

# A Tapestry of Edgelands: Defining Carceral Edgeland(s) in Masafer Yatta (*Firing Zone 918*)

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## Abstract

The carceral edgeland occupies a unique position. At times, it is acknowledged; at others, it remains unseen by those outside its boundaries. In cases where the edgeland is architectural, such as a prison or a detention center, it can prompt viewers to consider the power dynamics exercised within. This article, however, is concerned with the possibilities for the edgeland to be *moveable* and *embodied*. Focusing on the transformation of the area of Masafer Yatta in the occupied West Bank into a military training zone, the article shifts the discourse from the connection between the edgeland and the symbolic power of carceral architecture to suggest alternative carceral edgelands: the *occupying* edgeland, wherein the moveable and embodied converge to form a tapestry of edgelands. The Israeli military presence varies in intensity, yet the result is the realization of Achille Mbembe's 'infrastructural warfare' (2003) that manifests through the moveable edgeland, and second, the embodied edgeland that is enacted by the military personnel who symbolize the state. In Masafer Yatta, the army's long-term presence has had an impact on the communities that evokes Lauren Berlant's 'political depression' (2011). Building on Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' recognition of multitudinous edgelands (2012), this article suggests that there can be multiple carceral edgelands at one site, all of which facilitate exclusion and political depression through enclosure, whether through fences, walls, or moveable checkpoints.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the 'edgelands' have taken various forms, including a Dutch Asylum Seekers' Residence Centre (ASRC) (Bernardt et al., 2017), prisons and military bases (Moran & Turner, 2021), the natural borders that occur on landscapes and between the rural and the urban (Beck, 2021; Farley & Roberts, 2012; Gurrey, 2017), and the roads and walls that carve political boundaries (Bleibleh, 2015; Pullan, 2013). Adding to these interpretations, the

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occupation of Palestine-Israel raises the possibility of other edgelands, whether in the form of the military in training zones who present an *embodied edgeland*, the checkpoints that shift at short notice and present a *moveable edgeland*, or the Separation Wall and its static checkpoints, which track and control Palestinian movement on a daily basis and are a reminder of the larger *occupying edgeland* that threads the landscape like cement veins. In this sense, the fluidity and violence of the carceral edgeland follow Achille Mbembe's definition of infrastructural warfare in Palestine, where the destruction of physical surroundings 'disables' the local population (2003, p. 29). From the vandalism of olive trees and water tanks to the demolition of cities and electricity transformers, Mbembe prompts us to interpret lines in new ways that can be applied to the edgeland, too. By moving beyond borders as physical entities, the edgeland(s) can facilitate violence that emerges both along the y-axis, that is "not located solely at the surface of the earth" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 29), as much as through an x-axis via localized destruction, such as harming trees and the sabotage of water tanks.

Mbembe's y-axis is a significant tool through which to explore alternative edgelands, and his starting point of looking up (to the sky) and down (on and below the ground) reveals a network of 'conflict zones' within conflict zones, while the lines that delineate the "symbolics of the top (who is on top)" that are invisible to the naked eye, are as definitive as the lines drawn on the earth by walls, borderlines, and checkpoints (2003, p. 29). If the conflict zones and edgelands on the ground are more identifiable when compared to the invisible lines in the sky and underground, then a deeper reading reveals the less easily perceptible (yet no less influential) edgelands that regulate the everyday and transform the land and communities into carceral sites.

Reflecting on this, this article is concerned with the question of whether the edgeland contains a tapestry of edgelands that contrasts with the idea of a single, blanket edgeland? And, within this tapestry, how far is it shaped by the actors and mechanisms that make the carceral edgeland possible? To address these questions, the article opens by locating the idea of the edgeland in the occupied West Bank and unravels the role of language and history in creating the carceral edgeland in Palestine-Israel. Next, the article surveys the discourse on edgelands and the concepts that drive its evolution and create the possibility for new interpretations of the edgeland in zones of occupation and conflict. Having established the scope of the corpus, the article contributes three new edgelands—the embodied, the occupying, and the moveable—and unpacks the intricacies of how they manifest and their connection to the different forms of power, control, and violence that unfold around Masafer Yatta. Building on the literature on checkpoints and borders in the wider region (Hammami, 2019; Weizman, 2017 [2007]; Makdisi, 2010; Tawil-Souri, 2010; Kirstein Kesht, 2006; Hammami, 2001), the article suggests that the *embodied* and *moveable* edgelands facilitate the fluidity of violence in the zone, as the residents negotiate restrictions on movement, the military presence that disrupts everyday encounters, and ultimately, the long-term impact of the threat of dispossession.

## BACKGROUND: 'THOSE INVENTED LINES'

'B: a book that doesn't mention my language or my country, and has maps of every place except for my birthplace, as if I were an illegitimate child on Mother Earth.

Borders are those invented lines drawn with ash on maps and sewn into the ground by bullets.'  
(Palestine A-Z', Abu Toha, 2022)

In his 2022 poetry anthology, *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear*, the Palestinian poet, Mosab Abu Toha, takes the reader on a journey through a life under siege in Gaza. The verses of the 50 poems are visceral, soft, and unsettling, and meet an unspoken objective to take the reader into a zone of uncertainty and unrest. In the poem, 'Palestine A-Z', Abu Toha expresses a concern that encompasses not only the existence of his country, Palestine,

but also his identity and language. The mechanism that facilitates his sense of erasure is structural, and Abu Toha draws our attention to a component within the system: lines, and by extension, their configurations of borders, boundaries, and edgelands. The history of 'those invented lines' is bound with the history of Palestine-Israel, and in particular, the settler-colonial turn that brought a switch from the colonialism of the British Mandate (1920–1948) to the settler-colonialism of the Israeli state in 1948.<sup>1</sup> As the latter emerged and new towns rose, older Palestinian towns and villages were depopulated and the residents exiled to the West Bank and Gaza, surrounding countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and beyond to South and North America and Europe. Known as the Nakba ('Catastrophe'), the forced diaspora has no end point and continues to bear an impact on subsequent generations, whether through their continued exile, or the ongoing house demolitions, restrictions on movement, and land seizures.

The depopulation of approximately 418 villages (Fields, 2017; Khalidi, 1992) created a fourth edgeland that layers over the ruins of the sites. While the once lively communities are no more, their narratives (Davis, 2011) and history (Masalha, 2008, 2012) are not forgotten and in recent years, memory work at the sites by subsequent generations of Palestinian scholars, activists, and artists has foregrounded remembrance of the villages and their inhabitants (Gandolfo, 2018; Saloul, 2008). While the scope of this paper does not extend to unpack the notion of a *memory edgeland*, the concept of one is as poignant as the *embodied* and *moveable* edgelands that are discussed, as it provides an imperceptible line on the landscape that, when entered, evokes the loss and violence that occurred there. For the visitor who is aware of the site's history, this knowledge prompts a pause, particularly at locations where the Palestinian account is omitted from the information points.

Since 1948, how the region's history, and particularly its geography (including the borders and boundaries), is discussed in academic and non-academic circles is significant. In part, this is due to the important point that certain events, communities, and sites are *not* spoken about, and their omission contributes to an *unspoken* history of the geopolitics of Palestine-Israel. For Rallie Murray, the process of erasure is rooted in early state bureaucracy, when Zionist leaders promoted the view that Israel would be 'a land without people for a people without a land'. While the origin of the phrase is debated,<sup>2</sup> the statement signaled the beginning of the erasure of Palestine (Murray, 2016) and located the origins of the carceral edgeland in the bureaucratic system, one that was equal parts shaped by "ideology, culture, history, religion, and political and social ideas" (Fleishman & Salomon, 2008). That these are the same elements that inform the perception and longevity of border lines is not unexpected, since the manifestation of geopolitics on the ground is closely tied to national narratives and aspirations.

In the intervening years, Israel's borders and boundaries have expanded and multiplied. By 2020, the number of roadblocks and checkpoints around the West Bank had reached 593, the objective being to protect the 700,000 Israeli settlers residing in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank (OHCHR, 2021; UN OCHA, 2021). Although the figure of 593 marks a fall compared to 705 in 2018 (UN OCHA, 2021), the ability to increase and decrease the obstacles introduces uncertainty regarding future mobility and stability. Moreover, the variation in the location and number of obstacles underscores where the power lies in terms of the lines' location, who exercises power at the lines, and how (and if) they can be crossed. Over time, the lines have grown to include not only a variety of types, but also ones with different functions, prompting the question of whether a solid definition of 'the border' or 'the boundary' is helpful or limiting.

An answer perhaps can be found in Henk van Houtem and Anke Strüver's invitation to revisit the concept of borders and how it is defined. No longer a collection of "self-evident, inevitable, invariable or ineradicable lines", they suggest that borders should be regarded as "'unearthed', in the sense of not being earth-bounded any more" (2002, p. 141). More than twenty years on, their invitation is still relevant, especially when studying the borders, borderlands, and we might add, the edgelands in Palestine-Israel, where the lines cross over- and under-ground, at sea and through the airspace overhead. At times, the lines are hypervisible, insofar as they are staffed by Israeli military personnel and operate under the Israeli government. At others, they are less visible, borders and boundaries that are hidden from view as they carve alongside or under the roads and state boundaries in the form of tunnels or passageways. The presence of Palestinian tunnels is known, to the point that they have been the

subject of art pieces, notably Mohamed Abusal's multi-media installation, *A Metro in Gaza* (2012), which reimagines an underground transport system modelled on the Parisienne metro, flagged by glowing red 'M's planted around Gaza. A wry nod to the tunnels, Abusal's piece recognizes that "the concept of the project is based on the observation that Gazans have a little experience in digging tunnels... but also, that they need dreams, so here is another dream" (Abusal, 2012).

Both Abusal's installation and the Israeli barriers around the Occupied Palestinian Territories signify "a thing or idea itself" (Van Houtem & Strüver, 2002). More than a line that delineates between one area and the next, the lines signal "the site at which, something becomes something else [...] at which 'we' end and 'they' begin" (Fleishman & Salomon, 2008). The symbolic line between 'we' and 'they' emphasizes the intricacy of border maintenance. To the naked eye, it takes place physically: following a personnel rota with shifts that end and start at set times, the sites are maintained, and the latest surveillance technology is routinely introduced. On an individual level, the lines are sustained by the aforementioned "ideological, cultural, historical, religious, symbolic, political and social ideas" (Fleishman & Salomon, 2008, p. 1022). In Palestine-Israel, this is facilitated by Israeli memory work that includes how regional history is celebrated, commemorated, and shared through state narratives (Khoury, 2016), history textbooks (Yogev, 2010), and postage stamps (Limor & Mekelberg, 2017).

The history of Palestine-Israel, and how it is conveyed, has been cautiously curated and while this practice is not unique to Israel (we can consider the ways that colonialism and slavery have been addressed in Britain, too), it nonetheless highlights the boundaries that exist in how we understand and discuss geopolitical lines. In this respect, power and control are connected, since "[c]ontrolling access to the past controls populations in the present, and determining who writes history can affect thought and behavior" (Ramirez, 2022). Access to the past is a tense, yet important, consideration when discussing land and history—particularly when it comes to the question of who is featured and who is omitted. As we re-interrogate historical accounts and their erasures, we are also paying attention to the voices that have been marginalized, since the voices are often those of members of historically marginalized communities. In Palestine-Israel, the omission of not only the Palestinians but also their land and history, shapes how the edgelands evolve, as well as how violence is used and experienced in the edgelands.

## MASAFER YATTA (OR, FIRING ZONE 918)

The area of Masafer Yatta sits in the southern West Bank, near the city of Al-Khalil. A cluster of twelve small villages<sup>3</sup> spread over 32 square kilometers, it has a combined farming population of 6,200 residents. Designated as a restricted military zone by Israel in 1972 (B'Tselem, 2022 [2013]; Butmeh, 2022; ACRI, 2013) it shortly after became known by a second name, 'Firing Zone 918'.<sup>4</sup> In the years since 1972, the Palestinian residents have experienced forcible expulsion, demolition, restrictions on movement, and threats of dispossession, including an eviction order issued by the Israeli High Court of Justice in May 2022 for 1,200 residents (ACRI, 2013; Butmeh, 2022; Gandolfo, 2016; UN OCHA, 2017). For many advocacy and human rights organizations, the firing zone has provided a pretext for expelling Palestinian residents, even though certain areas have not been used for military training for several years (B'Tselem, 2021). The seizure of the land began in the early 1980s, led by the former Israeli Prime Minister (and then Minister of Defense), Ariel Sharon. Introduced in the West Bank to counter the "spreading of Arab villagers", the firing zones were used to "keep these areas, which are so vital, in our hands" (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Pappé, 2021).

Four decades on, the intention remains, albeit the "spreading of Arab villagers" recently has been rephrased as 'a crop of "weeds"' (specifically, "couch grass") that can be "thinned out" through military exercises (Hass, 2019). As the language shifts, nature (here, flora) obscures and dehumanizes the individuals who populate the villages, and the erasure of their presence enacts a symbolic invisibilization. While this article is primarily concerned with the edgelands, the language that frames the military activities in Masafer Yatta is notable. In their study of the

narratives of Syrian victims of state violence in the transitional justice process, Brigitte Herremans and Tine Destrooper connect the processes of erasure and invisibilization to practices of power and marginalization (2021), noting that “[o]missions are not casual occurrences; in many cases they reflect existing power dynamics” (p. 580). The discursive omission of the Palestinian residents renders not only the population invisible, but also the violence that unfolds in a zone that is semi-concealed from public scrutiny. In this sense, it is vital to observe that the edgeland is a complex entity: not only is it multilayered, but it is informed by larger structures beyond the zone in which it exists, including history, language, perceptions, and state policies— aspects that are not limited to Masafer Yatta, but can be found in other zones of conflict and instability, too.

## DEFINING THE EDGELAND(S)

Over the years, borders have benefited from sociological attention that has encompassed the geopolitical (Van Houtem & Strüver, 2002), border tourism (Sofield, 2006), the ways that borders facilitate Othering (Paasi, 2020; Van Houtem & Van Naerssen, 2002), and the experience of interactions at the border (Bosworth, et al., 2018; Shalit, 1987). In contrast, the edgelands have at best been “largely ignored or misrepresented” (Farley & Roberts, 2012, p. 8), or at worst reduced to “merely a backdrop for bleak observations on the mess we humans have made of our lives, landscapes, politics and each other [...] these ‘schools’ run the same risk - using the edgelands as a short cut to misanthropy” (Farley & Roberts, 2012, p. 9). While this article runs a similar risk by focusing on the impact of the occupation on the landscape, politics, and the communities living in Masafer Yatta, it will temper the edgelands’ descent into misanthropy by unpacking Farley and Roberts’s thoughts on how we define the edgelands today.

An immediate consideration is the substance of the edgelands, and how we, as viewers, spectators, and travelers, engage with them: how do we see the edgelands? More importantly, particularly in Palestine-Israel, how are the edgelands *unseen*, and what does the act of not seeing denote through the conscious act of visual exclusion? In their study of the edgelands in the English countryside, Farley and Roberts suggest that the edgelands “are not meant to be seen” (p. 5); while the English countryside is far from the activities unfolding in firing zones around Masafer Yatta, the problem of ‘not seeing’ remains, for “if we can’t see the edgelands, we can’t imagine them, or allow them any kind of imaginative life. And so they don’t really exist” (p. 5). The challenge is, then, twofold: to see and *speak* of the edgelands, as well as imagine their complexities, including their various forms (both moveable and overlapping [Farley & Roberts, 2012]) and the impact they have on the surrounding environment and residents.

In the ‘carceral edgelands’, (in)visibility is determined by the structures that frame the spaces. When a community is governed by a carceral state, their movement, relationships, and daily activities are subject to management “within the interlocking systems of the state structure” that is practiced through the surveillance and control of a population (Murray, 2016, p. 72). Looking to Hannah Arendt’s reflection on ‘the banality of evil’, Murray reminds us that the bureaucracy of the carceral state is inextricably linked to violence – in particular, “the perpetuation of unthinking yet intensely interested violence at the behest of the state against individual and collective bodies designated not-quite or no-longer human via silences in official discourse” (2016, p. 73). The bureaucratic foundations of Murray’s ‘intensely interested violence’ echo earlier analyses of state violence, notably Johan Galtung’s ‘structural violence’ (which he also calls ‘social injustices’) that can practice or conceal mass violence, while shrouding the perpetrator (Galtung, 1969). Galtung’s understanding of structural violence is brief yet broad, including domestic violence, life expectancy, and economic relations. The commonality across these examples is that while “there are no concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others”, in all cases the violence is “built into the structure” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Whether the structure is legal, social, or cultural, the carceral element emerges steadily; in the case of Palestine, the carceral space has created “a regime of graduated incarceration, mediated over time and space” (Smith, 2011, p. 317) and, we might add, mediated in its forms that are ever evolving.

At first, the idea of 'graduated incarceration' suggests a slow evolution of the carceral space, one that could seem at odds with the abruptness of the expulsion of Palestinian residents from their homes, as happened in Masafer Yatta in 2022 (and continues to occur). However, for the expulsions to occur, a foundation for the ruling must exist that creates a framework in which the loss of homes, land, and livelihoods is deemed acceptable and "so vital". In this way, contemporary events are not disconnected from those of decades past, and in Palestine, the dispossession that unfolds today is a continuation of the expulsions of the 1940s; the Nakba is not just a reminder of the expulsion of Palestinians in 1947 and 1948 (Abu-Lughod, 2007; Masalha, 2008), it is connected to the ongoing violence practiced through the 'interlocking structures' (Murray, 2016) of the state.

On closer scrutiny, the overlap between this violence and the carceral spaces reveals a cornucopia of mechanisms of control, regulation, containment, and closure that extends from health care and housing to checkpoints and military force (Murray, 2016; Smith, 2011; Tawil-Souri, 2012). In his detailed consideration of the micro-geographies of occupation in Palestine, Ron J. Smith unpacks these mechanisms and observes that the "carceral geographies [that] play out within Palestine range from the systemic and quotidian" to the "located and punctiform" practices of restricted movement, and onwards to "the militarized and the panoptic" (2011, p. 319). Here, the carceral geographies double as systemic and quotidian violences, the ultimate objective (and result) being "to contain, to discipline and punish, to erase the inconvenient and unwanted carceral subjects from free spaces to preserve the logic of its justice" (Murray, 2016, p. 77). Smith and Murray provide a deep understanding of the levels on which the carceral state works, and yet its influence can be taken further, since death does not bring an end to the erasure, containment, and control. Rather, the punishment continues as the grieving process is delayed and the communal agency around death rituals are subjected to the same carceral practices, which for Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, is representative of necropenology:

[A] form of forced confinement of the living and dead colonised entities, in a frozen and freezing temporality and spatiality (confined to their dying presence). [...] It is a fluid carcerality and an ever-changing penalty that produces an eliminatory social order. It moves from punishing the dead to punishing members of his family and his entire community. (2020, p. 286)

Here, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's 'fluid carcerality' presents two possibilities: first, that the carceral is moveable, reaching into the private sphere of mourning, grief, and death rituals to determine who is buried, when, and mourned *in situ* by whom. Second, that the ultimate edgeland—the line between life and death—is vulnerable to the occupying and embodied edgelands, as the life course of Palestinians is shaped by structural violence (including restrictions on movement and access to health care) and recurrent, sudden violence (by the military or settlers, for example).

## EMBODIED EDGELANDS

Embodiment has been unpacked in a variety of conflict contexts: embodiment as memory work (Conway, 2007; Frankel, 2019; Ribeiro de Menezes, 2014), embodiment and conflict trauma (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2020; Koureas, 2008), the gendered dimensions of embodiment (Fisher, 2011; Inkle, 2014), and how embodiment unfolds under the occupation (Bishara, 2015; Cooperman, 2021; Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2017). In the case of embodiment under occupation, Rema Hammami considers a neglected aspect of the occupation: moving away from the regular analyses of the spatial dimensions of the conflict and Israel's technological advances, she suggests that we look at "the embodied dirty work at its core" (2019, p. 87). Carried out by Israeli soldiers (who are designated as the 'operators') and Palestinians (the 'targets'), the process of accessing, passing through, and exiting the checkpoints unfolds in a liminal environment, an in-between zone that is neither moving forward nor going back (Braverman, 2011, p. 272).

Within this liminal environment is a double edgeland: first, the occupying edgeland of the checkpoint itself and second, the embodied edgeland in which certain individuals are 'sorted' (notably the 'targets') and others do the sorting (the 'operators' [Hammami, 2019, p. 90]). Once the commuters enter the checkpoint, they are immersed in a zone of transition and their experience of crossing the checkpoint is shaped by the mood of the operator as much as by gender dynamics, with women having "a greater chance of success in passing through the sort" (2019, p. 92). However, it should be noted that the success of women commuters is not free from conditions, with permits granted more often for activities associated with religion and health care (or, 'piety and care') than for cultural and economic endeavors (Griffiths & Repo, 2021, p. 254). Even then, despite medical appointments being viewed as part of the success of 'care' mobility, over the years the timing of the permits has been problematic and often fatal, particularly in cases where pregnant mothers have sought urgent access to hospitals (Wick, 2010). In this sense, the embodied edgeland can include acts of indifference, violence, and in/security (Hammami, 2019, p. 96). The latter of the three, in/security, is Janus-faced, providing security for the Israelis whom the checkpoints protect, while at the same time presenting an act of political theater that reinforces the power imbalance mapped out across the territories. In this sense, the sites exercise an embodied *insecurity*, as Palestinian bodies are 'sorted' (itself a process fraught with violence), their mobility is not self-determined, access to health care is uncertain, and the wait to move forward exacerbates exhaustion and frustration.

As at the checkpoints, the occupation is embodied by the Israeli soldiers in Masafer Yatta, and control is exercised over who moves where and when, and who lives in the area and for how long. For the residents of the area, the lack of security can manifest at any point; in July 2022, a house in the village was struck by a bullet, and when the residents extracted the bullet from their roof and presented photographs of the damage, the Israeli army maintained that there was no evidence that the military exercise was involved (Shezaf, 2022). In this case, the army's denial illustrates a control of the narrative as well as the erasure of the Palestinian residents, their homes, and their experience of violence in the firing zone.

While the embodied border differs from the edgeland, common ground can be found between the two, as the physical presence of the community challenges the attempt at erasure or invisibilization. Pellander and Horsti's analysis of embodied borders takes place amidst a protest, and yet, they provide a foundation that can be used to unpack the embodied edgeland, too, while creating space to interrogate how the edgeland might differ. Pellander and Horsti's embodied border is a powerful visual representation of protest, enhanced by the presence of the protestors who offer a gaze that notes the violence unfolding, through "moments of contestation and rupture, moments that, by the disturbance of the ordinary gaze of the urban space, reveal to citizens in their everyday environment borders and the violence they cause" (2018, p. 169). To understand how the edgeland differs, we can revisit Smith's (2011) concept of 'graduated incarceration', which suggests that the embodied edgeland goes beyond the embodied border constructed by the protestors and shifts towards a long-term, evolving manifestation of the carceral state. To put it directly, while a protest often has an end point, the military presence in the West Bank (for now) does not. Without an end in sight, the embodied edgeland remains in flux, a reminder of the power imbalance that generates rupture and is rooted in an entrenched structural violence.

## MOVEABLE EDGELANDS IN MASAFER YATTA

Bodies are, however, only one part of the regulatory system in the West Bank. A number of terms have been used to describe the complex network of Israeli security in the area, a network that is not only complicated due to the range of mechanisms, but also the levels at which they operate, as they follow both Mbembe's y-axis (from below ground to the sky) and an x-axis, too. Spread horizontally across the landscape, the checkpoints (static and flying) create something that Hagar Kotef and Merav Amir define as 'a web' that observes, controls, captures, and prohibits Palestinian movement (2011, p. 56). Holding the web together are threads that are at first invisible to the naked eye, but on a closer reading reveal 'imaginary lines' that accompany the physical lines of the walls, fences, and

checkpoints. Kotef and Amir's imaginary line, drawn by Israeli soldiers, links the embodied and moveable edgelands and highlights the influence of perception and the subliminal mechanisms of power and control at border points:

It is a line that delimits the permitted movement of Palestinians within the space of the checkpoint, yet a line which exists only in the minds of the soldiers standing in front of them. [...] the imaginary line is a technique and a symbol of a particular form of controlling a given space, which not only relies on controlling the rules applying to this space, but, even more importantly, on controlling the knowledge of those rules (Kotef & Amir, 2011, p. 58).

While the imaginary line exists 'only in the minds of the soldiers', Hammami extends this scope by arguing that people are the *bearers* of borders. In doing so, her position makes space for the Israeli soldiers to embody borders, as well as the additional ways that an individual (or collective) can represent a border. "Regardless of checkpoints and barbed wire, it is an individual's, or a people's nationality, race, ethnicity, class, or sometimes gender that defines the nature of a physical border and determines whether it represents an obstacle or not" (Hammami, 2001, p. 15). Here, an element of subjectivity enters: the blockage is there, but whether it is an obstacle or not depends on the traveler. For example, a Palestinian worker experiences movement through the Occupied Palestinian Territory differently to an Israeli settler, their experiences diverging in terms of the passage of time (Azoulay, 2001; Joronen & Griffiths, 2019), waiting and queuing (Hage, 2009; Hammami, 2001), violence (Braverman, 2011; Murray, 2016; Wick, 2011), and surveillance (Fields, 2020; Turumello, 2016).

In contrast to the static checkpoints, the flying checkpoints lend unpredictability and danger to a journey, as their location shifts intermittently and their presentation varies between hefty concrete blocks and foldable stop signs (Gandolfo, 2016; Tawil-Souri, 2010). This unpredictability brings nuance to the 'obstacle', which is both physical (a block of cement, for example) as well as symbolic (a block on freedom of movement and agency). The latter, the symbolic obstacle, has an impact that extends beyond the checkpoint, seeping into the everyday lives of the Palestinians who navigate the blockages. For Mark Griffiths and Jemima Repo, their experiences can be likened to Berlant's 'political depression', triggering emotions such as "hopelessness, helplessness, dread, anxiety, stress, worry, lack of interest" (2018, p. 23). Taking it further, the visceral emotional impact recalls Susan McManus' understanding of affective encounters, which shape not only the emotions, but also the body's responses, movements, and actions after an encounter. "Affective encounters are both constitutive and orienting (we are 'made-up' as we move and act) insofar as they disclose possibilities in the world and force our world to matter, immediately, viscerally, both sensually and cognitively, to us: affective encounters disclose body, form, and enable movement" (McManus, 2011, p. 5). In the carceral edgeland, the affective encounter is inverted: the possibilities narrow and movement is not always enabled, though the impact this has on how the body is 'made-up' remains profound.

Dotted around the West Bank, the flying checkpoints are also present in Masafer Yatta and they control not only the flow of residents around and through the area, but also those wishing to visit, as the human rights activist, writer, and resident of Tuba, Ali Awad, recounted in June 2022:

A few weeks ago, I visited the village of Al-Mirkez with photographer Emily Glick. On our way out, we encountered a "flying checkpoint" which soldiers had erected to detain anyone passing through the area – not only into Al-Mirkez but all the other villages too. The soldiers immediately stopped us and asked to see our identification, which they photographed. They told us to turn off the car and wait while the commander made some calls.

When we asked what was happening, he told us: "You are detained for entering an area that belongs to the army, which is against the law." [...] After two hours of being detained, the commander released us and ordered us to never come back here – the area in which I live. I have been arrested before in Masafer Yatta, but never ordered to stay away from my own home. (Awad, 2022)



The concluding act at this particular flying checkpoint highlights how the blockage is more than an obstacle: it is a moveable edgeland that for the Israeli soldiers determines where Palestinian free movement ends and Israeli control of the land for military purposes begins. The conversation between Awad and the soldier provides an insight into how immovability occurs on two levels: the physical blocking that prevents Awad and Glick's progress into the village, as well as the ideological block. In the case of the latter, the soldier believes that the area 'belongs' to the army—an institution made up of moveable parts, as the soldiers and their checkpoints can change location at any point in time. In contrast, Awad's belonging is static: the village is his home, the order to 'stay away' an exile enforced on the spot. At this point, the moveable edgeland connects with the occupying edgeland, by exercising the power to not only decide who can enter (or not), but also who can be ordered to "never come back here", regardless of whether the traveler is a resident or a guest.

By doing so, the soldiers at the checkpoint re-enact the eviction order of May 2022 (and those before it) writ small, two soldiers issuing the order of no return to one Palestinian seeking entry to his village. By recognizing the power of the flying checkpoints, it is possible to imagine their complexities and the ways that these nuances impact the residents and the environment, as the latter is quickly and temporarily transformed from a rural path or road into a site of political contestation. The moveable edgeland presents a paradox: it can be as light as a stop sign and staffed by as few as two soldiers. And yet it carries the carceral undertones that hold the clout of a large, static checkpoint. Moreover, the ability to move swiftly brings a deft control and unpredictability: ever-moving, the element of surprise becomes a tool in the mechanism of mobility control and the exercise of power in the region and demonstrates the alternative ways that the edgeland can be carceral *and* mobile.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A primary concern for this article is the ways that a carceral edgeland can be textured. To comprehend this, it was necessary to clarify the nature of first, the edgeland, and second, how the 'carceral' aspect is enacted. In his consideration of colonialism, Mbembe observes that the colonial project was as much a process of redefining social relations as it was one of land seizure. And yet, the two processes are not separate, as spatial relations have been redefined through the lines etched on the land: the borders, boundaries, enclaves, and zones (Mbembe, 2003). To this, we can add the inclusions and exclusions that occur around the settlements (Zureik, 2011), and importantly, the concept at the heart of this article: the edgeland.

The question of how to separate the edgeland from the multitudinous lines that define a region's geopolitical circumstances (such as 'borders', 'lines', and 'boundaries') has been central to this article, and we can conclude that such a distinction is only partially possible. The carceral edgeland in Masafer Yatta (as elsewhere in the West Bank) is to varying degrees informed by the borders, boundaries, lines, and fences that divide the wider landscape. Each is a proclamation of power and control over movement, residence, access to employment, health care, and family. Masafer Yatta is a concentrated example of how the carceral edgeland is enforced through embodied and moveable edgelands, yet it is not unique: by 2022, twenty percent of the West Bank was designated a 'firing zone', despite the areas being home to 38 communities (UN OCHA, 2022). The carceral edgeland, and the tapestry of edgelands that it contains, are shaped by the broader structural mechanisms and maintained by the actors who staff the checkpoints and barriers.

Although the corpus on the checkpoints and barriers is rich, Farley and Symmons Roberts's call to attend to the edgelands is as poignant in zones of occupation and conflict as it is in the countryside and urban spaces of England. In the West Bank, the edgeland is fluid yet perceptible; its lines can shift and be experienced differently depending on who holds the power and who holds free agency. It can arrive in many forms: in this article, the embodied and moveable edgelands were unpacked, but we can also tentatively look towards an *occupying* and *memory* edgeland that would bring nuance to spaces of control and violence (both past and present). In this respect, distinguishing between the edgeland and the border/boundaries is perhaps a misstep. Instead, the edgeland should be viewed as

an extension of the borders and boundaries, its presence offering an overlapping space that can be seen/unseen, as well as sensed/un-sensed. And, where the carceral edgeland is a site of violence and control, its perceptibility gains added importance, offering opportunities to record narratives of injustice, displacement, and erasure, as well as moments in which the perceived authority of border and boundaries is challenged.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For a historical account of the establishment of the state of Israel and the Nakba, see: *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* by Rashid Khalidi (2020); *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History* by Nur Masalha (2018); *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015); *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* by Ghada Karmi (2015), *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel* by Ilan Pappé (2011), and *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, an edited collection by Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod (2007).
- <sup>2</sup> Earliest sources include the British politician, Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885) and the author, Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) (Abu-Saad, 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> Including Tuba, Mufaqara, Sfai, Majaz, Tabban, Khribet al Fakhiet, Megheir Al-Abeid, Halaweh, Mirkez, Jinba, Halat a-Dab'a and Sarura.
- <sup>4</sup> In their brief consideration of language, Farley and Roberts observe that "language acts upon us, rather than functioning simply as one of our actions" (2012, p. 185). The names we use (or choose not to use) shape how a place and community is understood and recognised. Acknowledging that language can promote erasure, this article distinguishes between the area of Masafer Yatta and the firing zone. While many sources refer to the area as 'Firing Zone 918', this is a code-name and repeated use (in the absence of Masafer Yatta) has the potential to erase the official name. By doing so, writing and speaking about Masafer Yatta provides a reminder of not only the place and its residents, but also the political power of naming and the ways that names can 'act upon us' and our awareness of a space, place, and people.

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