

# The silencing of radical democracy in American community development: the struggle of identities, discourses and practices

Akwugo Emejulu

---

**Abstract** This paper attempts to understand how 1968 as a transformative historical moment has influenced the discourses and identity constructions of community development in the United States. Using a post-structuralist discursive analytical framework, the paper examines the nature and structure of community development discourses as reproduced in the language and social practices of the militant wing of the Southern Civil Rights Movement, the early Black Power movement, Alinskyism and the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty. Rather than community development being constituted by radical democracy, this paper argues that community development is dominated by hierarchical and unequal ideas and practices which invest the professional subject with agency and construct local people as passive objects. The paper explores how the radical democratic practices have been silenced from 1968 onwards and as a result how contemporary community development discourses may be reproducing highly problematic ideas and practices which undermine rather than support community development's goal of achieving equality and social justice for marginalized groups.

---

---

*Address for correspondence:* Akwugo Emejulu, Department of Educational and Professional Studies, Jordanhill Campus, University of Strathclyde, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP, UK; email: [a.emejulu@strath.ac.uk](mailto:a.emejulu@strath.ac.uk)

## Introduction

The year 1968 is often constructed in the United States as a transformative historical moment whereby the ideas of democracy, power and justice were radically transformed by the Civil Rights Movement, the New Left and the nascent feminist movement. In terms of community development, 1968 serves as a crucial historical moment because an innovative community organizing praxis used in the militant wing of the Southern Civil Rights Movement helped to transform wider social and political structures in terms of winning expanded social rights for African-Americans and extending the scope of the welfare state. Because the mythologizing of 1968 invokes radical democratic ideals, it is important to interrogate this historical moment in order to better understand what kind of radicalism, democracy and equality community development has adopted as both a goal and purpose for social justice activities today.

This paper focuses on the changing discourses and identities of community development in the United States from 1968 to 1975. Community development is a political and social process of collective education and action to achieve self-determination and social justice for marginalized groups. Using a post-structuralist discursive analytical framework, three major discourses have been identified for analysis. The 'Democracy discourse' is constituted by the ideas, language and practices of community organizers in the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC), the dominant militant organization within the Southern Civil Rights Movement. The 'Power discourse' is constituted by the ideas, language and practices of activists involved in the Black Power movement and those organizers supporting Alinskyism. The 'Poverty discourse' is constituted by the ideas, language and practices of official state actors administering the federal anti-poverty programmes funded by the Ford Foundation and the Johnson Administration. As we shall see, the ability of these three discourses to respond to the antagonistic practices of competing discourses during this transformative moment appears to be the cause of the marginalization of the Democracy discourse and the domination of the language and ideas of the Poverty and Power discourses from 1968 onwards. As will be shown, the silencing of the Democracy discourse within the texts of community development has profound implications for community development's sense of self and the way it constructs ideas of radicalism, equality and social justice.

However, before we explore the structure and practices of these three discourses, this paper will briefly discuss the methodology used to analyse discourse and texts.

## Comparative moments and discourse analysis

Drawing on Hansen (2006), this paper has adopted her 'comparative moments' analytical model. Hansen argues that discourse analysis is the process of understanding how identities are constructed and reproduced through the systematic selection and rigorous analysis of texts. Understanding identity construction is a three-pronged process of analysing basic discourses, the dominant and oppositional practices between competing discourses and the construction of the Self and the Other within particular discourses. Hansen (2006, p. 78) defines her comparative moments as 'a small number of clearly defined points in time which are tied to particular events [that are] analytically driven by changes in important political structures and institutions.' Analysing discourse and identity within a structure of comparative moments is helpful because these moments can 'generate knowledge of discursive changes – or repetition – across well defined moments... [and] trace how previously important representations have been silenced and written out of the discourse of the present' (ibid, p. 78–79).

Rigorous text selection and analysis is the linchpin for effective discourse analysis. Texts are academic articles, policy documents, training manuals, newspaper articles and speeches that comprise the discourse of community development. Texts, however, are not self-contained entities; they are relational and interact with each other and in so doing, some texts are granted authority while others are marginalized (Howarth, 2000; Hansen, 2006). Understanding intertextuality is crucial for text selection and analysis because by tracing the relationships between texts it is possible to deduce how dominant and marginal discourses are created and reinforced.

Hansen (2006, p. 85) suggests that the texts selected and analysed should be based on their clear articulations of basic discourses, that texts are cited widely, have authority and status and that texts provide a mixture of 'official' discourses in terms of state policies and approaches and anti-establishment and oppositional discourses in terms of re-conceptualization of identities and practices. In addition, Hansen suggests that the majority of texts selected and analysed should be from the time period under study and that these primary texts should be supplemented by conceptual history texts in order to place texts in a social and political context and to demonstrate how texts and discourses have interacted over time. Half of the texts selected for analysis in this paper are primary and are from the 1968–1975 historical moment; however, these texts have been supplemented by conceptual history texts. As will be discussed in more detail later, the Democracy discourse is primarily an oral discourse; it was reproduced through mass meetings and through the practice of organizing and mobilizing

black communities in the South. With the exception of Zinn (1964) and the minutes of SNCC staff meetings, very few primary texts were produced during the time period under scrutiny, and it is only recently that SNCC and its particular approach to militancy and democracy have been studied systematically. As a result, several contemporary texts have been used for this particular discourse analysis. Hansen's (2006, p. 53) guidelines for reading texts are straightforward: read a large number of texts as per the selection criteria, focus on the basic discourses that articulate divergent identities by analysing repetitions of concepts and ideas, explore how the Self and the Other are constructed in different ways and finally place the discourses and identities in a historical context to understand how the discourses and identities interact and change over time.

However, to fully appreciate the legacy of these various discourses and identities, we must now chart their constructions and antagonisms. We begin first with the Democracy discourse and its construction of militant identity.

### **The rise and fall of the Democracy discourse**

Black people who were living in the South were constantly living with violence. Part of the job [community organising] was to help them to understand what that violence was and how they in an organised fashion could help to stem it. The major job was getting people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use and . . . how group action could counter violence even when it was perpetuated . . . by the state (Baker 1972, p. 347).

The Democracy discourse is constituted by the ideas, language and practices most closely associated with SNCC and its concept of participatory democracy. SNCC was founded and sustained by Southern black students and SNCC engaged in organizing poor blacks to demand civil rights and undertake high-profile non-violent direct action to bring national attention to the American apartheid system (Payne, 1989, 2007; Mueller, 1993; Carson, 1995; Polletta, 2003, 2004; Ransby, 2003). Through its practices of working with marginalized and disenfranchised groups, SNCC sparked a new way of thinking about the construction of radical identity and the organization of spaces to struggle for progressive social change.

Understanding the construction of participatory democracy in the Democracy discourse is important because this concept distinguishes the Democracy discourse from other competing discourses within the broader Civil Rights Movement. The texts that construct Democracy discourse define participatory democracy as the belief that ordinary people have the knowledge, skills and capacity to deliberate, make decisions and

take action on the issues that affect their lives (Baker, 1960, pp. 1–2; Hayden, 1961, pp. 3–4; Carson, 1995, pp. 2–3; Polleta, 2003, pp. 56–63; Ransby, 2003, pp. 240–244). The constituent elements of this discourse rest on three key concepts: the construction of ‘ordinary people’, the process of decision-making and the ability to take collective action. Each of the concepts will be discussed in turn subsequently. However, what is important to note at this stage is that the foundation of participatory democracy is the quality of the social relationships within the collective. By emphasizing the process of creating and maintaining a non-hierarchical and non-competitive community whereby authority is invested in the group rather than in any individual or dominant ‘expert’, the Democracy discourse is seeking to construct a moral identity that attempts to live its values while at the same time working towards radical social change (Hayden, 1961, p. 26; Polleta, 2003, pp. 122–123; Ransby, 2003, pp. 240–244).

Striving to achieve equality within local groups and throughout society requires a radical re-imagining of ordinary people. The Democracy discourse seeks to shift the traditional constructions of leaders and followers through a reconstruction of ‘indigenous leadership’. For radical social change to take place, ordinary people – those people not traditionally considered appropriate or capable – had to be the leaders and strategists of community organizations. Thus, the goals of community organizing and, by extension, major social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement had to be both building indigenous leadership and dismantling the structures that produced the social, political and economic inequality of African Americans and other marginalized groups. The Democracy discourse emphasizes that the process of building a movement of people to articulate and demand social, political and economic rights was of equal importance as the success of achieving those rights. Thus, as an SNCC student activist recalls of the philosophy and social practice of the movement: ‘whatever you seek to achieve as an end must be evidenced in the process by which you seek to accomplish it’ (Polletta, 2004, p. 61).

Building indigenous leadership requires not only a commitment to democracy but also the adoption of a set of practices to support the development of local people. Local people require open and flexible organizational structures to support group-based discussion and decision-making. The concept of ‘group-centred leadership’ rather than ‘leader-centred groups’ means that local movements are structured as democratic spaces for people to self-organize for education and action (Baker, 1960, p. 1; Ransby, 2003, pp. 27–24; Polletta, 2004, p. 63–64). Eschewing unilateral decision-making and hierarchical leadership can help to create an innovative, flexible and educational space whereby local people learn to use their power in different ways. Through collective

decision-making, local people learn how to negotiate, strategize and be accountable to each other. By focusing on group consensus, leadership is invested in the collective rather than in any individual. Finally, the process of deliberation helps to build solidarity and sustain people's commitment to the movement:

In the long run they themselves [local people] are the only protection they have against violence and injustice . . . people have to be made to understand that they cannot look for salvation anywhere but themselves (Baker 1972, p. 347).

To support the process of deliberation and collective action, the Democracy discourse constructs a clear role for a community organizer. The role of the community organizer is to engage in an explicitly educational process with local people and support them in creating spaces for learning and action (Payne, 1989; Mueller, 1993, pp. 51–53; Carson, 1995, p. 133). The Democracy discourse constructs community organizers not as leaders of local movements but as facilitators who help build solidarity between people and support people in their own self-directed process for social change. Thus, a community organizer is not the focus within the Democracy discourse; the focus is on the process of building equality between people to support their self-determination:

I have always thought what is needed is the development of people who are not interested in being leaders as much as developing leadership among other people (Baker, 1968 quoted in Payne, 1989, p. 892).

An analysis of identity constructions demonstrates the radicalism of the Democracy discourse. This discourse constructs community organizations as free spaces where organizers are able to live the democratic values as they struggle for them in the wider society. By living their values, individuals are able to experiment and refine their democratic principles while at the same time inculcating these beliefs in local people. For example, SNCC has been described by organizers not as an organization but a network of intense friendships forged in adversity. The often repeated slogans were that SNCC was 'the beloved community' or a 'band of brothers standing in a circle of trust' (Carson, 1995, p. 77; Ransby, 2003, p. 282; Polletta, 2004, p. 55). Thus, the Democracy discourse's construction of Self is derived from the solidarity gained through the collective experience of organizing local people and enduring beatings, arrests and shootings by the racist white establishment in the South:

More than 150 SNCC field secretaries are symbols of courage and dedication as they undertake the often tedious and tiring, and always dangerous work in the most difficult areas of the South. . . . They live in the

community, often in the homes of local residents, for the weeks and months that are required to break through generations of fear and intimidation (SNCC, 1963, p. 4).

By defining the Self as radical educators and organizers, the discourse constructs the Other as active agents and emerging leaders of the struggle for equality and social rights. Importantly, however, through its practices of group-centred leadership, the Democracy discourse seems to be deconstructing the Self/Other binary that structures the organizers' relationship with local people. By constructing local people as capable and competent leaders, this discourse appears to be displacing the category of Other altogether and subsuming ordinary people into constructions of Self.

From about 1960 to 1965, the Democracy discourse dominated identity constructions in the Southern Civil Rights Movement. However from 1965 onwards a key historical moment was unfolding, which helped to marginalize the Democracy discourse. The goals of African American protest were beginning to change. Expectations were raised with the passage of the Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act in 1964 and 1965. These laws were meant to ensure the enfranchisement and equal rights of blacks; however, no immediate transformation in the social, political and economic fortunes of African Americans was evident. As a result of this persistent inequality, a string of urban riots broke out across United States; these riots climaxed following the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr in 1968. This frustration among African Americans – especially young black men – about the lack of social change and the relatively moderate goals of the Civil Rights Movement found expression in a new Black Power discourse which advocated black pride, black separatism and the creation of alternative institutions to channel black political and economic power (Carson, 1995, p. 191; Ransby, 2003, pp. 342–343; Polletta, 2004, pp. 111–114). The Democracy discourse was unable to respond to these new developments. Thus, the changing goals of progressive struggle and the displacement of civil rights as the focus of struggle helped to marginalize the Democracy discourse (Carson, 1995, p. 205; Polletta, 2003, p. 27–28; Polletta, 2004, pp. 111–116).

This marginalization was reinforced by antagonistic practices by rival discourses. The strength of the Democracy discourse is its fluidity; it is able to adapt to different contexts because its internal logic dictates that ordinary people have to define for themselves the terms of their struggle. Importantly, this discourse relied on oral traditions – its focus on dialogue and deliberation as both political education and the building of solidarity – in order to survive. The process of debate and discussion in mass meetings, through door-to-door organizing and non-violent direct action, was facili-

tated by the voice and rhetoric of organizers and local leaders. The rise of the Power discourse was helped by a focus on print media. Indeed, the key texts of the Power discourse are considered canonical works in the history of radical community development. This is not the case with the Democracy discourse. With the exception of Zinn (1964) minutes of meetings, promotional materials and retrospective interviews with activists and organizers, few substantial contemporary texts exist which discuss the Democracy discourse's ideas and social practices.

Thus, in 1968, there was a blank textual space that the Power discourse could fill with its own interpretations and reconstructions of ideas and events. As a result, the Democracy discourse was simply silenced – written out of the history of community organizing and development – by competing discourses. If it was mentioned at all – allusions are made to it in Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) – it is portrayed as well-meaning but essentially misguided. In the other dominant text, the Democracy discourse is misrepresented as both nihilistic terrorism and the indulgences of the politically naïve (Alinsky, 1971).

This has profound implications for the identity and discourse of community development. An entire tradition of ideas and practices has been marginalized and community development's ideas of radicalism are perhaps not fully informed by its own history.

However, to fully understand the marginalization of the Democracy discourse, we must turn now to analyse the rival Power discourse.

### **The rise and rise of the Power discourse**

Perhaps, it is surprising to combine the texts and practices of Black Power and Alinskyism into a single discursive category. The ideas and practices of these two discourses seemingly lead community development down different paths. However, Black Power and Alinskyism share patterns in language, identity constructions and antagonisms. What unites Black Power and Alinskyism is the shift in language from democracy to power, from idealism to real politick, and with this shift in language comes a shift in identity: from a fluid and open Self to a hardened and exclusive vanguard for a fundamentally misguided Other.

Black Power is both the analysis of the causes and effects of racism and the collective action blacks can take to develop a revolutionary black consciousness and to create alternative social institutions that promote equality. Racism is the by-product of the 'white power structure' that defines African Americans as inferior and reproduces white privilege in society:

The social effects of colonialism are to degrade and dehumanise the subjected black man. . . . White society maintains an attitude of superiority

and the black community has too often succumbed to it... Racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply ingrained into the fibre of society that they infuse the entire functioning of the national subconscious. They are taken for granted and frequently not even recognised (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967, p. 47).

The Power discourse constructs racism as both a socio-economic and a psychological condition that causes and perpetuates black inequality and powerlessness. It is important to note this key shift in language with the Power discourse's introduction of the psychology of racism. This is an important difference from the Democracy discourse, as the Power discourse is laying the groundwork to discuss issues of false consciousness among ordinary people.

In order to undermine and challenge the white power structure, what is required is the development of Black Power. 'The time is long overdue for the black community to redefine itself, set forth new values and goals and organise around them' (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, p. 48). The ultimate focus of Black Power then is the creation of new definitions of 'blackness', understanding and reclaiming a silenced but distinctive black heritage and tradition and identifying the self-interest of the 'black community' in order to build alternative structures that promote the political and economic power of blacks (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, pp. 51–53).

For once, black people are going to use the words they want to use – not just the words whites want to hear (Carmichael, 1966, quoted in Carson, 1995, p. 219).

The Power discourse's construction of self-determination is an important antagonism with the Democracy discourse. Self-determination as defined in the Democracy discourse was an empty signifier that local people could define for themselves. In the Power discourse, self-determination is linked to conquering the false consciousness of black inferiority and the futile cooperation with whites in order to achieve social justice. By subverting this false consciousness, ordinary blacks are able to develop racial pride and work towards seizing power from whites to build powerful all-black institutions.

The emphasis on the concepts of 'power' and 'blackness' have important implications for identity construction. The Self in the Power discourse is not a facilitator or an educator as in the Democracy discourse. Instead, the Self is a revolutionary vanguard figure that can dismantle white privilege and instil in local people an authentic sense of blackness. The Self helps to 'awaken... [and] educate the black community... to break open the chains in the minds of people' (SNCC, 1966, quoted in Polletta, 2003, p. 28). Thus, the Self is didactic and infused with essentialism about black-

ness and power. 'The most important thing that black people can do is begin to come together and to be able to do that we must stop being ashamed of being black. We are black and we are beautiful' (Carmichael, 1966, quoted in Carson, 1995, p. 217).

Black Power's construction of a revolutionary vanguard Self constructs two distinct Others: the 'bewildered' black community and the naïve 'radical'. The black community is rendered an abstract and homogenous mass that is misguided through false consciousness perpetuated by the white power structure. Unlike in the Democracy discourse that constructs local people as leaders and agents, the Power discourse constructs the black community or black people as passive objects devoid of agency who are to be acted upon by revolutionary leaders. Black people require development – not into leaders – but into a regimented form of 'authentic' blackness to build 'alternative institutions':

We can see no meaningful, long range social changes coming about for these masses until we can change each individual's belief in himself... they can only gain [respect] when they see Black people working together accomplishing worthwhile programmes (Nitty Gritty, 1966, quoted in Carson, 1995, p. 194).

The vanguard Self also constructs the competing Democracy discourse as naïve radicals. In another important antagonistic practice, the Power discourse constructs the Democracy discourse as harmful to the self-interest of black people:

Now it is over. The days of singing freedom songs and combating bullets and billy clubs with love. They used to sing 'I Love Everybody'... now they sing: Too much love/Too much love/Nothing kills a nigger like/Too much love (Lester, 1966, quoted in Carson, 1995, p. 237).

It is the notion of 'effectiveness' and 'realism' that marks a key difference between the Power and Democracy discourses. The Power discourse as constructed in Alinskyism continues these discursive patterns. Alinskyism is a self-proclaimed 'non-ideological' approach to organizing communities to build organizations capable of ascertaining a collective self-interest by taking power from institutional decision-makers.

To build a mass organization, to be a 'realistic radical', requires an unsentimental understanding of the world: it is a place of 'power politics moved primarily by perceived immediate self-interests, where morality is rhetorical rationale for expedient action and self-interest' (Alinsky, 1971, p. 13). Thus, to affect social change requires popular organizations willing to muck in to this morass of conflicting interests in order to dominate proceedings to win power and influence for community groups.

Like the Black Power discourse, Alinskyism is using elitist language and constructing identities that allow for the domination of an organizer/leader Self and the subordination of the misguided community Other. The Self as constructed in Alinskyism is a realist; this non-ideological Self has one belief: 'If the people have the power to act, in the long run they will, most of the time, reach the right decisions' (Alinsky, 1971, pp. 11–12). However, this Self is also a sage. Young people 'have no illusions about the system but plenty of illusions about the way to change our world. It is to this point that I have written this book' (*ibid.*, p. xiii). This elite construction of Self, similar to constructions in Black Power also construct similar Others: the naïve 'radical' and the alienated and abstracted 'people'.

As in Black Power, the 'people' as constructed in Alinskyism are passive subjects to be acted upon by an enlightened organizer who sees the world clearly to build a power-based organization. Marginalized people are thus described as:

Chained together by the common misery of poverty ... ignorance, political impotence and despair ... they are a mass of cold ashes of resignation and fatalism but inside there are glowing embers of hope which can be fanned by the building of means of obtaining power (Alinsky, 1971, pp. 18–19).

It is the job of the organizer to develop people out of their political impotence in order to gain power to use for their own self-interest. However, 'unchaining people from misery' is difficult and requires:

a passive, affirmative, non-challenging attitude toward change among the mass of our people. They must feel ... so defeated, so lost, so futureless in the prevailing system that they are willing to let go of the past and change their future (Alinsky, 1971, p. xix).

This paradoxical view of 'the people' appears to undermine this discourse's commitment to agency and democracy. If this discourse constructs people as having the ability to act based on their self-interest, it is not clear how a passive object has either the ability or the capacity for agency. Again, the Power discourse's hegemonic constructions of the alienated 'people' have important implications for how community development constructs the Self and the Other. If the Other is constructed as passive and ignorant, then it seems that the role of the Self must be constructed as a dominant subject leading the way towards enlightenment.

Like Black Power, Alinskyism also undertakes antagonistic practices of misrepresenting the Democracy discourse in order to gain dominance. Referencing the collapse of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and SNCC and their respective transformations into the Weather Underground and a vehicle for the Black Panthers, Alinsky (1971, pp. xiv–xviii) contends:

The young have seen their 'activist' participatory democracy turn into its antithesis – nihilistic bombing and murder. . . . There are no rules for revolution . . . but there are rules for radicals. . . . These rules make the difference between being a realistic radical and being a rhetorical one who uses tired old words and slogans.

This marginalization of a competing discourse is an important development in the changing discourse and identity of community development since 1968. Community development's sense of radicalism can be seen as one-sided. Radicalism, as defined by the Power discourse, is the action of an elite who transforms the masses into authentic beings. The Democracy discourse's attempt to deconstruct the Self/Other binary in order to build democratic social relationships is constructed as ineffective and naïve. The Democracy discourse's alternative perspective on radicalism appears to have been written out of the history of community development.

Helping to write the Democracy discourse out of the history of community development is the Poverty discourse. This relatively conservative discourse differs significantly from the two other discourses analysed during this moment in time, but what the Poverty and Power discourse share is a similar construction of identity, and this coalescence of identities is crucial to our understandings of community development today.

### **The alternative analysis of the Poverty discourse**

Unlike the anti-establishment Democracy and Power discourses which seek to work on the outside of official power to challenge state institutions, the Poverty discourse is constituted by the ideas, language and practices of official state actors. This discourse appears at the same moment as the Democracy discourse and was spurred on by the same events of persistent African American poverty and inequality. However, instead of interpreting black inequality as the effect of institutionalized discrimination, the Poverty discourse constructs inequality to be the result of a failure of democratic institutions to be responsive to the needs of marginalized groups. Thus, the practices of the Poverty discourse are focused on coordinating institutional services through rational scientific planning and community consultation (Marris and Rein, 1972; Brager and Specht, 1973). The Poverty discourse constructs the idea of 'community action' as:

Concerned above all with the reorganisation of local social services into an integrated plan to attack the roots of social deprivation. It was to be at once responsive to the people it served, imaginative and adaptive, comprehensively coordinated, informed by a systematic analysis of the causes of deprivation and methodically evaluated (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 10).

The concept of reform is a key concept in the Poverty discourse. One of the causes of poverty is the breakdown of communication between different institutions and the reliance on outdated practices that are aided by a bureaucratic culture of the state. Thus, one major goal of reform was to 'alter the opportunity structure in education, employment [and] housing' (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 63). By promoting joint planning between different social services, by promoting poor people's participation in institutional decision-making and by creating alternative agencies armed with new ideas which were to be 'ruthlessly evaluated', reform could fulfil the promise of the American dream for people living in poverty (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 72).

However, reform was also to be targeted at the 'culture' of people living in poverty. The Poverty discourse constructs poor people as perpetuating a dysfunctional cycle of poverty that undermines their abilities to exploit existing opportunities. The cycle of poverty – a lack of opportunities promoting alienation and delinquency and this behaviour limiting available opportunities – could only be tackled by institutions expanding opportunities and by poor people eschewing delinquency and becoming 'good citizens' through participation in institutional decision-making about their needs and interests (Marris and Rein, 1972; Brager and Specht, 1973).

With reform required for democratic institutions to perform more effectively and for the poor to help themselves by being good citizens, clear identities are constructed.

A reformer in American society faces three crucial tasks. He must recruit a coalition of power sufficient for his purpose; he must respect the democratic tradition which expects every citizen . . . to play an autonomous part in the determination of his own affairs and his policies must be rational (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 29).

The Self in the Poverty discourse is not just a reformer but also a professional expert who uses the scientific method to make rational decisions about anti-poverty programmes. Armed with a scientific analysis about the causes of poverty, the professional uses this exclusive knowledge to create and evaluate planned programmes that will address both the causes and effects of deprivation.

[The War on Poverty] did not rest on idealism and faith so much as on technique. The professional reformers addressed themselves to the professional rulers rather than the public upon which their power ultimately rested (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 58).

Like the Self in the Power discourse, the professional reformer is also an elitist category that is invested with agency. This construction of Self has contradictory implications for the Other. The expert Self is also a democrat

who wishes to foster community participation in reform. However, because the Other has been constructed as alienated and delinquent, this poses problems for identity constructions in this discourse.

The poor are constructed along paradoxical lines. On the one hand, the poor are a 'leaderless, ill-educated and dispirited people' (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 213), but they are also citizens with potential agency to run their own affairs. The paradox is in how individuals and groups constructed as passive and ignorant have the capacity to deliberate and negotiate with the experts. By constructing the poor in such uncompromising terms, the discourse is unable to reconcile its secondary construction of the Other as a good citizen. Indeed, this contradictory construction of the Other has real implications for social practices, as a community action project, Mobilisation for Youth, found when trying to promote participation in its decision-making structures. Because the poor are constructed as 'ill-educated', the organization was sceptical of the participation of any articulate poor people, as they could not be the 'authentic' representation of the poor or reflect the 'real' interests of people living in poverty. Thus, they focused their outreach work on those whom they deemed to be less intelligent and less able to participate in decision-making. In response to this seemingly contradictory policy, a US Senator observed:

Mobilisation for Youth is going to get hold of a lower level of true and genuine leaders who are – what? – inarticulate, irresponsible and relatively unsuccessful? I am sorry but I suspect that proposition . . . these are not the principles [to recruit] indigenous leadership (Moynihan, 1965, quoted in Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 214–215).

Because the Other has been constructed as a passive object, the Self must be invested with a dominant role, thus rendering the democratic possibilities for action difficult to attain. While it seems rational to look beyond working with community elites, if ordinary people are constructed as hapless delinquents, then it is irrational to support their participation, in spite of any democratic impulses.

## Conclusions

Despite 1968 being constructed as a transformative historical moment whereby radical ideas of democracy, freedom and equality changed the structure of social relationships, upon closer inspection of some of the discourses of this moment, we see a silencing of radicalism and the construction of highly problematic ideas and practices related to equality, democracy and leadership which seem to reinforce the status quo rather than trying to dismantle it. Rather than community development being con-

stituted by the radicalism of the 1960s and early 1970s, it is dominated by two discourses that construct community development identity in similar ways. The construction of the Self as a revolutionary vanguard, a realistic radical or a professional expert appears to require the construction of a passive Other represented by the black community, the poor or the marginalized. In order to sustain the construction of Self as a subject with vision, rules or rationality necessitates the construction of an Other who is the opposite: who is blind, ill-disciplined or irrational. In doing so, the Self creates a perpetual justification for the domination of the Other.

Alternatives to this binary as analysed in the Democracy discourse have been marginalized not only through a transformative historical moment whereby the structure of protest shifted from civil rights to identity politics but also through the hegemonic practices of the Power and Poverty discourses through the misrepresentation of the Democracy discourse in texts from this moment in time. As a result, important approaches to the construction of identity have been marginalized within the community development discursive repertoire. The Democracy discourse's ideas do not seem to inform much of community development's contemporary identity. Thus, alternative constructions of the Self and Other – the process of trying to breakdown this binary by subsuming the Other into the Self by constructing the Self as a facilitator and the Other as an active subject who is a leader – are not recognized. The opportunity for community development to be a radical and egalitarian identity is compromised because the dominant identity construction promotes elitist and undemocratic discourses and practices.

These antagonisms between the 1968 discourses have continuing relevance for contemporary community development discourses both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. This pattern in the community development discourses of 1968 – in terms of undemocratic and unequal identity constructions – is surprisingly commonplace when compared with other transformative moments (for example, see, Emejulu, forthcoming 2010). The contemporary discourses which reject these problematic binary constructions, such as those linked to feminist or anti-racist community development practices, seek to transform the hierarchical 'professional/community' binary and instead construct identities similar to what we have explored in the Democracy discourse. These discourses are still in a rather marginalized position in relation to the broader discourse of community development, and this marginalization probably helps to explain why more democratic and egalitarian constructions of both practitioners and local people are largely missing from contemporary community development identities and social practices.

Akwugo Emejulu is with the Department of Educational and Professional Studies, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

## References

- Alinsky, S. D. (1971) *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, Vintage, New York.
- Baker, E. (1960) 'Bigger than a Hamburger', *The Southern Patriot*, accessed at: <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/sncc2.htm> (3 December 2007).
- Baker, E. (1972) Developing community leadership, in G. Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, Vintage, New York.
- Brager, G. and Specht, H. (1973) *Community Organisation*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Carmichael, S. and Hamilton, C. V. (1967) *Black Power*, Penguin, London.
- Carson, C. (1995) *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Emejulu, A. (forthcoming 2010) *Community Development as Discourse: The Construction of Community Development Identities, Discourses and Practices in the US and the UK from 1968 to 1997*, University of Strathclyde, PhD Thesis.
- Hansen, L. (2006) *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, Routledge, London.
- Hayden, T. (2005 [1961]) *The Port Huron Statement: The Visionary Call of the 1960s Revolution*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York.
- Howarth, D. (2000) *Discourse*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Marris, P. and Rein, M. (1972) *Dilemmas of Social Reform: Poverty and Community Action in the United States*, Pelican, London.
- Mueller, C. (1993) *Ella Baker and Origins of 'Participatory Democracy'*, in Crawford V. L. Rouse J. A. and B. Woods, eds, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Payne, C. (1989) Ella Baker and models of social change, *Signs*, **14** (4), 885–899.
- Payne, C. (2007) *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, University of California Press, Berkley.
- Polletta, F. (2003) *How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice*, accessed at: <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/meta-elements/pdf/Polletta.pdf> (3 December 2007).
- Polletta, F. (2004) *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Ransby, B. (2003) *Ella Baker and The Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- SNCC (1963) *SNCC: Structure and Leadership*, accessed at: <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/sncc63-1.pdf> (3 December 2007).
- Zinn, H. (1964) *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, Beacon Press, Boston.