



Shifting the Balance in Environmental Governance: Ethnicity, Environmental Citizenship and Discourses of Responsibility

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the notion of environmental citizenship in examining how black and minority ethnic groups (BME) in Britain talk about environmental “rights” alongside environmental responsibilities. This broader discursive context leads us to engage with two interpretations of sustainability promoting different policy and planning agendas—the environmental sustainability and just sustainability policy agendas—in understanding the multiple spaces of identity, power and agency in which BME communities respond to environmental issues in institutional and daily life. We conducted ten semi-structured interviews with community key informants and ten focus groups with African-Caribbean or Indian communities. We identified four environmental responsibility discourses in the participants’ talk, that were variously defined by issues of trust, social equity, off-loading of responsibility and government intervention and that served to shift environmental responsibility away from the individual onto “institutional others”. We conclude by suggesting policy implications for the environmental and sustainability policy and planning community.

Keywords: discourses of environmental responsibility, environmental citizenship, ethnicity, multiple spaces of identity, power and agency

Introduction

Individualisation in late modernity has meant that individuals are required to take active responsibility for their own well-being and the well-being of their communities and society, including environmental well-being. In the last 15 years, Britain has witnessed a plethora of citizen schemes (eg Going for Green, Local Agenda/Action 21, urban regeneration initiatives, Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Planning) designed to encourage active citizenship in terms of environmental protection and, more broadly, in terms of sustainable

development. However, evidence reveals that these citizen schemes have been largely unsuccessful in involving groups typically marginalised in the wider community, such as low income groups and black and minority ethnic (BME) communities (Agyeman 2001; Community Environment Associates 2003). In many ways, this reflects a current trend in Western democracies that has seen a decline in public trust in politicians and in politics generally due to a growing scepticism about political processes and outcomes in daily life (Curtice and Jowell 1995; Misztal 1996).

As a result, political discourse in Britain has reignited an interest in the notion of “citizenship” in an attempt to address very real concerns about the breakdown of relationships between government institutions, individual citizens and their communities. Indeed, by focusing on the notion of citizenship in this paper, and more specifically on environmental citizenship, we broaden the environmental and sustainability debate to include talk on environmental “rights” *alongside* environmental responsibilities. This broader discursive context engages an environmental justice or equalities framework as witnessed in the UK in the work of Agyeman (2001, 2005) and Capacity Global (2004), and it is one that we draw on in this paper, particularly since many BME communities in Britain are of low income and live in inner urban areas and, therefore, they encounter a range of environmental and social problems such as poor housing, lack of green open space, air pollution, racism and unemployment (Agyeman 1989; Modood et al 1997; Runnymede Trust 2000).

In the context of environmental responsibility, a growing body of literature has attempted to investigate the factors that mediate the relationship between environmental concern and anxiety on the one level, and little or no environmental action and responsibility on the other level. These studies have identified the structural and institutional constraints on individual environmental responsibility (eg Blake 1999) or pro-environmental behaviour (eg Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002); the importance of trust, agency and equity in mediating people’s (un)willingness to assume their environmental responsibilities (eg Eden 1993; Harrison et al 1996; Myers and Macnaghten 1998); and the discursive vocabularies that lay people employ to negotiate the burden of responsibility for ecological issues and risks away from the individual to political and other institutions and, in so doing, justify little or no personal action for environmental protection (eg Bickerstaff and Walker 2002; Bickerstaff et al 2008; Phillips 2000). This work has proved insightful in developing the conceptual frameworks put forward to understand perceived environmental responsibilities among lay publics and how these perceptions are bound up with institutional relations in daily life. Moreover, the different social and cultural contexts of these attributions of environmental responsibility have engaged the perceptions and viewpoints of different socio-demographic

groups, informing policy and practice on the management of environmental risk. What is noticeably absent in this body of work, however, is research specifically involving BME groups and how they talk about and negotiate their environmental responsibilities and those of others. Adopting a “racial” dimension not only supports a more inclusive environmental and sustainability research agenda but it also advances theoretical understanding of whether and how “race”,¹ culture and ethnicity matter in discursive articulations of environmental responsibility and the broader implications of this for environmental governance. In particular, our analysis aims to capture the structural and cultural dynamics of environmental responsibilities among black and South Asian communities in Britain—an analytical focus that we believe is innovative and insightful in informing academic, policy and practitioner debate on widening participation in environmental and sustainability issues. At the same time, and taking into account the present discursive context of environmental citizenship, our research can illuminate whether BME communities engage with the notion of “citizens’ rights” *alongside* citizens’ responsibilities in environmental well-being, as this subject has been under-explored in the literature and is currently absent from most environmental and sustainability planning and policy.

The first part of our paper asks what environmental citizenship entails. We look at how this dimension of citizenship is key to different sustainability policy agendas. In the process, we engage in dialogue with and bring together concepts from hitherto distinct theoretical discourses in the literature—in this case, the environmental justice literature and the sociological risk literature—in providing a holistic understanding of people’s constructions of environmental responsibility (and rights). From this dialogue, our intention is to pose key analytical questions that will help us to theorise about the multiple spaces of identity, power and agency in the environmental responsibility discourses of BME communities. This provides the context and analytical framework for the main discussion presented here. The paper then introduces our study, providing an overview of the case studies and the methodology employed. This is followed by a discussion of the accounts of BME communities, which occupies the main part of this paper. The concluding section discusses the main findings and suggests policy implications for the environmental and sustainability policy and planning community.

Environmental Citizenship and Sustainability Policy Agendas

The notion of citizenship is typically associated with, on the one hand, the duties and obligations conferred upon each citizen to engage in activities that promote the good of the community and society and, on the

other hand, certain rights that each citizen is granted by the state. Indeed, citizenship constitutes an inherent aspect of sustainable development. Dobson (2003) emphasises the importance of both dimensions of citizenship in the pursuit of environmental sustainability and social justice, since we all utilise and make an impact on environmental resources through our daily lifestyles and should be held accountable and, yet, there are many communities around the globe who do not have access to the basic human right of an environment fit for their health and well-being.

Despite being two sides of the same coin, responsibilities and rights are given different emphases within two interpretations of sustainability promoting different policy and planning agendas. One interpretation is the *environmental sustainability* (ES) agenda, which is situated within the New Environmental Paradigm (Dunlap and Van Liere 1978) and interprets sustainable development in terms of environmental stewardship and protection. It is an agenda whose goals and principles are supported by major conservation and environmental organisations and many government institutions. This interpretation recognises that we are living in a “world risk society” (Beck 1992) in that we are all affected by environmental degradation and, therefore, it is the responsibility of *all* people to resolve these environmental problems by making fundamental changes to their current lifestyles. In response to this agenda, we have witnessed the growth of local sustainability initiatives in Britain that focus on empowering communities to engage their environmental responsibilities and to participate in the decision-making process of local sustainability programmes (such as Local Agenda/Action 21 and, more recently, Community Strategies).

Beck’s (1992:36) oft-quoted maxim, “poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic”, indicates that environmental problems in late modernity are global and universal in form and hence all people, irrespective of social class and other social differences, will equally be at risk from environmental degradation² which is the result of human activity. Thus, Beck’s risk society thesis invokes a new global citizenship requiring a shared sense of responsibility—“democratisation of responsibility” (Thompson 1995)—for resolving global ecological risks.

Moreover, as a result of individualisation and modernisation, both Beck and Giddens (1990, 1991) maintain that many areas of daily life are less constrained by structure and, instead, subject to human agency, such that individuals are able to take control of problems that occur in the environment by exercising personal choice and responsibility. Of importance to our paper, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:27) maintain that factors such as social class and ethnicity have less influence in structuring the opportunities and threats that people face in their everyday lives and, as a result, these social categories have “become ‘zombie categories’, which have died yet live on”.

How do the above theoretical arguments relate to the present research context? Since environmental issues and risk are likely to be experienced in the context of institutional and everyday life, lay people's responses to ecological problems may not entail a democratised or shared sense of responsibility as advanced in the ES policy framework. Instead, the racial and social inequalities experienced by many BME communities in Britain (see eg Brah 1996; Modood et al 1997; Runnymede Trust 2000) may find expression in our research through the tensions that exist between the rights and responsibilities of a new environmental citizenship. Indeed, there are parallels here with the environmental justice literature and this leads us to a discussion of a second, different sustainability policy agenda.

This more recent interpretation of sustainability revolves around the principles of fairness, equality and justice, whereby the sustainability agenda highlights the unequal distribution of environmental "bads" (eg siting of toxic waste facilities) and inequitable access to environmental "goods" (eg green open spaces) among socially and economically disadvantaged groups both nationally and globally (Agyeman 2001; Eames and Adebawale 2002). The policy framework adopted here draws on an environmental justice or equalities agenda (Agyeman 2001; Agyeman et al 2003; Capacity Global, 2004) and, unlike the New Environmental Paradigm/ES agenda cited above, this emergent *just sustainability* (JS) policy agenda (Agyeman et al 2003) recognises the importance of the relationship between environmental degradation and social inequality experienced by current generations of disadvantaged groups in Britain and elsewhere (Adebawale 2002; Agyeman 2005; Taylor 2000). This conceptual framework has been termed the "Just Sustainability Paradigm" by Agyeman (2005) and, while it does give importance to "the environment", it equally prioritises social inclusion, equity and justice in the delivery of sustainable development which it defines as: "the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems" (Agyeman et al 2003:5; see also Agyeman and Evans 2004). Thus, this framework makes the link between social justice and environmental quality and it centres more, but not exclusively, on a rights-based agenda in the pursuit of sustainable development policy and practice, as opposed to the largely responsibilities-based agenda of ES.

Essentially, the environmental justice frame in the UK has tended to focus on the deprivation of environmental rights among poorer communities generally (Cutter, 1995) and studies by Friends of the Earth (FoE 1999) and Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES 2000) have found that the distribution of environmental health risks has a "class bias", with poorer neighbourhoods bearing a disproportionate share of hazardous risks. However, the ethnicity dimension has received

some attention in studies looking at the distribution of environmental hazards. For instance, a preliminary study by researchers at Staffordshire University (eg Walker et al 2001) found limited support for an ethnicity bias in the distribution of environmental risks whereby South Asian people in the UK were more likely to reside in wards that contained major accident hazards. However, the authors stress that these findings are inconclusive in proving environmental racism in siting decisions, since more work needs to be done on how ethnicity co-varies with other social categories, such as age and gender, in the distribution of environmental risk. In response, de Silva (1999:3) reaffirms the importance of “race” and ethnicity in the distribution of environmental threats as he argues, “Although the problems associated with pollution are not generally race-specific, they nevertheless tend to affect black minorities disproportionately as the communities are largely concentrated in the most populous industrial areas of Britain”.

What is the relevance of the JS agenda to our research context involving BME groups’ perceptions of environmental responsibilities? Referring to the Brundtland Report, the narrative of sustainability employed, “meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life” (cited in Pinfield 1994:163), suggests that everyone *equally* has the opportunity to satisfy their needs so as to enhance the quality of their lives. Yet for disadvantaged groups in society, who experience social and economic problems in their day-to-day lives, having what Porritt (in Porritt and Winner 1988) called “the privilege of concern”, to be able to devote scarce resources to “saving the planet”, is not an option. Instead, disempowered groups, such as British BME communities, like their counterparts in “environmental justice communities” in the US, may be more likely to respond to environmental problems in terms of their “rights” to a better quality living environment as promulgated by the JS framework, rather than identifying that everyone is in “the same boat” and equally has a responsibility towards protecting the earth, as advocated by the ES framework. In other words, the rights-based dimension of the citizenship–environment relationship, as Agyeman and Evans (2006) have argued, may be an important articulation of BME communities’ response to official calls for citizen engagement in environmental protection. This also implies that people’s environmental geographies will be localised as disempowered groups make sense of, experience and respond to environmental issues and risk in the context of their daily living space (see eg Burningham and Thrush 2001; Macnaghten et al 1995).

Engagement with these two interpretations of sustainability, namely ES and JS and the implications that they have for environmental well-being, prompts several key questions:

- How do BME communities respond to government calls for citizen responsibility towards environmental protection?
- What assumptions about agency and (shared) civic responsibility are negotiated and contested in assigning responsibility for environmental well-being?
- What discourses of environmental responsibility do BME groups employ to engage with, negotiate and contest political rhetoric on citizen responsibility for environmental protection?
- What (cultural) identities and relations are constructed in the discourses that BME communities employ to negotiate their responsibilities (and rights) and that of “others” to act towards environmental well-being?

Central to the above analytical questions and, therefore, to our analytical framework, are three key themes, *identity*, *power* and *agency*, suggesting critical spaces and points of analysis in understanding how disempowered communities, such as BME groups, might approach and respond to environmental issues and risk in the context of institutional and everyday life. Of importance to the present discussion and given that people’s identities are fluid and decentred (Giddens 1990; Laclau 1990), it is our belief that BME communities will “speak” from many positions of social differentiation, such as class, age, gender, religion and disability, in constructing how they perceive their environmental responsibilities and their (un)willingness and (in)ability to effect change. Thus, we maintain that the analytical framework that we have developed is able to capture the multiple spaces³ of identity, power and agency in BME groups’ discourses of environmental responsibility, as illustrated in the accounts detailed later in this paper.

Thus far, two contrasting sustainability policy frameworks have been described—engaging at selected points with the sociological risk literature and the environmental justice literature—which emphasise different dimensions of environmental citizenship by engaging with either a more responsibilities-focused (ES) or a more rights-focused (JS) policy and planning agenda. In our study, we looked at the contradictions and tensions inherent in these different interpretations of sustainability, seeking answers to our analytical questions. Before we present these accounts, we introduce our research approach.

Case Studies and Research Methodology

The findings outlined in this paper were derived from conducting research in two case-study local authority areas based in the south of England. We use the pseudonyms Green Acres and Springdene.⁴ Both locations had ethnically diverse populations of many cultures, traditions and languages and it is notable that the constituencies in which our

research was conducted had higher deprivation levels relative to other parts of the case-study areas. The south-west part of Green Acres was a main tourist and religious centre, comprising many South Asian food and retail businesses and a large Sikh temple and, as a result, this area was fairly crowded and experienced traffic congestion problems.

Green Acres and Springdene were selected based on their having a relatively high concentration of Indian or African-Caribbean inhabitants respectively. Comparatively, both ethnic groups define a “middling category” of relative deprivation (although the exact nature of their deprivation is different) (see Modood et al 1997) and the selected case-study local authorities adopted contrasting approaches to environmental and sustainability outreach—in this case, Springdene adopted a neighbourhood approach to local sustainability, in contrast to Green Acres, which adopted a centralised, district-wide approach to sustainability. Similar to the national context, there was a noticeable lack of representation and involvement by BME groups in the local sustainability programmes. Adopting a case-study approach enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of how BME communities did or did not identify and engage with environmental issues, activities and responsibilities within the wider socio-political and cultural context and the implications of this for local sustainability policy.

A qualitative research design was employed and research activities were undertaken between March 2001 and December 2004. The data used to inform this paper were based on conducting ten in-depth interviews with BME community activists and voluntary and community group leaders/“representatives” working with BME communities. The BME community activists had “crossed the borders” and engaged in the local sustainability programme and their inclusion in the study was to provide greater insight into BME groups’ engagement with and responses to environmental issues. The involvement of voluntary and community group “representatives” in the research reflected the importance given by the UK government to engaging the voluntary and community group sector as major stakeholders in Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Planning (DETR 2000a). Ten focus groups were conducted with community members of either African-Caribbean or Indian descent. Each focus group met once for two hours.

Drawing on the work of Macnaghten and Urry (1998) to inform our research design, we share their view that people understand, experience and respond to “the environment” and “environmental issues” through their multiple identities—for instance, as parents, women, low income groups, young or elderly people, minority ethnic groups and faith communities. Therefore, in order to obtain “information-rich” cases (Patton 1990) among African-Caribbean and Indian communities, theoretical sampling was used to select participants along other axes of social differentiation and identities (see Table 1). This would ensure

Table 1: Focus group profiles and number of participants in each case study

GREEN ACRES CASE STUDY	SPRINGDENE CASE STUDY
Indian overseas students (5) Mixed gender Age: 18–25 years	Young people of African-Caribbean origin (6) Mixed gender Age: 17–22 years Second generation
Indian Arts Group (8) Mixed gender Age: 25–47 years First and second generation	Mothers of African-Caribbean origin (6) Age: 25–38 years First and second generation
Indian Mothers Club (9) Age: 25–59 years First and second generation	Rastafarian Community Group (5) Mixed gender Age: 35–59 years First and second generation
Asian Community Centre (7) Mixed gender Age: 45–59 years First generation	Caribbean Women’s Society and Caribbean Elders Association (7) All female Age: 25–60 years First and second generation
Sikh elderly women (6) Age: 60+ years First generation	African-Caribbean Elderly Women’s Group (5) Age: 60+ years First generation

diversity within and between BME groups.⁵ We were also committed in our approach to seeing the world from the community participants’ point of view and identifying the categories that they used to define and understand environmental issues and responsibilities in daily life, without imposing any predefined understanding of green issues and actions.⁶ As such, and supporting previous work (eg Bickerstaff and Walker 2003; Burningham and Thrush 2001), we found that the majority of participants tended to localise their perceptions of environmental issues and responsibilities (rather than engage in talk about wider environmental issues and responsibilities) which is, perhaps, not surprising, given that “environmentalism is ordinary . . . it goes to the very heart of the way people live from day to day” (Ken Warpole cited in Burningham and Thrush 2003:532–533). Therefore, the current research treated the articulation of local and immediate concerns among lay communities, such as litter and dog mess, as “environmental issues” (see also Burningham and Thrush 2001; SDRN 2004). It is also these issues that have gained prominence in the UK government’s current policy agenda on liveability and improving people’s local environment and quality of life (ODPM 2002).

We adopted a micro-analytic approach in our study, focusing on the discursive constructions that the participants employed to understand their own responsibility and that of “others” in environmental protection. In particular, “vocabularies of motive” (Mills 1940) were used as

the main analytical unit to identify “how” people talked about and negotiated responsibility for environmental problems. In this study, vocabularies of motive are verbal articulations that people employ to shift environmental responsibility away from the individual “self” onto “others” (government, business, society) and, in doing so, to excuse or justify little or no personal action. Our analysis focused on how different discourses assigned different meanings to environmental responsibility and engaged different identities and social relations in negotiating responsibility for environmental protection.

Shifting Responsibilities of Environmental Protection

The choice of phrase “shifting responsibilities” is deliberate in the present analytical context, since it is our intention in this paper to demonstrate the shifting boundaries, dimensions and tensions of environmental responsibility between those who are perceived as responsible for environmental degradation and those who are seen as having responsibility for environmental management.

Not surprisingly, the importance of protecting “the environment” received overwhelming support among the participants in both case studies, who showed verbal displays of identification with the environmental crisis and the importance of environmental improvements to one’s sense of place. Yet this public acknowledgement was not easily translated into citizen responsibility to act to alleviate environmental problems. For instance, we found that where people did indicate their engagement in “green” actions, this was limited to conservation behaviours in the home (eg recycling, turning lights off) or their engagement with “nature” (eg experiencing the outdoors), without any major changes to their lifestyle or civic responsibilities. In attempting to address what Blake (1999) calls the “value–action gap” in the context of our research, this paper will endeavour to show the discourses of environmental responsibility that BME communities adopted to excuse or justify individual inaction towards environmental protection and how these discourses were constructed in relational and moral terms, implicating the responsibility of (institutional) “others”. Our paper will also show how BME groups employed, in certain discursive contexts, a rights- and justice-based dialogue to negate the position of responsibility that was assigned to them by sustainability policy and planning agendas.

Briefly, we observed four vocabularies of responsibility in the participants’ talk: *personal distancing to the collective “we”*; *redistribution to (ir)responsible others*; *shift to government to guide and regulate behaviour*; and *redirection to government as an active rebuttal of individualisation*. For the most part, we noticed that people’s perceptions of environmental responsibilities were rooted in local place, and hence tied up with their everyday social practices and

lived experiences. We will now explore each of these discourses of environmental responsibility. It is our intention to quote freely from the data transcripts in order to situate the language used by the participants in constructing vocabularies of environmental responsibility.

Personal Distancing to the Collective “We”

The majority view in our research was that “we are all responsible” for environmental protection, yet, similar to the findings of Bickerstaff and Walker (2002:2185) and their analysis of responsibility in air pollution discourses, the participants in our study adopted vocabularies of motive which “play[ed] an important distancing role” in terms of shifting responsibility for environmental protection away from the “self” onto an all-inclusive “we”. The examples given here demonstrate the inherent powerlessness of the individual relative to the collective (community, society and institutions) and, as a consequence, the current responsibility discourse employed by the participants did not problematise individual inaction towards environmental welfare.

By suggesting the need for a collective identity in working towards environmental sustainability, some of the participants raised the issue of equity and sharing the environmental burden in rationalising personal inaction towards ecological protection (Harrison et al 1996). This was evident in the context of global environmental responsibility,⁷ which served to distance the responsibility of the individual and re-centred the onus of environmental protection onto global (powerful) “Others”, as indicated below:

I read something and they said what is the most dangerous species on earth and it is the human being, because we’re destroying something and we’re doing it in so many different ways . . . We talk about the rainforest and about how communities have lived there and we’ve been responsible for destroying some of those . . . So quite frankly at the end of the day, the concept of sustainability is a good one, but how can we as you know we’ve even had people who are at the very pinnacle of the power base to be able to do something about it, even they’re turning their backs on it (Pooran, Centre Manager of the Indian Mothers Club, Green Acres).

By adopting the position of a “generalised ‘we’” (Phillips 2000:184), the community informant was able to distance herself from the current sustainability debate and absolve individual responsibility for protection of the earth—almost as if the individual were absent in her talk on the environmentally destructive impact of human activities. This phenomenon of “personal absence” or distancing was identified by Beck (1992:33) in his thesis on risk and responsibility, as he maintains: “Everyone is cause and effect, and thus non-cause . . . one can do something and continue doing it without having to take responsibility

for it ... as if one were acting while being personally absent". Personal distancing is heightened at the global level of environmental responsibility, indicating the negligible impact that ordinary people perceive they have in effecting global environmental change. In the above example, the "democratisation of responsibility" (Beck 1992; Thompson 1995) towards protection of a globally fragile earth was eroded by the unsustainable and unjust practices of key actors in the global sustainability debate. This demonstrates relational inequities between the (powerless) individual and political institutions (see also Bickerstaff and Walker 2002).

Even at the level of the locality, the extent of ordinary people's powerlessness to effect environmental change relative to the collective was evidenced in the interview accounts. An interesting discussion occurred among the African-Caribbean elderly women, in which the participants employed shifting (and sometimes ambiguous) "we" forms in their dialogue which corresponded to shifting identities and environmental responsibilities, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Interviewer: Who do you think is responsible for environmental protection?

Anthea: I think some of it is us and I think some of it is the government. And some of it, we, we personally.

Gloria: I think we personally.

Anthea: Well because, if they know more about it, you will act differently, to be aware of certain things ... Know what to do and not what to do.

Gloria: If you pollute the air and I think if we know more, we wouldn't do it. If, these people who dump rubbish at your street, had a sense of knowledge that it's gonna, it could cause a lot of mice and rat and things like that to make us sick, they might not know it. But because they don't know they're not very well educated on that. So I think, we need to listen to ignorance

(African-Caribbean Elderly Women's Group, Springdene).

In the first part of the group dialogue, the participants used the all-inclusive "we" to implicate themselves as having personal responsibility for environmental welfare. In the second part of the interview dialogue, the participants employed "ambiguous 'we' form[s]" (Phillips 2000:186) in order to distinguish or set apart "other people", who were responsible for environmental degradation, from themselves, who did not degrade the local surroundings. At the same time, these ambiguous "we" forms provided a rationale for the undesirable behaviours of "other people" who pollute, since they act out of ignorance. These collective identities, built around the notion of "we", are constructed so that they simultaneously include and exclude the individual "self" from having responsibility for environmental protection—similar to the construction

of exclusive and inclusive “we” forms in political discourse which work to the advantage of the speaker(s) (Fairclough 2000).

Identity, power and agency were important factors in this responsibility discourse and our analytical framework was able to capture the interplay of these factors in accounting for the structural inequities between the powerless citizen and the powerful collective (society, institutions), leading to personal distancing of environmental responsibility to the collective “we” (Phillips 2000).

Redistribution to (Ir)responsible Others

In both case studies, the most frequently cited vocabulary of environmental responsibility was the “discourse of redistribution to (ir)responsible others”. This discourse redistributed the burden of environmental responsibility to “irresponsible others” who polluted the local environment and, simultaneously, onto “other institutions” that were seen as having responsibility for environmental protection but who were not “doing their bit” towards environmental welfare. Below we look at the participants’ constructions of the “discourse of redistribution to (ir)responsible others” using examples from our research.

Given the religious activities and tourist attraction of the research study area, the participants in Green Acres were particularly concerned about the influx of people visiting the local area and engaging in environmentally damaging behaviours. In constructing this vocabulary of motive, the participants’ dialogue centred on issues of “fairness”, “social equity”, “apathy” and “outsider status”, arguing that irresponsible others should undertake their fair share of environmental responsibility (Harrison et al 1996) since: “we’re responsible for only part just to keep it clean and tidy. A lot of people comes into [local area] . . . they get takeaways, sit in the car right, changing nappies in the car . . . Right what they do open the door and slam it under the car and drive away. And who makes [local area] dirty, the people from outside” (Asian Community Centre).

There were also instances where the discourse of redistribution to (ir)responsible others was mobilised around people’s (un)willingness to engage their responsibilities in local environmental and sustainability initiatives, as observed by Gurdas, the community activist in Green Acres:

The Indians in [local area], tend not to take up the projects that the local authority tends to put forward. I think they have a feeling that the local authority really ought to be doing a lot more and doesn’t (Gurdas (m), community activist, Green Acres).

The phrase “ought to” shows that the local authority was seen as having a moral duty to engage its environmental responsibilities. As Harrison et al

(1996:226) argue, “responsibility . . . is a complex concept. It includes a powerful moral or normative dimension about what people [in this case institutions] ought to be doing, not only for the sake of the environment but also for the discharge of their social obligations, especially at the local level”. Moreover, Gurdas added:

And this is why I think going back to the role of the local authority, it becomes more important that, the people, your citizens of any particular area must feel that the local authority are also doing their bit . . . If the local government isn't going to have a plan which works for everyone, rather than just one area, then it is going to fail. It is going to create conditions where the people living in an area which is ignored can turn around and say, we don't get anything. My argument is local government has a responsibility (Gurdas (m), community activist, Green Acres).

Here, Gurdas adopted a dialogue of citizens' rights versus institutional responsibilities, revealing the tensions between individual non-responsibility and political/institutional failure. There are two dynamics operating in the above dialogue, both of which have practical implications for the (dis)engagement of individual responsibility towards environmental protection. Firstly, similar to many of the other discussions defining this vocabulary of motive, local people needed to see that government authorities were engaging their own environmental responsibilities, “also doing their bit”, which would ensure an equitable and just response to environmental problems (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002; Harrison et al 1996). However, Gurdas discussed this redistribution of environmental responsibility within the context of lay people as “citizens-with-rights” rather than New Labour's image of lay people as “communities-with-responsibilities” (DETR 1999; ODPM 2005a, 2005b). This leads on to the second dynamic evidenced in the above dialogue, namely, the relationship between “your citizens of any particular area” and local government. Here, emphasis is on the entitlement of all citizens to “substantive rights” (eg the right to a clean, healthy environment) as advocated by the 1999 Aarhus Convention (DETR 2000b) and the responsibility of government authorities to ensure that these rights are delivered to their citizens – in this case, the effective (and equal) delivery of local environmental management services. Indeed, throughout his interview, the community activist made reference to the perceived “institutionally racist practices” (Macpherson 1999) of the local authority in neglecting to discharge its responsibilities in service provision to the local Indian community, suggesting in the above excerpt that South Asian communities were being denied their rights to a good quality living environment. By mobilising his argument using the narratives of social equity and citizenship rights, the community activist felt justified in shifting

responsibility for environmental protection (and improvements) away from the individual onto political institutions.

An interesting observation from the data, evident in the Green Acres case study, was the mental and physical separation of the immediate home environment and the external local environment, and how these spaces were perceived differently in terms of individual (dis)engagement of environmental responsibilities, as illustrated below:

Interviewer: In terms of what you said, that you still think they're living in India, could you just expand on that bit?

Bina: All Asians this is a fact an Indian community they look after themselves if they keep a nice house they'll keep a, but other issues it's all it's not our problem that's what they [say]. If someone says oh the street is dirty they said that's not my problem. My house is I do my bit.

Puvneet: Cleaning and that.

Bina: Yeah that's right.

(Indian Mothers Club, Green Acres)

As observed in the above excerpt, for (first generation) South Asian people the inside space of the home was conceptualised as purity and cleanliness and, therefore, it symbolised an extension of the "self", whereas the outside space of the local area was associated with impurity and dirt and became "Other" to the self (Douglas 1966; Sibley 1995). These conceptions of inside-outside space served to define and dictate the boundaries of environmental responsibility such that the mothers indicated the responsibility of "other (South Asian) people" as maintaining hygiene in the home, whereas the responsibility of environmental problems and threats in the local area was assigned to the local authority. Similar to many of the other accounts in this section, the participants constructed this vocabulary of responsibility by engaging in a dialogue of equity and fairness, thereby transferring responsibility to institutions perceived as responsible for environmental management (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002; Blake 1999; Macnaghten and Jacobs 1997).

Comments similar to the mothers' account above were made by Gurdas in response to whether Indian communities perceived themselves as having responsibility for environmental protection:

Yes. But, I think by and large, Indians are very proud of their own homes for instance. And if therefore, the place they live in, is environmentally friendly, then they must be aware of those and take the responsibility. But, this is why I kept on going back, said the responsibility of the local authority becomes paramount because, if the individual sees the immediate surrounding, that is to say, the house and the grounds are kept right, then outside of that becomes the responsibility of somebody else, ie the local authority (Gurdas (m), community activist, Green Acres).

Indeed, the notion of an “Asian mentality”, as relayed in the interview accounts above, referred to the cultural understanding, perception and priorities among (first generation) South Asian communities that they held personal responsibility for the home environment and the council held institutional (and moral) responsibility for the local environment. These cultural beliefs reveal high expectations of the local authority doing “its own bit of the work” which Gurdas indicated later in his interview stem from earlier experiences of paternalism in India. In the absence of local government discharging its responsibility towards environmental protection, this accounted for and justified continued inaction among (first generation) South Asian communities. By comparison, (first generation) black participants in the Springdene case study did not exhibit this cultural understanding of environmental responsibility.

To conclude this section, the vocabulary of redistribution to (ir)responsible others has been expressed in diverse ways. However, the distinguishing feature of this vocabulary of motive is that it is circumscribed by the notion of equity and sharing the environmental burden with “other people” who pollute and “institutional others” who are “not doing their bit” towards preventing or resolving environmental problems. Once again, identity, power and agency are key dimensions of this vocabulary of motive and, through the examples given, our analytical framework captures the dynamic and sometimes conflicting interactions between structure and culture in explaining the redistribution of environmental responsibility away from the individual onto “others”, which is seen as fair and just. These cultural interpretations of environmental responsibility have until now been unexplored or unrecognized in the literature.

Shift to Government to Guide and Regulate Behaviour

A widely expressed vocabulary of motive among the community participants in both case studies was the shift of responsibility to government authorities to guide, monitor and regulate behaviour. The different articulations of this vocabulary of responsibility centred on government provision of educational resources to raise public awareness and action; government provision of the physical conditions that are conducive for environmental protection; and government being seen as the main body to take the lead in preventing environmental degradation by controlling the polluting activities of “other people”. This responsibility discourse is illustrated below:

Interviewer: Do you think community group members see themselves as responsible for protecting the environment?

Mrs Lewis: I think they see themselves in that way, but they need the help they need the resources, you know like I said, everyone wants to

make their environment better. You know not just the black community the white community everyone wants to make their environment a better place to live . . . but they do need to have the implements to make it happen (Mrs Lewis, Chair, Rastafarian Community Group, Springdene).

In the above extract, discussion about the responsibility of the individual was a moot point since the power to make things happen and effect change in the environment rested with government institutions and hence the (powerless) individual could not be held responsible for environmental degradation (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002). Although the community informant did not specify the “implements” that government authorities needed to provide, given the emphasis throughout her interview on education and awareness-raising, it was likely that the informant was referring to the provision of educational tools to inform and empower lay people on how to protect and improve the environment where they live. The word “everyone” was used repeatedly in the participant’s dialogue as an “extreme case formulation” (Pomerantz 1986) to legitimate her claim and convince the interviewer that environmental quality was a general concern that affected all people, irrespective of “race” or ethnicity. The black elderly women were also quick to suggest the education of young people as a key route to modify people’s (unsustainable) lifestyles with the onus resting with government.

A common tendency across most of the community informant interviews was to identify the environmentally damaging practices of “other people”, yet simultaneously to shift the responsibility to government institutions who were seen as neglecting to discharge their duties as “service providers” or “enablers” of environmental management (see also Bickerstaff and Walker 2002). For instance, in response to whether community group members would perceive themselves as responsible for environmental protection, the Centre Manager of the Asian Community Centre in Green Acres indicated that “the day before the rubbish is going to be collected, it’s left on the street . . . by the time the people are going to come and collect the rubbish, sometimes the bags have been torn and it’s all over the place. Now if the local authority for example, looked at something like that, I’m sure people will use their little bins to make sure yeah? I think people would. I think if you give them the tools to use, they will”.

In some of the interview accounts, responsibility was shifted to government who had legal authority to prohibit continued pollution of the environment, as indicated by the community activist in Springdene:

Interviewer: Who do you think black people in the local area feel are responsible for environmental protection, or improvements?

Noel: It's the council. It's the local authority, they have our money, they have authority we have elected them. They are even considered under the law, that they have power, to put cleanness and tidying up all our areas. Who have money to go and tell somebody who is dumping refuse somewhere (Noel, community activist, Springdene).

Here, local government has a moral and legal obligation to act responsibly towards improving the welfare and environmental conditions of the local community that it has been elected to serve, as well as delivering the environmental management services that local people pay for. Indeed, Noel had continuously stressed in his interview that "the black environment conditions are unhealthy and very poor" and, in the above excerpt, there are signs of a rights-based discourse that stresses local people's rights to a healthy and good quality living environment (Adebowale 2002; Church et al 1998). The lack of political intervention served to justify existing patterns of environmentally destructive behaviours and, at the same time, minimised personal responsibility for environmental protection (see also Bickerstaff and Walker 2002; Hinchliffe 1996).

In the Green Acres case study, several participants in the Indian Arts Group argued that, since the council was not discharging its (legal) power and responsibilities in local environmental management—in this case, traffic control—this had the effect of legitimising the continued inaction of other motorists (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002), as they stated: "people they can park anyway . . . the council can't control it, they are not doing anything".

To conclude, across the different articulations of this vocabulary of motive, the individual is exempted from engaging her or his environmental responsibilities since (local and central) government have the power to enforce legal measures or provide the tools for people to act responsibly. In the various accounts given, structure plays a key explanatory role and our analytical framework reveals the dynamic interplay between identity, (individual) agency and (institutional/legal) power in constructing this vocabulary of motive and shifts of responsibility.

Redirection to Government as an Active Rebuttal of Individualisation

Another discourse of environmental responsibility engaged with and actively challenged the advanced liberal ideology of active and responsible citizenship (Raco and Imrie 2000). Here, duties and obligations are imposed on individuals and communities so that they become social agents of their own governance while engaging their responsibilities in a way that is in line with government objectives (Raco and Imrie 2000). However, by contesting this form of governance,

which was perceived as burdening individuals and communities with too many obligations and responsibilities, the participants in this study were actively redirecting environmental responsibility away from the individual back to local and central government, who were perceived as the main actors that should undertake this responsibility. This was a minor discourse, although it was articulated in both case studies in a variety of contexts.

“Front door” environmental issues, such as the problem of dog fouling, which affected the quality of their neighbourhood and sense of place, was of grave concern to many of the participants in both case studies (see also SDRN 2004). People’s strong views on this issue were exacerbated further by the council refusing to take responsibility for tackling the problem, as the following extract exemplifies:

Maureen: I reported it to some people of the Housing and what they’re saying to me, is that I should try and see where they live. So I must come out my house and follow them people their dogs messing down the front, find out where they live because they’re saying to me it’s a thousand pound fine for it. But why should I [laughs]! (Rastafarian Community Group, Springdene)

As evidenced in the excerpt above, the government’s objective of self-governance and self-discipline did not rest comfortably with the perceived responsibilities of local residents. Indeed, this narrative of resisting government policy of self-management in institutional and daily life challenges Foucault’s (1980 cited in Allen 2003 and Elliott 2009) notion of disciplinary power in contemporary society whereby the state employs techniques such as normalisation and self-regulation to train individuals to manage themselves and their behaviours “mak[ing] it difficult for individuals to constitute themselves in any other way” (cited in Allen 2003:65). In our examples, the participants’ narratives do not suggest “docile bodies” but instead speak of resistances and the active questioning of imposed responsibilities.

Another argument that negated individual and community responsibility for environmental welfare and redirected this responsibility back to government was expressed in response to the emphasis on engaging communities in local sustainability programmes and decision-making, as illustrated below:

Patrick: So what they’re really saying is, they want the community to police the community. That’s what they want. They want the people in their community to police . . .

Interviewer: To take responsibility for . . .

Patrick: No, to police their community. That’s what they want, ’cos they don’t wanna do it.

[Group members laugh]

Patrick: So they want the people in the community to do their work for them. Why don't they just say that and get it over with, yeah? Because that's why you've got neighbourhood watch, and you've got all these things set up in the environment in your communities yeah, to stop prevention of crime.

(Rastafarian Community Group, Springdene)

In the above context, official attempts to encourage active citizenship and self-empowerment in environmental management were met with scepticism and an open rejection of what was perceived to be an “off-loading” of institutional responsibility. As Raco and Imrie (2000:2198) argue, “All these ... mechanisms are designed to encourage local authorities, partnerships, communities ... to police themselves and implement the wider policy objectives of the DETR without the latter ‘governing’ in the traditional sense”. Thus far, the examples presented in this section, and the issue of citizen responsibility that they raise, demonstrate the political, ideological and contested spaces of people’s daily experiences and interactions in local place (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1989).

The community activist in Green Acres also employed a vocabulary of motive that redirected environmental responsibility back to government. However, in this instance, the informant raised the issue of cultural differences between Indian and British society in the allocation of environmental responsibilities. As the community informant argued:

There is also a perception within the Indian community that there are certain things which, local government or central government ought to be doing rather than asking them to waste a lot of their times and so on ... It's a I suppose a cultural thing. So, they perceive that the local authority lets environmental issues slide. Always continuing to them, well you should be doing this that and the other rather than taking their own responsibilities, rather than expecting citizen to do everything (Gurdas (m), community activist, Green Acres).

Gurdas stressed that (first generation) Indian communities expected public authorities to take responsibility for duties that they were obliged to carry out—in this case, environmental management and improvements in the neighbourhood—which conflicted with the political ideology in Britain of active citizenship, self-management and self-responsibility (Rose 1996).

To conclude this section, although a minor discourse in this study, the discourse of “redirection to government as an active rebuttal of individualisation” was a defensive yet oppositional response to individualised society and the institutional “off-loading” of environmental and social responsibilities onto individuals and communities. Contrary to the new form of governance propagated under New Labour, the participants did not feel an empowered sense

of citizenship as a result of these new and imposed responsibilities but, instead, they questioned the hidden motives of government ideology. Similar to the discourse of redistribution to (ir)responsible others, both structure and culture are key dimensions of this vocabulary of responsibility. Here, relational inequalities in the functioning of local environmental governance, and perceived cultural differences between Indian and British society concerning the role of individuals (and institutions) in environmental protection, resulted in a redirection of environmental responsibility back to government.

Some Conclusions

In this paper, we sought to examine *how* BME groups talked about their own responsibilities towards environmental protection and that of “others” and *why* the participants allocated responsibility in the ways that they did. Identity, power and agency penetrated the discursive micro-worlds of people’s talk on environmental responsibilities and we identified four responsibility discourses in the group discussions and in-depth interviews, which were variously defined by issues of trust, social equity, off-loading of responsibility and government intervention. The articulation of these vocabularies of motive served to shift environmental responsibility away from the individual onto “others” (mainly government institutions)⁸ and, simultaneously, justified continued patterns of environmental degradation—similar to the findings of previous studies (eg Bickerstaff and Walker 2002; Phillips 2000). These responsibility discourses illustrate the moral, relational and institutional context in which lay people attribute environmental responsibility to themselves and to “others”—“reproduc[ing] the tension between institutional and individual responsibility” (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002:2185)—and they challenge the civic responsibility model of New Labour and local sustainability programmes in Britain. It is noticeable from our findings that lay people responded to environmental problems in the context of their highly personal, localised environmental geographies (see also Burningham and Thrush 2001; SDRN 2004). This at once dispels the notion of a “shared” and “democratised responsibility” towards (global) environmental problems advanced in social and cultural theory (eg Beck 1992, 1998; Thompson 1995).

At the same time, in constructing discourses of environmental responsibility, the BME community activists in both case studies tended to engage with the notion of citizenship in terms of people’s access to “environmental rights” in their everyday lived localities. Perceiving local government as neglecting its responsibilities in the provision of environmental management services, the community informants argued that the BME communities in the respective case-study areas were being denied their substantive rights to, for instance, a cleaner, greener and better quality environment. This finding supports the more rights-based

dialogue inherent in the JS framework cited earlier (Agyeman et al 2003; Agyeman and Evans 2006) and it has important implications for the government's recent policy on liveability and access to a better quality of life through its neighbourhood renewal programme and its strategy to create sustainable communities that are socially inclusive and ensure equality of opportunity in service provision (ODPM 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

An interesting finding that emerged in our research, which has not yet been acknowledged in the literature or in public, policy and political debate, are the perceived cultural differences among first generation Indians in apportioning environmental responsibilities and how these challenge the advanced liberal ideology of active and responsible citizenship. In this study, it was indicated on several occasions that first generation South Asian communities tend physically and mentally to separate the boundaries of environmental responsibilities in terms of individual responsibility for the immediate home environment and local authority responsibility for the outside local environment. These cultural understandings served to negotiate perceived environmental responsibilities of the individual "self" and that of "institutional others" as well as to contest the individualisation of responsibility in Western society. The analytical framework that we developed was sensitive and subtle enough to capture these cultural explanations and understandings of environmental responsibilities among (first generation) South Asian communities.

Finally, the individualisation of responsibility in contemporary life and New Labour's agenda of "no rights without responsibilities" (cited in Giddens 1998:65) had been critically challenged in some of the participants' accounts, to the extent that a negotiated and revised "citizen's agenda" had been proposed—one that necessitated a moral, ethical and more equitable balance between citizens' rights and institutional responsibilities in environmental welfare. Reworking the "rights and responsibilities agenda" of New Labour, as observed in the present accounts, more accurately reflects the ways in which disempowered groups talk about their environmental responsibilities and that of "others" in local places. From a policy point of view, these findings have implications for local and central government initiatives and environmental NGO campaigns that are oriented towards building and engaging a sense of civic responsibility towards environmental protection and sustainable development. The ES agenda constructs the identity of "the public" as open and responsive to persuasion and participation. However, this was not evident in the community accounts, nor was the trust in political institutions to fulfil their duties. The tensions identified in the participants' discourses between rights and responsibilities, the individual, community and society, practical constraints and autonomous choice, everyday lived realities and the

powerful political arena are issues that need to be urgently debated within a deliberative community forum, not only to question, as Bickerstaff and Walker (2002:2189–2190) do, “How is responsibility to be distributed—relative to power?” but also, why are environmental rights not distributed unconditionally?

At the beginning of this paper, we posed the question of whether “race” and ethnicity make a difference in the perceived environmental responsibilities of BME communities. From our analysis, we draw various conclusions in trying to resolve this question. Firstly, the findings of our study resonate, in many ways, with the discourses of responsibility articulated by other social groups, irrespective of “race” or ethnicity (see eg studies by Bickerstaff and Walker 2002 and Phillips 2000), particularly the emphasis given to feelings of powerlessness to effect environmental change relative to powerful institutions. However, this is only one side of the debate, since we observed in our analysis that BME community activists tended to construct their responsibility discourses around the *specific* environmental perceptions and experiences of BME communities, suggesting that “race” and ethnicity do matter. These discourses alluded to the structurally (and racially) unequal relationship that BME groups have with political institutions in daily life and the perceived neglect of local authorities to discharge their responsibilities in the provision of environmental management in minority ethnic areas (relative to non-BME areas). Reframing their discourses in this way, perhaps, reflected the community activists’ everyday engagement with improving the social and economic welfare of local BME communities and, as a result, their responsibility discourses were filtered through the prism of environmental rights, equalities and justice.

This is not the end of the debate, however, since ethnic and cultural dimensions of perceived environmental responsibilities surfaced, at times unexpectedly, in our research. Indeed, a distinctive theme that was reported in our study was the “different mindset” (“Asian mentality”) of first generation Indian communities, which impacted on their perceived responsibility towards environmental protection, as indicated earlier. This might suggest that ethnicity and culture do matter in shaping how BME communities construct their environmental identities and responsibilities (see also Kelleher 1996), and hence ethnicity is not a “zombie category” as maintained by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). However, we acknowledge that further research is needed in terms of unpacking the “Asian mentality” concept in different research contexts involving other (first generation) South Asian communities in Britain to see whether and how the concept applies in their perceptions of environmental responsibilities. Indeed, another way of approaching the observation (and analysis) of the “Asian mentality” concept is to question the context in which it emerges. In other words, has the “Asian mentality” concept emerged solely from within the “home”

experience of the Indian community or, given their experiences of post-war immigration and racial politics in Britain (Brah 1996; Layton-Henry 1992), could such a concept have been mobilised through the interactions (and tensions) that the South Asian diaspora have with British institutions, the white majority and other ethnic groups? The findings in the current paper are unable to answer this question, although, by raising the issue, it highlights that “race” and ethnicity are continually negotiated in local place, giving rise to complex and varied (social and environmental) experiences and identities (Hall 1988). Perhaps a better supported claim, based on the findings in this paper, is that there are varying degrees of commonality and difference between the environmental responsibilities of BME groups and the majority ethnic population, and it is important that this is recognised among the environmental and sustainability policy and planning community in their policy, planning, communication and outreach work with black and South Asian groups in Britain.

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Endnotes

¹ We acknowledge that “race” is a social construction (rather than a naturally given phenomenon) that acquires different meanings in different historical, political and geographical contexts.

² We note here that in a later book entitled *World Risk Society*, Beck (1999) is inconsistent in his original view on the global equality of risk. In *World Risk Society*, Beck briefly states that “pollution follows the poor” (p 5). However, a review of Beck’s manuscript (see eg Zürn 2000:179) indicates that “World Risk Society is not especially sensitive to issues of poverty and inequality”.

³ We adopt a more empowering reading of space in the present research context in that we view spaces as “strategic locations” (cited in Smith 1999:20) where marginalised voices now have a position from which to speak and be heard. By talking to the participants and listening to their stories, this study enables BME communities to locate themselves in this marginalised space and adopt multiple, complex and shifting identities in talking about their perceptions of environmental responsibilities in institutional and everyday life.

⁴ Several of the local authority officers in our main study requested the anonymity of the study locations and, therefore, pseudonyms were used.

⁵ Much of the small group literature recommends that focus groups are homogeneous in terms of age, gender and social class (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990) to ensure that the range of understandings and meanings of the research topic are explored among particular population groups (Macnaghten et al 1995). However, in agreement with Goss and Leinbach (1996:119), focus group discussions do not exist in a vacuum, “independently of social relationships and social context”. Thus, in the case of some of the community and voluntary groups, our research used mixed (gender, age, disability and religious) groups to reflect the community context more accurately.

⁶ This is particularly germane to disempowered groups, such as BME groups since, historically, the environment and conservation movement has tended to focus on issues of environmental quality, such as biodiversity and wildlife conservation, to the exclusion of human equality issues (Agyeman 2001). The implications of this legacy of environmental quality were observed by Friends of the Earth, who reviewed survey data on environmental groups in the UK and concluded that “the mainstream environment movement employs a narrow definition of ‘the environment’, one defined by white, middle class people . . . Ethnic minority people are under-represented in the environmental movement as a whole. It does not reflect issues of daily relevance to their lives” (FoE 1996 cited in Agyeman 2001:16).

⁷ It is notable that the view on global environmental power and responsibility was a minor response in the interview accounts, articulated by three of the community key informants.

⁸ Concluding that BME communities employ various discourses to shift responsibility for environmental protection to political institutions can give the impression that we are exposing the “excuses” of BME communities to adopt environmentally responsible behaviours or, at worst, it runs the risk of reinforcing politically conservative assumptions that these communities refuse to take individual responsibility for any contribution to environmental problems—neither of which is our intention. Instead, we feel that the “government responsibility” narrative can be defended in the context of our study particularly since the point of entry in which environmental issues have import in the lives of BME groups is in terms of inequality, lack of access and poor quality environments (Pulido 1996). These claims are supported by the fact that 44 of the most deprived localities in England have four times as many inhabitants from BME groups (Seraaj 2001 cited in Eames and Adebowale 2002:6) and such areas suffer from greater volumes of traffic and reduced play spaces as well as increased road accidents among BME children (Acheson 1998).

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