

# The Battle of the Airwaves: The Role of Radio in Mission and Colonialism/Apartheid

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## Abstract

Defining technology according to Aristotle's idea of "techne" refers to both a practical skill and the systematic knowledge or experience that underlies it. Technology can be described as a means to achieve specific objectives. This article will investigate the role of the radio during the missionary era and the accompanying colonial project. Firstly, the study will consider the genesis of radio broadcasting and its relation to the church and its mission. Furthermore, the study will focus on the ambiguous relationship between the radio during the colonial and apartheid periods in Southern Africa. The article presupposes that the World Council of Churches enabled the African National Congress to operate radio freedom through its Programme to Combat Racism and Special Fund. The article concludes with an overview of how radio served as a tool of social control during apartheid by briefly discussing the battle of the airwaves between Radio Republic South Africa and Radio Freedom.

**Keywords:** radio; mission; colonialism

## Introduction

This study investigates the role of radio broadcasting in evangelisation during the missionary era and colonialism and apartheid. Firstly, the emergence of Christian radio broadcasting and its history of development in Africa will be discussed. Secondly, the study engages how the interplay (battle) between religion (Christianity) and politics underpinned the ambiguous use of radio during apartheid. We place particular focus on South Africa's first apartheid-controlled radio station, Radio Republic of South Africa, the World Council of Churches programme to combat racism and radio freedom, and the African National Congress's (hereafter ANC) Radio Freedom.

The question of the 21st century that remains uppermost is: Who controls information, and who owns knowledge? Knowledge is a popular commodity. Within globalisation,



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technology is not ruled by neutral ethics but is consumed by economics (Clay 2004, 153). This situation offers both positive results and dangerous problems. Complex technology decisions cannot be the sole responsibility of private companies; they also demand social responsibility from Christians.

The emergence of radio broadcasting has a Christian tinge to it. The first voice transmission took place on Christmas Eve, 1906, when a Canadian innovator, Reginald Aubrey Fessenden, broadcast a Christmas message to ships off the east coast of the United States (Lausanne Movement 1989, 3). Until then, Morse code was the traditional method of transmitting messages. Fessenden entertained the crews with a violin solo composed by Gounod, namely “O Holy Night.” He then read a passage from the Gospel of Luke and continued with more music (Lausanne Movement 1989). The Pittsburg radio station in the United States, KDKA, was the first to air a religious programme on January 2, 1921, namely a church service from the Calvary Episcopal Church (*The Daytona Beach Journal* 2019). The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has broadcast Christian programmes since it first aired in 1923. The Protestant-backed Dutch Christian Radio Association (NCRV) in the Netherlands was the first international Christian radio to air in 1924 (Van der Haak and Van Snippenburg 2021, 209).

## History of Radio and Mission

The Acts of the Apostles describe how missionaries have personally shared and carried the gospel to various territories. This required long and dangerous journeys to lands believed to be saved. In contrast, 20th-century missionaries had the advantage of technological innovations such as radio to support missionary activities. Radios were inexpensive compared to a television set or other major media instruments and reached a wider audience. Churches and mission societies discovered and harnessed the enormous capacity of radio broadcasting long before any government. Since its founding in 1885, the Covenant Church Chicago has been dedicated to spreading the gospel worldwide (Larsen 2019, 125). In 1886, the Covenant Church began its world missions from Russia and China to Taiwan and Thailand. Missions began in Latin America after World War II. Clarence Jones and Covenant Church member Reuben Larsen started one of Ecuador’s first missionary radio stations on Christmas Day 1931 with a tiny 250-watt transmitter (Macharg 1994). This groundbreaking endeavour eventually led to Radio HCJB (Heralding Christ Jesus’ Blessing). This enabled the Chicago Church to witness throughout Latin America.

The Roman Catholic Church also entered the radio scene in 1931 with Vatican Radio, broadcasting from Rome (Palo 2008). By the end of World War II, the Catholic Church was leading the Protestants in shortwave broadcasting. This is mainly due to the launch of UNDA (Latin for wave) in 1928. UNDA was the Catholic International Association for radio and television based in Switzerland (Arnaldo 1968, 189). Guglielmo Marconi, considered the “inventor of radio,” was instrumental in assembling the transmitting installations of Vatican Radio. With the advantage of a technically advanced radio

station, the voice of the Pope could be heard globally. Palo (2008) states that by the 1930s, the Vatican set up radio stations in Argentina, Brazil and Portugal. Radio Vatican's African initiative was broadcast from Rome and often showed a positive and constructive approach to society and culture. By 1939, Vatican Radio was transmitting programming in 10 languages.

Since then, missionary radio has grown globally through the Far East Broadcasting Company, Trans World Radio, and many other Christian radio stations (Stoneman 2012, 200). The Protestant missionary broadcaster, Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), began broadcasting Christian programmes from the Philippines in 1948. Planning for the global missions station Trans World Radio began that same year (Palo 2008). The missionary craze of the 1950s led to the founding of radio ELWA (Eternal Love Winning Africa) in Liberia. In April 1950, three American missionary students from Wheaton College joined forces to evangelise Africa through radio. William Watkins, Abe Thiessen and Merle Steely founded the West African Broadcasting Association in February 1951, which would later evolve into Radio ELWA (Stoneman 2012, 201). In 1952, Radio ELWA merged with a North American faith-based mission company, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), which increased the station's broadcasting capacity. Radio ELWA broadcasts throughout Africa and can even be heard as far away as Fiji (ELWA 2022).

In an age of new communication technologies, radio continues to "reign supreme over other forms of mass media channels" in Africa and internationally (UN News 2022). According to the Radio Religious Bureau (NRB), Christian radio stations have more than 20 million listeners weekly (NRB 2021). This makes radio the most diverse medium and an essential source of information. Even in the age of television and social media, radio remains the universal medium for bringing the light of Christ to every corner of the world.

## Battle of the Airwaves: Radio Republic of South Africa vs Radio Freedom

Mainly two complementary, conflicting and overlapping themes govern the broadcasting history in South Africa, i.e., religion and media. It is impossible to engage the history of any form of broadcasting during the colonial era without referring to the roles of religion and politics. Religion was pivotal in supporting the political project and subsequent public broadcasting (Scharnick-Udemans 2017, 258). The National Party's version of the Calvinist tradition, endorsed by the Dutch Reformed Church, was the driving force behind public broadcasting content. Scharnick-Udemans (2017, 261) states that religious reasons were behind the delayed introduction of television in South Africa. The introduction of radio broadcasting became a means to an end, and in the context of colonialism and apartheid, that end was either defending or refuting the powers of oppression. Skelchy (2020, 346) describes the immensely influential power of radio to galvanise public opinion, which was the intention of the colonial project and

apartheid. Through radio, listeners accessed information about their faith and political surroundings and subsequently constructed their daily realities through listening. This was particularly the case for those listening to Radio Freedom from abroad. Considering the intimate interplay between religion (Christianity) and politics behind radio broadcasting during colonial times and apartheid, the study will further investigate the emergence of radio broadcasting and how it was used to repudiate and achieve human rights. During the darkest days of apartheid, radio was one of the main avenues through which oppressed people were provided hope that their freedom would be realised and their God-given human rights be acknowledged. While the apartheid radio stations were broadcasting propaganda blessed by an apartheid theology, the “guerrilla” radio stations were broadcasting valuable information, inspiring music and the decisions of the various denominations’ general synods and meetings against apartheid. The following section will provide a detailed account of the ambiguous use of radio in South Africa.

Radio development in Africa has developed in three phases since 1924 (KCOMNET 2019). The first phase was the colonial phase, as radio was appropriated for the colonial project. Lekgoathi, Moloi, and Saíde (2020, 1) agree that radio came to Africa as an instrument of empire. Radio arrived in Africa during World War II to wage the “European imperial propaganda wars” among themselves and their colonised African territories (Chikowero 2020, 66). This was particularly the case in Southern Africa. The European-controlled African colonies were subsequently drawn into the war under their European masters. South of the Sahara, France, Britain, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Portugal were the major European colonial forces. Pro-colonial radio stations first emerged in Kenya (1927), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (1932), Mozambique (1933), Congo (1935), Sierra Leone (1934), Gold Coast (Ghana) (1935), and Nigeria (1936) (KCOMNET 2019).

The Nazi radio station, Radio Zeesen, was the first South African propaganda radio station in the 1930s to focus on influencing political opinion (Lekgoathi et al. 2020, 2). This station broadcast in Afrikaans to promote Nazi sentiment in Namibia and South Africa. In 1936, Britain began radio broadcasts for indigenous peoples in all of its African colonies (KCOMNET 2019). In the early 1940s, growing racial distrust during World War II contributed to the first radio programmes being broadcast in African languages (Lekgoathi et al. 2020, 2). This was done to pacify the families of the soldiers participating in the war with regular updates. Colonial powers used this opportunity to inspire loyalty to the empire. In South Africa, in 1948, the victorious National Party (NP) inherited the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), a powerful instrument that would “support and publicise economic, social and political aspects of racial separation and white privilege” (Zaffiro 2014, 958). In 1952, during apartheid, the SABC launched ethnically divided radio stations that broadcast government-censored material. Collectively, these radio stations were known as Radio Bantu. Lekgoathi et al. (2020, 3) note that these ethnically diverse radio stations were initiated to cement the Bantustan policies of ethnic separatism.

The broadcasting landscape changed after African colonies gained independence from their European rulers. African airwaves were ruled by state-controlled radio to drive European interests. Since the 1950s, a battle for the airwaves developed when the liberation movements also seized upon radio as a mechanism for their liberation struggle. The battle escalated as liberation movements went into exile in the early 1960s, and radio access became paramount for nationalist movements in Southern Africa (Lekgoathi et al. 2020, 2). Amidst all other media tools of the liberation movements, the radio remained a key role player in the struggle for independence in Southern Africa. Radio leaves no incriminating paper trails. The invisibility of sound enabled the liberation movements to address their supporters without being physically present.

Lekgoathi et al. (2020, 2) coined the rebel broadcasters of Southern Africa as “Guerrilla Radios” since they destroyed the propaganda of the colonial state. Guerrilla radio stations included the following stations located across Southern Africa:

- Voice of Namibia of the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO).
- Angola Combatente of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).
- A Voz Livre de Angola of the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA).
- A Voz da Frelimo of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).
- Voice of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC).
- Voice of the Revolution of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU).
- Voice of Zimbabwe of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU).
- Radio Freedom of the African National Congress (ANC) (Lekgoathi et al. 2020, 2).

## Radio Republic of South Africa

On March 21, 1960, South African police opened fire on an unarmed crowd protesting outside Sharpeville police station against the dreaded pass laws.<sup>1</sup> On that fateful day, 69 people were killed and about 200 injured (Sibeko 1976). Similar events were repeated shortly at Vanderbijl Park and Langa in Cape Town. The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 was a significant turning point in South Africa’s liberation struggle as it launched a new wave of Black resistance. The shots fired at Sharpeville echoed around the world. The international community was outraged when images of the massacre circulated. After Sharpeville, the apartheid regime experienced unprecedented pressure. Most pressures were felt on the economic front as stocks plummeted and international confidence faltered (Lamola 2021, 22). International pressure after the Sharpeville massacre “alarmed the regime and businessmen” (Reddy 1965). The liberation movements took advantage of this situation when trying to persuade the international community to introduce economic sanctions against South Africa. These efforts were instrumental in

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1 This Act required Black South Africans over the age of 16 to carry a pass book, known as a “dompas” everywhere and at all times. It was a system designed to segregate the population, manage urbanisation, and allocate migrant labour.

the decision to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961 and the call for sanctions by the United Nations General Assembly in 1962 (Reddy 1965).

According to Lamola (2021, 62), since 1963, the South African economy has not only recovered from the post-Sharpeville crisis, but it was also in a period of significant economic expansion. How did the apartheid government regain international confidence and avert an inevitable collapse of South Africa's economy in two years? Sharpeville tarnished South Africa's international image, which needed correction. To this end, the apartheid government appointed three men to wage South Africa's propaganda battle. In 1960, the Department of Information (DIP) was launched, headed by Dr Connie Mulder, who later recruited Dr Eschel Rhoodie, whom Christian John Makgala described as "the Joseph Goebbels of the apartheid government" (Makgala 2016, 169; Ndlovu 2006, 155). In 1961, Hendrik Verwoerd appointed John Vorster as minister of Justice, who launched several "propaganda campaigns abroad and merciless repression at home" (Lamola 2021, 155). The apartheid government's propaganda campaign revolved mainly around two aspects. Firstly, it had to convince the West that South Africa was particularly important to the Soviet Union due to its location and, therefore, worthy of its support. Secondly, from 1963, the South African state continuously reminded the West that 71% of their gold production came from South Africa (Lamola 2021, 62). Somehow, the apartheid government had to silence its critics and show the world that apartheid was misunderstood and misrepresented.

The apartheid state chose radio as the means to achieve their objectives. According to Somerville (2018, 359), radio was the best-suited instrument as it was "immediate, overcame the problem of illiteracy and distance in reaching audiences and had the power to develop trust associated with the human voice and being told news or given opinion by recognised presenters rather than reading the pages of a newspaper." On May 1, 1966, Radio Republic of South Africa (Radio RSA), "the voice of South Africa," was formally launched by broadcasting from Johannesburg into Africa, the United States and Europe (Ndlovu 2006, 156). Radio RSA proliferated owing to its potential to broadcast in 11 languages (English, French, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, and Spanish) in attempts to sway international support. Radio RSA was to operate as the international voice of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and National Party (NP) (Somerville 2018, 365). On May 20, 1965, the opposition leader, MP Durrant, stated the following regarding the programming of Radio RSA: "... it is of no use saying there will be no propaganda service. Talks will be presented on those [shortwave radio] services. There will not only be music but talks as well because without talks the service as a propaganda service to tell the truth about South Africa is worthless" (Ndlovu 2006, 157). In his reply to Durrant, MP Greyling responded as follows:

The content of those [shortwave] broadcasts will be directed positively towards the outside world. It will not be positive propaganda because it is of no avail to try and refute propaganda with propaganda. The SABC will give a positive picture of South Africa as

a civilised country. We shall make the outside world acquainted in a positive way with the fact that we are not, for example, a police state, that we are not living in the dark ages, that there is no slavery here and that one worships God here in South Africa. We shall give the world a positive picture of the fact that we in South Africa are a civilised and highly developed nation. That will be our image. (Ndlovu 2006, 157)

In 1966, Radio RSA went from a regional broadcaster to a world broadcaster as more transmitters were installed. The voice of South Africa could now be heard across Africa, North America, Latin America, the Middle East, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, and Ireland (Ndlovu 2006, 158). It was even heard as far away as Japan. In 1965, the then-prime minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, explained the reason for launching Radio RSA:

The primary aim of the external service would be to present to the world a faithful picture of the South African way of life, and the traditions, growth and ideals of the people of Africa. The Voice of South Africa, as the service is known, would not be used as a weapon against any country or people, but would be an instrument for promoting goodwill, understanding and cooperation between nation and nation, and a medium to disseminate factual and objective knowledge of the Republic of South Africa. ... The Voice of South Africa (Radio RSA) will beam truth and goodwill to all parts of the globe. ... It will counter that which is so harmful to the welfare of this continent and civilisation as a whole. (Ndlovu 2006, 158).

As previously mentioned, Radio RSA filled the airwaves across Africa. That was both a weakness and a strength. The ANC members in exile often tuned into Radio RSA and received valuable information. According to Ndlovu (2006, 165), listening to Radio RSA was necessary for the ANC to understand what was happening in South Africa. Listening to Radio RSA, the ANC learned that spies had infiltrated its camp in Angola and that South African Air Force fighter jets were planning an attack on their camp (Ndlovu 2006, 174–175).

Ndlovu (2006, 159) states that Radio RSA was not only to broadcast a positive image of South Africa to the international audience, but to counter false propaganda against South Africa. It should further promote international trade and strengthen friendships. Deliberately designed programming included music, magazines, actuality, sport, religion, and discussions in support of Western values (Somerville 2018, 374). According to Somerville (2018, 374), Radio RSA achieved the objectives of Verwoerd and the apartheid government, as its policies distinctly influenced its narratives.

## The World Council of Churches: The Programme to Combat Racism and Radio Freedom

Radio Freedom broadcast the news six times a week in English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, SeTswana, isiZulu and isiXhosa (Moloi 2020, 190). Other programmes included: Africa Reconstruct; Writers and the People; Heroes of the Struggle; Speaking my Mind, and Pictures of History. Saturday and Sunday programming included music and religion,

respectively (Ndlovu 2006, 622). This testifies to the fact that Radio Freedom was not only interested in disseminating political information but that it also ventured to uplift the spirits of the oppressed through inspirational music and religious broadcasting. Radio Freedom also used various anti-apartheid reports and statements of the ecumenical church in their political news reporting. In one broadcast, the reporter examined the report of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference<sup>2</sup> (SACBC 1984) released in December 1984 (Tinjarir 2020). In this report, the SACBC addresses the reckless conduct of the police in townships. According to the report, obtained affidavits declare that the police's conduct resembles that of a foreign army occupying a territory of the enemy (SACBC 1984, 6). The report discusses individual events of police brutality and violence. The church always participated in Black people's struggle for liberation, as the church aligned itself with the oppressed. The "guerrilla" radio stations were an essential link between the church and the oppressed, as they provided hope to those in exile and South Africa.

Another major role player in the liberation struggle in Southern Africa was the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC provided significant impetus when the ecumenical body adopted the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) at its Consultation on Racism in Upsalla in 1968. The Consultation of Racism, sponsored by the WCC, was held in London in 1969, where it adopted a "Declaration of Revolution" (WCC 1969, 29–33). The resolution stated that instead of "onwards Christian soldiers, we are saying onward Freedom Fighters" (WCC 1969, 29). The initiative included the launch of a special fund to support the liberation movements in Southern Africa, including the ANC. The fund proceeds were distributed to the liberation movements without prescription for utilising it. In other words, movements like the ANC could employ the funds according to their discretion.

The WCC encouraged member churches to support liberation movements, including revolutions (Lamola 2021, 159). This decision of the WCC was not welcomed by everyone, including the apartheid government. Apartheid radio and television stations accused the WCC of being supporters of terrorism and the armed struggle (Lamola 2021, 160). The Prime Minister, John Vorster, called on all the South African member churches of the WCC to withdraw their membership and banned WCC officials from entering South Africa. It may be plausible to argue that the funds from the WCC to the ANC were employed to service Radio Freedom from Lusaka. Without support from the WCC, the ANC would have found it challenging to render radio broadcasting to its supporters. Hence, the backing of the church proved to be instrumental in the South African struggle history, and it is worth investigating.

## Radio Freedom and the Black Consciousness Movement

After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the Nationalist government exiled the ANC and PAC and made political gatherings illegal. As a result, until the fall of apartheid, these

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<sup>2</sup> The report is entitled, "Report on Police Conduct during Township Protest."

liberation movements had to orchestrate the liberation struggle from outside South Africa's borders. These movements needed to keep in touch with their members inside the country. They had to reassure their members that they still existed and were operational. To this end, the two movements launched their armed military wings. The ANC established uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK, the Spear of the Nation) and the PAC, Poqo (later renamed the Azanian Peoples Liberation Army or APLA) (Moloi 2020, 184).

During this period, the apartheid system governed all spheres of life and was etched into a gallery of racist laws, leaving the Black majority of the population poor and vulnerable. Steve Biko (1972, 29) discovered that under racism and apartheid, Blacks had "become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity." Aside from violating the fundamental human rights of Black people, apartheid's most potent weapon was its psychological assault. Biko recognised that apartheid was, at its roots, a psychological system. Biko (1972, 22) states that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

In the 1960s, South Africa's population was racially divided. Racially allocated living areas and the Bantustans were the most visible signs of this division. This split's main goal was to fragment the oppressed and nullify a united resistance movement. This changed with the advent of the Black Consciousness Movement, which unified all oppressed groups under the term "Black" by their oppression. Boesak (2005, 10) notes that the liberation struggle in South Africa shifted to three levels in the late 1960s. First, the vacuum left in the political arena by the ban on liberation movements was filled by a new, united, militant youth. Second, the new vision of youth established inclusiveness never seen before. Third, this generation understood the importance of transnational Black solidarity. This transnational Black solidarity was steeped in the philosophy of Black Consciousness and found expression in the notion of Black Power, which unleashed waves of resistance to the brutal apartheid regime. Biko (1972, 21) defines Black Consciousness as "an attitude of mind and a way of life." Black Consciousness led the Black oppressed to embrace their Blackness and have the courage to be Black (Boesak 1984,16).

The ANC knew that the liberation struggle would have to be fought along numerous fronts, one of which would have to encompass a psychological approach. While uMkhonto we Sizwe launched sabotage attacks on government structures, other forms of struggle were necessary to capture their supporters' hearts and minds. The ANC's Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) had to neutralise the apartheid regime's propaganda to cease support for the apartheid regime. Pallo Jordan, Frene Ginwala, and Thabo Mbeki, among others, played significant roles in DIP (Ndlovu 2006, 162). In June 1963, the ANC secretly launched "Radio Freedom" on Lilliesleaf Farm in Rivonia (Lekgoathi 2020, 141). However, it had to be dissolved after the leadership of the ANC was arrested in 1963. Radio Freedom was relaunched in 1967 as part of the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) (Moloi 2020, 190). It broadcast from

Tanzania's Radio Tanganyika's External Services and later from Lusaka. Moloi (2020, 185) argues that Radio Freedom's return in the mid-1960s revived the ANC's politics inside the country, while in exile. Radio Freedom was the only option for the government-controlled SABC programming at the time, airing political news and banned artists (Bosch 2006, 250). The Black Consciousness Movement was vibrant when Radio Freedom resumed broadcasting in exile. Moloi further argues that Radio Freedom exposed members of the Black Consciousness Movement to the politics of the ANC and encouraged them to join uMkhonto we Sizwe. Murphy Morobe, a Black Consciousness activist, recalls:

Now in all of these years (as a high school student), when I was an affiliate or I was a committed Black Consciousness activist, it was you know, there was something you really wanted to know, that were either not spoken about or you got a hint off. That related to the banned organisations. And it was really in 1973–74 that I became slowly to be exposed to the ideas of the African National Congress, mainly through Radio Freedom when some of us used to have short-wave radios and we would invite each other to listen to Radio Freedom. My friend, Supa Moloi, had an uncle who was a SACTU stalwart, comrade Elliott Shabangu who slowly Supa got to introduce us to him ... you listen to Radio Freedom and then once in a while you will luckily run across a copy of Sechaba or u Msebenzi. If you are luckier you will stumble across upon a copy of the African Communist. (Moloi 2020, 164)

Listening to Radio Freedom was illegal and punishable with eight years in prison. Bafana Sithole, a recruit for the ANC in the early 1970s, was introduced to Radio Freedom by a friend. He recalls the time as follows:

Remember, this was the period of the Black Consciousness. We then met a certain young man from the Makhaya family in Alexandra. This young man was a member of the BCM. His older brother knew about Radio Freedom and he had informed him about it. So Muza Makhaya introduced us to Radio Freedom. We were a group of about 12 young people from Alexandra. We'd meet at Gama's house. They had a spare room detached from the main house. We'd congregate there and listen to Radio Freedom. After listening we'd ask, "Where can we find this ANC?" But no one would provide us with answers. (Moloi 2020, 192–193)

Several teenagers stumbled across Radio Freedom while searching the airwaves for other stations. Wonga Bottoman, who left the country in 1980 to join uMkhonto we Sizwe, was such a case:

One quiet night as I twiddled a transistor radio, searching for a disco music station, I heard the statement, "The terrorist regime of Ian Douglas Smith," delivered in thick African tones. The broadcast went out of tune and I twiddled the dialling knob; the crackling thick voice came back and my body tensed with every turn of the knob I'd had to make, to keep the broadcast in focus. After the deliverance, a familiar song from the political rallies started. At the end, I heard that the broadcast was Radio Freedom. (Moloi 2020, 193)

Radio Freedom has often been the medium for educating and recruiting members of the ANC.

ANC structures were organised into cells of two or three people. The responsibility of each cell was to explore ways of reviving the ANC, to conduct political education, to identify young men and women who could be recruited for military training. ... Radio Freedom was identified as a particularly important medium for educating recruits about the ANC and making potential recruits aware of the ANC. (Moloi 2020, 194)

By 1973, Radio Freedom had so saturated the South African airwaves that some members of the Black Consciousness Movement began to question the ANC's approach to the liberation struggle. Some members complained "that the movement believed in talking and conscientisation and not in fighting" (Wilson 1991, 32). Some members began to abandon their ties with the Black Consciousness Movement and answered the ANC's call for an armed struggle. Several teenagers who started to listen to Radio Freedom were encouraged to join the armed struggle. In his book, *The Honour to Serve: Recollections of an Umkhonto Soldier*, Ngculu (2010, 22) recalls the following recollection:

We ... listened to the ANC's Radio Freedom, broadcast from Lusaka, and the sound of the opening tune, "Hamba Kahle Mkhonto" followed by a burst of gunfire, excited us. We would imagine ourselves pulling that trigger.

Similarly, Oupa Maluleke, who later became a broadcaster on Radio Freedom, found his inspiration to take up arms by listening to Radio Freedom.

Listening to Radio Freedom made me more militant, because I was getting frustrated. As young people we were militant. We wanted to fight these guys. Take them head on. We felt that talking won't help us. So when we listened to Radio Freedom we felt that the time for talking was over. We needed to take up arms. We were all itching to get our hands on the guns. (Moloi 2020, 194)

At this point, Radio Freedom inspired a generation with the clear message that the time for talks with the apartheid regime was over. The time to act had come. This led to an exodus of young people into exile to receive military training and return to South Africa as part of uMkhonto we Sizwe. Radio Freedom regularly broadcast revolutionary music to achieve its goal of revolutionising its members at home. In an interview with Tsepo Moloi, Oupa Maluleke recalls a particular song:

There was one song that they used to play a lot: "M'hlasibuyayo Kuyokhala umbambayi" (When we return there'll be a sound of gunfire). That song used to excite us a lot. Then we'd discuss amongst ourselves that these guys are serious. They say when they return all hell will break loose. (Moloi 2020, 196)

Radio Freedom was an indispensable participant in the liberation struggle, as it was instrumental in politicising, particularly young people. Without it, the ANC was isolated

from their members. After observing the influence of Radio Freedom on the youth, the apartheid government intervened by jamming Radio Freedom's frequency in South Africa.

## Conclusion

This article indicates that radio has been crucial in spreading the gospel's good news to the most desolate places. It was and remains an indispensable instrument of missionary work and evangelisation. The effectiveness of radio was proven again during the Covid-19 pandemic when social distancing prohibited gatherings. Radio can cross boundaries and reach audiences that otherwise would be unreachable. The article illustrates how the Christian message was partially responsible for the genesis of radio and the first voice transmission. It furthermore indicated how Christian radio expanded globally, being able to spread the gospel to all the corners of the earth.

Furthermore, this article discussed the intimate relationship between Christianity and politics and how radio was a form of struggle during colonialism and apartheid, and how it was used to both deny and fight for people's human rights and freedom. The paper argues that the WCC's PCR was instrumental in funding various ANC projects like Radio Freedom and, in doing so, provided hope when hope was absent. Radio Freedom countered the apartheid-controlled Radio Republic of South Africa with alternative and necessarily political, musical and Christian programming. In the end, the battle of the airwaves was a "war of words" for the control of the human spirit (Ndlovu 2021, 162).

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