



THE THEORIES, CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES OF DEMOCRACY
SERIES EDITORS: JEAN-PAUL GAGNON · MARK CHOU

The African National Congress and Participatory Democracy

From People's Power
to Public Policy

HEIDI BROOKS

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The Theories, Concepts and Practices of Democracy

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There are many types of democracies and many types of democrats. Though contemporary Western scholars and practitioners of democracy have tended to repeat a particular set of narratives and discourses, recent research shows us that there are in fact hundreds of different adjectives of democracy. What one theorist, political leader or nation invokes as democracy, others may label as something altogether different. Part of this has to do with the political nature of democracy. As a practice and concept, it is always contested. Yet instead of exploring these differences and ambiguities, many democrats today retreat to the well-worn definitions and practices made popular by Western powers in the twentieth-century.

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The Theories, Concepts and Practices of Democracy
ISBN 978-3-030-25743-9 ISBN 978-3-030-25744-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25744-6>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Andrew and Joni

PREFACE

This book emerges from several years of research, much of which informed my doctoral thesis, completed at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2015. In the process of the research, I became increasingly fascinated by the concept of a genealogy of ideas: The notion that our actions—as individuals, collectives, organisations and governments—do not take place in a conceptual vacuum, but are rather born of experience and of ideological and intellectual exposure. Ideas evolve, take shape and reconstitute themselves such that emergent trends in contemporary thinking require an appreciation of their origins. Ideas themselves have an intellectual or theoretical parentage and they give power and purpose to action. Comprehending the successes, failures and limitations of practice requires the exploration and interrogation of its underlying ideas.

As a scholar of political studies and South African political history, I wanted to explore what appeared to be a longstanding tradition of popular participation; a frequently stated commitment by the dominant liberation movement that the people are their own liberators. From the mid-1940s the African National Congress, under the emerging leadership of its Youth League, reconstituted itself as a mass movement and over the subsequent decades worked toward the marked expansion of its popular membership. Despite its banning in 1960 and existence as an exiled organisation for three decades, the number of people who considered themselves to fall within the ‘Congress camp’ mushroomed. By the time of its unbanning in 1990 and reorganisation as a political party

within South Africa, the ANC existed not as a clandestine movement but as a mass democratic one. With this status came not only an extensive popular hegemony but an entanglement of the mass movement identity with the very existence of democracy itself.

This organisational evolution took place in a particular historical context—under conditions of repression, underground operation and severe restrictions on open activity. The ANC was also a creature of its intellectual and ideological environment—one which extended from the domestic activity of civic associations and underground cadres, to the bilateral solidarity and alliances of international organisations and regimes. This context—organisationally, geopolitically and ideologically—shaped the very nature of the movement that emerged.

Underpinning its mass character was the mantra of active participation. Perhaps most visible in the ANC-aligned movement of the 1980s, mass participation and popular control came to characterize the discourse of the struggle and democracy. Yet what became apparent to me as my own research progressed was how the discourse of ‘people’s power’ in the 1980s had been analysed as a phenomenon of the period; a fragmented and unrepeated experience, often unrelated to its conceptual roots in the wider trajectory of ANC democratic thought. My own project thus sought to investigate this heritage in the hope that challenges to ‘popular participation’ as a democratic ideal in contemporary South Africa might be explained by its theoretical roots.

Reading in 2010, at the time that this research commenced, the surge of academic critique and political commentary on the limitations of participatory local government a decade after its legislation, I sought to locate the ANC government’s commitment to a participatory form of democracy to this broader trajectory of ideas. Fortunately, a series of valuable collections of original sources have been compiled by historians such as Tom Karis, Gwendolen Carter and Gail Gerhart which made the commencement of this research easier. Jeremy Seekings, Ineke Van Kessel and Tom Lodge, among others, provide excellent accounts of organisational activity which provide solid background to this project. Tremendous work has been done by archivists in South Africa to document and catalogue important works, records and recollections, many of which have been invaluable in the writing of this book. As such, it makes an attempt to tie together what we already know with accounts and discussions about which we know little. It sheds light on a notion

of participation by ‘the people’ which remains central to the ANC’s discourse but about which there is limited conceptual and official articulation. Perhaps most importantly, it places in the spotlight the relationship between people and movement that has been the life blood of Africa’s oldest liberation movement. At the time of writing, the ANC is facing perhaps the greatest challenge to its hegemony since 1994. Damage to both its organisational unity and moral legitimacy exists in proportions even greater than that acknowledged at its national policy conference in 2012. Yet the discussion documents of its policy conference in July 2017 were severely wanting in inspiration and innovation. Their lack of promise of anything new suggests a weariness, even complacency, in the so-called ‘battle of ideas’.

Any reversal of the damage done by years of mounting factionalism, deepening corruption and rotting of the very fabric of the people’s movement seems to rest on the Presidential leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa, in office since February 2018, as well as on the constitution of the ANC’s National Executive Committee, and most recently on the new executive cabinet following the 2019 national election. Interwoven with the issue of leadership succession is the longstanding connection of movement and people. Both the ANC’s credibility and South Africa’s democracy are infused with this relationship and with the associated identity of the ANC which, despite its growing fragility, has been so effective in sustaining its hegemony until now.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude is due to a great number of people for assistance and support during the writing of this book. The Leverhulme Trust in the United Kingdom provided generous financial support for my research, which was carried out as part of my doctoral studies, without which much of the archival study would not have been possible. My thanks also go to the Department of Political Studies and Humanities Graduate Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand, and to students and colleagues at the Centre for Social Change at the University of Johannesburg who provided a continuously stimulating academic environment for writing and research. I am also fortunate to belong to the collegial environment of MSA where I lecture in political studies. I thank Kate Alexander, the South African Research Chair in Social Change for her mentorship and ongoing support, Anthony Butler for his encouragement, and Daryl Glaser, as my doctoral supervisor, for his advice and sharp mind in guiding me through the field of democratic theory. I received valuable comments on earlier stages of my work from doctoral examiners, Roger Southall, Saul Dubow and Bettina von Lieres, and from anonymous reviewers in the writing of the final manuscript. Ambra Fintello and Anne-Kathrin Birchley-Brun at Palgrave Macmillan have been extremely helpful on the road to publication.

The archival staff of the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre at the University of Fort Hare, the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, Wits Historical Papers, the South African History Archives and South Africa's Constitutional Court

provided valuable assistance and access to their archive collections during my data gathering. Tremendous gratitude, in particular, goes to the individuals who generously gave their time and made themselves available for interview. Their personal recollections and insights have been invaluable in contributing rich material to inform this book.

I thank my brother and sister-in-law, Skip and Helen, and my circle of friends in South Africa and the UK for their friendship and encouragement along the way. The support of my parents, Roger and Chris Brooks, enabled me to go to university, travel to South Africa and continue onto a doctorate. Most of all, I thank my husband and best friend, Andrew and our daughter, Joni who give me the love, support and encouragement every day to enable me to do what I enjoy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	Alexandra Action Committee
ANC	African National Congress
CAJ	Civic Association of Johannesburg
COD	Congress of Democrats
Cogta	Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COP	Congress of the People
Cosatu	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPF	Community Policing Forum
CST	Colonialism of a Special Type
DLCA	Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs (ANC)
DLG	Developmental Local Government
DPE	Department of Political Education (ANC)
DPLG	Department for Provincial and Local Government
Gear	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MK	Umkhonto We Sizwe
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NEC	National Executive Committee (ANC)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLGNF	National Local Government Negotiating Forum
NWC	National Working Committee (ANC)
NWC-SC	National Working Committee Sub-Committee (ANC)

RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
Sactu	South African Congress of Trade Unions
Salga	South African Local Government Association
Sanco	South African National Civic Organisation
UDF	United Democratic Front



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Battle of Ideas

The political landscape of contemporary South Africa is a combination of its past and present. A history of colonialism and apartheid has left deep social and political scarring and a skewing of the nation's socio-economic trajectory lasting well into the third decade of democracy. Its history of popular political organisation and aspirations for a participatory form of politics have also been carried through to the democratic era. Yet the current political environment is characterised by widespread popular disillusionment with the quality of democracy. Since 2004, South Africa has seen an upsurge in popular protest (Booyesen 2007: 24; Alexander 2010), often seemingly triggered by the failures of service delivery but rooted in deeper grievances over lack of representivity, accountability, and disappointment with the fruits of democracy. The spread of community and sectoral unrest in black urban townships, the fateful mineworkers' strike at Marikana in 2011, and the 2015–2016 #FeesMustFall movement on university campuses provide but a few examples.

The backdrop to the present picture is a long history of struggle politics which fostered not only popular aspirations for a democratic future, but the idea of a democratic state in which South Africa's citizens would play a decisive part. At the helm of this struggle was South Africa's largest liberation movement, and now dominant party, the African National Congress (ANC). In recent years, despite a shift in party leadership and the faded prospect of a 'new era' of bottom-up organisation, South Africa has witnessed a ruling party increasingly factionalised. The years

from 2007, in particular, have been marked by a crumbling of the ANC's historic alliance with labour, the breakaway and subsequent formation of new parties posing a challenge to the ANC,¹ mounting distrust of the executive, internal leadership challenge, systemic levels of personal aggrandisement in public office, and popular frustration with the unmet promises of freedom.

There has, more positively, been a burgeoning of alternative Left movements. The emergence of a new protest politics has brought with it a revitalisation of civil society organisations and autonomous social movements, not only challenging the status quo, but demanding substantive popular engagement in the governance process. Indeed, it might be suggested that the challenge to centralised power through associational mobilisation from below, represents both a prospering of new spaces for action by an engaged citizenry and the claiming of political rights.² Yet, as South Africans have increasingly resorted to 'invented' spaces to make their voices heard, this has been seen as symptomatic not only of a popular desire to influence policy but of the failure of formal institutional channels for citizen participation in governance (Benit-Gbaffou 2007, 2008; Sinwell 2010).³

During both the transition to democracy and since 1994, the ANC has advocated a role for participatory democracy alongside representative institutions. Local government, in particular, has been the focus of this initiative, with participatory democracy being provided for through both constitutional provision and municipal legislation. Yet, despite the intent to engage citizens in decision-making processes about issues that affect their lives, the participatory democratic project in South Africa is largely considered to have failed and has not fulfilled the objectives set out in legislation.

Although, on the part of the ruling party, the presence of formal mechanisms for participatory democracy indicates more than a rhetorical commitment, for an organisation whose 'mass character' has long been the vehicle of its political programme, the limitations of its approach to institutionalising citizen participation warrants examination. Many on the Left in the historic ANC alliance continue to lament the post-1994 submergence of the ANC's participatory traditions in an increasingly 'thin' democracy. As a movement, the ANC, as Anthony Butler argues, has "always been constituted in part by how its supporters have conceived of it" (2012: 14). In the context of formal and institutional commitments—and history of the ANC-as-movement, whose very *raison d'être* lies in its connection with the people—how does one explain the

inadequacies of democracy's depth? Those with an interest in the construction and future trajectory of South African democracy might well ask, what went wrong?

In order to understand the limitations of South Africa's participatory democracy, this book interrogates the connection between *ideas* and *practice*: how deficiencies in the practice of citizen participation might be explained by the ideas that inform it. The deficits of democracy and failures of the democratic promise are witnessed by present day South Africans. Yet the origins and explanations for these deficiencies can be found in the history of its democratic trajectory. Valuable scholarly attention has been given to both procedural and substantive weaknesses in the implementation of participatory mechanisms. Yet the ideas that inform commitments to participatory democracy remain inadequately understood: *There has been limited examination of their conceptual underpinnings as an explanatory factor of policy failure.* There has also been no analysis to date which takes into account *the interconnection between the ANC's very understanding of 'democracy' and its own mass movement history.*

1.1 THE INTERTWINING OF MOVEMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Despite the weakening of the ANC alliance, the domestic political landscape of South Africa remains indisputably shaped by its dominance—not only as a political party but as a mass movement historically. The increasing strength of political opposition, and notable (if marginal) decline in the ANC's share of the vote in the 2019 elections, do not nullify the imprint that its democratic discourse has made on the contemporary landscape. For the movement's activists and intellectuals, as Butler suggests, “the ANC is more than an organisation: it is also an idea” (2012: 14). An important, yet under-theorised, strand in participatory democratic discourse, is linked to the very identity of the ruling party.

The ANC has historically seen itself as engaged in a battle of ideas: an ideological struggle over the vision for the democratic state in which it seeks to mobilise and win hegemony over progressive sectors of society. Although this battle is framed as a national (even global) contestation, between external neo-liberal forces and the objectives of its own ‘national democratic revolution’ (ANC 2013, 2017), there has always been and remains a struggle for ideological dominance within the movement itself.

This book seeks to show how the contestation of ideas in the ANC about the role for the people is played out in participatory democracy. The focal periods of the book are the 1980s ‘people’s power’ movement and the formulation of post-1994 policy. While there is no cut-off date for the period of analysis, the book is concerned with the period of policy formulation: the roots and development of ideas and their conversion into formal commitments. By examining the ANC, first as a liberation movement and then a dominant party, it unravels the theory and ideas within the ANC that inform its policy commitments. Importantly, the discussion highlights how the intellectual history and conceptual underpinnings of the post-apartheid framework have played a critical role in the way democracy is understood and practiced.

1.2 SOUTH AFRICA’S LANDSCAPE OF PARTICIPATORY TRADITIONS

Existing research on the 1980s experience of organisational and grass-roots struggle ranges from providing a history of the movement itself to case-study-based accounts of popular power in various regions and localities. From the end of the 1970s, with the resurgence of domestic struggle, the growth of organised black labour and advent of a broad civic movement largely aligned to the ANC, a language of mass participation and control became visible in its discourse (Lodge 1999: 5). The period 1985–1986 saw the emergence of township organs of ‘people’s power’, as well as a revival of the 1955 Freedom Charter’s demand for ‘democratic organs of self-government’. The ANC’s call of 1984 to render South Africa ‘ungovernable’ (Mayibuye 1984) shifted toward a discourse of ‘people’s power’ in which the centre of control was transferred from the apartheid state’s Black Local Authorities to local popular organs informally structured outside of the state.

Thorough accounts of township struggles in the 1980s are to be found in works by Jeremy Seekings (2000), Ineke Van Kessel (2000), Steven Mufson (1990), Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson (1991), and Glen Adler and Jonny Steinberg (2000). Equally, some of the most well-known case studies of popular and civic organisation in the mid-1980s cover townships in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging region (Seekings 1991, 1992a, b; Marks 2001) and, more specifically, the West Rand (Seekings 1992a; Van Kessel 2000), Alexandra (Bozzoli 2004; Mayekiso 1996; Carter 1991), Atteridgeville/Sausville (Steinberg 2000)

and Diepkloof (Marks 2001). Research has also covered areas including Sekhukhuneland (Van Kessel 2000), Port Elizabeth (Cherry 2000a, b) and, to a much lesser extent, Cape Town (Van Kessel 2000; Scharf and Ngcokoto 1990).

Seekings (2000) and Van Kessel (2000) have produced the most thorough written histories of the United Democratic Front (UDF)—an umbrella organisation launched in 1983, originally to campaign against the elections for a tricameral parliament, but which later took on a much broader significance in linking local community and sectoral struggles to demands for national political change (Seekings 1992b; Sisulu 1986: 101–102; Van Kessel 2000: 28). While these popular structures were widely understood by ANC activists and cadres as contributing to mass mobilisation for the liberation struggle, for some they were also understood as pre-figuring a direct and participatory democracy (Adler and Steinberg 2000).

Feeding into the burgeoning civic movement were the traditions and personnel of the independent trade unions. Organised labour, which, from the 1970s, had been implementing democratic shop-floor structures and practices of workplace democracy (Friedman 1985, 1987; Fine and Webster 1989; Adler and Webster 1995, 2000; Erwin 2017), made an imprint on the organisational practices and representative structures taken up by community activists (Friedman 1985: 451–452; Glaser 1991).

As a legal front organisation comprised of national and regional leadership but also a range of local affiliate organisations, the UDF itself housed a variety of political traditions (Lodge and Nasson 1991: 127). For this reason, the discourse of ‘people’s power’ itself was by no means uniform. Containing traits and influences of the ANC’s multiple traditions, the shapes it took were not always democratic. Amongst activists, intellectual influences of nationalist and Marxist thought varied and, while the UDF had aligned itself with the ANC’s ‘national democratic’ project, Lodge and Nasson highlight the dominance of a socialist vision amongst the UDF rank and file (*ibid.*: 134).

In the official literature of the ANC of the time, and in the dominant narrative of its leadership in particular, the imprint of the civics’ and unions’ ethos of grassroots control is interestingly absent. While they each formed part of the MDM, and thus the contestation of ideas, it is not clear that their discourse was dominant in the ANC’s understanding of *democracy*. In the ANC’s own narrative, as this book seeks to show, trade union influence remained wanting throughout the 1980s, as did a

real commitment to the idea that people's power' was not merely a vehicle for revolution, but a valuable end in itself.

Despite the array of literature on mass organisation in the 1980s, missing from existing accounts is an analysis of the ideas about democracy that this popular movement implied—not only as isolated organisations, but as part of a *broader trajectory of democratic thought*. The way in which both the role and future of people's power was understood by the ANC helps us to uncover the formation of ideas about the role of popular participation.

In addition to the literature on internal activism and organised labour, accounts of the ANC's period in exile provide important insight into its thinking about the armed and political struggles.⁴ Howard Barrell's research (1992, 1993) addresses the relevance of the ANC's review of revolutionary strategy in 1978–1979 to the direction that the internal liberation struggle took from 1980 onwards. The review acknowledged the severe limitations of the 'militarist vanguardism' it had pursued up until this point (Barrell 1992: 85) and instead 'identified a political base as a prerequisite for a decisive and forcible ANC contention for state power' (ibid.: 64). Grassroots political organisation inside South Africa consequently came to take on greater strategic importance. While this may have set a precedent for the anticipated role of civil society organisations as partners in the forging of a democratic state, the ANC's new focus on internal mobilisation did not, in reality, beget the building of a real grassroots power base nor the inclusion of ordinary people in the construction of a democratic future (Friedman 2012). Although the waning conceptual influence of civics and labour became most apparent in the political transition, this book seeks to show how its roots can be traced to dominant thinking in the ANC already present by the 1980s.

The theoretical debates and discussions in the ANC camp leading up to the democratic transition—the years following the height of people's power in 1986, and preceding the 1994 formation of the Government of National Unity—also constitute an important period in the history of its democratic thought. As apartheid's longevity grew increasingly doubtful, the latter part of the 1980s begot a more detailed discussion about its vision of a democratic future. Warranting a particular focus, is the intersection of formal discussions in the ANC which resulted in an official position as to the *type* of state it envisaged, and the debates and democratic discourse of people's power in the MDM at home. The work of the ANC's Constitution Committee, established in Lusaka in 1986 to draw up a set

of constitutional principles, has been somewhat overlooked in this regard (Brooks 2018). Yet two of the most critical shifts which would shape participatory policy took place during this period, including the adoption of some classically ‘liberal’ democratic principles, and the envisaged location of participatory democracy in the local government sphere specifically.

Since the transition, South Africa has embarked on a period of policy formulation with regard to participatory democracy. While it has taken time for the legislative meat to be put on the bones of policy frameworks, the participatory principles for which the ANC has sought institutional form continue today to be linked by policy-makers to 1980s traditions of civic activism and community participation. The later chapters of this book therefore turn to the very ideas informing post-1994 policy. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 was seen by many on the Left as providing the policy foundation for people-driven, participatory development (Lodge 1999: 9). Through green and white paper processes, and finally in the passing and implementation of legislation, participatory democracy has been given form and content alongside a commitment to parliamentary representation.

The ANC, moreover, has linked the Freedom Charter’s principle, that ‘the people shall govern’, to the structures of local government (ANC 1995) and, more specifically, to ward committees (ANC 2000). For South Africa’s citizens, the local government ward committee system constitutes the primary mechanism in legislation for the institutionalisation of participatory democracy. Parts of the ANC have gone so far as to refer to participatory governance structures as contemporary ‘organs of people’s power’.

On the surface, therefore, both political and legislative commitments are in place. Reports from commentators, academics and participating communities themselves, however, suggest that these mechanisms are not substantively working. The civic movement, previously at the centre of people’s power, has not come to play the influential role in community representation it had envisaged. The ANC has rather sought to co-opt civics within its own project of national democracy, branding as ‘anti-transformation’ those organisations embarking on protest against government delivery. Joining an alliance with the ANC, Cosatu has also forgone its political autonomy, choosing loyalty to the movement over adherence to its ideological proclamations.

With regards to the establishment of institutionalised participation, a range of research has been published detailing its systemic and structural

failures (Buccus et al. 2008; Benit-Gbaffou 2008; Piper and Deacon 2009; Malabela and Ally 2011). Despite clear expectations upon municipalities to engage communities in decision-making, reports indicate that state-invited spaces have been of limited success in providing for local control, accountability and feedback.⁵ Yet while these accounts highlight issues such as deficits in representivity, the challenge of educating communities, weak accountability of participatory structures, and problems of party-political loyalty, absent from the research to date is an attempt to *connect* this failure to the *underlying theory*. As a result, despite a discourse whose trajectory has made reference to popular involvement, we still don't fully understand how the ANC conceives of 'participation'.

1.3 APPROACHING THE STUDY OF IDEAS

This book is a combination of democratic theory and political and intellectual history. It traces and interrogates the genealogy of ANC democratic thought, exploring the way in which popular participation has been understood by the ANC in the context of both struggle and democracy. In so doing, it assesses how the ANC viewed the role and future of people's power; examines its ideas about democracy from the late 1980s through the transition; and attempts to draw out the way in which various ideas and themes have been woven into contemporary policy.

The contestation of political concepts and ideas, as Laurence Hamilton reminds us, are the crux of politics and political theory (2013: 521). As such, we cannot overlook the significance of intellectual histories and the genealogy of political thought. This book cannot profess to be a pure 'history of ideas'—a endeavour that seeks to understand the development of ideas and theories through examining the historical contexts in which they were formulated—social, political *and* discursive (Hamilton 2014: 338).⁶ Yet the book is, nonetheless, premised on the position that politics and democracy cannot be understood without reflection on the role of ideas—theories, concepts, and their history, contestation and context. As such, it is a contribution to attempts to reinvigorate the study of ideas. Examination of the development of intellectual trajectories can tell us as much about our present as our past (Hamilton 2014).

It is acknowledged that within the ANC there is no well-developed theory of participatory democracy. The banning of the liberation movement and its primary focus on the overthrow of apartheid precluded

a detailed discussion about the form of a future state. This absence of a singular understanding of participatory democracy is, of course, a reflection of the ideological breadth of the ‘Congress movement’.⁷ The shifting influence of different intellectual strands and ideological camps—between Marxist-Leninists, workerists, social democrats, and liberals—is characteristic of the ANC historically and is no less relevant to its vision of democracy. Coinciding influences and ideological outlooks, indeed, sometimes characterised individuals—as Butler describes of Cyril Ramaphosa’s lasting affiliation to the simultaneous ideas of black consciousness, non-racialism, socialism and, later, business (2013: 219).

In light of what Hamilton suggests has been an aversion to, and ideological polarisation of, theoretical positions and debates in the study of politics in South Africa (2013: 524–525), it would seem all the more important to examine such conceptual heritage. Interrogation of the movement’s understanding of democracy thus necessitates familiarity with its ideological roots and traditions. For the ANC, the Freedom Charter and the concept of National Democratic Revolution (NDR) endure as guiding frameworks. Also of relevance are the overlapping identities, ideological roots and personnel within the Congress camp: The South African Communist Party (SACP) from the 1950s, the UDF from 1983 to 1991, and Cosatu from 1985. While the focus of this book is specifically on ‘the ANC’, it seeks to highlight the ways in which inter-organisational linkages and cross-cutting membership have shaped, promoted or constrained certain ideas.

A related issue, of course, is how we define ‘the ANC’. This is especially pertinent to its period of illegality, its alliance with the SACP, and the concurrent existence of the aligned, but officially autonomous, UDF. While we can isolate the UDF as a legal front organisation, it was, by its own admission, operating in the absence of the banned ANC and some members of the UDF leadership were involved in the underground ANC. Organisational and communication difficulties triggered by the ANC’s banning, however, saw the development of divergent strategies and tactics between the exiled movement and internal activists. Importantly, different ideas existed across the Congress camp about the role and future of people’s power. Analysis of the 1980s in this book therefore looks at the ideas about popular participation within both the exiled leadership of the ANC and within the UDF, civics, trade unions and other groups who came to comprise the MDM. As John Dunn observes in uncovering intellectual histories, man’s influence over the

power of ideas is itself held unequally (Hamilton 2014: 340). As such, understanding the triumph of some ideas over others, is part of the value of studying their histories (ibid.).

In mapping the history of democratic thought in the ANC, we can certainly identify the emergence of dominant currents and understandings. As a broad church, the contested ideas in the ANC have sometimes remained unresolved—from the race-class debate of the ‘national question’ (Simons and Simons 1969; Wolpe 1972, 1975, 1988; Callinicos 1999; Legassick 2017; Davies and O’Meara 1984), to the role of rights in a national democratic state (Sachs 1988; Friedman 1993) and achievement of political democracy at the expense of economic transformation (Marais 2001, 2011; McKinley 2001, 2006). Thus, while the book examines the coexistence of a variety of influences on the shaping of democracy, it also identifies those conceptions which have, in effect, ‘won out’.

It also seeks to show that the dominant notions of democracy in the contemporary ANC are not necessarily manifestations of the democratic era, nor are they a reflection of a post-1994 shift in the ‘character’ of the former liberation movement. Instead, they are a consequence of long-standing conceptual currents in the ANC historically. The dominance of a *vanguard* conception of democracy and a *teleological* view of participation in the ANC—explored in Chapter 3—can be traced to a strand in its democratic discourse during the years of struggle. While this was by no means the *only* conception of popular power in the ANC ‘family’, examination of the historic discourse of the ANC itself suggests a very limited presence of the democratic vision of its partners in the labour and civic movements. Where ideas of popular power have emerged in the ANC, they have joined the battle for influence. Yet, ultimately, they have served neither the purpose of empowering workers nor providing communities with agency. Limitations in the character of democracy can be traced to the history of underlying ideas.

Taking this analysis into the post-1994 era, existing accounts of functional and democratic weaknesses in the system of participatory governance are valuable in their analysis of specific structures, mechanisms and localities. As such, this book does not seek to retrace existing terrain and is instead concerned with exploration of the ideas informing such policy. In light of this focus, it does not purport to provide a study of *non-institutional* participatory spaces instigated by civil society. A wealth of literature is already available on the rise of social movement and civil

society activism.⁸ What the book does do, however, is take note of the emergence of such invented forms of participation, considering the way in which they are understood by the ANC as a participatory democratic space.

Finally, it should be noted that the analysis takes place in the context of formal commitments by the ANC to complementary systems of representative and participatory democracy. It has formally set out its adherence to principles of liberal constitutionalism: the separation of powers, provision and protection of individual rights, political pluralism and open contestation. Political opposition may be discredited—even deemed undesirable—but it nonetheless operates openly on a contested terrain. Therefore, while the book is concerned with participatory democracy, it incorporates analysis of the ANC’s understanding of democracy generally. It is also intended as a contribution to normative democratic debate, discussing participatory democracy by drawing on a range of ideas about its role. This approach is not to submerge the empirical in theory, but is rather used to inform the questions asked of the ANC’s conception of participation. Importantly, it seeks to reveal how the understanding of participatory democracy maintained by the dominant political forces in the ANC influences the extent to which resulting practices can truly be considered ‘democratic’.

1.4 THE ROLE OF THEORY IN SHAPING DEMOCRACY

To some extent, an exploration of participatory democracy in South Africa must be located in a broader understanding of its theoretical and intellectual origins, as well as an awareness of the debates in democratic theory regarding its normative value. For Left democratic theorists, the participation of citizens is seen as a valuable supplement (and, for some, a superior alternative) to representative democratic institutions.

The surfacing of participatory democracy as an alternative to contemporary representative democracy can be located in the rise of radical democratic discourse in the 1960s. By the early 1980s, citizen participation had formed part of a global discourse and practice on the New Left, emanating both from a revived interest in democratic alternatives to orthodox Marxism as well as a desire to address the limitations and political inequality of classic liberalism (Held 1996: 264–265).

Despite apartheid South Africa’s global isolation in the 1970s and ’80s, the spread of New Left debate about participation was visible there

at around the same time. Marxist intellectuals and left wing activists engaged in the growth of the independent trade unions and, in support of material struggles in South Africa's black townships, brought with them discussions about the role of ordinary people in bringing about development and change. During the early 1990s, a not unrelated wave of thinking re-emerged amongst development specialists globally, whose ideas influenced international organisations, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) via a broader theory of 'participatory development'. Debates on the role and impact of participation have since come to incorporate a range of concerns, including goals of popular empowerment; the benefits of decentralised democracy; the realisation of procedural and substantive democracy; and the protection of rights and freedoms.

Although radical approaches gained visibility from the late twentieth century, the intellectual lineage of participatory democracy can be traced to Jean Jacques Rousseau's denunciation of representative democracy as a narrow and limiting form of popular control (1762). While Rousseau's was a form of direct democracy that drew its inspiration from the city states of Ancient Greece, the value he placed upon participation's 'educative' and 'self-sustaining' qualities (Pateman 1970: 24–25) influenced radical democratic thought. It also restored debate amongst subsequent theorists about the value of 'classic' democracy involving the direct participation of citizens (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Keane 1988; Walker 1966; Bobbio 1987; Dahl 1985).

Although the formation of the modern nation state rendered Rousseauian ideals of republican and direct democracy increasingly untenable, its ideas have caused modern democracy to undergo normative reconsideration. Indeed, in the global South, the push for broader societal participation and a redefining of democracy has been an important characteristic of movements from below (de Sousa Santos 2005).

Drawing on the ideas of theorists such as Carole Pateman (1970), Benjamin Barber (1984), John Keane (1988), David Beetham 1993, 2005 and more recently Andrea Cornwall (2008), Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan (2004), participatory democracy has largely come to be understood as *the participation of individual citizens in decision-making processes about issues that affect their lives*. According to Beetham, if 'the core meaning of democracy is the popular control of collective decision-making by equal citizens [then] the point of participation ... is to have some say in, and influence upon, collective decisions' (1993: 61).