medium before it, television brought the world into the homes of millions of ordinary people. But just as television screens became a view into a large world, the medium showed its potential as a tool for manipulation. In Germany, for example, television had been introduced by the Nazi regime in the 1930s, and was used for propaganda.

In July 1969, television's ability to showcase the world took an enormous step forward. Millions of television viewers across the world – the so-called 'armchair millions' – watched as astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon. The event was spectacular: it was the first time that any human had walked on an extra-terrestrial body. But this feat was made even greater and more real by the fact that television footage of the moonwalk was transmitted live. Suddenly, television became more than just a window to the world. It was a window into human daring and greatness, and to the infinite universe with its boundless possibilities.

In South Africa, however, this window was closed. When television was spreading to more than half of the world's countries in the 1950s and 1960s, South Africans had to rely on other, less modern forms of communication to bring them their news. But only a few people seemed to complain about it openly, and those who did were mainly from the opposition parties and the newspapers that supported them. Television was still a fairly unknown medium among most South Africans, and despite the United Party's promises to establish television if they were elected into office, the National Party remained in power.

Then, in 1969, the moon landing changed things quite drastically. The veil over television was momentarily lifted when the television footage of the moonwalk, or ‘Moon Television’, was shown at selected venues. South Africans arrived in their thousands to see the screenings, and got not only a glimpse of man on the moon, but *especially* a peep of the medium they had been missing out on for decades. South Africans realised that, far from being the West’s leading nation, they were really outsiders who could not take part in the magnificent society that had been able to send man into space. Moon Television gave South Africans a brief look into the larger world – but it also highlighted that the only position from which South Africans could look through that window to the world, was from the *outside in*.

### **Television as a shield**

It was television’s very ability to bring the world into living rooms that caused the NP to reject the medium for nearly two decades. Television should be kept at bay, they argued, in order to protect the country and its people. The medium would threaten many aspects of South African life: the economy, important industries such as local film and theatre, and especially the morals of all South Africans. Many of these reasons were, however, often little more than excuses. There was more to the NP’s determination to keep television out than the protection of ordinary South Africans’ morals.

The NP’s policies, in fact their whole political position, were based on ideologies that were becoming increasingly unpopular in the rest of the world. If television opened a window into a multiracial, democratic world, South Africans – particularly NP supporters – might become more aware and open to a way of life that did not include NP ideology. Television also threatened industries, such as the press and cinemas, in which many NP supporters, members and even Cabinet Ministers had financial interests.

The absence of television was therefore used as a shield to protect the NP’s financial and political position. But around 1969, the situation changed. First of all, after the moon landing, many South Africans looked at the government’s reasons for television’s absence in a new light. If television was *really* that bad for a country’s

morals and intellect, how had the Americans, who had had television for forty years, been able to achieve something as remarkable as the moon landing? If South Africa was really such a modern and prosperous country as the NP would have everybody believe, why could it not find the money, infrastructure and manpower to establish television? Moreover, television had proven itself to be one of the most magnificent technological developments in the world. Why did the NP find it necessary to shield South Africans from such a marvellous invention?

Secondly, the absence of an official South African television service could only be an effective shield as long as there was no other way for ‘foreign ideologies’ to enter South African living rooms. By the end of the 1960s, South Africans could receive satellite broadcasts directly from overseas, without government approval or regulation. At a time when South Africans felt embarrassingly isolated and became increasingly hungry for television, such unsanctioned broadcasts posed a threat to government control. In order to shield South Africans from these foreign ideologies, and ultimately to protect their own position, the NP then decided to establish a state-controlled television service.

Before the 1970s, it was the *absence* of television that served as a shield. After 1976, however, it was the state’s control over South African television that became the protective screen.

South Africa’s state-controlled television service was more than just a shield to protect South Africans from anti-apartheid ideals. In order to uphold and entrench the existing NP ideology, television was also used as a screen to separate South African cultures, languages and people.

### **Television as a separator**

For two decades, the absence of television acted as a separator. Television promoted multi-racialism, argued the NP, and such anti-apartheid messages could endanger the segregation the government had worked very hard to entrench. Then, when South African television was introduced, it was segregated – just like the society in which it had originated. For many years, there was a service for white people, and a service for

black people. Moreover, the black service was further divided along linguistic and ethnic lines.

Having separate services for different language groups was not necessarily a new or unique phenomenon. In Belgium, for example, it has been common practice for years, and there are separate networks and stations for French and Flemish viewers.<sup>1</sup> But in the already heavily segregated South Africa, the language divisions were more than a practical consideration. Linguistic divisions on television were determined by race and ethnicity, and were in line with the NP's policies of segregation and separate development. Even though many black people could understand English and Afrikaans very well, it would be many years after television's introduction before black performers had important roles on white television. Besides, it was not merely a question of understanding a 'white' language. The SABC argued that, just because black viewers could understand English and Afrikaans programmes, it did not mean that the programmes would be suitable for black consumption. According to the SABC, black viewers had a lower level of visual understanding than white people, and most 'white' programmes could therefore not be shown to black audiences – not even if the programmes were dubbed into an African language. Black people had to have their *own* programmes that reflected, nurtured and cultivated their *own* cultures.

While the SABC was determined to give black South Africans their own, separate window to the world, they would make sure that this was not a window into the white man's world. South African television would not, to echo former Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd's words, show black people 'the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze.'<sup>2</sup>

### **Television screens**

In South Africa, the window to the world was veiled for many decades. When the NP government finally relented and introduced television in the 1970s, this veil was lifted, if only partially. There were still many foreign influences from which the

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<sup>1</sup> D. Biltreyst, Television in Belgium, in J. A. Coleman & B. Rollett (eds), *Television in Europe*, p.88.

<sup>2</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.71.

government wanted to shield South Africans, and the NP still wanted to keep white and black South Africans divided. But if the NP used television as a shield and a separator, it was to protect more than South African morals, attitudes and ways of life. It was really to protect their *own* control over South Africans, whether white or black.

Even though South African television only began in the 1970s, its history started many decades earlier. By the 1960s, politicians had learnt enough about the medium to be aware of its potential: but while the opposition parties saw possibilities for economic growth and cultural stimulation, the NP focused on television's potential to damage their position. Long before its introduction, television became an important instrument in the political battles between the UP and the NP. But it was more than just a political tool: television became a *symbol* of their different ideologies and visions for South Africa. On the one hand, it stood for everything that was modern, progressive and part of a magnificent human society. On the other, television represented that which was immoral, harmful and threatening. However, despite the different views on television and, ultimately, the modern world, both the NP and its opposition recognised one thing: television was a powerful invention that could, across great distances, mould thoughts, change identities and shape societies.

### **Further research**

Although some aspects of South African television have indeed been studied, there are many themes, stories and questions that have yet to be explored. One subject that has been neglected is a comprehensive narrative history of South African television *after* its introduction in 1976. Within this subject, there are several different topics and approaches to consider.

Firstly, the programmes and personalities of South African television should be documented thoroughly. A second possible topic of study is the South African broadcasting companies. Although the SABC has been researched and analysed, the other television institutions – M-NET, ETV, and especially Bop-TV – remain largely unexplored. In 2007, broadcasting licenses were awarded to four more companies,

namely Telkom Media, On Digital Media, e.Sat and Walk On Water.<sup>3</sup> This makes the South African television landscape even bigger and opens more opportunities for academic studies.

In this dissertation, the segregation of television between white and black services was explored. What was *not* investigated was the position of viewers categorised as coloured and Indian. In the research into television audiences that was done before the introduction of television, the differences between white and black audiences were highlighted, but the Indian and coloured cultures were not included. This is interesting, as the Indian languages were mentioned – in fact, it was used as a reason why television would be too expensive – in the television debates of the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> But once television was introduced, the same languages did not seem to receive any consideration. From 1979, coloured and Indian Christian ministers were used as presenters on the daily devotional programmes, and in the 1980s, coloured presenters appeared alongside their white counterparts on the white television service.<sup>5</sup> But were these appearances evidence that the state accepted these cultures to be compatible with white South African culture? Where did these groups fit in according to NP and SABC policy?

Another important topic is the role of television in the political and social changes in South Africa. For example, six months after television was officially introduced, the Soweto uprisings began. The uprisings were to play a significant part in South Africa, and have been hailed as a major turning point in the fight against apartheid. Did television have any impact on the way the June 1976 uprising was seen? Did the Soweto uprising have an influence on television and the way it was controlled by the government?

The suggested research, together with this dissertation, will enrich the study of South African television and further the understanding of a medium that has played an integral role in South Africa's political and cultural life for *more* than the thirty years that it had been on air.

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<sup>3</sup> Bizcommunity.com, 'USAASA Welcomes New Pay TV Channels'. Internet: <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/66/18078.html>, 2007-09-14. Accessed: 2007-10-12.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter III, p.72.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter VII, p.173.

**APPENDIX A**  
**THE MEYER COMMISSION'S**  
**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

*The Commission recommends:*

1. That a statutorily controlled television service be introduced for South Africa in conformity with the principles laid down in the terms of reference of the Commission and with the requirements set out in the preceding chapters of this report;
2. that the introduction of the service be entrusted to the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which should introduce it as an integrated radio and television service and should in this connection make as much use as possible of its existing machinery, and that the Broadcasting Act (Act 22 of 1936), as amended, be further amended to authorise the introduction of a television service in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission;
3. that this television service should form a supplementary and an integral part of the country's pattern of education and should be founded on such principles as will ensure that the Christian system of values of the country, the national identity and the social structure of its various communities will be respected, strengthened and enriched—
  - (a) by providing wholesome and edifying entertainment;
  - (b) by supplying reliable, objective and balanced information;
  - (c) by reflecting and projecting the cultural assets of each community;
  - (d) by stimulating indigenous creative talent; and above all
  - (e) by constantly striving to foster good relations between all the people of the country;
4. that the South African Broadcasting Act, like the National Education Policy Act, No. 39 of 1967, as amended by the National education Policy Amendment Act,

- No. 73 of 1969, be amended to provide that all radio and television services shall have a Christian and a broad national character;
5. that this television service should be subject to proper control to ensure that the service will at all times meet the requirements set forth in the Commission's terms of reference and the requirements contained in the preceding chapters of the report, and that the necessary control should be exercised by the SABC, the viewer community itself and ultimately Parliament;
  6. that from the outset, even before the introduction of television, a scientifically oriented and co-ordinated research programme should be undertaken to determine the effect of this medium in South Africa, and that the research should be continuous;
  7. that the service should not contain sponsored programmes, but only advertisements before and after programmes, and that programmes should not be interrupted for advertisements; that advertising should not exceed 10% of the total transmission time during the six week days; and that no advertisements should be broadcast on Sundays;
  8. that the service should not be developed as an extension of the film industry;
  9. that the introduction of the service should be implemented in the following phases:

*First Phase*

Initially a combined service for Whites, on one channel, should be presented in Afrikaans and in English with completely equal treatment of the two languages;

As soon as possible after launching of the first phase, a start should be made with a single-channel Bantu service in Sotho and Zulu for the Witwatersrand area;

*Second Phase*

For Whites separate services should be instituted in English and in Afrikaans as soon as practicable;

the Witwatersrand Zulu service should be extended to Durban and a Xhosa service should be introduced in the Eastern Cape;

10. that, in order to ensure that all aspects of the introduction of television are properly co-ordinated, a Standing Committee be set up, consisting of representatives of the following organisations: The SABC, the Post Office, the South African Bureau of Standards, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa Limited, the Departments of Commerce and of Industries and the Radio Manufacturers' Association;

11. that the service should commence with a colour system from the outset, which can also be picked up on black-and-white sets, since this will eventually mean a considerable saving in capital outlay, while the public will have the option of buying either black-and-white or colour receiving sets;

12. that, in regard to colour techniques, the PAL System I, as specified in Report No. 308-1 (Documents of the XIth meeting of the CCIR held in Oslo in 1966, Volume 5) of the International Radio Consultative Committee be adopted;

13. that the erection of a suitable ground station in South Africa to pick up television programmes from other countries via satellite transmitter stations should be given immediate attention by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs;

14. that the SABC should in addition erect a ground station of its own to enable it to link up with the Eurovision network of Europe on a 24-hour basis;

15. that the Broadcasting Act, No. 22 of 1936, as amended, be amended to empower the South African Broadcasting Corporation to screen applications for permits for closed-circuit systems or cable systems and to suggest requirements in this regard;
16. that one of the provisions of the Broadcasting Act should be that only the programmes of the statutory organisation which will be responsible for television transmissions may be carried by cable and closed-circuit systems, provided that such a provision should relate solely to programmes available to the general viewing public, and that systems such as those in hospital operating theatres, in mines, in secondary industries and so forth, should not be included;
17. that the Departments of Commerce and of Industries be authorised, if need be by legislation or regulation, to introduce effective tariff protection and to take steps for the production of receiving sets by private manufacturers in such a way as the Standing Committee, on the strength of recommendations, deems to be in the best interests of the country;
18. that the sales, excise and import duties on receiving sets and components, or an amount equal to the total of these duties, should be appropriated for the partial financing of capital expenditure on the introduction of the service, until such time as the service begins to show a profit, but in any event for not more than ten years after the introduction of the service;
19. that, with regard to advertising—
  - (a) no sponsored programmes be allowed, but only spot advertisements before and after programmes, and that programmes should not be interrupted to broadcast advertisements;
  - (b) advertising time should not exceed 10% of the total transmission time on the six week days, and that no advertisements should be broadcast on Sundays;
  - (c) preference be given to products and advertising copy produced locally;
  - (d) the grouping of advertising time according to a rotation or some other system be considered in order to free the presentation of programmes, especially at peak times, from any pressure that listener and viewer ratings could exert on advertising schedules and advertising tariffs;

- (e) the SABC should negotiate with the Association of Accredited Practitioners in Advertising (Pty) Ltd for a reduced advertising commission on spot advertisements since these advertisements will be very limited;
20. that a provision similar to that in the Copyright Act and in the Performers' Protection Act should be incorporated in the Broadcasting Act to enable the Corporation to show sporting events of public importance, at a reasonable fee, which in the absence of an agreement, should be determined in accordance with the provision of the Arbitration Act, 1965 (Act 42 of 1965);
21. that the Broadcasting Licence be amended so as to apply the following section 13 of the Licence to all television programmes as well:
- ‘The Corporation shall not broadcast or permit to be broadcasted any news, matter or information which–
- (a) contains anything of a blasphemous, indecent, obscene, offensive or libellous nature;
- (b) is repugnant to law or decency; or
- (c) is likely to create public unrest or civil commotion’
22. that, in regard to programmes for young people, in the scheduling of such programmes times which are suitable for children should be taken very carefully into account, so that television will not encroach unduly on the time required for their school duties, indoors and out of doors;
23. that, in regard to the use of television for extra-curricular education, the SABC should study the possibility of offering television courses in due course, in consultation and in co-operation with universities, colleges or other educational institutions in fields where this would best serve to supplement the shortage of skilled labour in the Republic;
24. that South Africa should aim at introducing an ensemble service which will in the first place take account of the whole spectrum of programme possibilities and

- programme types, constantly bearing in mind that the medium should serve the community by informing, edifying and education, but also by entertaining; and that the principle should apply that a television service should not merely consist of a number of independent programme departments each pursuing its own ends more or less as it pleases as regards programme content and presentation, but that it should form a co-ordinated homogenous whole, planned on an ensemble basis and above all with definite aims;
25. that, since the television service recommended will be subject to sufficient restrictions to ensure ample room for a profitable and vigorous press in South Africa after the introduction of television, no further protective measure in regard to the press should be introduced;
26. that no annual Government grant be made to finance television service wholly or in part because such a grant would impose unduly heavy burdens on the White taxpayers and also because the Commission is convinced that if an additional advertising channel in the form of television is not made available in South Africa, pressure of the establishment of such a channel will become so great that it will result in the establishment of parallel commercial television services on a profit-making basis which would be a development which would be extremely detrimental to South African and its people;
27. that, so far as the film industry is concerned, the Government should, with due regard to its anti-inflationary policy, as far as possible give sympathetic consideration to the representations of the industry in regard to rationalisation in the industry, particularly in granting permits for the alteration of existing theatre buildings for other purposes.

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**Source:**

P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television* (Pretoria, 1971), pp.54-57.

**APPENDIX B**  
**ANNOUNCEMENT – THE INTRODUCTION OF**  
**TELEVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

INTRODUCTION OF TELEVISION SERVICE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

The MINISTER OF NATIONAL EDUCATION: With your leave, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement. It reads as follows:

1. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to Television has been accepted by the Cabinet in its essentials. The Cabinet has also approved in principle the introduction of statutorily controlled television service for South Africa [interjections], which will form an integral part of the Republic's broad educational system as a whole and which will be based on a foundation designed to ensure that the Christian values of this country and the social structure of its various communities are respected. [Interjections.]
2. Considering that such a service will make great demands on, *inter alia*, our country's financial resources and manpower potential; that it does not warrant priority over other, more essential, projects; that considerable preparatory work will still have to be done; and that there are several, especially technical and financial aspects that call for closer study and investigation, it is obvious that it will not be possible for the service to start transmission for another four years at least.
3. The service will be entrusted to the S.A.B.C., which will have to introduce it as an integrated radio and television service with the necessary provision for effective control and making the greatest possible use of its existing facilities.
4. As regards the nature of the proposed service, a few of its main features may be mentioned:

(1) Statutory provision will be made for a body which, on behalf of and in the interests of the public, will serve the Government and the S.A.B.C. in an advisory capacity in regard to the general character of the service, as indicated above.

In addition, control will have to be exercised by officers in charge of the S.A.B.C. and by the Control Board of the S.A.B.C., by the viewing and listening public, by means of a continuous scientific research project and, ultimately, by Parliament.

(2) The service will necessarily have to be introduced in phases, and initially there will be a service of about 37 hours a week on one channel only in English and Afrikaans, with completely equal treatment of these, the two official languages. In the light of experience gained and results obtained, a decision will be taken on separate services in English, Afrikaans and the main Bantu languages.

(3) From the outset the service must be presented in colour which can also be picked up on black-and-white sets. A decision will be taken later, on technical grounds, on the particular type of colour technique to be adopted.

(4) The service will have no sponsored programmes, but only a strictly limited number of approved spot advertisements before and after programmes.

5. With a view to the expert, scientific and technical planning of the details of the service and to the necessary co-ordination, a technical advisory committee is to be constituted under the Chairmanship of the S.A.B.C.'s representative on the committee. [*sic*] consisting of an equal number of representatives from each of the following:

The South African Broadcasting Corporation, the Post Office, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Human Sciences Research Council, the South African Bureau of Standards, the Armaments Board, the

Industrial Development Corporation, and the Departments of Commerce, of Industries and of National Education.

The secretarial work will be undertaken by the S.A.B.C.

This advisory committee, which will have the power to appoint subcommittees for specific investigations or tasks, will be required to advise the S.A.B.C., and through this body the Minister, on any matter that it considers important to the introduction and development of the most efficient service possible within the framework of our resources and circumstances, but in any event at least on the following aspects:

- (1) The financial implications;
  - (2) The training of staff;
  - (3) Television by means of radio waves and/or by means of cables;
  - (4) Licensing of closed circuit and cable systems, and control of programmes over these systems;
  - (5) Safeguards against exploitation of the public by the importation and manufacture of obsolete receiving sets.
6. The Department of Industries is being directed to promote, in co-operation with other interested parties, the establishment of a local industry for the manufacture of receiving sets and for the further development of an all-embracing electronic industry in collaboration with the Armaments Board.
  7. The amending legislation to give statutory effects to the foregoing decisions, will be introduced in due course.
  8. In conclusion, the Cabinet wishes to issue a very serious warning to the general public not to buy receiving sets at this stage or commit themselves to the hiring or purchase of sets at some later stage. Today's most up-to-date set may be obsolete in a few years' time; moreover, technical progress is likely to result in lower

purchase prices. In order to utilize the manufacturing facilities to be established to the best advantage and to prevent injudicious spending, severe hire-purchase conditions in respect of television sets will be applied during the initial years.

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**Source:**

Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates (Hansard)* 33, 1971-04-27, columns 5288-5290.

## APPENDIX C

### MILESTONES IN SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION

- 15 December 1969 The Meyer Commission is appointed.
- 1970 The broadcasting portfolio is entrusted to the Department of National Education.
- 27 April 1971 Sen. J. van der Spuy (Minister of National Education) announces the introduction of television in South Africa.
- 5 May 1975 The first test transmissions are made.
- 5 January 1976 SABC-TV officially opens.
- 2 January 1978 The first advertisements are screened on South African television.
- June 1978 A number of South African television advertisements win awards at the Cannes festival.
- 1978 The British Equity ban is extended to television programmes recorded on film.
- 1979 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs once again.
- 1980 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Information.
- 31 March 1980 Piet Meyer's term as Chairman of the SABC Control Board ends.
- 1979 A start is made in using coloured and Indian Christian ministers as regular presenters of the daily religious programmes, *Oordenking* and *Epilogue*.
- April 1980 Transmission time is extended to 42½ hours per week.
- 31 December 1981 The black television services, TV2 and TV3, are officially launched with a gala ceremony.
- 31 December 1982 TV2 and TV3 are split into two regional channels.
- 1984 Bop-TV is launched.
- 7 June 1984 The first educational programme, *Ek en My Kind* (Me and My Child), is broadcast.
- 1985 TV4 is launched.
- 1 November 1985 Teledata is introduced.
- 1986 Broadcasting falls under the Minister in the State President's

- Office entrusted with Administration and Broadcasting Services.
- 1986 The first simulcasts in South Africa are broadcast.
- 1986 South Africa's first pay channel, M-NET, is launched.
- 1988 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of Home Affairs and National Education.
- 1990 TV2 and TV3 are combined into one channel, CCV-TV.
- 1991 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of Home Affairs.
- 1992 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of the Interior and Environmental Affairs.
- 1991 TSS is introduced.
- 1993 Broadcasting falls under the Minister of Home Affairs.
- 1993 A new, multiracial SABC board is appointed by State President F. W. de Klerk. Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri becomes the first black and first female Chairperson of the Board.
- 1993 TV1 and CCV-TV introduce 24-hour broadcasting by relaying CNN International and Sky News respectively throughout the night.
- 4 February 1996 The SABC introduces three new, restructured channels to replace the old services. The new channels are SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3.
- 1998 Bop-TV is formally integrated with the SABC's channels.
- 1998 South Africa's first free, independent channel, e.tv, is launched.
- 2003 Bop-TV ends transmissions.

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## **VII PERSONAL INFORMATION**

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