Re-reading the propaganda and counter-propaganda history of South Africa: on African National Congress's (ANC) anti-apartheid Radio Freedom

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Abstract

Radio Freedom, the African National Congress's (ANC's) 'exiled' broadcasting platform, is arguably the oldest politically aligned and anti-apartheid-created broadcasting media institution to be solely dedicated to propaganda that challenged the racially oppressive policies of South Africa. Launched as a counter-response to the void that was left by the banning of anti-apartheid political activity in South Africa, Radio Freedom initially conducted its broadcasting activities in South Africa. It was later forced to broadcast from several African countries that were hosting the then exiled ANC. The focus of this article is on understanding how the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) in general, and Radio Freedom in particular, assisted this political organisation in maintaining a 'virtual' presence in South Africa using propaganda and counter-propaganda strategies. Using a qualitative research approach in understanding the strategies and planning of the ANC's 'virtual' propaganda machinery, the article suggests that the ANC developed an interesting attitude to control and maintain its image through political propaganda. Relying on the growing interest in media history scholarship, this article argues and concludes that Radio Freedom is one of the key media institutions that can be used to understand the history of media and its response to apartheid South Africa.

Key words: ANC, apartheid, media, propaganda, Radio Freedom