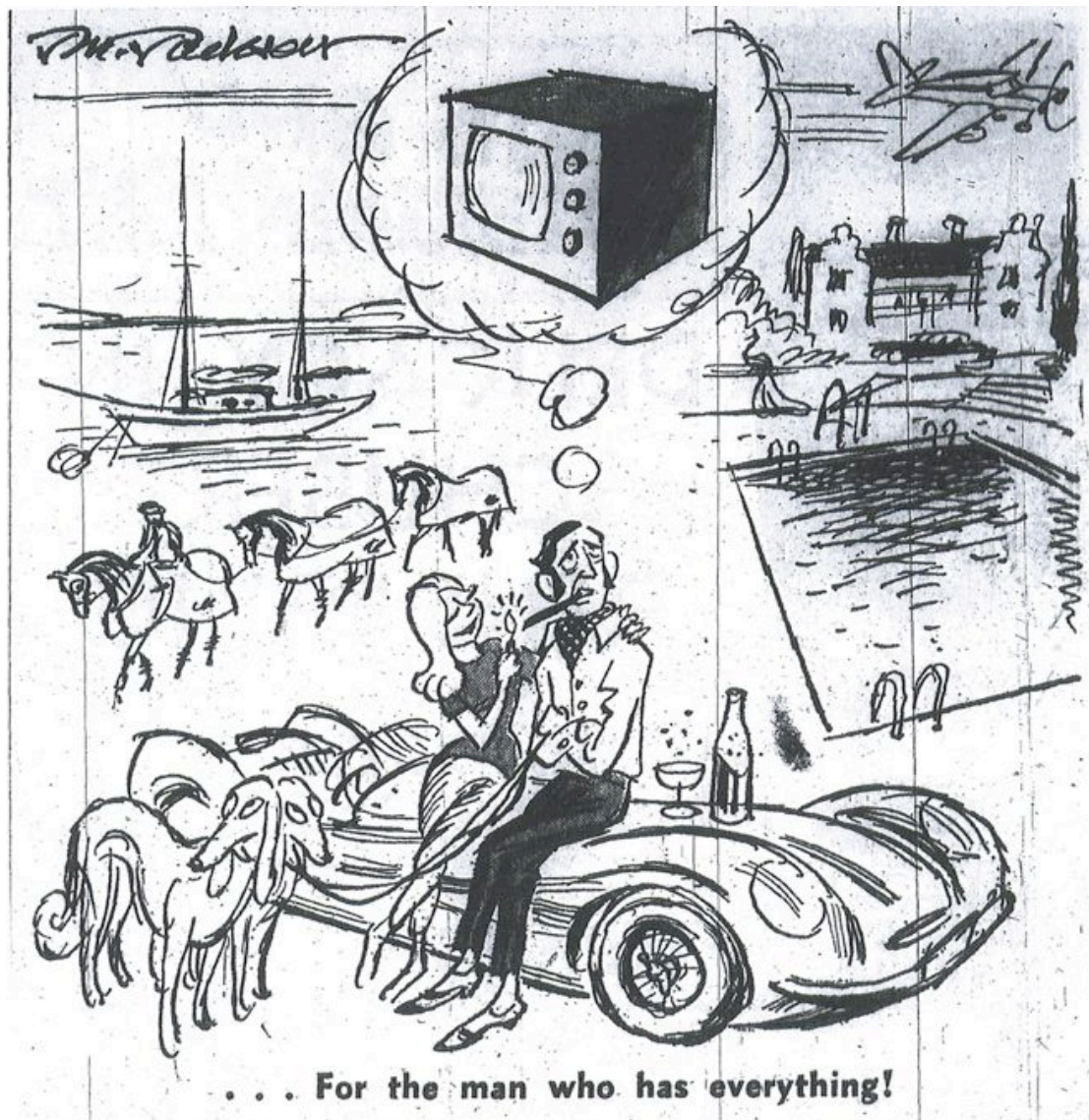


**IV**  
**SEEING STARS:**  
**TELEVISION SATELLITES AND THE MOON LANDING**



**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

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<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.