

**Between Complicity and Resistance:
A Social History of the University Presses in Apartheid South Africa**

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Abstract

University press publishing, while often associated with the promotion of academic freedom, may be situated between the poles of resistance and complicity when considering intellectual responses to apartheid. Yet the history of this form of scholarly publishing has largely been ignored thus far, due to a perception that it had little to tell us about either apartheid or the struggle against it. However, the social history of South Africa's university presses – at Wits, Natal and Unisa, in particular – provides a new angle for examining academic freedom and knowledge production during the apartheid era. Using a hybrid methodology including archival research, historical bibliography, and political sociology, this study aims to examine the origins, publishing lists and philosophies of the university presses through the lens of a continuum of intellectual responses: ranging from collaboration and complicity, to opposition and dissidence. Results show that, over time, the positions and publishing strategies adopted by the South African university presses shifted, becoming more liberal. It is argued, however, that the university presses should not be considered oppositional or anti-apartheid publishers, in part because they did not resist the censorship regime of the government, and in part because they operated within the constraints of publicly funded, bureaucratic institutions of higher education. They nonetheless produced an important, if under-valued, body of work and provided a platform for a variety of academic opinions. Moreover, the university presses faced a variety of challenges in their struggle to survive over the years, including financial pressures, international competition, and wavering institutional support. But perhaps the greatest challenge was a delicate balancing act: an attempt to promote academic freedom within a climate of political repression, censorship and ideology. The study demonstrates the significance of publishing history for an examination of broader issues of social history, as well as the applicability of a wide range of methodological tools for the field of Book History.

Keywords: academic freedom, apartheid, censorship, knowledge production, oppositional publishing, scholarly publishing, self-censorship, social history, South Africa, university presses

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AWA	African Writers' Association
CUP	Cambridge University Press
FRP	field of restricted production
GIS	geographical information systems
IPASA	Independent Publishers' Association of South Africa
ISBN	international standard book number
NLSA	National Library of South Africa
NP	National Party
OUP	Oxford University Press
PASA	Publishers' Association of South Africa
PCB	Publications Control Board
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SANB	South African National Bibliography
SPRO-CAS	Study Project on South African Christianity in Apartheid Society
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly the University of Natal)
UFH	University of Fort Hare
Unisa	University of South Africa
UNP	University of Natal Press
VOC	Dutch East India Company
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WUP	Witwatersrand University Press

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