Countercurrents to the Green Energy Transition: *Contested Development, Procedural Injustice, and Sovereignty Struggles in Tunisia's Green Hydrogen Contention*

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Abstract

In the race toward net-zero, Green Hydrogen (GH2) has emerged as a pillar of the Green Energy Transition. Northern industrial countries, with the European Union at the forefront, pursue decarbonization through "win-win" partnerships with Southern counterparts, whose renewable energy potential and industrial ambitions make them eager participants. Beneath this rhetoric of mutual benefit, however, lie local tensions that these green futures have yet to address. Against this backdrop, this article examines grassroots contention against Tunisia's national GH2 strategy, with a focus on Gabes, a region historically shaped by industrialization and environmental degradation. It traces the collision of top-down, state- and donor-led 'green' development trajectories with bottom-up counter-currents emerging from local communities, civil society organizations, and environmental activists. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Gabes and analysis of protest materials, I identify three counter-currents to the GH2 ascent: contested development pathways, procedural injustice, and sovereignty struggles. These counter-currents mobilize historical memory, oppositional knowledge practices, and collective action to contest GH2's framing, governance, and environmental implications. Situating Gabes within broader debates within environmental political theory and green growth, I foreground the 'local' in the socio-political dynamics of the global green energy transition, in showing how resistance from below shapes and constrains global "win-win" visions of the green energy transition.

Key Words: Green Energy Transition, Green Hydrogen, Contentious Environmental Politics, Europe, Tunisia.

Introduction

> "*Until when will Tunisia remain the laboratory of research for Europe? Let the Europeans do this research. Either we have national sovereignty or we do not.*"— Community Member, *Oasis Days Festival*, Gabes, October 10, 2024.

In fall 2024, the *Oasis Days* Festival convened a coalition of civil society actors, community leaders, local officials, and farmers from across Gabes and neighboring regions, many traveling from the string of oases that stretch inland from the coast of Gabes—Chenini, Menzel, Jara, Chott Essalam, Ghanoush, and others. Together, they represented 35 oases spanning some 570 hectares, each a node in a living agroecological system barely holding in the face of compounding pressures including creeping urbanization, youth out-migration, chronic underinvestment in public services, and high unemployment. Most urgently, in the eyes of residents, stood the "environmental terrorism" inflicted by the nearby Tunisian Chemical Group (*Groupe Chimique Tunisien,* GCT). A largely state-owned phosphate-processing complex, the GCT has since 1972 sat at the heart of Tunisia's industrial economy, handling the transformation of the country's most important mineral resource and dumping thousands of tonnes of Phosphogypsum daily into the shores and sea of the Gabes coast. Generations living in the shadow of the GCT have faced its externalities firsthand; corroded soil, contaminated waters, acrid air, a slew of respiratory and chronic illnesses, eroded farming and fishing livelihoods have all threatened the socio-ecological reproduction of a rare oasis ecology found almost nowhere else on earth. It was into this charged atmosphere that the newly appointed governor of Gabes stepped to deliver an inaugural address lauding the vitality of the oasis and reaffirming the state's commitment to its preservation, only to be publicly accosted by a local environmental activist demanding answers about a planned green hydrogen (GH2) project slated for installation in the GCT complex.

The project in question stems from a Tunisian-German collaboration that—months before the confrontation—produced Tunisia's *National Strategy for the Development of Green Hydrogen and its Derivatives* (hereafter, GH2 Strategy). The strategy's first phase centers on establishing Gabes as a national hub for GH2 and green ammonia production, with plans for a manufacturing plant and the GCT slated as a primary industrial off-taker. Citing independent research, the activist argued that the project's estimated water consumption would double the already critical hydraulic stress caused by GCT's operations. A heated exchange ensued; a localized war of expertise in which activist and governor cited conflicting data on possible water usage, each contesting the other's claim to authoritative knowledge. Ultimately, the governor acknowledged that the project remained in the study phase assuring the audience that it would be halted if proven harmful before excusing himself. The encounter opened the floor to a barrage of other interventions, with participants voicing anxieties about the cascading threats to agricultural and marine livelihoods and others about Gabes' role as an ecological sacrifice zone and now seemingly a space for European-qua-colonial experimentation.

This triad of grievances—ecological degradation, disposability and postcolonial dependency—would resurface with renewed intensity in the months that followed. Between December 2024 and May 2025, a diverse contingent of GH2 challengers straddling local and national scales and leveraging different tactical choices including environmental justice movements, student and trade unions, peasant advocacy groups, and local football ultras participated in a series of direct-action protests targeting both the GH2 project and the GCT's as its industrial predecessor and now host: three in Gabes and one in the capital, Tunis. Central to the demands are the revocation of the GH2 agreement and redress for environmental harms disproportionately borne by Tunisia's regional peripheries. The final protest proved the most confrontational, resulting in the arrest (and eventual release) of three demonstrators. These mobilizations, which unfolded in parallel with Tunisia's signing of successive Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with international energy actors, were buttressed by networks of

oppositional infrastructures—community assemblies, activist media, knowledge production initiatives, and grassroots organizing—that seeded public skepticism not only toward the GH2 project but also toward the broader vision of development it was seen to represent.

The world over, GH2 projects are proliferating at remarkable speed as northern industrial nations scramble to respond to the climate emergency by finding in their southern and resource-rich counterparts' partners in the Green Energy Transition (GET). In these 'win-win' partnerships, the former advance towards their goal of carbon neutrality while the latter receive a 'green'-certified industrialization boost. Both move towards a mutually-shared future where economic development is met in tandem with the imperatives of climate action and green technologies are harnessed and shared cross-borders in the service of both. Beneath the language of mutual benefit lies a host of frictions that these partnerships are ill-equipped to resolve. As GH2 initiatives take root, so too do local and indigenous challenges to their foundational logics; and where GH2 agents have emphasized the mutually beneficial and universally desirable virtues of GH2 as 'technofix' (Barry, 2016) and ecomodernist solution to the 'doom and gloom' of the climate disaster (Karlsson, 2025), GH2 challengers, particularly those "on the frontline of [renewable] infrastructural conflict" (Dunlap & Laratte, 2022, p. 2) have mounted serious indictments of the development models these projects presuppose. In so doing, they bring to the fore the ways in which such projects undermine sovereign capabilities and re-inscribe core–periphery hierarchies through 'green capitalist techno-fetishism' (Pedregal & Lukić, 2024).

In this article, I trace the collision of dominant currents and alternative counter-currents shaping Tunisia's 'green' energy future to answer the question of what made Gabes a particularly potent site for anti-GH2 mobilization. On one side are top-down trajectories propelled by state and donor-led GH2 development framed as inevitable, technocratic solutions to the climate emergency. On the other, a tide of grassroots resistance has emerged to contest these projects, generating locally-rooted energy counter-currents from below. These counter-currents—expressed through claims, knowledge practices, and direct actions—disrupt the green energy consensus in peripheralized contexts such as Gabes, where critiques resonate with extant political and ecological struggles. I argue that these counter-politics are both mobilized through, and themselves mobilize, in the following three ways. First, by resisting state and donor-led projections of "green progress" from above, GH2 challengers articulate people-centered development pathways grounded in demands for ecological repair and social reproduction. Second, they respond to 'procedural environmental injustices' (Bell & Carrick, 2017) that foreclose participation by affected communities and delegitimize local expertise. Against this exclusion, GH2 challengers generate oppositional knowledge practices and cultivate energy counter-publics (Asen & Brouwer, 2001) that contest dominant narratives and reclaim technopolitical authority (Saunders, 2025). Finally, they foreground imperial entanglements in energy and natural resource governance, framing GH2 as a continuation of extractive logics under the banner of the green transition (Tunn et al., 2024). Advancing a variety of vernacular sovereignty claims (Picq, 2018; Galeana, 2022), GH2 challengers articulate the opposition to GH2 as a struggle for national sovereignty over natural resources (chief of which are land and water) and development trajectories writ-large. In advancing vernacular claims to sovereignty over territorial futures, challengers' position GH2 as both environmentally untenable and politically illegitimate.

Theoretically, this paper draws on multiple strands within Environmental Political Theory (EPT), including the anticolonial tradition (Tornel & Dunlap, 2025), degrowth thinking (Hickel, 2022), and critical environmental justice (Pellow & Brulle, 2005; Pellow, 2016). I connect these strands of thinking on ecological violence, political exclusion, and underdevelopment with literatures on contentious environmental politics to illuminate how they converge in frontline struggles against GH2 projects. In contrast to ecomodernist critiques of the so-called "fetishization of the local" (Karlsson, 2025, p. 125), this article positions the local as an important unit of analysis (Galès, 2021) through which to understand global energy regimes and green-capitalist transformations as well as community receptions to these. In so doing, it bridges political science and EPT to reconsider what articulations of environmental justice from below entail under conditions of green transition (Smith, 2016).

The case of Gabes is particularly generative for these purposes as it captures how persistent industrial harms, technocratic energy interventions, and budding environmental justice movements collide in one of Tunisia's most ecologically degraded regions. With its history of industrial development, its centrality to national and international decarbonization agendas, and now renewed wave of mobilization, Gabes offers a site from which to interrogate the contradictions of the oft-touted green energy transition and the competing futures it sets in motion. The point is not to render Gabes exceptional. Rather, I show that these counter-currents circulate across contexts, drawing comparative insights from other African sites as well as cases from the broader Global South where many GH2 projects are slated to unfold. What makes Gabes instructive is how a set of locally specific enabling conditions have brought these three lines of critique into a unified mobilization, by tracing the processes through which counter-currents to the green transition are articulated and scaled.

A brief conceptual clarification is warranted here. First, the term *extractive* is employed in much of the surveyed literature to denote not only the brute removal of natural resources but also the modes of violence and dispossession that accompany projects undermining the sustainability of African political economies for the benefit of external actors (DeBoom, 2020, p. 902). Thusly, *extractivism* is best understood as a political-economic logic premised on unequal exchange and environmental degradation that structures processes of resource removal. Second, regarding the top-down/grassroots dichotomy implied in the framing of currents and counter-currents: *top-down* refers to discourses, policies, and interventions imposed vertically by recognized power holders, whether at the national level (e.g., the state) or the extra-national level (e.g., multinational corporations and international financial institutions). By contrast, and particularly in the domain of environmental politics, *grassroots* efforts denote forms of collective organizing that emerge from within communities to resist or reshape such impositions (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). In the case of Gabes, grassroots mobilization primarily encompasses community-based initiatives and environmental associations that articulate locally rooted claims to environmental justice. Crucially, the fact that these actors collaborate with legacy organizations—including labor unions—or transnational advocacy networks does not undermine the grassroots character of their mobilization. Rather, such alliances often amplify community claims and enable them to travel across scales without erasing their local anchoring.

Methods

In service of my argument, I draw on fieldwork conducted through iterative ethnographic stays in Gabes between 2021 and 2024. In 2021, I visited several oases along the Gulf of Gabes, including Ghanouch, home to the Industrial Zone of the GCT. Between 2022 and 2024, I undertook four ethnographic stays in the Oasis of Chenini. In both Ghanouch, Chott Essalem, and Chenini, I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with fishermen and small-scale farmers allowing for first-hand engagement with the environmental harms produced by the GCT as articulated by sea- and land-dependent community members. During my most recent field visit in 2024, I participated in a town hall-style meeting, the annual Oasis Festival, its preparatory community gathering, and a series of workshops and informal conversations with local residents and festival attendees, including discussions explicitly and tangentially related to GH2 and the GCT. In parallel, I compiled a corpus of publicly available mobilization materials including protest chants, flyers, manifestos, and anti-GH2 propaganda which I leverage to gauge the repertoire of opposition and the discursive construction of grievances. An abridged version of this material, listed in Annex 1, were selected to reflect the immediate context of protest, with particular attention to content circulated before, during, and after the four anti-GH2 demonstrations I present in Table 1.

The ethics of conducting research on social movements in closed or repressive contexts has long been fraught. In Tunisia, activists engaged in environmental mobilization are exposed to coercive threats, as evidenced by the arbitrary arrests of three protestors during the May 2025 demonstrations. As such, I have sought to minimize reliance on individual activists' testimonies, privileging instead collective outputs such as manifestos, statements, and communiqués. Where individual testimonies were used, these were drawn only from publicly available sources and further anonymized to mitigate risk. An ethical safeguard, this strategy also serves a methodological purpose. Discourse saturation, or the point at which additional manifestos no longer produced new analytical insights, was reached after engaging with a substantial corpus of movement communiqués, thereby reducing the need to depend on individual accounts. The data were coded around three counter-currents to the GH2 ascent, using iterative inductive–deductive cycles. I began by drawing on insights from the literature on anti-GH2 and anti-renewable contentious politics to delineate an initial set of counter-currents. These categories were then refined through repeated cycles of manually going through the data itself, fine-tuning the analytical framework to better capture the articulations of claims and contexts from which they emerged.

Table 1. anti-GH2 Mobilizations in Tunisia

Date	*Locale*	*Main Challenger Groups*	*Mobilizational Support*	*Target(s)*
10.12.24	Gabes, Centre Ville	Ultras (09 Eagles) Stop Pollution		GCT
24.04.25	Tunis, The Tunisian Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mines (MIME) HQ	Stop Pollution Working Group on Energy Democracy	National Student Union (UGET)	MIME & GIZ

03.05.25	Gabes Stadium	Ultras (Mostaqbal Gabes)	Stop Pollution	GCT
23.05.25	Gabes, governorate headquarters	Stop Pollution	25 CSOs and organizations at the national and local level	GCT MIME GIZ
26.05.25	Gabes, Court of First Instance	Stop Pollution	14 CSOs at the national and local level	Ministry of Interior Gabes Police (Bab Bhar station)

Green Energy Imperialism: GH2 and the Making of Euro-African Renewable Partnerships

Undergirding what is commonly referred to as the Green Energy Transition (GET) is the assumption that a shift to low-carbon and renewable energy systems is "self-evidently a good thing" (Laird 2013, as cited in Bickerstaff 2018, p. 388). This presumption has entrenched the move from fossil fuels to renewables as a pillar of global climate mitigation, a cornerstone of 'sound' and climate-responsible governance, and a pathway towards 'green' growth that is translatable across geographical contexts (Hickel, 2022). Amongst the most popular instruments of the GET is the European Green Deal (EGD) which aims to achieve EU-wide carbon neutrality by 2050 positioning it as the first climate-neutral continent. The GET enshrines these objectives through what its proponents dub a " [...] new coupling of climate and financial policy to put sustainability at the heart of economic strategy" (Bloomfield & Steward, 2020, p. 772). Yet the ecomodernist and 'green' vision underpinning both the GET and the EGD has faced both activist and scholarly critique for promoting visions of unconstrained growth with few ecological limits (Mastini et al., 2021), for advancing the neoliberalization of the energy sector (Dunlap & Laratte, 2022), for relegating responsibility away from states to anonymous markets (Levidow & Raman, 2020), for obfuscating the scale of natural resource-use and disproportionally impacting indigenous land (Sovacool et al., 2017; Zografos & Robbins, 2020), for fuelling socio-ecological conflict (Dunlap, 2021), and for foreclosing locally rooted, people-centered alternatives to development and sovereignty (Pedregal & Lukić, 2024).

These critiques are anchored in, and contribute to, a vast body of scholarship foregrounding the techno-political, geoeconomic, and socio-environmental implications of the GET. GH2—as a flagship energy vector of the GET and a 'techno-market fix' (Levidow & Raman, 2020)—is shown to mobilize speculative, geopolitical, and technocratic logics that position resource-rich yet economically peripheral states as laboratories of energy experimentation. In these works, GH2 is variously framed as an object of speculative investment (Gabor & Sylla, 2023), a vehicle of geopolitical projection (DeBoom, 2025), and a site of future-making (Cezne & Otsuki, 2025; Klagge et al., 2025; Virens, 2024). In particular, literature has examined how liberal notions of futurity, modernity, and progress embedded in GH2 projects are mobilized in ways that re-inscribe unequal ecological exchange between

Europe and its former colonial peripheries (Tunn et al., 2025, p. 118). These perspectives align with and build on earlier critiques of 'green extractivism' that highlight how low-carbon transitions often rest on new regimes of accumulation that reproduce the material and discursive logics of historical resource extraction (Riofrancos, 2019; Sultana, 2020; Bruna, 2022; Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022; Pedregal & Lukić, 2024).

Despite—and in several ways through—these critiques, the EU's renewable energy expansion has proceeded apace, embedded within the very growthist, technocratic, and modernizing frameworks that critics problematize. Within the EGD, the Renewable Energy Directive establishes binding targets to increase the share of renewables in national energy portfolios by promoting investment in sources widely accepted as green, including solar, wind, and hydropower; this is despite growing contestation over the environmental and social costs associated with such low-carbon infrastructures and scepticism about their ability to lead to decarbonization (Tornel & Dunlap, 2025). To this end, European renewable energy targets are ambitious. By July 2021, the European Commission had already revised the Directive, raising the 2030 target from 32% to 40%, alongside introducing measures to accelerate renewable energy deployment across all sectors. Following the Russia-Ukraine war and the growing pressure to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuel imports—compounded by energy price volatility in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic—the Commission introduced further revisions under the REPowerEU Plan (European Commission, 2022). Backed by a €300 billion investment package, the plan increased the 2030 renewable target to 45% and introduced provisions to fast-track permits for renewable energy infrastructure (European Commission, 2023).

It is within this context that GH2 has been elevated to a flagship pillar of the EU's energy transition, cast as a scalable, transportable, and clean/green fuel capable of satisfying Europe's growing energy appetite while advancing—at least nominally—accelerated renewable targets. Marketed as the missing link between intermittent renewable generation and continuous energy supply, GH2 is championed as a versatile energy carrier and a 'key net-zero driver' that can be produced at scale, stored, and traded thus cementing its place at the heart of plans to knit diverse renewable sources into a unified, transnational energy system (IRENA & WTO, 2023). To rehearse a previously made point, the enthusiasm for GH2 must be tempered by critical technical assessments. Above all, the technology remains more expensive than existing fuels, leaving it reliant on subsidies and international financing to be competitive (Hancock & Pitel, 2025). Its novelty also entails unresolved challenges in storage and transportation (Chistyakova et al., 2025). These technical limitations are not separate from but directly intersect with the aforementioned political critiques in that they heighten the risk of reproducing unequal energy geographies between producing and consuming regions (Gabor & Sylla, 2023).

Indeed, European domestic decarbonization goals hinge on its efforts to secure renewable energy supplies beyond its borders and particularly in geographies seen as rich in renewables. As such, the diversification of energy supply sources through international partnerships is part-and-parcel of the European Recovery and Resilience plans and is central to meeting energy security imperatives amidst intensifying geopolitical tensions. In the language of the REPowerEU Plan, aggregating demand, optimizing cross-border infrastructure, and enhancing the EU's bargaining power vis-à-vis external suppliers are strategic levers for securing renewable energy flows, including GH2 (European Commission, 2022). As part of

this effort, The REPowerEU aims to produce 10 million tonnes domestically and import another 10 by 2030 (ibid.).

By then and as outlined in its GH2 Strategy, Tunisia is expected to contribute 3% of these imports through the construction of a "Tunisian H2 Backbone" pipeline connecting production sites in the country's south to the European hydrogen network in the north, enabling the export of 300,000 tonnes of GH2 annually (MIME & GIZ, 2024). Tunisia is but one node in the North–South geopolitics of the energy transition, where European energy security is premised on infrastructure that physically and politically binds Southern production zones to EU demand (DeBoom, 2021). Indeed, EU member states with Germany at the fore (particularly exposed due to its reliance on Russian gas) have pursued a broad portfolio of GH2 partnerships seeking to diversify sourcing geographies, to hedge supply risks and secure long-term import contracts, all the while reinforcing the centrality of cross-border supply chains to Europe's decarbonization agenda (see, *BMWK, 2014 for Germany's Import Strategy for Hydrogen and Hydrogen Derivatives*).

These green-powered futures, predicated on large-scale renewable energy imports from the Global South, are legitimated through discursive regimes that portray Southern geographies— particularly Africa—as naturally suited for green energy production: Abundant solar, wind, and land resources coupled with persistent accounts of underdevelopment are cast as latent assets to be unlocked through EU investment, framed as a win-win path to prosperity and modernization (DeBoom, 2021; Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022). GH2 development has thus found material footing in several corners of the African continent where the vision of GH2 as a pathway to sustainable and green development has been internalized (see for example, the Egyptian government's GH2 investment strategy in Bakr, 2023). As such, several states have positioned themselves as hubs for large-scale GH2 exports, chiefly to the EU. Backed by public-private partnerships and through transnational financing instruments, such endeavors are central to the EU's hydrogen diplomacy and its broader energy diversification strategy.

Morocco, for instance, has earmarked 300,000 hectares for hydrogen production involving firms such as TotalEnergies and Engie, and has secured €624 million in EU funding alone (Eljechtimi, 2025). Egypt's GH2 ambitions are equally impressive with an initial pilot phase drawing investment of €1 billion from the EU alone (Hydrogen Europe, 2024). Namibia's 'Hyphen Hydrogen' project—its largest yet—has become a poster child for the EU's hydrogen diplomacy drawing EU investment to the tune of $10 billion (DeBoom, 2025). Angola has signed a MoU with two German companies for a large-scale ammonia plant (Oliviera et al., 2024). In South Africa, GH2 development is proceeding under the Platinum Valley framework, a set of interconnected hydrogen hubs tied to the country's post-COVID economic recovery strategy (Government of South Africa, 2020). These countries have joined in on the 'African Green Hydrogen Alliance', an initiative that now includes ten African countries, with Tunisia's accession currently under consideration.

In addition to funding, EU involvement has propelled the expansion of GH2 projects across Africa by drawing the institutional and regulatory frameworks through which these projects are being realized. In this respect, Germany—though far from being the only EU player—has been prolific, with its Import Strategy presenting the assurance of national import needs and the 'sustainable development the energy supply in partner countries' are two sides of the same coin (BMWK, 2014). In South Africa, two environmental planning mechanisms—the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guideline for green hydrogen projects and the

South African Green Hydrogen Potential Atlas—were developed in partnership with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ)—Germany's development agency. These instruments aim to "remove regulatory uncertainty, drive investment, and accelerate South Africa's transition to a green hydrogen economy" (Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, 2025, para.1). In Kenya, GIZ plays a similar role in supporting the creation of a legislative framework conducive to GH2 development (GIZ, 2025). Its involvement is most extensive in Namibia, where it provides advisory and technical (in addition to financial) support to the national GH2 strategy, including the development of the 'HyIron' pilot, set to be the continent's first green iron production plant based on GH2 (BMWK, 2023) as well as co-sponsoring the country's GH2 and Derivatives Strategy (Ministry of Mines and Energy Namibia, 2022).

Tunisia is no exception. The elaboration of its GH2 Strategy has hinged on similarly close collaboration with German advisors. The Strategy builds on a renewable energy policy framework influenced by decades of donor-driven liberalization efforts. These efforts stretch back to the 2012 German-Tunisian Energy Partnership promoting 'green' development and the December 2017 conference on accelerating renewable energy deployment where public–private partnerships (PPPs) were advanced as a key solution to unlocking the country's energy potential and alleviating the financial pressures faced by the indebted public utility (Ben Rouine & Roche, 2023). In this context, critical actors have denounced GIZ for funding renewable energy studies that subsequently inform legislative recommendations favoring the privatization of Tunisia's renewable energy sector (Ammar, 2022, p. 19). Key to this process is Tunisia's 12-2015 law on electricity production from renewable energy, amended in 2019, which authorizes the use of agricultural land for renewable energy projects (Ammar, 2022). This legal framework intersects with the Tunisian Solar Plan Acceleration Program purportedly replete with 'legal loopholes' that facilitate access to land for investors in renewable energy" (ibid., 21). It also as builds on the Tunisian Solar Plan first published in 2012 and finalized in 2015. The latter relies primarily on private investment and, in the words of Ben Rouine & Roche (2023, p. 204), frames Tunisia as "[a] borrower of Northern technology and expertise to achieve its energy transition, thus deepening dependency rather than fostering autonomous development." These would all foreshadow later critiques directed at the GH2 Strategy regarding its land and water use, embedded market logics, and its role in reinforcing asymmetric North–South relations. By the same token, the visibility and depth of GIZ's involvement in designing the Strategy would become a central object of contention among actors questioning the Strategy's legitimacy and ownership reactivating in the process questions on national sovereignty.

Globally, the narrative of GH2 as a climate solution increasingly confronts the enduring structural asymmetries of the global economic order. These asymmetries are not new. Much like other decarbonizing energy systems, GH2 reflects and reproduces entrenched injustices in the spatial and social distribution of energy benefits and burdens (Bickerstaff 2018). This critique gains more salience when considering that domestic applications and uses of GH2 remain the exception rather than the rule. GH2 strategies, by design, are primarily export-driven and oriented around EU offtake demand rather than local developmental needs. Where internal applications do exist, as is the case of Morocco for example, they are often targeted toward non-strategic or poorly integrated sectors (Amouzai & Haddioui, 2023), putting into question the long-term economic and social embeddedness of GH2 infrastructure in host countries. In Tunisia's case, the GH2 Strategy advances "a combination of local and export markets, with the export market ultimately driving economic and industrial development through the introduction of green hydrogen and its derivatives." (MIME & GIZ, 2024, p. 9). The implications for national sovereignty are paramount. Questions like who defines the purpose of energy infrastructure, who controls its benefits, and to what extent national

strategies reflect the priorities of local communities rather than those of 'international partners' would all animate and propel the eventual GH2 challenge in Tunisia and beyond. These questions are buttressed by the critique that sourcing GH2 from formerly colonized, institutionally constrained, and externally indebted states reflects a renewed form of extractive internationalism or what Hamouchene and Sandwell (2023) advance as "green colonialism" or, in an adjacent—albeit politically distinct—frame green/ecological imperialism (Frame, 2021; Radley, 2023; Pedregal & Lukić, 2024; Boretti, 2025).

The proliferation of this language across geographically and politically distinct contexts signals its growing analytical and mobilizational utility in framing resistance to green energy transition projects perceived as extractive or externally imposed. The proliferation of this discourse has, in some cases, reached the level of high politics. In Namibia, Germany's Economy Minister pre-emptively addressed concerns about neo-extractive dynamics during a 2022 visit by warning against the emergence of "green energy imperialism" (Wehrmann, 2022, para.1). In South Africa, similar critiques prompted a public response from the German ambassador, who rejected accusations that Germany was 'stealing' natural resources or misleading South Africa into an externally orchestrated energy transition (Peschke, 2023). Although the long-term impact of such contestation on energy diplomacy remains to be seen (and is not the goal of this paper), these defensive interventions from diplomatic actors may signal the disruptive potential of GH2 criticism in reframing the legitimacy of transnational climate and energy agendas. As such, I now turn my attention to the political work performed by critique itself, i.e., the contentious environmental politics that have compelled responses of this level.

Counter-currents to the GH2 Ascent

As with other environmental justice movements (Adamson et al., 2002; Holifield et al., 2017), one of the most striking features of the emerging critique of GH2 is its embeddedness in transnational conversations among social movements operating both within and beyond project implementation sites. As EU investment in GH2 expands across Africa and the broader Global South, it has also generated new political frictions. From Chile to Namibia, a heterogeneous constellation of actors—trade unionists, pastoralists, Indigenous leaders, environmental NGOs, and climate justice networks—are contesting the socio-ecological costs of GH2 and the development models underpinning it. Forging alliances that cut across sectors, scales, and geographies, and deploying tactics ranging from street mobilization to policy advocacy to direct action, these actors articulate a critique that is materially grounded, historically situated, and locally specific, yet speaks to a shared set of concerns. In their various contexts, three recurrent axes of contention emerge: (1) the legacies of colonial dispossessions and their continuities through imperial asymmetries; (2) the procedural exclusions embedded in project design and decision-making; and (3) competing development visions that prioritize local socio-ecological needs over export-oriented growth. Such conflicts form part of a growing pattern of resistance: as of the time of writing (July 2025), the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice documents 34 hydrogen-related struggles worldwide.

The first of these counter-currents—described in activist and (critical) scholarly discourse as 'green colonialism'—links GH2 opposition to a wider body of critiques of renewable energy mega-projects in the Global South and Indigenous territories. Hamouchene & Sandwell (2023, p. 29) understand green colonialism as the "extension of the colonial relations of plunder and dispossession (as well as the dehumanization of the other) to the green era of renewable energies, with the accompanying displacement of socio-environmental costs onto peripheral countries and communities, prioritizing the energy needs of one region of the world over

another." GH2-critical activists in South Africa (Kalt et al., 2023), Colombia (Combariza Diaz, 2024), and Chile (Clery, 2025) have leveraged the frame to connect environmental degradation, underdevelopment, and authoritarian governance with questions of sovereignty, territorial rights, and ecological justice. Because renewable energies projects are produced within and slanted onto extant systems of unequal ecological exchange (Hickel et al., 2022), they naturally raise questions about the extractive contours of a transition away from fossil fuel that purports to be just (Mastini et al., 2021). Historical memories of colonial extraction are central to this line of critique. In South Africa, Kalt and colleagues (2023) show how large-scale renewable energy land deals have evoked memories of apartheid-era expropriation and reactivated distrust toward intentions baked into renewable projects more broadly. South Africa's groundwork (2023, para.13)—one of the country's preeminent environmental justice collectives— has maintained its position that GH2 development serving global markets first "will continue the same colonial pattern of extraction and exclusions we have seen throughout South Africa's history". In Namibia, the Hyphen project has met fierce resistance for threatening Indigenous lands seized during German colonial rule, prompting activists to label it "a second genocide...this time against nature." (Götze & Hecking, 2024) When the German energy company RWE withdrew from the Hyphen project in September 2025, rights groups cited pressure, including an inquiry into encroachment on ancestral land, exerted by the Nama Traditional Leaders Association as a contributing factor (ECCHR, 2025). In Colombia's La Guajira region, *Wayuu* communities have blocked wind farms intended to supply EU markets, citing desecration of sacred territories and burial sites. The resultant delays eroded investor confidence in proposed hydrogen infrastructure (Bocanegra, 2023).

These histories travel and inform a transnational political language that maps present-day energy investments onto older logics of resource control. In Tunisia, the prominent role of GIZ in crafting the national GH2 Strategy was widely interpreted as a threat to autonomous development, reviving neocolonial imaginaries and anxieties over foreign intervention. In such cases, GH2 challengers mobilize what Galeana (2022) and Picq (2018) term "vernacular sovereignty claims" or the bottom-up assertions of political and ecological self-determination rooted in the lived experience of dispossession be it through settler colonialism, authoritarian modernization, or the protracted industrial sacrifice zone of Gabes. Importantly, invocations of green colonialism are not confined to the Global South. In Northern Europe, Indigenous Sámi communities have resisted green energy infrastructure projects encroaching on their traditional lands. In Norway, years of struggle culminated in a Supreme Court ruling that the state had violated the Sámi people's rights to cultural practice (Normann, 2021).

At the same time, and relatedly, GH2 opposition has drawn on a legacy of environmental justice movements that foreground community consent and participation as prerequisites for infrastructural development, particularly when such projects risk dispossessing communities of vital resources—especially land—on which their livelihoods depend (Bell & Carrick, 2017). Degrowth thinking has, in turn, been enriched by these locally-rooted struggles, which have sought to rectify both the historical harms and anticipated futures of extractive infrastructural expansion (Hennen, 2022). In this context, land-dependent communities in siting areas have developed an expectation of meaningful access to information, participation, and justice in decisions that reshape their ecological landscapes. What are known as 'procedural environmental rights' (Gellers & Jeffords, 2018), while increasingly recognized in policy and law, in practice leave much to be desired. Communities' expectations frequently clash with what Pedregal and Lukić (2024, p. 122) describe as "methods of legitimization based on the justification and promotion of supposedly environmentally beneficial policies" embedded in green development projects.

Such policies are often paired with procedural inclusivity measures—such as socio-environmental impact assessments and public consultations—that while emerging from environmental justice reforms are now deployed in ways that can reinforce exclusion, or in the words of one South African energy collective, "are designed to exclude." (Groundwork, 2023). Procedural marginalization has thus become a central site of tension in the challenge to GH2, as technocratic planning processes dominated by state agencies, donors, and corporate actors sideline communities in implementation zones. In Chile, critics characterized the "participatory construction" of the national GH2 roadmap as industry-centered and exclusionary of Indigenous voices (Seeger, 2023). Similarly, in South Africa's Boegoebaai project, the *Ama* community protested what they viewed as tokenistic consultation and encroachment on communal land rights (Goodall, 2024), drawing focus to both territorial dispossession and the procedural exclusions that render projects seemingly consensual. Even when formal participation occurs, it can serve as an example of 'deliberative speak' or symbolic inclusion that legitimizes preordained objectives rather than shaping them (Cotton et al., 2014, as cited in Bickerstaff, 2018, p. 392). The latter is evident in Morocco's GH2 'Chbika' project which Amouzai and Haddioui (2023, p. 20) criticize for its 'aggressive bureaucracy' emblematic of the collusion between state and private interests that 'keep the local population in the dark.' Going further still, participation frameworks can entrench environmental injustices by structurally denying affected communities the opportunity to refuse such projects, as seen in Namibia's Hyphen Project, which local residents regard as both imposed from above and ultimately "not for [them]" (DeBoom, 2025, p.14).

The perception that GH2 projects are conceived without genuine consideration for the needs and priorities of affected communities underpins the third counter-current of dissent, that of conflicting development imaginaries. These divergences crystallize around sovereignty struggles over natural resources chief of which are land and water and, by extension, over who holds the authority to define development trajectories. Returning to South Africa, Hydrogen Watch—a coalition of national civil society and community-based organisations active in GH2-critical space—challenged of the "overhyped framing [of GH2] as a silver bullet response to climate change and the Just Transition" while saddling the state with significant public debt. But their critique is also pragmatic in raising the question of why in a country mired in an energy crisis and chronic load-shedding, which has undermined every facet of daily life, should electricity generation from GH2 projects not first serve local communities (Groundwork, 2023, 2025). Even the most cautious policy assessments acknowledge the lack of clarity on how GH2 production will concretely benefit local energy needs (see for example, Cassidy & Quitzow, 2023, pp. 19–22).

While Morocco has not yet seen GH2 mobilization as organized as in South Africa, policy critiques draw on the lived memory of recent and currently ongoing renewable energy developments to highlight continuities extractive violence. Analysts note that "the same dynamics leading to the depletion of water resources apply to green hydrogen production projects, despite the promises of sustainable resource exploitation" (Amouzai & Haddioui, 2023, p. 17). The risk of conflict is heightened in land-dependent communities inculding in Sidi Ayad, who have already mobilized against previous (and currently unfolding) mega-energy projects that encroach on their livelihoods and divert scarce resources (Hamouchene, 2023, p. 33). Similarly, the proposed GH2 pilot in Tunisia's Gabes overlaps both geographically and institutionally with the GCT as a parastatal emblematic of decades of industrial pollution and local underdevelopment. As such, Tunisia's GH2 challengers would take advantage of the spatial and institutional continuities to sharpen the perceptions that GH2 development reproduces rather than departs from extant industrial trajectories. Not only that, but the case of Tunisia will see a constellation of GH2 challengers leverage all three counter-currents as

interlocking lines of critique and mobilization to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the GH2 process, underscore its exclusionary character, and situate it within a longer lineage of top-down development models that have reproduced environmental harm and resource dispossession.

Setting the Stage for the GH2 Challenge

Opposition to Tunisia's GH2 Strategy is anchored in a layered repertoire of contention shaped by locally embedded grievances, past encounters with 'green' development projects, and enduring anxieties over the erosion of public sovereignty. In Gabes, these histories converge through three interlinked currents. First, a protracted environmental crisis has galvanized a civil society landscape that channels long-standing demands for socio-ecological reproduction. Second, repeated experiences of procedural injustice—particularly in renewable energy initiatives—have deepened distrust in participatory mechanisms and heightened vigilance toward exclusionary decision-making. Third, a political memory sharpened by the unfinished project of postcolonial sovereignty fuels resistance to forms of external dependency, especially those seen as opening the door to privatizing strategic sectors. Together, these conditions have provided the organizational infrastructure, moral authority, and narrative frames through which diverse actors in Gabes have not only mobilized against the GH2 strategy but also advanced a coherent critique of its underlying premises.

Neither accidental nor unprecedented, conflicts arising from infrastructural expansion—energy or otherwise—are hardly new. Before the arrival of hydrogen pipelines and solar megaprojects, infrastructure-driven ecological change has generated fierce local resistance (Adamson et al., 2002), that sits within a longer trajectory of environmental justice movements which as Sicotte and Brulle (2018, p. 26) explain have always foregrounded the bodily, territorial, and survival-based dimensions of environmental harm, framing ecological degradation not as a post-materialist concern but as both a consequence and a driver of structural inequality. As McAdam and Boudet (2012, cited in Sicotte & Brulle, 2018, p.28) argue, all environmental resistance begins with localized grievances and threats that make injustice legible at the level of bodies, homes, and livelihoods. The centrality of the 'local dimension' was a defining feature of post-uprising environmental movements in Tunisia (Pepicelli, 2021). Campaigns rooted in lived experience of chronic pollution succeeded in pushing environmental justice claims into the heart of Tunisia's post-2011 constitutional debates (Rousselin, 2018), with the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) and, in particular, its Environmental Justice department, emerging directly from this surge of public demand for environmental accountability (Robert, 2024; see also, Attar, 2022; FTDES, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a).

Gabes is one salient example of locally-rooted and regionally-defining environmental struggle amplified to national relevance by organizations like the aforementioned FTDES (FTDES, 2017, 2019b, 2021; Vernin, 2017; Moulin, 2021) and whose specialized Environmental Justice department has visited Gabes on several occasions (Robert, 2024, p. 367). However, this momentum would not have taken root without the existence of local environmental collectives, most notably though not exclusively the campaign-turned-movement *StopPollution* that emerged directly from the community itself as a recognizable organization with a central objective of pressuring the state to cease GCT's polluting activities in the region. beyond this, the pervasiveness of pollution in everyday life has arguably shaped all facets of civic identity in Gabes (Robert, 2024), transforming groups whose ethos traditionally does not center on environmental issues into active opponents of the GCT's damaging ecological footprint. Gabes' vibrant Football Ultras culture whose adversary position to the GCT is made most visible by protest graffiti depicting the complex's environmental

destruction is one such case. Together, *Stop Pollution* and the Ultras constitute the core mobilizers in Gabes. These are actors who possess intimate knowledge of the local terrain, have a proven record of organizing street-level actions, and crucially, can marshal bodies to sustain protest (The Ultras, in particular, harness their fanbase as a force for mobilization). As the challenge to the GH2 project unfolds, these groups serve as principal catalysts who would channel deep-rooted local discontent into organized and visible opposition.

This deeply rooted local discontent reflects the urgent needs of the Gabes community; these are needs that mobilizers, as embedded members of that community, understand intimately and represent in their demands. In her study of contestations against GCT pollution in Gabes, Robert (2021, 2024) advances this very argument in observing how the community's experience of harm at the local level has shaped their articulations of demands for repair. This is key to contextualizing the GH2 challenge as it would later highlight the perceived disjuncture between the project's advertised development possibilities and the urgent, community-defined needs in Gabes, namely, guarantees for social reproduction in the face of historic and ongoing GCT-induced environmental degradation.

In the wake of the 2010–11 uprising, Gabes residents including fisherfolks, farmers, the unemployed, trade unionists, and mothers buttressed and, at times, absorbed by a then-nascent environmental civil society mobilized around demands for social and ecological justice (Rousselin, 2018). Examining these mobilizations, Robert (2021) emphasizes the diverse nature of the demands voiced by these challenger groups. Nevertheless, such demands remain fundamentally material across, spanning livelihood protections, access to work, health infrastructures, and recreational spaces, together forming what she describes as a "grammar of survival and subsistence." (2021., p.12) This grammar also permeated wider protests targeting the phosphate sector beyond Gabes. In 2017, mobilizations swept across southern Tunisia demanding dividends from phosphate riches in the country's poorest and most unemployment-stricken regions. These actions would cost the state over $2 billion in lost production, and would prompt a securitized response through which the military was deployed, and strategic production sites—including GCT facilities—were declared 'military zones,' placing them under armed forces' control to curb local resistance (Amara, 2017, as cited in Rousselin, 2018). The GCT designation as military zone would remain to this day.

At the same time, the GCT sought to diffuse and manage discontent through piecemeal compensation and institutionalizing community communication channels. In the immediate post-2010 period, the GCT paid roughly US $1.5 million to settle pollution-related civil suits (Goldstein, 2014)—far below the GCT-induced economic loss estimated by a European Commission investigation (as cited in Djerbi, 2024). It also pledged to support local livelihoods through investments in cultural and recreational infrastructure, including local sports, as well as by promising to increase employment (Goldstein, 2014; Robert, 2024). In addition, it provided targeted support to fishermen and farmers in the region, echoing demands levelled by oasis producers as far back as the 1980s (Robert, 2021, p. 7).

Yet these remedies failed to address the root causes of pollution. Public frustration was further compounded by a series of unmet state and corporate commitments: proposals to relocate the most polluting industrial units outside of Gabes never advanced, a 2017 state pledge to end Phosphogypsum dumping was quietly reversed earlier this year (Ben Salah, 2025), and other community-driven demands—such as the call, during the 2013 protests, to introduce new medical infrastructure in response to the high incidence of pollution-related illnesses—remained unfulfilled (Goldstein, 2014). Cutting across different contexts, such unaddressed grievances constitute what Tunn and colleagues (2025 as cited in Weipert-Fenner, 2025, p.2) term the persistence of "background injustices", or the entrenched financial, epistemic, and political asymmetries that hold the potential to destabilize even the most well-

intentioned energy transitions. Weipert-Fenner (2024, p. 5) advances a similar argument with reference to national-level opposition against GH2 in Tunisia, arguing that such projects often reactivate dormant state-society tensions, producing layered terrains of contention where 'old' grievances converge with 'new' claims.

Building on a history of unmet claims and the moral authority it lends, Gabes mobilizers challenging GH2 would draw strength from another, overlapping terrain of struggle: the resistance mounted against decades of privatization efforts in the energy sector and the promotion of public–private partnerships (PPPs) as substitutes for public procurement specifically by legacy actors. These are institutions whose historical and symbolic weight in Tunisia's political economy grants them a degree of authority in questions of sovereignty and development (Bishara, 2020). In the GH2 debate, two such actors stand out: the *Société Tunisienne de l'Électricité et du Gaz* (STEG), the national utility emblematic of postcolonial state-building, and the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT), Tunisia's foremost labor syndicate whose origins predate and contributed to the country's independence. As Ben Rouine and Roche (2023), Jenss and Bonci (2025) and Weipert-Fenner (2025) all note, both institutions have been central to resisting private-sector-driven renewable energy projects—an opposition that predates the GH2 Strategy itself and can be traced back to earlier confrontations with German (and more broadly EU) interventions in Tunisia's energy sector in legislative landscape architecting and capacity-building conducive to liberalization as well as the 2015 law that both STEG and UGTT say was implemented without their consultation. While STEG and UGTT share concerns over energy privatization as an existential threat, the UGTT positions itself explicitly as a custodian of national sovereignty in the face of marketization and structural adjustment (Djerbi, 2023). This framing has led UGTT members to conceive of GIZ in particular as a "tool of colonization" (Jenss & Bonci, 2025, p. 4), a view echoed by the leading figure of *Stop Pollution*. STEG, for its part, has defended its resistance to EU-funded PPPs in renewables—including actions the state labeled 'sabotage'—as efforts to safeguard "national security and the public status of STEG" and to oppose the "commodification of electricity" (African Manager, 2020; Louati, 2022, p. 17). The prominence of state-controlled electricity generation, combined with these actors' built-in anti-liberalization stance and the visibility of GIZ's role in shaping the GH2 Strategy, would infuse the emergent GH2 opposition with a potent rhetoric of sovereignty.

Of course, the ability to chart autonomous development pathways is not the purview of legacy actors who themselves have led an imperfect record in channeling local demands. It would indeed be remiss as Weipert-Fenner (2025) cautions not to learn from past conflicts surrounding renewable infrastructure wholly owned and operated by STEG. One notable example is the protest against STEG-operated wind turbines in Borj Salhi, where communities, leveraging the momentum of the 2010–11 uprising, mobilized against what they said was the forcible forfeiture of their ancestral farmland without full awareness of the consequences, all while enduring inadequate services from STEG (Delpuech & Poletti, 2021). Their mobilization foregrounded the importance of community consultations in the implementation of such projects, forcing STEG to reckon with its past failures (Ben Rouine & Roche, 2023). This episode, together with the growing influence of GIZ and its association with external pressures toward privatization in the energy sector, has spurred the formation of specialized organizations that explicitly frame energy as a terrain of political struggle. Foremost among these is the Working Group on Energy Democracy (WGED) (Ben Rouine & Roche, 2022). By virtue of its trade union membership, WGED maintains close working ties with STEG and the UGTT, enabling them to translate sovereign claims over energy into vernacular forms that resonate locally. To this end, WGED has forged on-the-ground practices that serve as a corrective to earlier STEG-led projects, much like the Borj Salhi case, where communities were excluded from consultation leading to their dispossession. These efforts are operationalized

through popular pedagogies on energy democracy, such as community assemblies in southern Tunisia—regions where renewable energy projects have taken hold—centered on advancing the right to energy as a matter of collective self-determination (Delpuech & Poletti, 2022).

This ethos marrying procedural justice with energy sovereignty is embedded in the WGED's founding manifesto, which describes itself as a "grassroots dynamic linking trade unionists with community groups, social movements and civil society organisations in the struggle for energy democracy" (Ammar, 2022, p. 36). The manifesto places community outreach at the core of its resistance strategy against foreign-designed energy projects, with land-dependent communities forming the backbone of this opposition. In the emergent GH2 challenge, the WGED would play a central role in advancing popular pedagogy as political strategy and a means towards alternative worlds-building. Put another way, beyond critiquing existing and proposed projects, and thus expanding on the UGTT's positions, is cultivating alternative imaginaries and practices that prefigure socio-ecological futures beyond growth-centric logics (see, for example WGED's alternative electricity production model in Tunisia in Ammar, 2022, p.28). With its base of predominantly energy-sector trade unionists, WGED has endeavored towards advancing forms of counter-expertise against the 'infinite growth approach' baked into what it characterizes as 'neoliberal and government propaganda' on the energy transition. This stance would prove particularly instrumental with the introduction of the GH2 Strategy.

This confluence of factors has shaped a fertile terrain of contention onto which the GH2 Strategy in Gabes was introduced. Embedded within it are local groups that have embraced environmental justice as a pathway to sustaining livelihoods, pressing for redress from a major industrial polluter, and mobilizing the power of street politics toward these ends. Their political memory would prove valuable in shaping GH2 dissent. Long before the project's arrival, chronic marginalization and environmental hardship had anchored local mobilizers in place-based grievances, while national organizations such as FTDES amplified these claims by framing them within broader environmental justice narratives and helping translate these into nationally resonant struggles. Legacy actors like the UGTT and STEG not only have vested interests in resisting the liberalization of the energy sector but also draw on a history of sovereign clout that bolsters their defense of public control over labor and energy resources. Going further still, alternative knowledge producers such as WGED offer counter-expertise that directly challenges the technical and economic premises of renewable energy expansion.

This is not to suggest a neat division of labor among these actors who albeit being central are far from the only ones propping-up the GH2 challenge. Rather, the goal is to show how a constellation of multi-scalar forces forged an opposition capable of translating localized grievances into a broader challenge to GH2 Strategy as a development project. This is also not to submit that these are the only actors. Though they enjoy a high degree of visibility, their mobilizations would benefit from the support of a network of backers, from farmers' unions, peasant advocacy groups, student unions, queer and feminist groups, national-level climate justice groups, and an array of the other organizations that have lent direct mobilizational support by joining protests, signed on and amplified manifestos, and later put pressure on the Tunisian justice system to release the three protestors jailed during the May 2025 protests. At the international level, challengers have also benefited from ties with transnational associations, most notably the Transnational Institute (TNI) which enabled them to disseminate their research to wider audiences and in multiple languages and attracting additional support across borders (Personal Communication with *Stop Pollution* activist and TNI-affiliated researcher September 29, 2025).[i] Despite their differences, together they set the stage for a coherently articulated dissent organized along three counter-currents: contested development pathways,

procedural injustice, and sovereignty struggles. These form the analytical foundation for the following section, which examines how such counter-currents interact and coalesce to shape GH2 contention in Gabes and Tunisia more broadly.

Riding the Counter-currents of the GH2 Rollout in Gabes

Contested Development Pathways

> "The water going to Hydrogen, Gabes is more deserving of it." [*El-mā elli mshi lil Hydrogen, Gābes awlā bih*] Anti GH-2 Protest Slogan, Eagles 09 (Ultras Group) December 2024.

On the evening of December 10, 2024, Eagles 09—one of Gabes' Ultras groups—organized the first public anti-GH2 protest, mobilizing primarily the young men that from its core base. Since 2011, the group has staged direct action against the Tunisian state and the GCT as its proxy. Chants, slogans, and visual protest media revived grievances from earlier waves of mobilization denouncing Gabes' environmental and economic marginalization. In their manifesto, the Ultras framed the GH2 project as the latest iteration of resource extraction, building on "more than 50 years" of industrial pollution, disease, and water scarcity. In recalling past unfulfilled promises to contest present-day projects, the Ultras position GH2 as a new node of contention atop decades of industrial exploitation whilst signalling that unresolved grievances remain salient. Firmly anchoring GH2 in GCT's legacy of environmental harm and resource dispossession, they pre-emptively reject the future the former holds. The Ultras would not be the only actors that would leverage both threats of resource diversion and concerns for environmental welfare as a basis for the GH2 challenge.

The siting of the GH2 project in Gabes rendered the environmental dimension particularly salient for groups critical of and mobilizing against it. Most prominent of these concerns were the threat posed by a planned desalination plant to Gabes' already endangered marine ecosystem (EO1&EG, August 2, 2024; FU1, December 8, 2024) and the unresolved question of brine disposal (EO1, May 30 2025). In activist writing, both are described as "likely to worsen Gabes' pollution crisis" (CG1, March 19 2025) and as "threatening traditional fishing livelihoods" (EO1&EG, August 2 2024). Yet, neither is explicitly addressed in the GH2 Strategy, despite being standard matters well suited to an environmental impact assessment—an omission GH2 challengers repeatedly denounced while planting seeds of doubts about the project's 'green' credentials (EO1&EG, August 2 2024; C8, December 2 2024; C1, April 13 2025). Indeed, local mobilizers, national-level CSOs, and other solidarity actors alike portrayed the 'green' in GH2 as misleading: a 'misnomer' (P1, June 30 2024), a 'veneer' (FU1, December 8 2024), and a 'cover for the continuation of the same destructive practices' (EO2, March 7 2025). In a press statement on the GH2 prospects in Tunisia, a representative from the Working Gorup on Energy Democracy (WGED) warned that "GCT experience and the damage it caused are not to be repeated." (C5, May 10 2025).

Further undermining confidence in the project were the environmental track records of several corporations that signed preliminary GH2 MoUs, most notably France's TotalEnergies, which stands accused of environmental misconduct by local mobilizers (FU1, December 8 2024). Adding to these concerns was the apparent lack of involvement of the Ministry of the Environment in drafting the GH2 Strategy, a gap that FTDES emphasized through its environmental policy expertise consolidated over decades of engagement with pollution and justice struggles (EO1, May 30 2025). The Ministry's absence, moreover,

weakened confidence that environmental justice safeguards would be meaningfully institutionalized. This concern reverberated locally. During a meeting held by the Regional Environment Council in Gabes in December 2024 with the presence of the Minister of Environment, a Gabes assemblyperson stressed that the Ministry "counts as one of the most important for Gabes residents", and explicitly called for a clear position from the Prime Minister on GH2 projects and their derivatives (C8, December 24 2024).

Above all, it was the legacy of GCT whose operations have degraded Gabes' coastline, polluted its marine life, embedding toxic waste into the region's ecology and politics that provided the most compelling grounds for the challenge. In the words of one activist, the project with its promise of clean energy was seen as an attempt to "whitewash the crimes of the GCT" (C1, April 13 2025). Lending support to this sentiment is the March 2025 reversal of an agreement forged with the local community in Gabes to classify Phosphogypsum under the list of hazardous material, seen as a "a dangerous regression from environmental commitments and an entrenchment of developmental practices that harm the environment and negatively affect the health of citizens in Gabes" (CG1, March 19 2025) and "not only a betrayal of previous promises, but a clear declaration of the continuation of the policy of sacrificing the health of citizens and their rights to a clean environment." (EO2, March 7 2025)

The same decision was coupled with a reversal of a 2017 Ministerial decree calling for the dismantling of the GCT's Phosphogypsum 'polluting units.' In the eyes of community members, the reversal constituted "a denial of the long-standing right of Gabes residents, who have struggled for a clean and safe environment." (CG1, March 6 2025). Alongside reversing Phosphogypsum's classification and halting the dismantling of the polluting units, the government approved the installation of a green ammonia plant in the GCT in Gabes—a move *Stop Pollution* immediately condemned as one "belittl[ing] the struggles of the people and worsening the tragic situation of the region" (CG1, March 6, 2025). In this way, a 'clean' energy future is rendered suspect precisely because it is grafted onto ground already marked by unresolved tensions surrounding pollution and sacrifice, risking reproducing the same ecological harms that are themselves the region's defining mobilizational grievance and making them an especially potent site for renewed mobilization, or what one spokesperson described as "a provocation to the Gabes streets" (C1, April 13 2025). It is no surprise then that anti-GH2 mobilizations in Gabes, particularly the May 2025 one, revived the uprising-era protest slogan *'nhib na'ish'* [Tunisian Arabic for I want to live].

If waste legacies have provided the most resonant terrain for mobilization, struggles over land and water have proven just as central to GH2 opposition (see Kadri, 2023 for a more substantive discussion of the imperialist logics undergirding waste as a domain of accumulation). The project's reliance on these material and regulatory resources makes them key sites where local actors contest both current and future environmental degradation, as well as the legitimacy of export-oriented development in the face of unmet social reproduction needs. On land, the GH2 Strategy outlines future plans for a regulatory framework designed to attract investment. It envisions criteria for designating electrolyzer siting zones and the establishment of a land tenure system that would enable both national and foreign investors to exploit designated areas without prior administrative approval (MIME & GIZ, 2024, p. 28). The vagueness of this legislative scaffolding raised immediate alarm among critical observers who read it as a gateway to land seizures echoing earlier renewable energy ventures facilitated by Law 12-2015 on energy production from renewables (Ammar, 2022). Land concerns thus took rapid, mobilizable form. The Ultras warned that GH2 would "kill thousands of hectares

of land" (FU1, December 8 2025), while *Stop Pollution* denounced the "legalized dispossession" embedded in the project's legislative design (GC1 March 6 2025; CG1 March 19 2025).

Water concerns followed a similar logic of rejection. The Strategy estimates total water consumption to range between 20–30 liters per kilogram of GH2 and commits, given Tunisia's already-stressed hydraulic system, not to withdraw from freshwater reserves, relying instead on desalinated seawater (MIME & GIZ, 2024, p. 21). Presented as a 'climate-smart' solution attuned to national resource constraints, this was instead read by challengers as a misalignment of priorities wherein the deployment of new desalination technologies is set to serve a non-strategic, export-oriented sector, while local needs, especially for drinking and irrigation water, remain inadequately met, if at all, in Gabes (CG1, December 03 2025). At the national level, FTDES amplified these concerns by extrapolating Gabes' anxieties into a broader indictment of GH2's potential to worsen Tunisia's water crisis through excessive consumption (EO1, May 30 2025)

These material concerns are inseparable from political claims, connecting present grievances to enduring patterns of regional underdevelopment. At their first public protest in December, the Ultras framed the threat of water question as a symbol of ongoing marginalization with protest material reminding the state of its own track-record in the region: "Highest rates of malignant disease, third highest rate of unemployment, polluted air, sea poisoned with Phosphogypsum, oasis facing extinction, depleted aquifer." *Stop Pollution*, for their part, relied on an independent assessment of GH2's projected water and land usage, contrasting it with local needs, the risks posed to pastoralists and traditional agricultural communities, and the likelihood of escalating land conflicts within and beyond Gabes. Condensed into a series of infographics circulated on social media (CG1, December 03 2025), their assessment showed the misalignment of priorities inherent to the GH2 Strategy. The same information would later be mobilized to challenge the project more directly and to confront local authorities in public forums, as the introduction to this paper shows.

In this way, struggles over land and water, like pollution legacies, become vehicles for claims-making, uniting into a dual critique of environmental and developmental concerns and exposing the cleavages between local needs and the GH2 project's export-oriented green industrialization agenda. By linking historical grievances over GCT's pollution with contemporary fears of resource depletion, challengers sharpen the charge that Gabes is once again being sacrificed on the altar of development—first with the GCT, now with GH2. These stakes are best expressed in the following testimony from *Stop Pollution*'s in noting that *"*Only mobilization can stop the tragedy committed against Gabes. They fooled our grandparents and installed the GCT. Today it is our turn to decide against green ammonia*"* (C1, December 8 2024). At the same time, activists articulate an alternative horizon, demanding "a fair development model that respects the environment and people" in opposition to what they describe as a "destructive mega project" (CG1 March 6 2025; CG1, March 19 2025). These words would be etched into the mobilizational manifesto that preceded the May protest in Gabes.

Procedural Injustice

> "*The time of top-down decisions is over […] The GH2 Project cannot be imposed over the will of the People.*" Gabes Local Assemblyperson in a statement to the MIME, December 2nd 2024.

Just as the substance of Tunisia's GH2 Strategy failed to resonate with Gabes-based mobilizers and their solidarity networks, so too did the manner in which it was conceived and delivered. Mere days before the first Ultras-led anti-GH2 protest, the Industrial and Technological Cluster of Gabes and the French Embassy co-organized an "International Scientific Forum" to officially launch the Strategy and present Gabes as the future host of a national GH2 Valley. The event gathered a powerful roster of actors including the Secretary of State for Energy Transition, the governor of Gabes, the French ambassador, the French Hydrogen Association, senior officials from the GCT and MIME, representatives from the national oil distribution company, as well as environmental experts and university professors (Direction générale du Trésor, 2024).

Conspicuously absent were local environmental civil society organizations despite their mounting unease over GH2 development in Gabes and Southern Tunisia broadly, unease that had not yet spilled into the streets but was already palpable in activist circles. Days later, residents of Chott Essalam—one of the areas most directly exposed to the GCT—organized a parallel assembly, bringing together environmental associations, local activists, and members of the Gabes local council to voice their opposition to the project. At the same time, twelve local associations in Gabes, including farmers' syndicates, youth clubs, and environmental CSOs, submitted a statement to the Governor's Office, destined for the Presidency, denouncing the wholesale exclusion of community participation from GH2 discussions and categorically rejecting the installation of a green ammonia plant in their community. The ferment triggered by the forum eventually compelled the Gabes city council to convene an extraordinary meeting on GH2 development in an early sign that questions of democratic participation and procedural justice were beginning to eclipse the celebratory narrative of GH2 as a regional development panacea.

For challengers, this exclusion sharpened what they saw in the GH2 Strategy as a broader pattern of opacity. Their concerns surfaced in multiple forms from accusations of inconsistent messaging from state institutions, especially MIME; charges of limited and selective consultation with stakeholders, the heavy reliance on technical expertise inaccessible to lay publics, and the absence of institutionalized channels for civil society engagement. While the precise grievances varied in emphasis, they converged on the shared perception that the Strategy had been advanced through a closed and exclusionary process, or in the words of one commentator, "in the closed hallways of the MIME." (P1, June 30 2024). On this terrain, opposition mobilized a counter-current grounded in claims to procedural justice which framed the Strategy as a flawed policy that conflicted with local development aspirations and, at the same time, infringed on the right to meaningful participation. Capturing this very sentiment in a televised interview, a *Stop Pollution* spokesperson questioned how foreign governments and corporations could have knowledge of project sites long before local communities were informed: "We found these details published by foreign governments, like Germany, two years ago," he noted. "Now we discover these decisions are being made for Tunisia, and for Gabes, without speaking to us" (C1, April 13 2025).

Yet even before the Gabes forum, disquiet over the opaque governance of GH2 development had been fermenting at the national level. These concerns came to the fore in May 2024, when MIME signed MoUs with TotalEnergies and ACWA Power. In response, FTDES issued a statement urging the state to "enshrine the principle of public participation," insisting that affected communities in Southern Tunisia be given the right to reject projects imposed without consultation (EO1, May 30 2025). Similar criticisms

resurfaced just two months later, in July 2024, when six additional MoUs were signed with foreign companies. This time, FTDES and WGED issued a joint statement denouncing once again the 'lack of transparency' surrounding GH2 projects, particularly the opaque selection of firms, their 'unknown' corporate social responsibility records, and the absence of community input (EO1&EG, August 2 2025). For WGED, these grievances resonated with an extant assessment of the energy sector as a "closed circle" monopolized by technocrats and self-proclaimed experts (Ammar, 2022, p. 7). In this sense, WGED helped frame the GH2 debate as an extension of an elitist decision-making culture in Tunisian energy policy in a view that found common ground with *Stop Pollution* (C3, June 4 2024) and critical political commentators (P1, June 30 2024). The ferment created by local and national challengers alike around the lack of transparency inherent to the GH2 Strategy would, in the words of a *Stop Pollution* activist, urge 50 parliamentarians to issue a statement denouncing a number of 'dangerous violations' committed by MIME in pursuit of renewable energy partnerships without due oversight (C3, April 24 2025; April 29 2025).

Critiques of opacity would extend into a broader repertoire of action that responded to the absence of state-provided information, mushrooming into a counter-strategy centered on knowledge dissemination, especially among those seeking to democratize access to information pertaining to Tunisia's Energy Transition strategy and the GH2 project as one element therein. In reflecting on these dynamics, a *Stop Pollution* member noted about GIZ, "They hold capacity-building workshops and they do it in secrecy. Of course, we only hear about it till after […] and they do it in Gabes no less." (C3, April 24 2024). In response, challengers' counter-strategies took shape through video testimonials, multi-lingual opinion editorials, and alternative media content designed to make debates on GH2 and the energy transition more accessible to wider publics. Activists form *Stop Pollution* and the WGED in particular have increasingly intervened in national broadcast media, appearing on both public and private TV programs both to contest dominant expert discourses as is the case of a roundtable on GH2 held by Tunisia's largest private radio broadcaster (C6, June 3 2024)—as well as a reminder to the public of their right to clear information about energy transition projects. Understood through the lens of counter-public engagement, these interventions are efforts that seek to address the informational void left by the state and to reposition the energy transition as a matter of public concern rather than a closed technocratic exercise.

To this end, challengers with longer histories of grassroots consultation on energy, notably the WGED and FTDES, organized popular roundtables in the Tunisian South months before the green ammonia project was formalized at the Gabes Forum, beginning in Kairouan (EO1&EG, May 10 2025; C5, May 10 2025). WGED, this time in partnership with the UGTT, replicated the initiative in Sfax and, in commemoration of the 97th anniversary of nationalist and trade union leader Mohamed Ali El Hami, also led a roundtable in Gabes. Through these overlapping counter-publics, challengers positioned transparency as a political principle with paramount significance to national sovereignty. According to one activist "there is no real national sovereignty without popular awareness and decision-making" (C2 December 06 2024). In another intervention, the same challenger warned that without public access to information, GH2 projects risk "deepening dependence and colonialism, hidden under the slogans of energy transition and investment" (C2 December 08 2024). Perceived as emblematic of asymmetrical decision-making, the GH2 Strategy became a potent terrain for mobilization. In this way, critiques of GH2 were situated within broader political narratives, where contested development, procedural injustice, and threats to national sovereignty converged.

Sovereignty Struggles

> "*What do you mean when Total says that it 'chose' Tunisia? Who chooses whom? Shouldn't Tunisia choose? It's as if I am listening to a Jules Ferry speech from 1881, about [colonizers] choosing a colonial destination to bring us civilization […] This is a great shame.*" Trade Union Activist. Radio Intervention. 04.06.2024.

> "GIZ, get out." [*Dégage GIZ*] anti-GH2 Protest Slogan, April 24th, 2025. MIME Headquarters, Tunis.

If the first two counter-currents—contested development pathways and procedural exclusion—foreground the struggle over who defines Tunisia's energy future and who participates in that definition, they converge on a deeper question, that of sovereignty. For mobilizers in Gabes, sovereignty concerns found echoes in the positions of legacy actors who had long articulated critiques of diminishing national control over energy production, the grid, and the developmental choices tied to them. As noted in the previous section, apprehensions such as these are hardly novel nor were they instigated with the GH2 rollout. They had been expressed for years by STEG and its union, who resisted successive reforms liberalizing the electricity sector and opening it to foreign partnerships. Their opposition stemmed from fears of fragmenting the national grid, ceding decision-making authority over electricity generation, and weakening unionized labor through reliance on private or foreign-led projects (C5, April 16 2025). Against this backdrop, the announcement of Tunisia's GH2 Strategy intensified the anxieties that the initiative would further entrench Tunisia's asymmetric integration into EU energy markets, positioning the country as a peripheral supplier in the 'global green transition' while constraining domestic sovereignty over water, land, and energy.

The heavy imprint of Germany's development arm, GIZ, in drafting the GH2 Strategy has lent weight to dissenting voices. Challengers pointed to the contradictions of a national strategy stamped with the logo of a foreign institution (C3, April 24 2025), questioned the rationale of diverting scarce resources toward export-oriented renewables given Tunisia's miniscule emissions profile (EO1, May 30 2025), and warned of the hidden costs of foreign involvement or, as one trade union activist put it, "[the costs of] taking water away from Tunisians so a German can turn on his car" (C5, April 24 2025). These and other examples of vernacular sovereignties have formed a unifying counter-current that drew together various critiques under the banner of reclaiming control over resources and development trajectories and as a lived demand for autonomy over resources. These claims were voiced explicitly through the language of green colonialism and energy imperialism, both shorthands for the appropriation of local resources and the externalization of ecological costs in service of EU's decarbonization. By situating GH2 within longer genealogies of resource extraction and colonial dependency, challengers advanced bottom-up assertions of political and ecological self-determination, confronting the a 'green' resilience agenda that risks reproducing coloniality by naturalizing dispossession (Amponash 2025).

The resonance of this framing was evident in the streets. On the International Day of Anti-Imperialist Youth in April 2025, *Stop Pollution*—supported by the WGED and Tunisian General Union of Students—led a protest targeting both GIZ and MIME headquarters in Tunis. As explained by a member of the first collective, the action's goal

was two-fold: to contest plans for GH2 and to denounce Germany's central role in shaping it. The denunciation was tied to Germany's broader political posture, including its support for, funding of, and military backing to Israel. For the protestors, the links between Palestine and Gabes were explicitly material: "We are here to contest Germany's support of colonial expropriation in Palestine and the colonial expropriation of Tunisian lands under the guise of the GH2 project." (C3, April 24 2025).

This articulation of imperial expansion over Southern resources, simultaneously reinforcing geopolitical hierarchies abroad and shaping domestic developmental choices in Tunisia reverberated across protest slogans and manifestos in which GH2 was described as "a new link in the chain of domination that reproduces the differences between countries" (C2, December 9 2024); an expression of "energy imperialism" (CG1&EG, March 24 2025); "an extension of a neo-colonial path that serves EU demand at the expense of the health and rights of the people of Gabes" (CG1, May 17 2025); and "a new colonial depletion project with a beautiful green color" (FU1, December 09 2024). Attached to these colonial descriptors and metaphors were substantive concerns, against 'turning Tunisia into a testing ground' for private capital (EO2 March 7 2025; CG1&EG, March 24 2025), against 'transforming Tunisia into an energy reservoir for Europe,' (EO1, May 30 2024; P1, June 30 2024), and against efforts to undermine strengthening the local capacities of the national energy grid (EO1&EG, August 2 2024).

Sovereign vernaculars thus assumed multiple forms and extended beyond critiques of foreign involvement in drafting the GH2 Strategy or the export orientation of projects. A central thread was the defense of national resources and institutions as integral to sovereignty, with energy positioned as a public good that should remain under the stewardship of the national provider (C5&C6, April 4 2024). One strand of this framing was advanced by the Union of Small and Medium Enterprises, which denounced what it termed the "squandering of carbon credits" (B1, March 19 2025). In its view, the allocation of such credits to foreign companies amounted to the dispossession of a "public and sovereign property" that could otherwise generate revenues for the STEG. Parallel concerns were articulated in the parliamentary letter introduced in April 2025, which warned that GH2 projects could disadvantage national companies through tendering processes designed favourably towards large multinational firms at the expense of domestic actors in an arrangement described as a violation of national interests. These critiques converged on a broader diagnosis that the GH2 Strategy risked hollowing out the capacity of Tunisia's national provider with STEG trade unionists—now in partnership with Gabes mobilizers—denouncing the GH2 as "not serving local electricity needs and posing a direct threat to our already diminished sovereignty." (EO1&EG, August 2 2024)

Concurrently, a more radical register of sovereign vernaculars placed the question of land at the center of sovereignty struggles. To rehearse a previously made point, these challenges amplified concerns that allocating land to GH2 would divert scarce resources away from agriculture and local development. By the same token, they targeted the classificatory logics through which land was being revalued. The Strategy's designation of certain areas as 'low agricultural value' effectively redefined territory from agricultural potential to industrial utility. In turn, opposition to GH2 argued that this reclassification drew on long-standing narratives of emptiness and underutilization, resonant with colonial-era tropes of *terra nullius* (see also, Hamouchene, 2023). Brining into memory the historical struggles through which these lands were reincorporated into national control, activists contested such legitimation logics, noting that, "[t]he idea that the lands in the South are empty or sitting idly is not true. We fought with blood for these lands to be liberated; we can't now say they're empty" (C6, June 03 2024). Returning to the demands

for procedural justice, demands for community consultation and consent operated simultaneously as calls for just-based transitions and as assertions that land constitutes a collective resource embedded in social and political rights, rather than an asset available for reallocation to global energy markets.

Conclusions

In the race toward net-zero, the tide of GH2 has proven formidable. Industrial countries, with the EU at the forefront, pursue decarbonization agendas through seemingly virtuous win-win partnerships, formalized in Memoranda of Understanding with countries whose abundance in renewable energy and drive for industrialization position them as eager participants. Across Africa, this has translated into a host of mega-renewable projects tapping into resources—wind, solar, hydropower—considered underutilized or unmarketable. Beneath the high-level diplomacy of energy and oil giants, local communities in potential and actual implementation sites confront a different reality. They weigh the implications of a GH2 future on their resources, the possibility of national debt dependency, and the export-oriented trajectory of projects touted as engines of employment in emerging technologies with uncertain benefits. In some cases, these anxieties invoke memories of colonial dispossession; in others, they emerge from exclusion from decision-making processes that directly affect livelihoods; and in others, they arise from the dissonance between the vision of a green-energy future—exportable to EU markets—and lived conditions of underdevelopment.

What made Gabes a particularly potent site for anti-GH2 mobilization? In Gabes—home to a national industrial giant and a legacy of industrial pollution par excellence—the 'green-ness' of GH2 falters when confronted with a locally embedded environmental movement. Here, EU's decarbonization agendas, pursued through external energy partnerships, intersect with national development priorities and long-standing histories of expropriation, exploitation, exclusion, and resistance.The three counter-currents traced—contested development pathways, procedural justice, and sovereignty struggles—converge with particular intensity. Under a constellation of enabling conditions, these currents rendered Gabes a charged arena for anti-GH2 contention, wherein challengers reframed GH2 as a deeply political project with far-reaching implications for land, water, and national autonomy. They did so by drawing on historical memory, oppositional knowledge practices, and collective claims to reassert agency over Gabes' development trajectory and Tunisia's energy future writ large.

At the local level, environmental degradation, already sedimented as a national grievance, provides a lens through which new threats such as GH2 are understood and resisted. Coupled with decades of unaddressed social reproduction needs, these conditions meant that GH2 would not advance without reckoning with long-standing claims for reparation. The externally driven nature of the GH2 Strategy, its opaque formulation, and its misalignment with demands for redress reactivated a familiar logic of regional sacrifice. The land and water required for its implementation, alongside interference with national infrastructure and labor interests, galvanized those already attentive to threats to sovereignty over the national grid. GH2 thus becomes intelligible not in isolation but as a synecdoche for the continuation of a historical trajectory in which Gabes—like other sites across the Tunisian South—has been positioned as peripheral and extractable vis-à-vis the state and its international partners. The case of Gabes is particularly instructive in showing how efforts to integrate into global energy markets collide with local demands for recognition and social reproduction. More broadly, it demonstrates that energy transitions

cannot be fully conceived apart from the socio-political terrains in which they unfold and where counter-currents from below continue to shape, and at times forcefully resist, the tide of 'green' growth. Almost a year after the first protest erupted in Gabes, and as we sat down to reflect on the aftermath of the backlash, one Stop Pollution member had just returned from Namibia, where they met with local counterparts to share experiences and strategies from their respective struggles against GH2. They spoke of these South–South collaborations as fertile grounds for transborder resistance and, just as importantly, as spaces for reimagining what genuine development might look like. Far from opposing development, they insist on an industrialization that is both necessary and welcome: "Simply exporting raw materials is not development […] We want sovereign development."

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Appendix 1: Anti-GH2 Mobilization Manifestos, Public Interventions, & Statements in Chronological Order. Compiled by author.

Type	Content	Date	Code	Affiliation
MoU signed with the EU July 16th 2023, titled "A Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," with renewable energy being one of its main topics.				
GH2 Strategy is first published in September 2023				
Op-Ed	Titled "*From ancient Subjugation to Renewed Colonization: GH2 in Tunisia a New Mechanism of Plunder and Exploitation"* provides critical overview of the GH2 Strategy	04.04.2024	[C5 & C6]	TTNI & WGED
MoU signed with France's TotalEnergies, Austria's Verbund, and Saudi Arabia's ACWA on May 27th 2024				
Statement	FTDES publishes a statement on MoUs "*Signing of a new memorandum of understanding to implement a green hydrogen project: Energy transition in Tunisia: sovereignty or dependency*?"	30.05.2024	[EO1]	FTDES
Radio	StopPollution member and renewable energy expert on Mosaique FM debate GH2 Strategy.	03.06.2024	[C6]	TNI
Press Statement	WGED trade unionist on Son FM: *"GH2: Investment and Export at the Expense of Tunisians."*	04.06.2024	[C5]	WGED
News Interview	To al-Bawsala, activist critiquing state energy transition for lacking justice/inclusivity; mention of GH2.	04.06.2024	[C3]	*Stop Pollution*
Radio	On Express FM discussing GH2, foregrounding self-sufficiency first before exports.	15.06.2024	[C6]	*Stop Pollution*
Op-Ed	Workers' Party newspaper publishes a critical policy analysis of the GH2 Strategy	30.06.2024	[P1]	*Sawt ash-'ab* newspaper
	6 GH2 MoUs are signed July 29th 2024			
Statement	Joint statement on the MoUs titled "Statement on Memoranda of Understanding and the Green Hydrogen Race in Tunisia. Strategic Partnership or Local Sacrifices?	02.08.2024	[EO1&EG]	FTDES & WGED
Roundtable	Roundtable discussion on GH2 in Tunisia held in Kairouan	05.10.2024	[EO1&EG]	FTDES & WGED
Press Statement	Trade unionist provides statement to media on GH2's potential to siphon land and water resources.	05.10.2024	[C5]	WGED
Energy Transition Sec. visits Gabes (Dec 2, 2024) for conference *"Gabes: A Pole for GH2 and Derivatives"*, co-organized by Gabes Technical Pole & French Embassy; French ambassador attends.				
Statement	Local assemblyperson issues statement to MIME, Energy Transition Sec. & Minister, condemning visit as attack on Gabes.	02.12.2024	[C8]	Gabes Local Council
Social Media Post	StopPollution shares infographics, *GH2 in Tunisia: Opportunity or Risk?*, warning of land/water use, unequal trade, and "new colonialism."	03.12.2024	[CG1]	*Stop Pollution*
Social Media Post	Activist posts statement condemning French ambassador/GIZ visit; calls for mobilization against Green Ammonia project.	04.12.2024	[C1]	*Stop Pollution*
Social Media Post	Activist shares statement questioning lack of information about GH2 and need for public consultation	06.12.2024	[C2]	*Ashkal wa Al-wan* Association
Social Media Post	Activist shares post encouraging mobilizing against green ammonia project	08.12.2024	[C1]	*Stop Pollution*
Chot Essalam residents hold meeting to discuss GH2 and invite local council members, environmental CSOs, and local activists (Dec 8, 2024)				

Ultras Group [Eagles 09] lead first anti-GH2 mobilization in Gabes (Dec 8, 2024)				
Mobilization Manifesto	Eagles 09—Gabes-based Ultras group—shares an anti-GH2 mobilization manifesto on social media.	08.12.2024	[FU1]	Ultras [Eagles 09]
Social Media Post	Activist shares statement questioning the colonial character of the GH2 project.	09.12.2024	[C2]	*Ashkal wa Al-wan* Association
Social Media Post	Activist shares message on social media encouraging residents to mobilize.	11.12.2024	[C1]	*Stop Pollution*
Gabes City Local Council holds meeting on GH2 (Dec 16, 2024)				
Letter	12 local CSOs submit letter to Presidency (via Gabes Governor) opposing GH2 and further extractive/industry-heavy projects in Gabes.	18.12.2024	[CG2]	"For You Gabes" Association Chott Essalem Association Association for the Preservation of the City and the Oasis (ASMO) Regional Observatory for Development (ORDG) Association for the Development of Culture and Arts in Gabes (GADCA) The Tunisian Federation of Farmers Gabes (SYNAGRI) Regional association for the preservation of the environment and nature (ARPNE) Gabes Association for Sports Union for Farmers and Fishermen Gabes (UTAP) Medical College Association in Gabes Gabes Market Workers' Cooperative
Regional Environment Council, Gabes (Dec 24, 2024), with Environment Minister; local assembly members urge PM stance on GH2 projects/derivatives.				
Social Media Post	Assemblyperson shares recording from his intervention during the Reginal Environment Council meeting	24.12.2024	[C8]	Local City Council
Radio	Assemblyperson on Radio Elyssa FM introduces petition against Green Ammonia plant; asks to collect local signatures.	26.12.2024	[C8]	Local City Council
Ministerial Council decision (Mar 5, 2025) removes phosphogypsum from hazardous list and approves Gabes ammonia production project.				
Statement	Stop Pollution condemns decision removing Phosphogypsum from hazardous list, approving green ammonia unit, and rollback of 2017 polluting-unit dismantling, warns of environmental, water, and energy risks, and calls for citizen mobilization.	06.03.2025	[CG1]	*Stop Pollution*
Statement	Youth for Climate Tunisia condemns Ministerial Council decision removing phosphogypsum from hazardous list and promoting green ammonia, denounces ongoing environmental and social injustice in Gabes, and calls for dismantling polluting units and broad citizen mobilization.	07.03.2025	[EO2]	Youth for Climate Tunisia
Statement	Condemns decisions to reverse Phosphogypsum classification and new projects in Gabes	07.03.2025	[FU1; FU2; FU3; FU4]	Gabes-based Football Ultras Groups
Statement	Expresses support to the Stop Pollution movement in Gabes, condemns decisions to reverse Phosphogypsum classification	09.03.2025	[CG2]	UGET
Statement	Stop Pollution and national organizations sign statement condemning Mar 5, 2025 Ministerial Council decision removing Phosphogypsum from hazardous list and approving Gabes ammonia project.	19.03.2025	[CG1]	Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights Stop Pollution Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights NOMAD 08 Association

				Tunisian Association of Democratic Women Working Group for Food Sovereignty Africa Association Lawyers Without Borders Al Bawsala Association Beity Association Generation Against Marginalization Association Our Children – Tunisia Association *Aswat Nisaa* Association Kalam Association Mawjoudin for Equality Initiative *Fanni Raghman Anni* (My Art In Spite of Me) *Nashaz* Association Dignity for Rights and Freedoms Association Tunisian Association for Rights and Freedoms *Tawhida Ben Cheikh* Group for Health Tunisian Transitional Justice Network Federation of Tunisian Citizens Across Shores Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia Tunisian Organization Against Torture Tunisian Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty We Are the Youth Organization I WATCH Organization *Lina Ben Mhenni* Association Working Group for Energy Democracy Tunisian Human Rights Observatory
Ultras groups (Eagles 09, Sahleiano 07) protest GCT pollution (Mar 16, 2025), demand removal of polluting units and reinstatement of promised hospital in Gabes during football match.				
Stop Pollution and other Gabes CSOs mark World Water Day with *Toxic Paradise* (dir. Sadok Trabelsi), highlighting GCT pollution; anti-GH2 sentiment noted (Mar 21 2025)				
Mobilization Material	Anti-GH2 video diffused on social media	23.03.2025	[FU2]	Vikings Ultras
Mobilization Manifesto	In commemoration of International Day of Anti-Imperialist Youth, call to mobilize at MIME to demand transparency, resist EU/GIZ-led energy imperialism, and defend national energy sovereignty.	24.03.2025	[CG1&EG]	*Stop Pollution* & WGED
People's Assembly issues a letter (Apr. 03, 2025) signed by 50 members denouncing violations in GH2 Strategy				
News Interview	Stop Pollution member on Talvza TV: criticizes state short-sightedness, whitewashing of Phosphogypsum and GCT crimes, and unilateral approval of new ammonia units in Gabes without local consultation.	13.04.2025	[C1]	*Sop Pollution*
Statement	Proposal for a popular referendum on gradual removal of polluting units and transition to environmentally sustainable economic model; three-phase plan includes halting new polluting projects, redirecting profits to regional development	14.05.2025	[C8]	Local Council
News Interview	Trade unionist to Inhiyez in an intervention titled *"Energy Transition in Tunisia: Steps Backward or Forward?"* raises Tunisia energy transition issues, criticizes government formula for	16.04.2025	[C5]	WGED

	undermining energy sovereignty, warns projects favor foreign capital over STEG.			
Statement	condemns MIME for violations favoring foreign companies over public/national interests: illegal concessions, mismanaged carbon credits, lack of national renewable plan, unfair tenders, misleading grid claims, bypassing Parliament; protection of SMEs and public resources.	19.04.2025	[B1]	National Association of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
Radio	Activist on Son FM discusses secrecy surrounding GH2 development, capacity- building workshops and meetings held without local knowledge and participation.	24.04.2025	[C3]	*Stop Pollution*
Stop Pollution, WGED alongside UGET hold anti-GH2 protest in Tunis, targets MIME and GIZ (Apr. 24, 2025)				
Press Statement	To Inhiyez, trade unionist reiterates critiques of GH2 as diverting resources away from Tunisians; export of water abroad.	24.04.2025	[C5]	WGED
Press Statement	To inhiyez, activist reiterates position against GH2 and demands for ceasing foreign intervention	24.04.2025	[C3]	TNI
News Interview	Activist on Al-Katiba criticizes opaque energy transition strategy, highlights EU/German influence on GH2 and renewables, and condemns Phosphogypsum removal	29.04.2025	[C3]	TNI
Opening of 97th Mohamed Ali El Hami commemoration and symposium on renewables/GH2 in Gabes (May 10, 2025); WGED/UGTT present *"What future for Tunisia's energy transition?"*				
Press Statement	calls for citizen debate on GH2 and renewables in Gabes, warns projects serve European/German interests, risk water/land depletion, and repeat chemical complex damage; supports renewable/green hydrogen only if nationally beneficial.	10.05.2025	[C5]	WGED
Mobilization Manifesto	Calls for mass demonstration in Gabes (May 23, 2025) against Green Ammonia project, condemns Mar 5, 2025 gov't decisions reversing 2017 dismantling, phosphogypsum delisting; demands dismantling chemical units, suspension of GH2 project, and review of green hydrogen strategy.	17.05.2025	[CG1]	*Stop Pollution*
Protest held in Gabes (May 23, 2025); three protestors arrested				
UGTT/WGED hold roundtable discussion in Sfax on renewables/GH2 (May 24, 2025)				
Statement	Reports arrests in Gabes following protest; denounces violence, fabricated charges, and calls for immediate release and independent investigation; mobilization planned at Gabes Court (May 26, 2025).	[CG1]	25.05.2025	*Stop Pollution*
Protest held in front of Gabes Court of First Instance (May 26, 2025)				
Social Media Post	Emphasizes long-term struggle against pollution, connects environmental and social justice, praises participants and families, and frames activism as ongoing fight for life.	[C4]	27.05.2025	Soutkom [Your Voice] Association
Social Media Post	Calling for a second round of mobilization in Gabes against GH2	[CG1]	31.05.2025	*Stop Pollution*
Jailed protestors are released (June 4, 2025)				

[i] In reflecting on the partnership with the Transnational Institute, the quoted activist explained that they "wear two hats": one as a researcher with TNI and another as a street mobilizer with Stop Pollution. While the two roles are complementary, they emphasized that each serves a distinct function: TNI is not "involved in on-the-ground mobilization," which remains" rooted in and emerges from the local community." (Personal communication with author, September 29th 2025).