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Mapping Environmental Injustice With The Ejatlas: Tool Or Trap?

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Environmental justice (EJ) is sought by the poor, or working class, often of ethnic/marginal communities who have been disproportionately affected by the negative consequences of environmental degradation. Originating in American activism against 'environmental racism' in the 1970s and 1980s, academics (especially political ecologists, ecological economists, and environmental sociologists) have long focused analysis on the topic of EJ in the West. More recently, however, scholars have begun to document the evolution of a global environmental justice movement, comprised of both activists and researchers engaged in the work of linking protest with theory. Indeed in the South African (SA) context, evidence points to a burgeoning of EJ activism, as local communities engage in urgent, high stakes struggles to defend their access to non-market environmental resources and services upon which livelihoods depend, against contamination and/or encroachment by market and state forces. This paper examines a range of South African EJ struggles, drawing from a recently developed interactive map of environmental conflicts. It argues that online platforms such as the EJAtlas offer a valuable means by which environmental justice organisations (EJOs) can leverage "network effects", thereby increasing possibilities for achieving organisational goals."

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