



## Full Length Article

# The enduring coloniality of ecological modernization: Wind energy development in occupied Western Sahara and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights

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## ABSTRACT

The dominant narratives on how to confront climate change are often presented as neutral proposals concerned with the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. The main objective of this article is to exemplify how concepts like Ecological Modernization and Sustainable Development are used in the name of energy transitions to prolong illegal military occupations in two territories, namely occupied Western Sahara and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. By combining first-hand and secondary data from our cases, we also expose the enduring coloniality of such concepts that have been critiqued not only for their lack of neutrality but also for their contribution to the denial of basic human rights such as self-determination, sovereignty, and the right to resourcehood. We argue that renewable energy projects, in the two settings studied, are a manifestation of an ecological modernization that ignores aspects of justice and self-determination. Although touted as a solution to mitigating climate change, wind energy development in these two cases violates international law and the principle of self-determination.

## 1. Introduction

Renewable energies are presently touted as a sustainable way to deal with the deteriorating state of the planet. The narratives backing them, as well as the strategies through which they are implemented, are oftentimes presented as neutral ones concerned with the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. In contrast, many social scientists show how these represent and reproduce colonial relations that lead to uneven consequences (Davis et al., 2019; Davis & Todd, 2017; Hornborg, 2019; Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Sovacool, 2021). No doubt, the topic at hand can be (and has been) approached from a variety of perspectives. To disentangle the nature and meaning of these dynamics, scholars have used various approaches and theories, ranging from classical Political Economy to Discourse Analysis and going, of course, through Political Ecology (Baker et al., 2014; Davis, 2004; Ewing, 2017; Hornborg, 2019; Parson & Ray, 2018; Salas-Zapata & Ortiz-Muñoz, 2019). Drawing on previous research, we concur that the narratives of sustainable development and climate change mitigation are not only biased but in contexts, such as the ones we are taking up here, their outcomes are

devastating. In fact, a closer look to their variegated consequences reveals their lack of neutrality and their colonial underpinnings (Pepermans & Maesele, 2014; De Onís, 2018; Parson & Ray, 2018; Sovacool, 2021; Sovacool et al., 2021). In the best of the cases, actions based on these narratives favour some interests, lifestyles and ideologies over others. In the worst ones, they deny specific social groups the most basic human rights such as self-determination, local sovereignty, livelihoods, and, ultimately, the right to exist.

Our main objective is to attend to what we term ‘the enduring coloniality’ of Ecological Modernization through renewable energies (RE) in territories undergoing illegal military occupation. By enduring coloniality we expose not only the assumption of universality and neutrality of Ecological Modernization, but also its direct contribution to the denial of basic human rights such as self-determination, sovereignty and rights to resourcehood.

We focus on wind energy development in two illegally occupied territories, namely occupied Western Sahara (oWS) and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights (oS GH). We argue that wind energy projects in the two cases become a clear means to violate international law and the

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principle of self-determination. To evaluate and analyze the local consequences of these projects, we relate the narratives of Ecological Modernization and Sustainable Development to the way renewable energy strategies are implemented. We argue that these are a manifestation of an Ecological Modernization that ignores aspects of justice and self-determination of communities undergoing illegal military occupation and sacrifices territories and populations 'for the sake of salvation from climate chaos' (Andreucci & Zografos, 2022). The violence of such discourses is both ontological and epistemic in the way they portray climate change as a universal challenge that requires global solutions while ignoring the double burden experienced for decades by those struggling from the enduring coloniality (Sultana, 2022b; Whyte, 2017).

Despite similarities and differences between the two cases, we show that what is proposed as a 'benign' energy transition violates international law and established agreements. This sheds light not only on the role and ambitions of the occupiers to cement occupation through renewable energy projects, but also on the role of some western powers (such as the EU and the USA) in this process.

Furthermore, the cases demonstrate how RE projects become sites of 'green extractivism'; where climate change mitigation policies become sites of exploitative practices of resource extraction (Bruna, 2022; Dunlap & Brock, 2022), under the justification that they are "not only compatible with climate change, but indeed as necessary to its 'mitigation'" (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2021). Promoted as solutions to the climate crisis, wind energy projects become exemplary of a colonial legacy of expropriation and cause detrimental impacts for communities struggling to achieve self-determination. These framings and their colonial legacies turn natural environments into a mere source of investment and accumulation of capital sought by governments, corporations and development agencies alike (Núñez et al., 2020). Concerning this, Alatout (2006) demonstrates how environmental concepts and policy regulations, in this case renewable energies, 'are sites of conceptualization of relations of power' and are geographic locations where infrastructural colonialism is expanded (Davis, 2004). As colonized geographies, both cases show how investments in RE are yet another extension of a logic of colonial extractivism which produces infrastructures that cause harm to the communities, nature, political and cultural sovereignty. In this way, global climate change policy making becomes part and parcel of normalizing and depoliticizing illegal actions and deem them as favorable and benign (Dunlap, 2018).

Therefore, we centre our argument on two main underpinnings: (i) RE projects in occupied territories as perpetuating inequality and further impacting local population and the environment disproportionately (ii) RE projects as detrimental to the realisation of the right to self-determination and the adherence to international law. By exposing the enduring coloniality of concepts like Sustainable Development, Ecological Modernization and Renewable Energies, we attend to how seemingly benign green energy projects play out in the two cases.

## 2. Methodology

This paper results from a collaboration amongst political geography researchers with intimate knowledge of the local context of the two case studies. The paper is based on fieldwork carried out in the occupied Golan Heights and Morocco. Author A. has carried out fieldwork on the topic of energy transitions and the politics of renewable energy projects in Morocco from 2019 to 2020, with a focus on the occupied Western Sahara. This fieldwork included carrying out 24 in-depth interviews with high-level government officials from the Moroccan energy sector, key representatives from international organizations involved in the energy transition such as the German International Cooperation (GIZ), representatives from the energy partnerships between EU and Morocco, private companies working in the field, representatives from involved international banks in financing the energy transitions and local activists. Moreover, Author A. undertook in-depth online interviews with key representatives from the European Commission (EC) within the energy

directorate, and another online interview with a Sahrawi informant working within a wind energy project in occupied Western Sahara.

Author B. has worked in the occupied Golan heights since 2014 and has carried out the most recent fieldwork in 2017, at the commencement of the works of the wind turbine project and the local resistance to it. Due to the pandemic, the researcher relied on online communication with interlocutors in 2020–2021. Author C is a scholar from Western Sahara with extensive experience and first-hand account of the politics of the realities of resource exploitation there. The authors collaborated on this paper to reflect on their positionality as geographers from occupied territories with a critical approach to hegemonic concepts in development studies, renewable energy transitions and climate change policy making.

Additionally, the paper takes the case-study approach, by focusing on two specific cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Lune & Berg, 2017; Yin, 2009). The selected cases are considered unique and extreme (ibid), as both are undergoing violent yet somehow 'forgotten' illegal occupations and settler colonial control. Within this approach, the researchers relied on close examination of secondary literature, namely two important studies carried out in both locations: *Windfall: the exploitation of wind energy in the occupied Syrian Golan* by Al Marsad and *Green Washing Occupation: How Morocco's renewable energy projects in occupied Western Sahara prolong the conflict over the last colony in Africa*, by Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW) published in 2021.

## 3. The enduring coloniality of ecological modernization

In the 1980s, the concepts of *sustainability* and that of *sustainable development* were greeted with sheer enthusiasm and their theoretical value was broadly acknowledged. This was particularly so in policy-oriented research. However, the ambiguity of these concepts triggered academic and political disagreements that are still alive today (Brown et al., 1987; Caldwell, 1998; Leal Filho, 2000; Marshall & Toffel, 2005; Salas-Zapata & Ortiz-Muñoz, 2019). We emphasize that discourses of sustainable development are embedded in colonial logics. Such discourses remain void of addressing and prioritizing human freedoms (Sen, 1999) and essentialise issues of environmental protection over addressing issues of human inequality and asymmetric power relations. As Banerjee contends quite eloquently "sustainable development [...] is very much subsumed under the dominant economic paradigm" while its policies and outcomes continue to be characterised by an enduring coloniality and colonial thought (Banerjee, 2003). With the help of science, technology and capitalism, the Western colonial expansion has produced the global power structures that are still dominating today where some regions, societies and social groups have seen their agency to handle their local affairs strongly weakened. Likewise, the combination of capitalism and technology has reinforced extractivist modes of resource control leading to environmental degradation caused by misapplied technologies (Caldwell, 1998), while also utilizing the same modes to 'save nature' and protect the environment.

The Anthropocene, a term describing the first epoch of rupture of the Earth's systems due to human activities, comes to disrupt the benign underpinnings of mainstream sustainable development and question its inherent contradictions of economic growth and sustainability (Adelman, 2018, pp. 15–40; Rottman, 2014). However, the anthropocentric perspective is infused with power relations that lead to the prioritization of some humans and landscapes over others (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2017). Moreover, it flattens social difference and ignores that the burning of fossil fuels through economic and manufacturing activities by the Global North has destabilized the planet, and caused further exploitation, oppression and marginalization (Davis et al., 2019). Thus, we problematize issues of asymmetric power relations and join scholars who have extended the concept of the Anthropocene to include its colonial underpinnings. For example, Davis and Todd (2017) propose the onset of the colonial period as the beginning of the present environmental crisis. In a similar vein, Salih and Corry (2022) taking the

standpoint of the colonized and the displaced communities, criticize the Anthropocene as a collective form of extinction and put emphasis on the role of colonial violence and consequently its primary act of eliminating the native populations and destroying 'the indigenous enmeshment with nature' (ibid:3).

Another concept utilized within the present environmental crisis which reinforces the coloniality of climate change policymaking is that of Ecological Modernization (Buttel, 2000; Mol, 2002; Spaargaren, 2000). Its basic assumption is that a green adaptation in the confines of capitalism, where economic growth and ecology are favourably combined, is possible (Mol, 2003; Murphy & Gouldson, 1998; Orsato & Clegg, 2005; Warner, 2010). This implies, above all, increases in energy and resource efficiency, as well as innovations in environmental management, appropriate legislation and clean technologies (Bailey et al., 2011).

Among the initial criticisms against ecological modernization we find the overemphasis on production and negligence of consumption (Carolan, 2004), the lack of a thorough perspective that includes the role of capitalism in the global environmental crisis (Foster, 2002; York & Rosa, 2003), as well as the exclusion of environmental injustices and burdens generated by the capitalist system (Harvey, 1996; Everett & Neu, 2000, Low et al., 2003). Furthermore, the Eurocentric character of Ecological Modernization is evident as most of its concerns and studies had been confined to the Global North with little engagement with its relevance for analyzing the lifeworld and lifestyles of societies elsewhere (Fisher & Freudenburg, 2001, Mol et al., 2014).

### 3.1. Renewable energies as a manifestation of climate colonialism

While in the initial stages Ecological Modernization was mostly associated with the Global North and Sustainable Development with the Global South, we are witnessing now how elements of Ecological Modernization are expanding towards the Global South through RE transitions. Within these transitions, RE strategies are implemented through an eco-modernist approach where environmental protection and economic growth are sides of the same coin. Modern technologies function as both techno-fixes for the climate crisis and as opportunities to promote green capitalism and economic growth (Avila, 2018). However, RE development encroaches on indigenous territories, intensifies land enclosures and privatization that result in social unrest and radical alterations in fragile ecosystems (Dunlap, 2018, 2019; Torres Contreras, 2022).

In relation to this, Dunlap's work on wind parks in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, reminds us that wind energy as a strategy to mitigate climate change is misleading (Dunlap, 2018). Besides the dependency on fossil fuels and mining, wind energy development 'continues the trajectory of colonial genocide' on indigenous groups (Dunlap, 2018). State led land grabbing, conducted by corporations in the name of sustainable development, leads to 'accumulation by dispossession by environmental ethic' (Dunlap, 2018). It is a form of 'green grabbing', where the appropriation of land and resources to 'meet' environmental ends operates through legal and market mechanisms to justify the approach. All this builds on the colonial past and goes along the colonial genocide as the implementation of the RE systems takes often place on indigenous land (Fairhead et al., 2012; Dunlap, 2018, 2021a; Dunlap, 2018; Parson & Ray, 2018). However, we want to indicate that even in critical voices we see the tendency to misuse concepts such as colonialism in ways that trivialize history and the power structure inherited from it. For instance, interesting conceptualizations such as infrastructural colonialism used to describe green and post-carbon energy injustices (Batel & Küpers, 2022; Dunlap, 2020, 2021b, pp. 1–20, pp. 83–102; Dunlap & Laratte, 2022) in the global north, might reduce colonialism to a phenomenon that takes place in Europe today in similar manner to occupied territories where settler colonialism never stopped its reproduction. The populations of these territories are still fighting for basic rights such as self-determination

and sovereignty.

By using environmental and climate emergency discourses, occupying powers and their allies continue discarding attainments such as justice, human rights, and the right to self-determination, above all, for colonized people. This kind of eco-modernist approaches reinforce existing world structure without addressing the root causes. Renewables are presently mobilized in manners that are destructive for communities already devastated by climate and other injustices. Hence, the need for a climate justice approach that attacks the root causes of climate change, such as the combustion of fossil fuels, the strife for endless economic growth, the ruthless exploitation of natural resources, and to confront indigenous erasure and racialized structures (Davis et al., 2019; Moore & Patel, 2018; Sultana, 2021).

Climate justice scholarship claims that the climate crisis we are witnessing is not only about science and finance, but more about justice and human freedoms. On this regard, Sultana (2021) argues that in order to decolonize the climate, we need to tackle the complexities of ongoing colonialities. It is about giving attention to the extremely unequal and uneven impacts of climate change on the everyday lives of humans across different times and spaces and these cope with vulnerabilities in diverse ways (Sultana, 2022a).

Hence, our main contribution is to initiate a critical dialogue into how the enduring coloniality of Ecological Modernization materialize in specific geographies of military occupation and resource control in the Middle East and North Africa Regions, through wind energy development. It is an attempt to bring such cases into conversation within critical scholarship on climate justice and green energy transitions.

## 4. The case studies

The selected case studies of occupied Western Sahara (oWS) and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights (oGSH)<sup>1</sup> showcase two territories undergoing brutal but somehow 'forgotten' illegal occupations, where both the Sahrawis and the Jawlanis are fighting for decades to achieve their self-determination. While their struggle continues, Morocco and Israel intensify their power and control by using RE projects in the name of sustainability and doing good for the planet. Nonetheless, in our case studies, the wind energy projects demonstrate how they further cement such illegal occupations and weaken rights for self-determination and sovereignty. While both cases are examples of 'forgotten' occupations, we see that RE projects are bringing these territories to the forefront and promoting them as new frontiers of green extractivism and ecological modernization.

For the Sahrawis and Jawlanis, the wind energy projects installed on their territories without their consent are forcefully transforming their relationship with their lands and consequently their livelihood practices. The struggle for them is not only concerning the expropriation of their lands but more of being deprived from having their sovereign identity and belonging. They equally regard the current wind projects as an extension of the settler colonial dispossession of their right to exist, as this article reveals.

### 4.1. Occupied Western Sahara (oWS)

Western Sahara (WS) was a Spanish colony from 1884 till 1975. Following World War II, anti-colonial movements emerged and started criticizing such a colonial rule, which by mid 1960's led for Western Sahara to be classified on the UN's list as a non-self-governing territory awaiting decolonization (Badarin, 2021; UNGA, 2011). This classification has set the foundation for the UN to force Spain to decolonize and to

<sup>1</sup> Here we intentionally labelled both case study locations as 'occupied' as these locations have been under a normalized military occupation that sees the Israeli and Moroccan presence there as part of a status quo. Ayoub (2018) uses this term to speak of how the Golan Heights is a case of a forgotten occupation.

pave the path for the Sahrawis self-determination (Badarin, 2021). By 1975, the International Court of Justice declared that the people of Western Sahara have the right to self-determination, and that their territory belongs to neither Morocco nor Mauritania prior to the Spanish colonization. However, Spain withdrew without having fulfilled its obligations in contrary to the international law, by transferring the WS territory to the neighbouring countries (Morocco and Mauritania) in exchange of having access to the natural resources of the territory (Smith, 2015; WSRW, 2021, Allan et al., 2022) The Moroccan and the Mauritanian invasion of the Sahrawi territory forced a large number of Sahrawis to flee into Algeria where the refugee camps were established in 1975.

In 1976, the liberation movement Polisario Front (established in 1973) declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Later in 1979, Mauritania dropped its claims to the WS territory and recognized the SADR, while the Moroccan troops continued to invade the territory against the condemnation stipulated by the UN of the illegal Moroccan occupation (WSRW, 2021).

Until today, WS is considered as the last colony in Africa undergoing a brutal Moroccan occupation. Morocco has an explicit policy in populating the colonized territories with Moroccans while favouring them in regards to education and job provision. Additionally, Morocco is actively engaged in the plundering of the natural resources in the territories (mostly fisheries and phosphate) including renewables (solar and wind) (Smith, 2015). According to the World Bank, the potential of RE in WS is enormous, as such wind energy is 169% higher than that of Morocco (WSRW, 2021). This demonstrates the significance of the occupied territories to Morocco in achieving their energy targets of 42% of produced electricity from RE sources by 2020 and 52% by 2030 (MASEN).

According to the Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRS), WS's share of Morocco's currently installed wind power plants is 17.9% (255 MW out of 1427 MW in mid-2021). Adding all the wind parks under construction or in the planning process, the percentage will increase to 47.20% by 2030 (WSRW, 2021). Moreover, solar energy generated in the WS territory could reach up to 32.64% of Morocco's total solar energy, also by 2030 (WSRW, 2021).

#### 4.1.1. Wind energy

Until 2012, oWS territory was relying on Gasoline for energy, from 2012 they shifted to rely on wind energy. At present, there are three wind farms operating in WS, CIMAR, Fom El Oued and Aftissat, with two under way in Boujdour and Tiskard as part of the Integrated Wind Energy Program. Since the total Sahrawi population present in WS is nearly 120 000, there is low demand for electricity, meaning that most of the excess energy produced from the current wind and solar plants is transferred to Morocco via the existing transmission lines. Moreover, the implementation of the Integrated Wind Energy Program in WS will further increase Morocco's reliance on the WS wind energy generation.

The idea of this Integrated Wind Energy Program was conceptualized in 2010. This project entails the construction of five wind farms with a total capacity of 850 MW, of which two of the five - Boujdour and Tiskard wind farms, would be constructed in the occupied WS, with a combined capacity of 400 MW. The tender for all these five farms was launched by the Moroccan National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water (ONEE) (WSRW, 2021).

In March 2016, a consortium composed of Siemens Wind Power, ENEL Green Energy (Italy) and Nareva (Morocco) won the bid. The entire project's operation and maintenance is under a Build, Own, Operate and Transfer (BOOT) scheme, and is carried out under a public-private partnership with ONEE, the Energy Investment Company (SIE) and the King Hassan II Fund, all state owned. ONEE will buy the generated electricity under a PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) for 25 years, then ONEE sells it to the customers (WSRW, 2021). In 2019, ENEL Green Energy signed the contract with ONEE and MASEN for the construction of Boujdour wind farm (300 MW).

In relation to the above, on 29 September 2021, the European Court of Justice ruled that the EU's approach in WS is illegal. The court specifically argued that for any project and activity to take place in WS, consent has to be granted from Polisario (the UN recognized representation of the people of WS). This argument was previously made in 2016, confirming that the territory of WS is separate from Morocco, thus any EU agreement with Morocco is not permitted to take place in WS without the consent of the Sahrawi people (WSRW, 2021).

#### 4.2. Occupied Syrian Golan Heights (oSGH)

With its occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967, Israel succeeded in controlling a geostrategic land with rich natural resources. and immediately after the war, a surge of experts, from hydrologists, agronomists to archaeologists and civil engineers, were tasked by the government to assess and study the potential of the oSGH as an open terrain for development and planning (Ram, 2015). In the span of a few decades, Israel transformed the oSGH into an open plain for Israeli settlements with a focus on 'resource-based' industries carried out vast explorations of water, oil and gas and most recently wind (Southlea & Birk, 2019, Dajani et al., 2022). Today, 95% of the occupied territory is designated for Jewish-only development and settlement, leaving 50% of the population, the Syrian Jawlani, on 5% of the land. Israeli exploitation of natural resources is documented widely (Ayoub, 2018), and extends from agricultural development, wineries, water expropriation, tourism and industry. While wind energy projects have been operating for decades on the occupied land in the Golan Heights, the most recent project, the Clean Wind Energy Project, is proposed to be constructed on the agricultural lands belonging to the remaining Syrian Jawlanis and on the agricultural lands of the destroyed and depopulated village S'heita.

##### 4.2.1. Wind energy

Israel's decades conquest of the Syrian resources has a long and intertwined history and a clear example to highlight the intertwining between energy and water colonialism through that of the Israeli water company Mey Eden (Eden water). The company operates in the oSGH since 1980 and exploits water from local springs and other resources, which is deemed illegal by international law. In 1992, Mey Eden constructed what was claimed to be 'the first commercial windfarm in the Middle East' (Mey Eden website). This project is located on Mount Bnei in Israel, a settlement built in 1981 on the site of the destroyed Syrian village of Jweza (Ayoub, 2018). The farm generated 6 MW in total, which was consumed by the Mey Eden plant, the Golan Heights Winery and 20,000 Israeli settlers, while the remaining energy is fed into the Israeli electrical grid. Since 2016, EffiSolar Enterprises Inc. (EEI), an International RE company founded in Canada with an Israeli branch has owned the farm (EffiSolar) and repowered the turbine capacity to 15 MW with new wind turbines.

The current wind project of concern in this article is the one being planned by Energix Renewables, a public Israeli company operational since 2009. Because of intense opposition from the Jawlani community, the project has not yet been implemented on the ground and the legal proceedings are still ongoing in an attempt by the Jawlanis to stop the project.

What is striking about this project is that it's done in close coordination and support of the Israeli government. Energix has been promoting the idea to establish a large-scale wind turbine farm in the Northern Golan Heights under a National Infrastructure Plan (NIP). The plan includes installing 52 turbines near the lands of the remaining Syrian villages and generating 152 MW of energy, to be the largest wind farm supplying Israel's power grid. Installed on occupied land and on the border with Syria, the project has been stalled since then because of a number of challenges, mainly lacking approvals from the military (Bimkom nd). With the military approval of the project granted in 2019, the announcement has been made that the project will commence with the installation of up to 32 large turbines, each 200 m high.



While the international community's stance has been to rule the illegality of Israel's occupation of the oSGH, Israel's unilateral action to formally annex the area in 1981 went unabated, against international law. Donald Trump's proclamation on recognizing the oSGH as part of Israel in 2019 (Trump, 2019) exemplifies how the oSGH is to continue experiencing an intensification of settler colonial violence manifested in extensive settlement expansion, and as the article indicates, aggressive greenwashing efforts in the form of green energy and sustainability projects without any real condemnation or action by the international community.

## 5. Discussion

In the two occupied territories we present, the damages caused by wind energy development are multiple, but the most serious ones are the violation of the right to self-determination and the gradual acceptance of the international community of the illegal occupations. RE projects in the two cases is a manifestation of how Ecological Modernization discourses put the global before the local, the modern before the traditional, the occupier before the occupied, and the economic before everything else. We highlight below how we see the manifestation of the enduring coloniality of ecological modernization through western support and the occupying powers who entrench ideas of green colonialism to transform the lived realities of occupied communities and weaken their struggles for self-determination.

### 5.1. Western support and investment

RE energy transition and the potential export to Europe aids to obfuscate the illegal occupation of WS and to further increase Morocco's dependence on the occupied territories (Allan et al., 2022). So far, Morocco is connected to Spain via two HV underwater cables with 700 MW each. This 1.4 GW Spain-Morocco link is currently the only existing direct interconnector between Africa and Europe. Moreover, Spain and Morocco have recently signed a memorandum of understanding regarding a third power interconnection between the two countries, boosting their interconnection to 2.1 GW by 2026. Additionally, Morocco and Portugal are in advanced talks for a 1 GW interconnector between the two nations.

Although Morocco is heading towards RE transitions, most plans and policies are led by western interests that allow for higher dependency on foreign technology and knowledge. This has pushed for the liberalization and privatization of the energy sector, the influx of western corporations to produce the energy, as well as an increase of foreign investments and loans to finance this energy transition (Ben Rouine & Roche, 2022; Hamza, 2016).

In oWS, wind energy development undermines the United Nations peace efforts and consequently the Sahrawi's right to self-determination. Instead, they further entrench the occupation and give legitimacy to the Moroccan occupation. Similarly, for the Jawlanis such large-scale projects also reflect Israel's stance on increasing its grip over the oSGH, by intensifying its settlement project with mere condemnation from the international community (Schechla, 2021). Even if Israel is a powerful actor, it also relies on ventures with the international community and multinational corporations to secure its RE targets, allowing to promote itself as a leading actor amongst international counterparts (Eitan, 2021).

Additionally, under the Trump administration (2017–2021), the United States stance shifted to recognize oWS and oSGH as part of Morocco and Israel respectively. This gives further legitimacy to both occupying powers to push for normalizing economic relations and investments in the occupied territories.

### 5.2. Entrenching green colonialism

Both cases clearly show how Morocco and Israel are using the RE

projects to entrench their presence and dependency on the occupied territories, while presenting themselves to the world as pioneers in the green energy transition in Africa and the Middle East. Both Israel and Morocco view Jawlani and Sahrawi land as *terras nullis*; an open frontier to carry out extractivist projects for economic gain and imposition of sovereignty.

On this regard, Morocco is creating energy partnerships with the neighbouring countries as a mean to win their recognition for its illegal occupation of WS (Allan et al., 2022). So far, oWS is connected to Morocco via a 400 kV transmission line reaching to the capital El Aaiun, of which this is planned to be strengthened with another 400 kV connection between Agadir and El Aaiun, therefore securing a capacity of 800 MW from RE sources (WSRW, 2021). Another 400 kV power interconnection within WS between El Aaiun and Dakhla city is underway, all this with the hopes that Morocco will be connected to Mauritanian grid, and thus to export RE to West Africa (Allan et al., 2022).

While Israel has been for decades implementing a clear ecological modernization trajectory, with huge investments in technological fixes, most notably in water and agricultural sectors. In the oSGH, the wind project, if implemented, is a calculated attempt by the Israeli state to green its act and bolster its image as a haven for green technology and innovation. To fulfil its emissions reduction targets under the 2015 Paris Agreement, the project is envisioned to increase Israel's RE sources to reach 17% by the year 2030. However, green energy transitions in this case are achieved through expropriation of indigenous land and resources against international law (Dajani, 2020). Israel has also invested in a decades-long greenwashing campaign to brand itself as a green and eco-friendly 'start-up' nation, while the Israeli state has one of the biggest per capita ecological footprints with its heavy reliance on fossil fuels, mainly coal (Fischhendler, 2015).

### 5.3. Transformations of worldviews and livelihood practices

Jawlanis and Sahrawis are witnessing the expropriation of their lands without their consent and involvement, and for Sahrawi without their compensation, as the land is tribal and therefore is considered lacking of proof of ownership.

On an economic level, the Sahrawis are not benefiting from this green energy transition, as the price for 1 KW is the same as before. ONEE is in charge of the energy produced from the RE plants and sells it to the inhabitants of WS with a similar price as before the transition or even higher (Sahrawi informant 2020).

The presence of these wind parks attracts more settlers from Morocco to work in the occupied territories and exclude the Sahrawis from job opportunities as the positions are highly competitive and require specific qualifications. In the oGH, Energix claims that the project will "help the local Syrians of the Golan provide new avenues for income and industry" (Southlea and Brik: 13), it is clear that such avenues are short term and with the company's interests in mind rather than those for the local community. Moreover, such industries will also contribute to accelerating the illegal settler populations and further cement the settlement expansion project.

The oWS case also exposes how the seemingly green energy produced by the wind projects is used by industries that extract the territories' natural resources. For instance, wind parks in oWS provide energy for Morocco's exploitation of phosphate there, operated by a Moroccan state-owned company (WSRW, 2021). Their detrimental effects also have impact on the ecology of oWS, as according to a Sahrawi informant, their loud volume have forced the camels around them to run away elsewhere (interview 2020).

The Moroccan officials justify the presence of large-scale RE projects in WS by claiming that renewables are non-exhaustible resources, as the sun and wind are free and abundant. Such an argument completely ignores the large areas where such infrastructures are installed and blurs the main legal issue at stake: the Sahrawi people have not given consent nor approval to these operations, which are in violation of the

international law (WSRW, 2021).

Likewise, the international companies active there such as Siemens Wind Power and ENEL Green Energy, are arguing that the wind projects will bring benefits to the local communities by improving their socio-economic situation. Furthermore, they insist on not wanting to engage in political discussions when questioned about their activity there. Another way around their illegal presence and plundering of resources is by using the rhetoric that wind should not be compared with other resources as phosphate, since wind is abundant and free, thus installing the wind farms will not risk to exhaust this infinite resource, and cannot be compared to the extraction of non-renewables (WSRW, 2021).

In the oSGH, the planned wind farm by Energix is to be situated only 1 km away from the villages of Majdal Shams, Mas'ada and Bu'ata, and to be constructed on the agricultural lands of the destroyed village S'heita. As the project location is on the last stretch of remaining lands under the control of the Jawlanis, it will heavily obstruct any future expansion for the villages and accelerate illegal Jewish settlement expansion. Due to decades of economic disenfranchisement and financial allure of such a proposition, a handful landowners signed contracts causing tensions within an already fragile community. The Syrians of the Golan have been battling with internal tensions arising from the Syrian civil war taking place in Syria proper. Furthermore, this small community which for decades tried to maintain homogeneity in terms of its collective decision making (Eldin, 2019; Mason & Dajani, 2019) is under insurmountable pressure to seek more individualistic choices for political affiliation (incorporation into the Israeli society by engaging with Israeli institutions and applying for citizenship), in addition to the economic integration that has been inevitable, where many of the Jawlanis have been involved in the Israeli economy willingly or unwillingly. Following the publication of an extensive legal and investigative report on the project and its violations of basic human rights (Southlea & Birk, 2019) and Al Marsad's submission of objections against Energix in 2019, the latter filed a lawsuit against them on accusation of defamation of the company and continues to intimidate and prosecute the Jawlanis who clearly and vocally have been active in refusing the project. What is evident is not only that Energix is operating in illegally occupied territories against international law, but that it is lacking the community's approval, even threatening their dissent and ultimately their way of life and steadfastness on the land. The enduring coloniality is evident in the two cases not only by how green energy transitions are imposed on communities, but when their worldviews and aspirations are labelled as obstructing economic and sustainable green development.

#### 5.4. Dismissal of international law and rights to self determination

From a legal standpoint, the WSRS, in line with the applicable international law (stipulated on 29/09/2021) demands all the energy companies to leave oWS, and they further demand the world to account for Morocco's inaccurate climate branding (WSRW, 2021), as Morocco's energy transition efforts must take place within its own borders. Similarly, the Energix wind project clearly violates international law, like other businesses operating in the oSGH, as it infringes on the principle of banning pillage and destruction and alternation of occupied land. The project in its inherent design alters the status of the occupied land and transforms the livelihoods of the community. Another principle that is being defied is the right to self-determination, which the Jawlanis are clearly being deprived of (Southlea & Birk, 2019). More specific to oWS, the European Commission (EC) has only advised all the European public and state agencies to stay away from getting involved with projects taking place in oWS. This doesn't include foreign private companies that are allowed to be there and operate on their own risk without any legally binding laws (EC representative interview 2020). So far, Siemens Wind Power, ENEL Green Energy and Nareva are engaged in the wind energy development projects in oWS under the Moroccan ruling regime. The EU is acting as a silent spectator by not directly exerting power on Morocco

to withdrew from the illegally occupied territories. Instead, their stance violates the international law and what it consolidates, and it harms the Sahrawis by allowing Morocco to further consolidate control over the Sahrawi lands and resources. The RE projects do not take into consideration issues of historical injustices caused by these military powers and the alienation it has caused to the Sahrawis and Jawlanis (including those that do not live in these territories anymore, and who have become refugees or settled elsewhere).

In both cases there is a clear domination of a corporate type of green energy projects, heavily supported by occupying powers given green light from the international community. Mutually, there is an opposition of the projects by a majority of the local population that identifies the wind energy projects as sustaining the status quo and furthering the state's grip on resources, people and livelihoods. The Sahrawis and Jawlanis are mobilizing against those 'green' energy projects and are able to practice their self-determination by connecting their livelihoods and identities to their lands and environment.

Moreover, both cases exemplify how the wind projects are being promoted for their contribution to economic prosperity to the Sahrawi and Jawlani communities, cementing ideas of 'economic peace', a model that has been equally used to co-opt Palestinians to continue engaging with Israel as an occupying power in exchange for arguably better economic conditions (Nakhleh, 2014; Turner, 2012). Such a model has been critiqued for reducing liberation struggles to economic Neo-colonialism (Nakhleh, 2014). What the case studies show that this model is extended to green transition, as both occupying powers are greenwashing their expansionist and extractivist agenda under the guise of green development and sustainability. Liberation and self-determination become framed by these powers and the international community as a hindrance to progress and modernization, and any attempt to counter wind energy projects is deemed as irrational and detrimental to the economic well-being of the community.

#### 5.5. Appropriating coloniality of ecological modernization

As both cases are undergoing colonization by green infrastructural development, a sharp and a careful distinction needs to be made with green neoliberalism being pursued in the European countryside, framed by Dunlap (2020, 2021c, 2022) as 'infrastructural colonization'. While several communities in the west are fighting against the neoliberalization of the energy sector, such categorization ignores the systematic difference between the experiences of the Sahrawis and Jawlanis resisting infrastructural colonization as non-sovereign entities to that of Europeans living in sovereign nations and whose experience, no matter how intrusive, can't be compared to communities seeking self-determination on their colonized lands. Awareness of how problematic such framing is should be noted as it risks reducing the struggles of the colonized to achieve their liberation and self-determination. Moreover, the colonial legacy that persists in both the oSGH and oWS is not at all the case for the European context, which hasn't been and is not colonized.

Through his several studies on the RE infrastructure in the European countryside specifically in Catalonia, Spain and France, scholar Dunlap (2020, 2021c, 2022) is not taking into account that the indigenous communities are struggling with such an infrastructural colonization as an extension of the settler colonial project imposed on them, of which its mere aim is the replacement of the indigenous people through an institutionalized project of elimination (Wolfe, 1999). This is demonstrated in the case studies of the Sahrawis and Jawlanis, whose struggle against the current wind farms is an extension of their long-lasting struggle for liberation, existence and self-determination.

## 6. Concluding remarks

RE projects in occupied territories hinder any meaningful effort to end the military action, and rather entrench occupying powers and give them legitimacy in the eyes of the world. Under the guise of economic

prosperity and sustainability, such projects are framed as the panacea to what inherently is a case of systematic injustice and violence against people and territory. The intentions of Israel and Morocco with the green energy narrative is to consolidate control, exhibit territorial sovereignty and enforce an Israeli and Moroccan identity on the Jawlani and Sahrawi lands. Both Israel and Morocco are actively extending their surveillance and control of the populations living in those territories through state-centric apparatus and regulations of service provision. We trace an enduring coloniality of Ecological Modernization that is inherent in green energy development in occupied territories, which is used to justify illegal land occupation, hinder human rights, and prolong the colonial project by using 'new' means. In this regard, RE plants become sites for the destruction of decades-long struggles against land and resource theft of indigenous communities striving for self-determination and sovereignty on their lands. The Sahrawis and Jawlanis are leading a collective struggle against green colonialism and authoritarian settler-colonial regimes. They are resisting against a dominant corporate type of green energy projects, led by occupying powers and given green light from the international community.

Finally, situating what is happening in both oSGH and oWS in relation to other struggles of indigenous communities under (settler) colonial regimes allows us to unfold and shed light on how state led green energy colonialism, conducted by corporations, is replicated in other contexts where extractivism and environmental injustice are strongly tied to the ongoing colonial legacies. The struggles of today against RE projects are a continuation of an enduring struggle against the imposed settler colonial projects, and they will continue until self-determination and liberation are achieved.

#### Declaration of competing interest

This work has no conflict of interest.

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