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# Mobile Colonial Architecture: Facilitating Settler Colonialism's Expansions, Expulsions, Resistance, and Decolonisation

Irit Katz

Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

## ABSTRACT

Grounded in space yet facilitated by mobility, settler colonialism has adopted distinct architectural devices. Tents, prefabricated shelters, mobile homes, shipping containers, and other portable structures, have created the scaffoldings of new colonial settlements, allowing for rapid territorial expansion. These mobile spatial objects have also served as instruments of expulsion and expropriation, facilitating the creation of spaces of counterinsurgency and displacement for the containment of rebellious and expelled locals, who themselves used mobile architecture as an instrument of resistance. From the historical British 'Portable Colonial Cottage for Emigrants' to the caravans used by Israeli settlers in the occupied territories and the creation of humanitarian spaces, these mobile structures have been part of the toolkit enabling colonial powers to rapidly rearrange people in space. This article draws on critical mobility and architectural studies to examine settler colonialism's mobile architecture in both historical and contemporary contexts through the case of Israel-Palestine, from Mandatory Palestine's British and Zionist camps, through early statehood's spaces of displacement and emplacement, to current colonial environments. By doing so, the article highlights how settler colonialism's rapid spatial actions and counteractions require mobile spatial forms and their related infrastructure for the abrupt and often racialised territorial and demographic alterations and for related swift counteracts of resistance, protest and decolonisation.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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In the first year of the First Lebanon war (1982–1985), dubbed Operation Peace for Galilee (Mivtsa Shlom HaGalil) by the Israeli government and known in Lebanon as The Invasion (Al-ijtiyāh), an innocent-looking photo was taken by an Israeli photographer near Ein al-Hilweh, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon (Figure 1). The photo, found in the Israeli Photo Collection archive, shows two women entering one of the several types of mobile homes (called *caravanim* in Israel, *caravan* in singular), with large manufacturers' signs in Arabic, Hebrew and English leaning against these structures. Captioned 'Exhibit of prefabricated caravan-type houses on show outside the Ein Hilweh refugee camp offered for sale as alternate solution for housing of refugee families', the meaning of the photo remains obscure until the story of Ein al-Hilweh is revealed.

Ein al-Hilweh camp was created in 1948, the year of Israel's establishment, following the Arab-Israeli war and the resulted *Nakba*, the 'catastrophe' in Arabic, in which the Palestinian society was shattered with its majority displaced to neighbouring countries and the national Palestinian home was denied. The camp, like other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and Jordan, has become the live manifestation of the Nakba and core to Palestinian resistance against



**Figure 1.** Exhibition of prefabricated caravan houses outside Ein al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, 1982. Photograph by Miki Shuvitz, the National Photo Collection Israel, Government Press Office.

Israel, which refused to acknowledge the Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes, villages, and cities. The camps were central to the operation of the *fedayeen*, Palestinian militants or guerrillas considered 'freedom fighters' by Palestinians and 'terrorists' by Israel, who were a central target to Israeli military operations (Hazboun 1994; Weizman 2007). In the early 1970s, fedayeen groups have unified under the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), which moved from Jordan to set its headquarters in South Lebanon and launched attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets while relying on the camps for militant support (Peteet 2005). Invading Lebanon in the 1982 war, Israel aimed to destroy the political, social and armed structures of the PLO, with the Israeli army completely razing the urbanised camp of Ein al-Hilweh, then a stronghold of Palestinian resistance and home to around 40,000 refugees (Figure 2). 'We are going 34 years back,' reflected a Palestinian woman refugee after noting that Israel promised to provide tents to the displaced refugees; 'When we left Haifa [in 1948] we lived in tents, and now again the same suffering' (Kapeliouk 1982). The later Israeli decision to provide caravans for some of Ein al-Hilweh refugees before the harsh Lebanese winter could be seen as a poor propaganda couched in humanitarian terms for international consumption to present an answer for the camp's overwhelming destruction. The broader political meaning of these caravans, however, continues to unfold when examining an allegedly unrelated photo in the same archive.

The same type of caravan, manufactured by the Israeli company Tromasbest,<sup>1</sup> could also be seen in a photo of Elon Moreh, an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, taken two years earlier (Figure 3). Captioned 'Family homes of Elon Moreh made ready for settlers moving from their old location near Nablus to their new settlement on nearby Mount Kebir', the photo captures a core stage in the Israeli political struggles over the settlement of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, which challenged the then government policy to avoid settling this heavily populated area. Elon Moreh was created by Gush Emunim (Hebrew for Bloc of the Faithful), a national ultra-right-wing and religious-messianic-militaristic fundamentalist movement with the goal to establish



**Figure 2.** Palestinian refugees in the ruins of the destroyed Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp, 1982. Photograph by Sa'ar Ya'acov, the national photo collection of Israel, Government Press Office.



**Figure 3.** Prefabricated caravan houses of Elon Moreh Gush Emunim settlement in the West Bank in its new location near Mount Kebir, 1980. Photograph by Chanania Herman, the National Photo Collection of Israel, Government Press Office.

Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank highlands perceived part of the Jewish holy God-given biblical 'entire land of Israel' (Eretz Yisrael Ha'shlema) which must be redeemed. Originally created as a tent camp near Sebastia, North-East of Nablus (Figure 4), an Israeli 1979 Supreme Court decision ordered to dismantle Elon Moreh, agreeing with the Palestinian petitioners that expropriating private lands for settlement purposes contradicts the international law. After prolonged negotiations, the sixty members of Elon Moreh moved to a nearby site seized by the Israeli army (Lustick 1988; see also Weizman 2007). While the photo of the relocated settlement and its new mobile homes marks the ending of this episode, it also signals the beginning of a thorough Israeli political and legal process enabling massive land seizure in the occupied Palestinian territories on which many other Israeli settlements were created, this time with government support. Importantly, the photo also reveals part of the continuous prevalent use of mobile architecture in Israel-Palestine that enabled Israeli and earlier Zionist settling powers to rapidly create and relocate settlements as part of the territory's intense and ongoing colonisation.

In the Israeli historiography, the early 1980s photos of Ein al-Hilweh and Elon Moreh are of two unrelated stories. One story is of an Israeli seemingly humanitarian intervention to assist Palestinian refugees in a camp heavily damaged by Israel in the Lebanon War, and the other is of a successful solution to a dispute between the state and Gush Emunim settlers, both written into the photo captions. The Israeli portable architectural object of the mobile home presented by the camera in both sceneries could perhaps be dismissed as a too loose connection between these stories. Like other photographs which together assemble 'the [Israeli] discourse that did not acknowledge the [Palestinian] disaster' (Azoulay 2011: 13), these captioned archive photos separate the apparatus of the continuous Israeli settler-colonial project into what seem to be unconnected situations and contexts. By questioning the archive's 'identification and interpretation' imposed by the powerful (Mbembe 2002: 20), however, these photos can speak beyond the



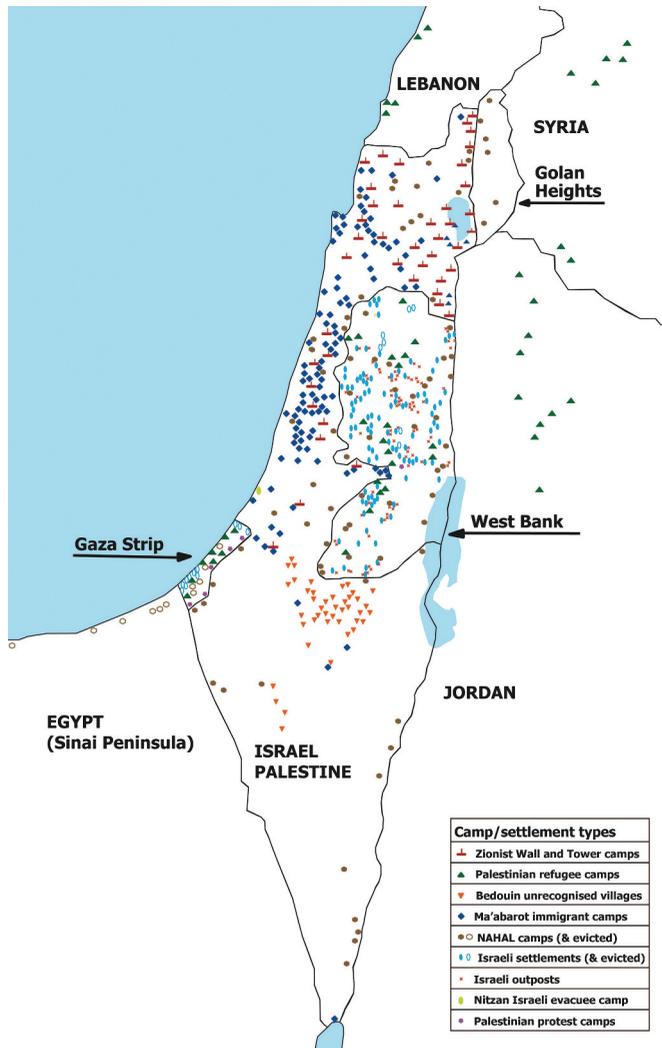
**Figure 4.** Gush Emunim settlers in from of their tents in the first location of their outpost near Sebastia, the West Bank, 1975. Photograph by Moshe Milner, the national photo collection of Israel, Government Press Office.

limiting meanings of their archival captions, and by focusing on the architecture that links between them a more encompassing story on settler colonialism's overarching mechanisms is revealed. The Tromasbest mobile architectural object which was used simultaneously at an Israeli settlement in the occupied Palestinian West Bank and in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, I argue, serves as part of a broad apparatus of mobile colonial architectural objects which are core to the ever-shifting colonial realities in Israel-Palestine and beyond. The mobile architectural object connecting between these cases reveals not only the political but also the material and spatial links between settler expansion, native expulsion and expropriation, and humanitarian actions which simultaneously make part of settler colonial projects in Israel-Palestine and other contexts.

As Zygmunt Bauman writes in *Liquid Modernity*, '[t]he "conquest of space" came to mean faster machines', and 'accelerating the moves was the sole means of enlarging the space' (2000: 113). Mobile architecture, this article argues, is one of these modern 'faster machines' that enabled the swift spatial changes which facilitated settler colonialism's rapid territorial moves to enlarge the colonised space. While the link between mobility and colonialism is mostly discussed in relation to human mobility (Clarsen 2015), material objects and systems, including railway lines, barbed wire and aluminium have also been recognised as key to colonial enterprises (Sheller 2014; Meiches 2015; Cowen 2020). These objects related to mobility inherently influenced the production of the settler colonial space and the 'elastic geography' (Weizman 2007: 6) of its ever-transforming frontiers, including its architecture of walls and checkpoints as asymmetric and often racialised power over immobility (Netz 2004; Kotef 2015), yet the fundamental role of mobile architectural objects in reshaping settler colonial spaces and territories is still under-investigated. Rather than analysing these forms and processes through abstract political and social notions, divisions, and constructs such as citizenship and national territory, this article illuminates how material and architectural elements contribute to practices of colonisation and decolonisation, taking its cue from the 'material turn' or 'new materialism', in which the social and political role of material objects and processes is reconsidered (Latour 2005; Latour and Yaneva 2008). This is not about shifting the attention of agency from human subjects to nonhuman objects, but about understanding how space and politics are affected by designed materials, including architectural objects, which are often considered as banal facts and are therefore overlooked.

By drawing on Israel-Palestine and its ongoing processes of settlement and territorial expansion from the early Zionist settler society to the current Israeli one, coupled with continuous processes of expulsions and expropriation of native Palestinian populations and their resistance to it, the article explores mobile architecture as a mechanism which is inherent to the ways different forms of colonial emplacement and displacement were and still are enabled, imposed, managed, and confronted (Figure 5). Mobility here is examined in its real and symbolic forms in relation to geopolitical, cultural, material and spatial aspects, such as expansion and dispossession, lightness and fluidity, camps and infrastructures, industrialised production and makeshift inventions. The ability to fully reflect on the experiences and implications of these forms, including the 'commercial networks' (Pascucci 2021: 26) of objects, such as the Israeli caravans in Ein al-Hilweh which, according to the caption, were 'offered for sale' to the Palestinian refugees, is admittedly limited in the scope of this paper.

To investigate how mobile architecture facilitated settler colonialism in the context of Israel-Palestine and beyond, I begin with a theoretical reflection on the link between settler colonialism and modern spatial technologies of mobility and speed, together with a genealogical investigation of the use of mobile architecture in both civilian and military colonial processes of expansions and expulsions across the globe. I then examine the mobile architectural objects in Israel-Palestine from the early days of the twentieth century by reflecting first on processes of colonial settling and territorial *expansion* of Jewish populations and then on the complementary processes of *expulsion* and *expropriation* of Palestinian populations from the very same lands, and their resistance to these imposed processes. Settler processes, I argue, adopted certain kinds of architecture which produced,



**Figure 5.** Map of some of the refugee camps, settler outpost camps, migrant camps, protest camps, and unrecognised and temporary settlements formed by prefabricated mobile architecture discussed in this article. Illustrated by the author.

and was produced by, particular forms of politics which relied on spatial instruments' mobility and speed to initiate and accommodate swift territorial changes of invasion, occupation and dispossession, as well as the resistance to them.

### Mobile colonial architecture

Architecture is not commonly perceived as something that moves around. In a world of countless artefacts and material objects, buildings are usually seen as desperately static formations which are connected to their environment with physical foundations and with their sheer sense of permanent stability. Yet architecture is not only connected to the world of steadiness and continuity but also to the material worlds of fluidity, elasticity and mobility (Weizman 2007; Latour and Yaneva 2008; Fredriksen 2014; Meiches 2015; Allweil 2018). 'Everybody knows – and especially architects, of course', write Latour and Yaneva (2008: 103), 'that a building is not a static object but a moving project'. While these architectural motions could mean gradual transformations over time, they

could also mean abrupt changes in which rapid spatial movements are facilitated by physically mobile architectural objects. Such forms of mobile architecture, including portable architectural objects and their related infrastructures and vehicles of movement, are linked to colonialism and colonial settler societies as inherently modern constellations. ‘Modernity’, as Bauman argues, ‘was born under the stars of acceleration and land conquest’ (2000: 112), and as larger space required accelerated movement, prefabricated mobile architecture became one of the machineries for this spatial conquest. As Clarsen notes, ‘[s]ettler-colonial formations are, after all, stridently mobile formations’ (2015: 42), with settlers travelling to claim sovereignty over native lands. Lloyd and Wolf also point out that colonial settlements depend on the settler’s mobility, ‘whether that displacement was initially coerced or voluntary’, thus furnishing ‘an icon of the modern subject defined by movement’ (2016: 115). The tight link between mobility and colonisation is not only about the great contradiction pointed out by Ballantyne ‘that “settlers” were typically unsettled and mobility was their defining characteristic’ (2014: 36) but also that these unsettled settlers had the power to unsettle those who already settled the area they have colonised.

Settler colonialism was and still is based on two complementary movements of expansion and expulsion, that is, the movement of settlers to ‘new’ territories and the imposed movement, or rather displacement, of local populations within or from these territories. This double movement was and still is facilitated by an ever-evolving set of modern material objects and technologies that not only support the mobility of settlers but also enable them to control the im/mobility of often racialised local populations who oppose their colonisations. Ships, trains, trucks and an evolving infrastructure of ports, roads, and railway lines have facilitated mobility while influencing the production of settler colonial cities and other environments ‘as spaces of intimate imperialism’ (Cowen 2020: 480). At the same time, the invention of objects such as the barbed wire and the searchlight (placed on a watchtower) has enabled settlers to impose im/mobility on those displaced by them. Mobile architecture is part of this set of objects which facilitated settler colonialism’s double expansion-expulsion movement.

‘Mobile colonial architecture’ is a notion that describes the role of architectural mobility in facilitating colonial projects. The term ‘mobile architecture’ is often used in the architecture discipline to describe portable structures employed for both necessity and leisure, with contemporary glossy Phaidon Press titles such as *Mobitecture* (Roke 2017) depicting its use in a range of settings, from pop-up holiday homes to transportable designs for the homeless. Decades earlier, Yona Friedman’s architectural manifesto *L’architecture Mobile* (19770 [1958]) called for the adoption of mobile architecture as an emancipatory instrument that could facilitate democratic self-planning, suggesting buildings that could be moved and readjusted by their users. While the term ‘colonial architecture’ still too often suggests a depoliticised view of European architectural styles incorporated into colonial built environments (see, for example, Guaita 1999), ‘mobile colonial architecture’ politicizes architectural mobility as a spatial instrument which is core to colonial projects. This concept joins the literature which critically analyses spatial and often racialised forms of power and violence that evolved with, or in relation to, the colonial laboratory of modernity (Weizman 2007; Meiches 2015; Katz 2015, 2022; Forth 2017; Cowen 2020, among others), including recent reflections on humanitarian (and often mobile) spaces as political reproduction of racial colonial relations and legacies (Davies and Isakjee 2019).

Architectural objects and systems of im/mobility were and still are an inherent part of colonial motions of settling and unsettling. Speed was necessary for the mobilities of settlers that were also seeking to achieve control over territories and populations, with the ability to rapidly create new ‘facts on the ground’ with mobile architectural objects being essential to achieving control and facilitating displacement, emplacement, and other spatial and territorial changes. These mobile objects could be easily transported and rapidly erected to enable to occupy and control space, and, as they were composed of light materials to facilitate their mobility, they were often temporary in nature, and later disappeared in favour of more stable and permanent structures and spatial realities. Many of these objects, however, were

documented in photos, which, together with the archives that kept them, created a colonial product of 'power and authority' (Mbembe 2002, 20), yet they now reappear as architectural ghosts to tell the story of the swift and violent transformations they have facilitated.

Tents, prefabricated shelters made of timber, aluminium and fabric, caravans, shipping containers, and other transportable structures, could be identified as the building blocks, or better, the temporary scaffolding of invasive colonial arrangements and settlements across the globe. This includes prefabricated elements such as stockades and watchtowers which together composed larger architectural structures, such as the fortified frontier outposts of the colonial Spanish military nuclei in Río de la Plata, today's Argentina, which were created as a response to the constantly changing colonial boundaries and facilitated colonial mobilities (Calvo, Collado, and Müller 2005). The hundreds of British blockhouses created during the Boer war to guard the railway lines and block movements of Boer population in South Africa, is another example of the way mobile architectural objects were used to create colonial space (Netz 2004). While the first blockhouses were built of masonry or concrete, a prefabricated portable version made of timber and a double sheathing of corrugated iron, which was later filled with sand, was devised to meet increasing demand (Royal Engineers Museum 2006). These and similar ad hoc outpost structures, or the 'fortified encampments of the colonizers' in Paul Gilroy's words (2000: 71), have combined military and civilian practices and were rapidly erected in strategic locations to secure colonised territories.

In modern wars and conflicts, argues Paul Virilio, victory is deemed by 'the hierarchy of high speeds of penetration and assault' (2006 [1977]:128), and rapidly erected prefabricated mobile architectural objects make an inseparable part of both military and civilian invasive colonial contestations. British forces have indeed continued to develop mobile military architectural objects in



**Figure 6.** Nissen huts in the former British military camp in Pardes Hanah, which later became an Israeli Jewish immigrant camp, 1948. Photographer unknown, the Zionist Archives, PHG\1010509.

various scales to support the rapid creation of space, with the 'Nissen Hut' being one of the most known British military designs of architectural mobility which was also used in Mandatory Palestine (1920–1948), the post-Ottoman Empire geopolitical entity of Palestine being under British rule. Designed during WWI by a British military engineer named Nissen, the hut was a light prefabricated structure made from steel ribs and a half-cylindrical skin of corrugated steel (Figure 6). It could be assembled by four people in four hours using only a spanner/wrench, with more than 100,000 units in kit form deployed to war zones to support British troops (Cohen 2011: 258).

Mobile architectural objects, however, do not only facilitate the creation of new expansionary military spaces but also the rapid creation of counter-insurgency spaces of containment to restrict the unsettled locals and native populations who resist the violent invasion. Camps were created to concentrate local populations by colonisers worldwide in places such as India, Cuba, Algiers, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Cyprus, and Mandatory Palestine, including what Aidan Forth (2017) calls 'Britain's empire of camps' (2017). The most famous example are the concentration camps created by the British in the late nineteenth-century South Africa to contain the displaced Boer civilians, forming, as described by British general Kitchener who displaced a quarter-million men, women and children, a country of 'everything moveable' (Ibid. 144). Portable structures including bell and marquee tents have facilitated the creation of a network of around forty concentration camps at the outskirts of towns overwhelmed by the displaced Boers, with their creation and function relying on the proximity of the railway infrastructure, in itself protected by the aforementioned prefabricated blockhouses, to enable the transformation of mobile structures, food and other necessities to sustain them. With dysfunctional supply lines and structural neglect, these rapidly erected camps became sites of humanitarian catastrophe where thousands have died of hunger and disease. These camps, which evolved into intentional genocidal weapons in other colonial settings (Martin et al. 2020), were later imported as a containment and genocidal tool to the West, forming the racialized architecture of the WWII Japanese American camps and the European Nazi death camps where 'undesired people' including millions of Jews were murdered.

Colonial outposts and concentration camps were created by architectural objects of mobility and speed. Their rapid creation links to modern materials and technologies of mobility, which did not only enable their prefabricated components to be industrially manufactured in one place and delivered to and erected in another but also supported their maintenance as spaces detached from their immediate physical surroundings and therefore must be connected to and served by lifelines of active transport infrastructures (Meiches 2015). While these spaces were often created and run by the army, they were often used to confine and administer civilians, with this military-civilian connection could also be recognised in their mobile architectural components.

The employment of prefabricated structures for civilian colonial purposes dates back to the eighteenth century. In 1788, a five-room house with timber-wall panels manufactured in England was shipped to create what was considered as the first 'real building in Australia' (Herbert 1972: 261). About four decades later, when a small group of British settlers came to West Australia around 1827, a few of the settlers were equipped with small wooden houses which their parts were manufactured in England and packed especially for export by the father of one of the settlers, a carpenter and a builder named Manning. It was indeed the appearance of 'The Manning Portable Colonial Cottage for Emigrants' which has marked the establishment of industrialised prefabrication as a technical means to facilitate colonial settlement in the first half of the nineteenth century. This housing unit, as architectural historian Gilbert Herbert reflects, was 'specifically designed for mobility and ease of transportation' to be packed 'in a small compass' especially for shipping; as Manning himself claimed, as 'none of the pieces are heavier than a man or a boy could easily carry for several miles, it might be taken even to a distance, without the aid of any beast of burthen', and could therefore easily carried to, and erected in distant colonial frontier areas (Ibid. 264–265). Being a product especially designed for mobility and transportation, the same factors of light weight and compact packing are still considered by current logistical apparatuses concerned with

the temporary provision and mobile practices of humanitarian shelters and their emergency spaces around the world (Fredriksen 2014; Pascucci 2021). Settler colonialism's mobile architecture, however, was there first.

Prefabricated mobile architecture created in the motherland and shipped with the settlers was used in different parts of the world for different functions and capacities. Prefabricated housing was part of colonial settlements in Africa such as Freetown, where, in 1792, the Sierra Leone company ordered an ambitious range of prefabricated structures including dwellings, shops, a warehouse, hospitals, and a church (Kubler 1944). Mobile architecture was not only part of private but also of national colonial initiatives: in 1820, when some 5,000 British settlers were sent to South Africa as a relief measure for the economic depression and acute unemployment in England, the government subsidised the journey and provided the settlers with demountable wooden cottages (Herbert 1972). Mobile architecture, unsurprisingly, was also keenly adopted by the Zionist movement from the very start to facilitate its well-calculated colonial project and its objectifying relationship to the land which reshaped the Palestinian relationship to it with its claims and actions.

### Mobile architecture of colonial expansion

Mobile colonial architecture has been scripted to Zionism from its very early days. Theodor Herzl, known as the 'visionary' of the Jewish State, had already anticipated at the turn of the twentieth century the modern technologies that would facilitate its creation. For its establishment, he writes, 'we will use all the sociological and technical achievements not only of the time in which we live, but also of the future times' (1988 [1896]: 194). This modernist vision also included the use of mobile prefabricated buildings: 'I ordered five hundred barracks from France – a new kind that could be taken apart like a tent and put together in an hour', he writes in his utopian novel *The Old New Land* (1987 [1902]: 205) (*Altneuland* in German, *Tel Aviv* in Hebrew), imagining, in the spirit of settler colonialism, the mobile colonial architecture that could be manufactured *en mass* in one place and then easily transported and rapidly erected in another (see also Kozlovsky 2008).

### Zionist settler tents and prefabricated portable outpost camps

The rapid creation of new settlements and their related mobile architectural objects were indeed core to the Zionist settler movement. Yet before Herzl's vision came to life with the later use of flat-pack prefabricated architecture, it was the tent that became the practical and symbolic core objects of the Zionist territorial project. Tents were the initial dwelling units of the Zionist labour and settlement endeavours of the Kibbutz settlement movement in the 1920s. The first Zionist groups of young 'pioneers' (*halutzim*) such as the socialist Zionist Work Battalion (Gdud HaAvoda) erected tent camps in remote, desolate and often temporary locations while settling and cultivating lands purchased by Zionist organisations such as the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which also purchased surplus tents from the British Army as the basic dwellings for the settlers. Speed was not only a territorial and political effort to create new settlements but was also dictated legally, as according to Ottoman and British land codes, purchased land had to be quickly settled and cultivated or it would lapse back to the sovereign (Allweil 2018). Ein Harod kibbutz, one of Gdud HaAvoda's first settlements, was established in 1921 in the Jezreel Valley as a tent camp (Figure 7) that later changed location and transformed into a permanent settlement, similarly to other Kibbutz settlements, such as Tel Yosef (est. 1921) and Beit Alpha (est. 1922).

The settler tent was suitable for the basic principles of the Zionist Kibbutz movement of frugality, equality, and rejection of private property, which mixed Tolstoyan ideas about being close to nature with Marxist revolutionary enthusiasm. This form of settlement also had a significant cultural meaning. As reflected by Neuman (2011), the effort of labour and dwelling in tents, with their unmediated and embodied connection to the soil, have established intense relation which 'united' the settlers with the land; when 'the pioneer moistens the land [with sweat], thus making it "Jewish";' they also



**Figure 7.** Ein Harod settler tent camp, Jezreel valley, 1921. Photograph by Avraham Soskin, Ein Harod archive.

constituted ‘a boundary between Jewish land and Arab land’ (Ibid. 1). The tents, by their sheer mobility, have also stretched the boundary of the ‘Jewish land’ at the expense of the ‘Arab land’. Moving their tent camps frequently, to ‘develop’ new lands, while establishing multiple settlements that often changed location, the physical mobility of the tent meant that a vast territory could be occupied almost simultaneously by a small moving settler group which cultivated, transformed and inhabited lands in multiple areas while ‘owning them’ and ‘making them Jewish’. The irony of this mobility as mode of colonial settlement, as we will soon see, came at the expense of Indigenous peoples who were later perceived as mobile and therefore deemed inadequate owners of the land.

The Zionist settler camp, which created many kibbutz settlements from the beginning of the twentieth century, has continued to evolve while becoming increasingly territorial. The Wall and Tower (Homa Umigdal) prefabricated fortified settler outpost developed as a defensive mobility-based settlement during the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939 which combined boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, and armed militant actions aimed at British forces and Zionist targets.<sup>2</sup> The famous motto ‘a land without a people, for a people without a land’, a Zionist twist to the colonial notion of *Terra Nullius* which accompanied Zionism from the late nineteenth century and depicted Palestine as an empty unsettled land waiting for those destined to redeem it, was predictably discovered as a deceptive myth as Palestine was already inhabited primarily by Arab populations, who began to actively object the colonial Zionist project. The Wall and Tower outpost-camp combined military and civilian methods for the rapid construction of prefabricated fortified agricultural kibbutz settlements, a settlement model that has significantly changed the Zionist territorial map of Mandatory Palestine.

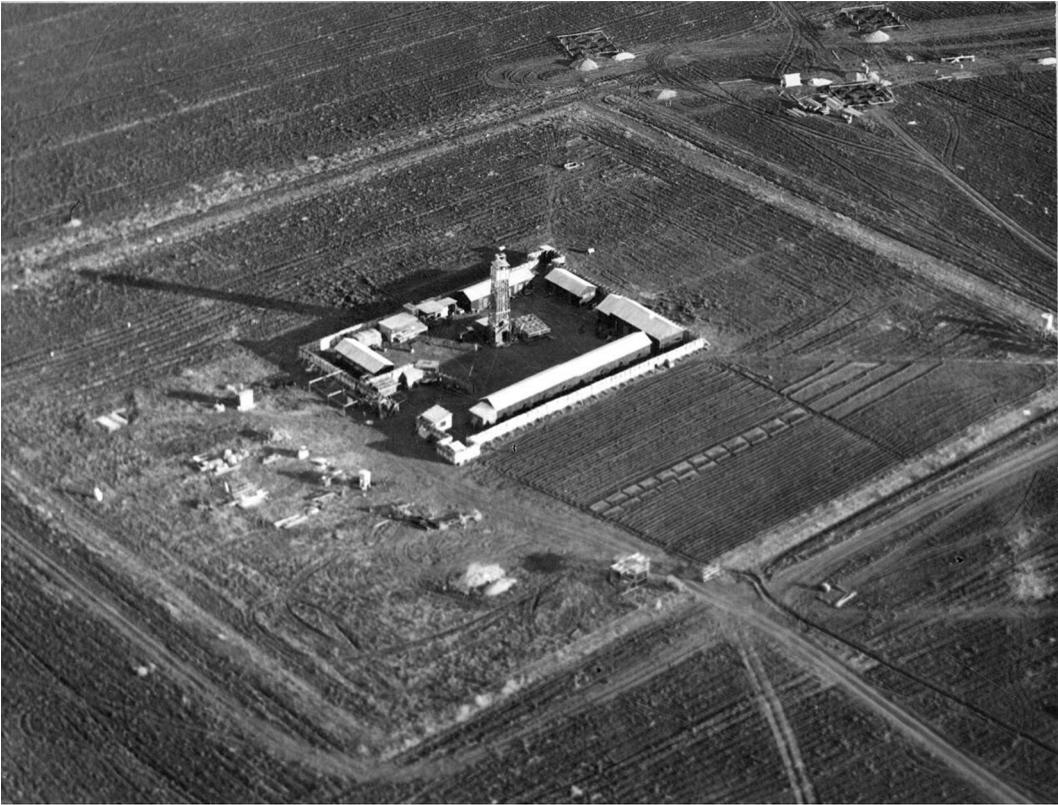
The first Wall and Tower was initiated by the members of Tel-Amal Kibbutz in 1936 in their attempts to seize control of land that had been purchased by the JNF in Bet-She’an valley but could not be settled due to the violent acts of the Arab uprising. In order to protect themselves, the settlers built a prefabricated portable fortified outpost that could be erected within six to eight hours, so they would be able to immediately defend themselves from expected attacks. The fortified outpost-



**Figure 8.** Volunteers on trucks carrying prefabricated structures on their way to establish the Wall and Tower outpost of Ein Gev Kibbutz, 1937. Photograph by Zoltan Kluger, the national photo collection of of Israel, the Government Press Office.

camps were composed of prefabricated parts: wooden moulds filled with gravel to create the walls with two shooting-standpoints in the corners, four huts which were often supplemented by a few tents, and a watching tower with a searchlight to overlook the surroundings and protect the 'conquering troop' from intruders (Figures 8 and 9). This enabled the settlers to cultivate the land and build a permanent settlement gradually, while being protected in their prefabricated fort. This architectural mobile invasive instrument, planned by a kibbutz member and the chief architect and strategic planner of the *Ha'gana* (defence) pre-state paramilitary force, was already a symbolic icon of Zionist settlement when it was continuously recreated and documented as a reoccurring event across the territory, with a Wall and Tower architectural model chosen for the Land of Israel Pavilion at the 1937 World Exposition in Paris, only one year after it was erected for the first time (Rotbard 2003). In this evolving spatial relation between the settler and the frontier, as Harney and Moten argue, 'the settler is portrayed as surrounded by "natives",' with the role of the aggressor inverted 'so that colonialism is made to look like self-defense' (2013:17).

Mobility, speed, and careful logistical planning were crucial in the design and construction of the prefab fortified Wall and Tower outpost camps which were referred to as settlement 'points', including trucks and infrastructure for their transportation and the additional manpower to quickly assemble them. The British mandatory authorities provided weapons for the settlement's erection and also funded road-paving as this infrastructure was essential to the creation, protection, and maintenance of these settlements, which were placed in a sequence to protect one another and to colonise a well-defined territorial unit. A few weeks before the British Partition Plan of the Palestine Royal Commission (the Peel Commission) was published in July 1937, Moshe Shertok (later Sharet), head of the Jewish Agency's political department stated: '[t]here is only one thing we can do in the current circumstances –



**Figure 9.** Bet Yosef kibbutz Wall and Tower outpost and its surrounding agricultural lands, 1937. Photographer unknown, the Zionist Archives, PHAL\1624342.

to change the map of the Land of Israel by establishing new [settlement] points [...]. Our role now is to grab and settle' (Raichman 2008: 263). Indeed, fifty-two Wall and Tower outposts were erected throughout the country between 1936 and 1939, significantly changing the map of Jewish settlements in Palestine. The Ha'gana Major General Yosef Avidar who managed the Wall and Tower campaign, compared it the appearance of the tank in WWI, similarly allowing 'for a rapid territorial break-through' (Avidar 1987: 147).

### ***The ma'abarot immigrant transit camps***

Temporary camps and settlement points based on the mobile architecture of tents and prefabricated structures have continued to evolve after Israel's establishment, providing temporary accommodation to the influx of around 685,000 Jewish immigrants who arrived to the country during the 'mass immigration' period (1948–51). While by 1948 only 6% of Mandate Palestine's lands, 1.5 of 26.3 million dunams, were 'Jewish owned', the borders of the new Israeli state enclosed 20.6 million dunams of which only about 13.5% (2.8 million dunams) were under formal state or Jewish ownership (Forman and Kedar 2004). While various forms of legal land seizure began almost immediately after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, immigration was perceived as necessary to secure Israel's territorial achievements which expanded way beyond the 1947 UN proposed Partition Plan of Palestine (Katz 2016, 2022). The first immigrant camps were formed in former British military camps, using the barracks and a substantial addition of tents. The overcrowding of these closed



**Figure 10.** Jewish immigrant children next to their tents with laundry hanging on the lines at the Bet Lid immigrant camp, Israel, 1949. Photograph by Zoltan Kluger, the national photo collection of of Israel, the Government Press Office.

camps and the financial pressure to feed the immigrants have prompted the creation of the open and smaller ma'abarot transit camps, where immigrants had to work to earn a living. While the first ma'abarot camps were created next to existing Jewish towns and settlements, around half of them were placed in frontier areas, according to the government's population dispersal policy.

Tents, wooden shacks, corrugated steel cabins, and canvas huts, mostly imported from courtiers around the world such as Canada, the United States, Sweden, Finland and even Japan, composed the prefabricated mobile architecture of these camps which were often unrelated to their surroundings (Figures 10 and 11). Swedish prefabricated huts suitable for cold areas, for example, were erected at the heart of the Negev desert (Katz 2015). Architectural mobility and temporariness were key to the ma'abarot transit immigrant camps, creating the perfect mechanism to bridge the gap between the rapid human mobility of the demographically needed Jewish immigration streaming into the country who had to be quickly absorbed and distributed to Israel's frontiers, and between the slower pace of the new state's long-term and well-calculated modernist planning and construction (Katz 2016, 2022). By 1952, more than 250,000 people, sixth of Israel's population, lived in more than 200 ma'abarot camps, with about half of which were constructed in remote frontier territories. While the camps were isolated from their immediate surroundings, they were heavily dependent on vehicles and infrastructure of mobility (roads, trucks, buses). These were essential in order to create, populate, and serve these detached spaces, with the mobile architectural objects, immigrants, and other necessities were transported to these camps which were erected wherever infrastructure existed (Katz 2015).

The ma'abarot, importantly, had a core role in the social engineering of the Israeli Jewish society along ethnoracial lines, with Mizrahi immigrants, Jews who came from Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa, composing the majority in these camps. This form of population mobility, in which a particular vulnerable group of immigrants was transported to and suspended in difficult conditions while being dependent on state-initiated labour and being prevented from



**Figure 11.** Ma'abara transit camp near Tiberias, 1951. Photograph by David Eldan, the national photo collection of of Israel, the Government Press Office.

moving into more central areas, began to create the spatially based segregation of the Mizrahi Jews from the predominantly Ashkenazi (European Jews) established Israeli society (Katz 2015, 2016, 2022). With the difficult conditions deteriorating in their temporary dwellings, exposed to the harsh weather and forced into physical labour, the state-created camps and its mobile architecture have enabled the newly established Israeli state to use the weak and racialised group of predominantly Mizrahi immigrants as reluctant pioneers to internally colonise its frontier territories. While these camps and their mobile architectural objects eventually disappeared from the land, they remained in the memories of these people as an imposed harsh lived experience, which influences Israel's political map until the present (Katz 2015, 2022).

### ***Israeli mobile architecture in the occupied Palestinian territories***

Rapid territorial and demographic changes have continued to prompt Israel's colonial settler society's use of mobile architecture. Not long after the 1967 war, Israeli settlements have begun to appear in the occupied territories, which then included the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, many of which initiated by enthusiastic Israeli civilian groups of settlers, rather than by the state, with Israel's concern about risking its fragile 'demographic balance' of Jewish majority constraining its territorial appetite. While avoiding a clear political approach, the government has approached the Foreign Minister's legal adviser, who stated that although civilian settlements in the occupied territories contravenes international law, they could potentially be established by military bodies being disguised as military camps, with a temporary character in their external appearance.<sup>3</sup>

Mobile prefabricated architecture was therefore again adopted by the Israeli colonial settler society, but this time not only for the rapid creation of settlements but also for their temporary appearance and legal cover. An array of mobile structures was therefore recruited, supplementing the regular use of tents and prefabricated structures by caravans and shipping containers converted for dwelling. After the sporadic creation of civilian settlements disguised as military outposts, the most prevalent state-initiated settling form in the occupied territories were the military-civilian *NAHAL* outpost camps and the Gush Emunim civilian settlements and outposts. The *NAHAL* (a Hebrew acronym for 'pioneer combatant youth'), initiated in the first year of statehood for linking between Israeli youth movements and the army, created military agricultural outpost camps called *He'ahzut* (Hebrew for 'holding on tightly'),<sup>4</sup> usually from tents and mobile prefabricated structures. After their settlers-soldiers completed three years of service, these military outposts often became permanent civilian settlements, more than ninety of which were created between 1950 and 1980 in Israeli frontier areas, including the occupied territories. Mobility was core to this form of settlement not only for the speed and immediacy of its creation but also because of political and strategic needs to often relocate them, sometimes as part of encompassing decolonial moves. Following the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1980, for example, the *NAHAL* Sufa kibbutz, along with some of its transportable structures, was relocated to the other side of the newly agreed Israeli-Egyptian border.

Mobile architecture was also a necessary instrument for Gush Emunim, with settlers rapidly occupying sites with no government permission and then forcing the state to approve their settlement retrospectively. The use of mobile architecture such as tents, prefabricated structures, caravans, and shipping containers, enabled them, and still does, to quickly create 'facts on the ground' and then negotiate the continuation of their existence or to relocate them, such as in the case of Elon Moreh discussed in the introduction. Political changes have continued to impact the mobile architecture used. Israel has created and legalised (against international law) over 250 settlements and outposts in the West Bank since 1967, while the dozens of outposts established



**Figure 12.** Mobile cranes lay the caravilla mobile homes at Nitzan Bet site, 2005. Photograph by Moshe Milner, the national photo collection of Israel, the Government Press Office.

since the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s without government approval are considered illegal. Settlers have continued to use a range of tactics of mobile architectural objects to create these outposts, to bypass Israeli laws and the military supervision when establishing and expanding them. This includes, for example, obtaining military authorisation to build a Sukkah, a temporary dwelling assembled for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, while creating it from a transportable metal frame which later transformed into the first semi-permanent house in a caravan settlement, cynically using a mobile symbolic Jewish religious architectural artefact for territorial purposes (Katz 2022).

These were different settlement practices than those imposed on the shocked population of Jewish immigrants in the years of early statehood as they were and still are initiated and conducted by the ambitious territorial quest of religious settlers motivated by a messianic call to settle the biblical 'entire land of Israel.' While initially these practices were not actively supported by the state, which nevertheless used its army to protect the settlers, they were later reinforced by Israel through financial, legal, and material actions, such as the creation of infrastructures to serve these settlements and connect between them and Israel proper, while separating and blocking the movement between Palestinian spaces (Kotef 2015). Unlike imperialism which is driven from the centre, colonialism, as Young (2001) stresses, is a practice composed of a set of activities on the periphery. Indeed, such methods could be linked to other models of settler colonialism, in which the preliminary actions of settlers in frontier areas were only later reinforced by the state's supporting infrastructure and military power (Harris 2004).

Israel has used, and is still using, mobile architecture for its various demographic and territorial needs as a settler state, including the Tromasbest caravans mentioned in the introduction, which were employed until the 1990s for national projects. These structures were part of the 1980s internal colonialism of Judaizing the Galilee through the Mitzpim (Hebrew for lookouts) project of hilltop community settlement, in which spatial mobility was not required but rather adopted for its 'pioneering' flare. These portable dwellings were also part of the temporary caravan sites created to absorb the mass immigration of Jews coming from Ethiopia and the former USSR in the early 1990s, who increased the Israeli population by more than ten percent and were sent to peripheral areas. In 2005, another model of improved mobile caravans called 'caravilla' (Figure 12) was used by the state to temporarily house the Israeli settlers evicted from the Gaza Strip, this time for the purpose of settler decolonisation, showing the potentiality of this settlement mechanism to work in a reverse way, which could be seen as a form of mobile architectural poetic justice.

### **Mobile architectural objects of expulsions and resistance**

The creation and expansion of the Zionist and then Israeli settler colonial project and society initiated the simultaneous process of the expulsion and expropriation of the native populations in Palestine from their lands and settlements, with mobile architecture making an inseparable part of the mechanisms used to contain and suspend the displaced. Mobile architectural objects, in later stages, have also become one of the instruments supporting the resistance and protest of the racialised natives against their ongoing dispossession, with their speedy creation allowing to quickly form spaces otherwise targeted by the control mechanisms of the colonisers.

### ***The Palestinian refugee camps***

During and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, around one-third of the Palestinian refugees found refuge in makeshift tent camps (Figure 13) beyond the armistice lines in neighbouring countries and territories, primarily Jordan (including the West Bank), the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria (Hazboun 1994). The camps, erected and managed by several aid organisations, were joined by what in 1949 became the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA distributed tents as the basic mobile shelter unit to each nuclear family. The mobility of the tents was not only core to the ability to rapidly provide emergency shelter



**Figure 13.** Tents and refugees at the Jelazone Palestinian refugee camp, the West Bank, 1950. Unknown photographer, ICRC audiovisual archives.

for the refugees but also for the refugees' ability to move around and organise their basic spaces of refuge in the best possible way, often according to family ties and social networks (Peteet 2005). When UNRWA replaced the tents in the camps with more permanent shelters in the early 1960s, many refugees rejected the change, worrying that this would jeopardise repatriation (Hazboun 1994). The new shelters in the camps were named *malja* ('shelters' rather than 'houses'), to emphasise their temporary character that would not risk the refugees' right to return, consistently prevented by Israel.

In their early years, the Palestinian refugee camps and the Israeli immigrant camps have constituted similar landscapes of mobile architecture formed by a population of roughly the same size; following Israel's establishment in 1948 around 700,000 Palestinians became refugees while around 685,000 Jewish immigrants entered Israel in the years of mass immigration (Katz 2016). Although the tent was the mobile object that facilitated and sheltered these corresponding population mobilities, these were of an inherently different if not contrasting nature: while the immigrants in the Israeli camps were citizens of their new state and their transit camps were later replaced by permanent settlements, the Palestinians in the camps were and still are refugees, with the camps still being the core manifestation of their continuous situation as people without a state.

Tents and other forms of mobile architecture have continued to be part of the Palestinian ongoing displacement, sheltering the second wave of Palestinian refugees displaced by the 1967 war from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Another set of camps was formed by UNRWA, again creating landscapes of endless grids of tents and corrugated steel shelters. In the current urbanised Palestinian camps the materiality of exposed concrete walls has become one of the main political signifiers of the prolonged in-between situation of the Palestinian displacement (Abourahme 2015). Mobile shelters, however, were and still are being erected for Palestinians whom their homes have

been destroyed by Israel's reoccurring violent military attacks (Katz 2022), as discussed in the case of Ein al-Hilweh in the introduction, with tents and caravans reappearing in the exposed Palestinian camps and cities where the population is displaced over and over again.

### ***Israel's internally displaced native populations***

The internally displaced people (IDPs) of native Palestinian populations, including the Negev Bedouin, also found shelter in mobile architecture, which was recruited to replace the lands and homes from which they were ruptured (Cohen 2002). Subject to military rule until the end of 1966, as were the rest of the Palestinians who remained in their settlements which formed part of what became Israel, most of the internally displaced Palestinians of around 25,000 lived in tents and other temporary structures at the outskirts of Arab villages, mostly in the Galilee, for more than a decade. Legally defined as 'present absentees,' the internally displaced Palestinians' homes, villages and lands were confiscated by Israel to expand the Jewish settlement and create a Jewish territorial continuity, with their original dwellers remaining internally displaced.

In the Negev (Naqab in Arabic) desert, after most of the 70,000 Negev Bedouin fled or were expelled during the 1948 war beyond the state's boundaries, the 13,000 who remained were concentrated under military rule in a closed zone known as the *siyag* (or *siyaj* in Arabic, meaning 'fence' in both languages). Before Israel's establishment, the Bedouin had already formed a semi-sedentary agricultural society, increasingly using permanent dwellings, which they were forced to leave behind. In the heavily supervised zone of the *siyag* the Bedouin were allowed to live only in mobile traditional tents or in other mobile and temporary structures, with Israel later acting to further concentrate them in purpose-built townships. While before statehood Zionist institutions purchased lands from Bedouin and therefore acknowledged their ownership rights, this has completely changed after Israel's establishment, when most Bedouin land was confiscated and declared as state land. Today, around 90,000 of the Negev Bedouin, who live on their ancestral land or on the land to which they were relocated by the state decades ago, are still fighting for their land rights and live in makeshift settlements, which are



**Figure 14.** Corrugated steel house, water tank and solar panels of a Bedouin family cloister in Rakhma unrecognised village in the Negev, 2014. Photograph by the author.

unrecognised by the state. Forced to live with no infrastructures and services (Figure 14), the Bedouin are also being criminalised for necessary building activities which often end up with violent evictions and demolitions which inflict on them a life of continued displacement and imposed mobility (Katz 2015, 2022; Kedar, Amara, and Yiftachel 2018).

Recently, the state has adopted a policy of further expulsion for planned national 'economic development projects,' of which mobile architecture again makes a core part. In October 2019, Israel's Southern District Planning and Building Committee discussed two (currently suspended) plans entitled 'Temporary Residential and Public Building Solutions for the Bedouin Population in the Negev' (Adalah 2019), which specify the use of portable structures to be erected in new 'refugee displacement camps' at the outskirts of the existing recognised Bedouin townships to accommodate around 36,000 Bedouin who are planned to be displaced from their unrecognised settlements.

### **Mobile architecture of decolonisation and resistance**

Mobile architecture, however, was also recruited by native Palestinian populations to resist and protest against their ongoing dispossession. *Sumud* (steadfastness), is one of the Palestinian (including Bedouin) main strategies adopted in decades of resistance to the Israeli rule and displacing practices (Nasasra 2020). As it is legally more complicated for the Israeli authorities to demolish built structures than ones under construction, light and therefore more mobile building materials are being used to rapidly construct homes in the unrecognised settlements as a way to resist Israel's building restrictions, a method which also reduces the economic investment in these structures in the case of demolition (Katz 2015). Bedouin and Palestinians building without permits in Israel and the West Bank are also using light and mobile architecture such as tents to cover and camouflage construction processes of more permanent structures, hiding the more substantial building process from Israeli surveillance (Butmeh 2021).

Mobile architecture has also been part of Palestinian protest against the Israeli colonial occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 2013, mobile tents were used to form a Palestinian protest camp accommodating around 200 Palestinian and foreign activists resisting Israel's settlement policy. This organised encampment, named Bab al-Shams, Gate of the Sun in Arabic after the epic novel by Elias Khoury, was composed of more than twenty large steel-framed tents erected on private Palestinian land in the E-1 zone, located between Jerusalem and the Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim (Figure 15). This was part of a targeted Palestinian effort to stop Israeli plans to build more than 3,500 housing units in E-1, a project destined to disconnect the Palestinian northern and southern parts of the West Bank and separate them from East Jerusalem while creating an Israeli territorial continuity which could eliminate any hope for a continuous Palestinian state (Katz 2022). This action of spatial protest, dispatched by Israel after only two days, was described as a 'countersettlement' (Shehadeh 2013) for aptly mirroring the Israeli material tactic of using temporary architecture for settlement purposes.

Mobile steel-framed tents were also used in the Gaza Strip for the protest camps erected in 2018 along the Israeli-Gazan fortified border fence, when thousands of Palestinians have demonstrated against their ongoing blockade by Israel in a campaign called The Great March of Return. Palestinian refugees make the vast majority of the Gaza Strip's population; 200,000 of the Nakba Palestinians refugees fled to the Strip, overnight tripling the local Palestinian population with more than fifty percent of them hosted in mobile tents and barracks (Hazboun 1994). This time, the mobile architecture of tents was used by Palestinians for actions of resistance to their violent enclosure and ongoing displacement.



**Figure 15.** The Palestinian protest tent camp 'Bab al-shams,' Gate of the Sun, being constructed in the E-11 zone, West Bank, 2013. Photograph by Oren Ziv, Activestills.

### Concluding discussion: mobile colonial architecture for every purpose

Mobile architectural objects were and still are an inseparable part of settler colonialism. In Israel-Palestine, these objects, including tents, prefabricated structures, and other portable architecture such as caravans and shipping containers, have been used to radically transform territorial and demographic relations of the settler and native populations since the early twentieth century. These mobile structures were used for the settlement and territorial *expansion* of the Zionist and later Israeli settlers. At the same time, similar structures were used to accommodate native Palestinian populations after their *expulsion* and expropriation. Mobile structures were also adopted for acts of resistance to these ongoing realities of displacement and dispossession.

From the Zionist settler tent camps and Wall and Tower fortified outpost settlement points, through the Jewish immigrant and ma'abarot transit camps of early statehood, the various settler camps in the occupied territories, and the spaces of the displaced natives, whether these are the Palestinian refugee camps or the temporary spaces of the Negev Bedouin and other Palestinian IDPs in Israel including their spaces of resistance, mobile architecture has facilitated the abrupt various territorial changes of settler colonialism in Israel-Palestine. With these examples of the portable structures and spaces, we can see how the mobile architecture of settler colonialism is used for both the emplacement of Jewish settlers and the displacement of the native Palestinian populations, while also being used by them to oppose and protest against these continuous colonial actions. While some of those using mobile architecture are strong populations of wilful settlers who follow a national ideology which might be mixed with a messianic call, others are racialized populations, including Mizrahi Jewish immigrants and Palestinian refugees and IDPs, who were moulded *en masse* in their spaces of displacement and emplacement according to the position imposed on them by the civilian-military apparatuses of the Israeli ethnocratic, if not racial, settler society.

The architectural devices of settler expansion and native expulsion and resistance are not only similar to one another but in some cases identical, as seen in the case of the caravans of Elon Moreh and Ein al-Hilweh. This is not coincidental but is embedded in their very characteristics related to modernity's forms of production and distribution that have made mobile architecture such an efficient tool to facilitate settler colonialism, attributes that were already part of the initial design of the Manning Portable Colonial Cottage and other similar structures. These are structures whose mobility enables them to reach and be distributed in distant locations either aimed to be settled or aimed to contain and suspend the displaced, moving around according to territorial, legal, or political needs. Their transportability means that they are also inherently linked to infrastructures and vehicles of mobility, on which they could easily travel to their desired location. In addition, these mobile structures are composed of prefabricated components which are built and created in one place and then transported to another, with their design and mode of manufacturing and assembly are all about mass production and logistics as compact and light structures that could be easily packed, carried and assembled by unexperienced people on unprepared sites. This prefabricated mobile colonial architecture functions, therefore, as a 'weapon of mass construction' (Carter 2005: 47), with its industrialised repetition forming a territorial instrument that, in Virillio's words, 'deploys its forces by multiplying them' (Virillio 2006: 90). The manufactured mobility of these light structures also often means that they are temporary and transient, created to take over a space in great speed only to later be replaced in more permanent settler colonial architecture.

Mobile colonial architecture, importantly, was not only produced by a particular form of politics and movement but also itself produced it. As a paraphrase on Mark Salter's reflection on the structures of mobilities, in which 'mobile Subjects are created by and create the structure of mobility in which they circulate' (2013, 7), we can say that mobile *Objects* are not only created by the structure of colonial settler mobility but also themselves create these structures in which they travel, generating new territorial forms of settlement, unsettlement, and resettlement. Latour, when discussing 'object-oriented democracy', observes that in political science, while subjects – the who – are being continuously discussed, it becomes mute when the objects – the what – should be included in the discussion, that is, 'the issues themselves, the matters that matter, the *res* that creates a public around it' (Latour 2005). In Israel-Palestine's ongoing settler colonialism, the 'who' of these actions is extensively examined – the *public* of the expanding settlers and the expropriated unsettled. However, the 'what' or the *res* of these colonial actions, that is, the particular thing, object, or matter which often works to facilitate both possession and dispossession, is much less discussed. The mobile colonial architectural object, the industrialised product of modernity which facilitates territorial 'facts on the ground' or accommodates the resulted displacement, as we have seen, has a central role in processes of settlement and unsettlement. Yet importantly, unlike the colonising and colonised subject, this architectural instrument is indifferent to the purposes, mechanisms, places and people that it accommodates. This material indifference is highlighted by the identical Tromasbest mobile prefabricated asbestos structures of Elon Moreh and Ain al-Hilweh which opened this article, used in the same period to continue to colonise Palestinian land and to accommodate Palestinian displacement from the land colonised decades earlier. These particular mobile architectural objects have usually left the factory with the attached sign 'Tromasbest: a mobile structure for every purpose'. Indeed, these and other mobile colonial architectural objects were used for both territorial takeovers and resulted dispossessions, complementary purposes for which almost every rapidly erected portable architecture would do.

## Notes

1. In Hebrew, *trom* means 'before' or 'pre' while *asbest* is asbestos, indicating it is a prefabricated asbestos structure.
2. Within three years (1933–1935), with the rise of Nazi Germany, the Jewish population in Palestine had almost doubled from 175,000 to 370,000 people, nearly reaching thirty percent of the entire population due to the flow of immigrants from Europe, mainly from Germany. This expedited the breaking of the nationalist uprising of

Palestinian Arabs against British colonial rule and mass Jewish immigration and land purchase. The uprising started as strikes and other forms of political protest directed by the elitist Higher Arab Committee, but later it became a violent resistance led by peasant-movements which aimed at British forces and Zionist targets and was suppressed by the British Army and the Palestine Police Force (Norris 2008).

3. The legal adviser, Theodor Meron, became a leading international legal figure, and was later the president of the United Nation's International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (Katz 2022).
4. A word similar to *Ma'ahaz* – the civilian settler outpost camps created in the West Bank.

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