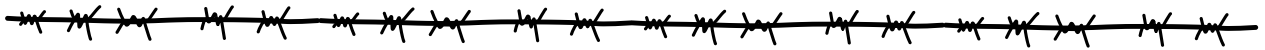


The Architecture of Coercion, Subjugation, and Domination:

Israel's Intensified Movement Restrictions in the West Bank

Introduction

The right to the freedom of movement is a fundamental right, internationally recognized as such and enshrined in multiple international human rights instruments. In the Palestinian context, however, this right is not merely violated as part of a restrictive system composed of physical restrictions or direct forms of closure. It is also systematically re-engineered as a mechanism of control, implemented through legal, military, and technological infrastructures designed to restructure the relationship between Palestinians and their spatial, bodily, and political realities on the one hand, and to collectively punish them on the other.



Physical Infrastructure of Control and Recent Escalations in Numbers

The Israeli regime of movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians cannot be understood outside the broader framework that has evolved since the outset of Israel's occupation in 1967. This regime now constitutes a core pillar of Israel's "matrix of control" over the Palestinian people, fragmenting their lands in the process.

However, since 7 October 2023, the West Bank has witnessed a marked escalation in the use of movement restriction measures. Israeli authorities imposed additional movement restrictions affecting 3.3 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. By September 2024, there are at least 793 movement obstacles, including: 89 permanent checkpoints, 149 partial checkpoints, 196 closed road gates, 158 earth mounds, 104 concrete roadblocks, 196 road gates, 122 of which are closed, and 316 obstacles that block Palestinian access to eight major roads. According to the Palestinian Authority, the total number of obstacles has reached approximately 900 checkpoints, while the United Nations has documented over 800, a significant increase compared to 645 checkpoints recorded in 2023. Between October 2023 and March 2024 alone: 86 new checkpoints were installed, movement restrictions were tightened at nearly 100 existing checkpoints, and more than 1,400 access denial incidents were recorded.

Systems of Restriction: Legal and Bureaucratic Frameworks

A central tool of this restrictive regime is the permit system, which governs access to and from the Gaza Strip, movement within the West Bank, entry into East Jerusalem, and even access to Israel for medical treatment or employment. Far from being a mere 'security' measure, as officially claimed, the system functions as a bureaucratic apparatus of daily humiliation, political fragmentation, and coercive subjugation. This system represents 'mobility as a mechanism of governmentality and bureaucracy as a tool of degradation,' where permits are granted or denied arbitrarily, often without justification, undermining Palestinians' ability to plan their daily lives and reducing movement to a survival request rather than a recognized right.





Movement Restrictions as Tools of Subjugation and Control

Daily exposure to unpredictable checkpoints that prohibit their access to their schools, work, hospitals, or places of worship, the arbitrary violence at the checkpoints, beatings, denials, and the constant threat of detention or being denied access to essential services has fostered a pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty, humiliation, and fear. This system produces a 'condition of existential constraint,' whereby individuals are subjected to bureaucratic violations that disintegrate political identity and reduce citizens to mere subjects of surveillance and control.

Legal and Spatial Separation

In the fragmented and divided space of the oPt, a fundamental component of Israel's occupation and control is legal and spatial separation. Israeli settlers are governed by Israeli civil law and enjoy full civil rights, while Palestinians are subjected to military rule under which civil and human rights are rarely protected. In military courts, the conviction rate for Palestinians accused of violence stands at 99.74%, while complaints against Israeli soldiers rarely result in charges, creating a system in which violence is institutionally sanctioned.

Surveillance and Monitoring



Israeli checkpoints in the oPt function not only as tools of physical control but also as instruments of daily humiliation. By subjecting Palestinians to arbitrary closures, prolonged waits, invasive searches, and degrading treatment, these checkpoints systematically violate personal and collective dignity and reinforce a regime of domination. Humiliation here is not a side effect; it is rather the point, and it is embedded in the structure and intent of the checkpoint system itself. Checkpoints additionally entail extremely invasive and advanced technologies. A facial recognition system known as the 'Red Wolf' is being used in Hebron in the occupied West Bank, where Palestinians' faces are scanned and added to extensive surveillance databases without their consent.

Crafting a Coercive Environment & Collective Punishment

The deliberate unpredictability of passage, the arbitrary long wait times, and the risk of arbitrary denial are not mere inconveniences; they are calculated methods of a carefully crafted coercive environment that seeks to induce, through the accumulated pressure from movement restrictions, a Palestinian 'choice' to relocate, in search of safety, dignity, and survival. Rather than targeting individuals suspected of carrying out alleged operations, Israel uses the checkpoint regime to impose sweeping restrictions on entire communities, limiting movement for tens of thousands of people based on their geographic location, identity, or proximity to settlements or military infrastructure inside the oPt, thereby punishing the entire population for the alleged operation, constituting a prohibited practice of collective punishment.

International Law

Israel, as the occupying power in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is bound by international humanitarian law, human rights law, and customary international law to protect the rights of the Palestinian civilian population. Key instruments such as the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Regulations, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) impose obligations to uphold fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, family life, religion, and non-discrimination. However, Israel's policies, including the permit regime and excessive movement restrictions, violate these obligations. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its 2004 Advisory Opinion declared the Annexation Wall illegal, finding that it severely restricts Palestinian access to work, education, healthcare, and religious sites while contributing to unlawful annexation. The deliberate creation of a coercive environment through closures, checkpoints, the permit system, and the Wall has led to forced displacement and transfer of Palestinians, prohibited under international law.