

## Relaying Memory through a Generated Environment: A Critical Recreation of Prisoners' Sense-Perceptions in Khiam Detention Centre

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Upon reaching the front gate of Khiam Detention Centre (KDC), I was greeted by an old man, Abu Ali, who limped heavily as he moved. He gave me a tour of the site that was half-destroyed by what appeared to have been an aerial bombing. Later on, during our conversation, I learned that the tour guide was himself a former inmate, the current caretaker of the site, and the prison's last inhabitant. Throughout the tour, he actively engaged with the site by recreating scenes of torture as we moved among the remains of the detention centre. The old man took on multiple roles, and his words reverberated in the halls of his former prison. The information he relayed to me was an apt introduction to the site. Soon enough, I became aware of the lack of mobile phone reception on the site. An echo replaced the sound of a phone call, and heavy background noise interfered with the radio signals throughout my exploration in the south of Lebanon. The feeling of being virtually and spatially occupied only increased when I came to realise that the photos I captured using my mobile phone were geotagged 'Israel', despite being physically located over fifteen kilometres from the Israeli border. Not only did the GPS inaccurately position me in Israel, but it falsely identified the coordinates of KDC, implying that the site was practically undetectable. The feeling of isolation and surveillance marked my exploration of the situated, remembered and (de-)mediated site of KDC.

Khiam Detention Centre, a detention camp established by Israel in South Lebanon in 1985,

is currently under heavy political interference that aims to manipulate and monopolise the writing of its burdened history. The preservation of the memory of events that took place in this prison needs to be urgently and collectively addressed in the face of the multiple attempts of erasure and biased revisions by both Israel and Hezbollah. Today the site of KDC lies in ruins following the Israeli Air Force bombing during the Summer War of 2006. This military operation is regarded by previous prisoners as an act of tampering with evidence to acquit Israel from accountability. Meanwhile, in Lebanon the history of KDC remains monopolised by Hezbollah, who exerts political dominance over the territory where the prison is situated. Hezbollah intended to inaugurate Khiam Resistance Museum in late 2020 on the site of KDC by adopting the history of the prison as its own. This study surveys three types of media sources that contain the memory of Khiam Detention Centre: 1) interviews conducted with former prisoners regarding their collective memory; 2) the data-archives of a radio programme called *Nahnu Bikhayr Taminuna Ankom* (We are alive, tell us if you are) and 3) the built environment mapped with a sonic device. The extracted memories are then transcluded into a generated environment that virtually relays the mnemonic site of KDC.<sup>1</sup> The contested memories surrounding the site, in parallel to its wrecked physical state, underline the importance of developing an alternative relay that would invite spectators to inhabit the senses of former inmates to better perceive the context of the prison.

This relay is developed in a generated environment that compiles and preserves the experiences of former prisoners with care and self-reflexivity for their wellbeing, PTSD and media exposure. It breaks out of the binaries of realpolitik imposed by the warring factions of US-endorsed far-right Israeli militarism and Iran-backed Hezbollah para-militarism. This article thus outlines the design of the generated environment by introducing the contradictions of prisoner versus visitor experiences within KDC, investigating remnants of torture and surveillance within the built environment of South Lebanon, and describing how the generated environment ultimately aims to transclusively extend memory into a virtually accessible archive.

### Background

KDC is notorious for being a place of many forms of draconian violence. During its operation, the detention centre hosted a total of approximately 3 500 inmates.<sup>2</sup> Today, KDC has the appearance of an abandoned ruin, coated in long-lost stories and auras of lost lives. It is semi-operative as a site for curious visitors, without the functioning amenities to be called a tourist destination. [Fig. 1]

KDC was built as barracks for French military personnel, and later put to use by the Lebanese Army as a military base, before it was occupied by an Israeli proxy called the South Lebanese Army in 1985. During its operation as a detention centre for Lebanese and Palestinians, torture techniques were devised and executed to inflict severe pain on inmates. KDC was infamous for detention with indefinite sentences without trial, and for unique physical and mental torture techniques. Such techniques included electric shocks, excessive beatings with electric cables, hanging from the ceiling for hours, exposure to bad weather, deprivation of water, food, sleep and restroom use, handcuffing and head-covering for excessive periods of time, and solitary confinement. The death of an inmate in 1996 warranted the intervention of the International

Red Cross, who during the period from 1996 to 2000 introduced several reforms intended to enhance the living conditions of the inmates. There was no documentation kept, no records of prisoners, no arrest warrants or any due judiciary process when incarcerating people. This indicates that the functioning of KDC was closer to a detention camp than to a prison.

The 'red box' refers to both a physical structure and a torture technique used against inmates at the whim of their interrogators. Located within solitary cells, a red box measures 50x70x70 centimetres, with an extra 10 cubic centimetres for female inmates. Prisoners were confined in the box for extended durations of time and were given a small amount of food and a pail for excrement. Testimonies about the consequences of confinement in the red box detail the stiffness of limbs which often resulted in reddish skin due to the prolonged exposure to metal. To further exacerbate the suffering of an inmate, guards would regularly thud on the red box using hard objects to send painful reverberations within the box and through the body of the inmate. [Fig. 2]

After the liberation of KDC in 2000, the camp was transformed into a museum by Hezbollah, with the aim of displaying the torture devices and inhumane practices used by the South Lebanese Army.<sup>3</sup> The detention centre operated as a museum until most of the campgrounds were destroyed in the aerial attacks led by Israel. Most of the site's operational facilities were damaged, leaving only the interrogation rooms, administration offices, and one out of the four prison wings. Some sources suggest that the attack intentionally targeted the KDC in an effort to erase a physical trace that could indict the State of Israel of war crimes.<sup>4</sup> Since 2006, Hezbollah has actively sought to recreate the site as a museum dedicated to Hezbollah resistance in the South. Hezbollah's reconstruction plan was supposed to be implemented starting in December 2019, but the



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

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Fig. 1: An overview of the Kham Detention Centre in its current form (17 September 2019). Source: author.

Fig. 2: The notorious red box, used to isolate prisoners and torture them through prolonged confinement and sound manipulation via the reverberation caused by guards deliberately banging on the surface. Source: author.

October 17 Revolution (of 2019) and the collapse of the economy deferred the plans until further notice. It could be argued that rewriting the history of KDC using museological techniques supports the geopolitical aspirations of Hezbollah and solidifies its overall political agenda.

Furthermore, on the Southern Lebanese border there is a series of visible Israeli antennae on the mountaintops on the Israeli side and a disguised Hezbollah network on the Lebanese side. The presence of Israel's antenna towers exerts a broader territorial claim which from the Lebanese side is perceived as a visual and electromagnetic occupation. Meanwhile, Hezbollah's invisible network, presumed to be subterranean, feeds into the suspicion and paranoia on the Israeli side. A manifestation of this invisible warfare is the electromagnetic interference that scrambled the metadata of our mobile phones and located us in Israel instead of Khiam. This phenomenon revealed the porosity of the border between Lebanon and Israel which resembles more of a contested buffer zone than a clearly defined line.

### **Research methodology**

The extraction of memory from KDC's media imprints required a mixed qualitative-methods approach to guarantee a reliable transfer of data to the generated environment. This environment hosts an online virtual relay to each of the three media imprints and can be accessed on <http://kdctoge.com>.

The data used for content development for the generated environment is based on the following three research questions:

1. How do former prisoners preserve their memories of KDC?
2. How does the surveillance contribute to the politics of erasure?
3. What are the prisoners' opinions and suggestions for the virtual reconstruction of KDC?

In order to explore these questions, data was collected via semi-structured interviews, content analyses, and fieldwork designed to 'extract' the memory from, respectively, former prisoners, data-archives, and the KDC's physical remains.

The collective memory of the former prisoners – and now witnesses – coming from different social backgrounds, with different political affiliations, religious associations, genders, and physical abilities, was accessed through a series of semi-structured interviews. A total of nine interviews was conducted with two women and seven men. The political backgrounds of the witnesses included the Lebanese Communist Party, Hezbollah, Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and non-affiliated citizens of the South. Interviews consisted of thirteen questions and spanned between twenty minutes and an hour. These prisoners were asked to identify their connection to the prison by reflecting on their time in detention, in juxtaposition to the current state of the camp as a ruin. Interviews were designed to grasp the collective experiences that continue to resonate with former prisoners, while also exploring the impact of applied reconstruction on their connection with the site.

Various content that communicates the relationship between space, sound, surveillance, and memory was collected and used to further contextualise the digitised memory archive dedicated to KDC. The aforementioned radio-programme *Nahnu Bikhayr Taminuna Ankom* was a useful source for unearthing communication tactics between prisoners and non-prisoners. Hosted by Sawtul Sha'ab, (The Voice of the People) beginning in the 1980s, this radio channel served as a platform where family and friends were able to get familiar with the living conditions of the prisoners. The memory of KDC that is stored within this programme's archives, was accessed after receiving consent from the radio hosts to compile and reproduce the data for the purposes of the generated environment.

Lastly, the memory stored in the built environment of KDC was accessed through data collected from ethnographic and sonic mapping generated within two spatial entities: the physical ruins of KDC and its surrounding electromagnetic field. The ethnographic data collection relied on performing focused observations, whereas data on sound and electromagnetic media was collected through a sonic-sensory device designed to be an audio-recorder, radio-receiver, and transmitter all in one. The device was built with the capacity to receive and transmit audio with a wavelength ranging from 88MHz to 108MHz and has the components of a transmitter, receiver, tuner, antenna, microphone, speaker, and a recorder. [Fig. 3] The aim of this device is to 'translate' the physical elements found in KDC from their solid state into sonic data that can be accessed on the generated environment. The interplay of sound and space was tested on the red box by following a technique developed by Alvin Lucier in his art piece *I am sitting in a room*.<sup>5</sup> The microphone and the speaker were placed on opposing sides of the red box's interior to capture how sound travelled within the confined space. The result of this experiment is the production of a sonic representation of the red box. Theoretically, it would have been compelling to broadcast the sonic recordings collected by the device from within KDC. The aim would be to transform KDC into a broadcasting infrastructure in the midst of the occupied electromagnetic territory. Unfortunately, this would not have been possible due to security concerns and the worry about possible legal repercussions. The data collected from within the red box was later extracted and uploaded to the generated environment platform. To summarise, through the techniques described above, the study engaged in raw data collection that is used to translate the memory of KDC, extracted from various sources, into a new information-generated environment.<sup>6</sup>

The outline of the generated environment consists of a virtual relay of the three media imprints

that contain the memory of KDC. First, the collective memory of the previous prisoners was assimilated to distinguish the social production versus the social construction of space. Secondly, the content of the aforementioned radio programme was analysed to expose a type of torture that operates through friction. Lastly, the sonic mapping of the built environment was used to translate memory associated with physical matter to data.

### **Social production versus social construction of space**

I will analyse the space of Kham Detention Centre through Setha Low's theories of social production and social construction. The materialist emphasis on social production is useful in defining the historical emergence and political economic formation of urban space, while social construction refers to the transformation of space through language, social interaction, memory, representation, behaviour and use into scenes and actions that convey meaning.<sup>7</sup> Through a social production lens, KDC is analysed based on the political, social, and historical motives of its planning and development, thus exposing how a place came into existence by emphasising the material aspects. Concurrently, the social construction lens exposes the role of social interaction, imaginings, feelings, and memories of the people who inhabited the space of KDC which give form and meaning to the physical space. A social construction conceptual frame assumes that place is an abstraction – not a set of physical properties – made up of shared understandings and social structural differences such as race, class and gender.<sup>8</sup>

The activity of the social production of space occurs on the grounds of the built environment, whereas that of the social construction of space occurs within the abstract realm of the human mind. This reality renders the built environment of KDC a vulnerable target to political actors that seek to manipulate the historical and political background

of the prison. The proposed reconstruction plan of KDC set forth by Hezbollah imposes a narrative that erases the presence of other political factions that were involved in the resistance against Israel. At the same time, the Israeli attempt to erase material evidence of local history can be read as another intervention in the social production of KDC's space. This has resulted in a contested memory of the prison among the general public who have no further information other than the revisionist histories of both Hezbollah and Israel. As both political actors engage with acts of erasure and revision to influence the social production of KDC, the social construction of its space remains intact, because its main activity occurs in the minds of the prisoners. The political actors seem to be speculating on the passing of time until the social construction – defined by the interactions and memories of prisoners – fades away alongside the bodies of the prisoners. Eventually, the only surviving memory would be a modified version of KDC's material setting. The urgency of preserving the social construction of space hence becomes essential to combat the political actors' manoeuvres on the social production of the prison's space.

Furthermore, in the theoretical framework of social construction I will draw on the work of Michael Richardson.<sup>9</sup> He emphasises an individualistic perspective of how people transform their experience into symbols, gestures, and figures. Through these symbolic transformations, human experience and feelings become directly attached to elements of the material setting and give meaning to the space. This was the case with the former prisoners when they were prompted to describe the memory of their prison cells, detailing the distinction between the social production of the cell and the symbolic representation of its space. The former is a physical setting within the built environment where an activity or an object is located. The prisoners objectively described the material setting of their cell – its dimensions, form, colour, and furniture. The social

construction, on the other hand, is the symbolic representation of the cell as conceived by the prisoners. They each individually constructed their own perception of space that expanded beyond the physical confinements of their cell, as mediated by socio-political processes of control, conflict, and exchange with their environment. They had a defined axis of movement that encompassed their cell, the shower, and on occasions, the sun-room. Hence, the prisoners grew accustomed to loss of sight and an enhanced sense of sound – in adaptation to their prolonged exposure to darkness – and used their restricted senses as a tool for communication to manipulate the physical boundaries of the cell to a nexus of scenes and actions reproduced from interactions between sound and material space. Such interactions include: synchronised banging on walls as a method of communication with adjacent cells, anticipating the guard's purpose of visit based on the speed of their footsteps, and associating the recurrent sound of a helicopter passing overhead with a specific time of day: 11:30 am. These examples indicate the construction of space through sound, as relayed from the memories of the prisoners. The space constructed by the prisoners, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relation to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations and cultural predispositions. Hence, the prisoners socially constructed and communicated local meanings through symbolic forms by appropriating space based on their needs.

#### **Translation into the generated environment under Virtual Relay 01**

The distinction between the social production and social construction of space was essential to locate the exact grounds where political actors operate. Hezbollah's reconstruction scheme targets the social production of KDC by remodelling its material setting, and the social construction by selecting prisoners that were affiliated with their party to relay their experiences. Among the prisoners I

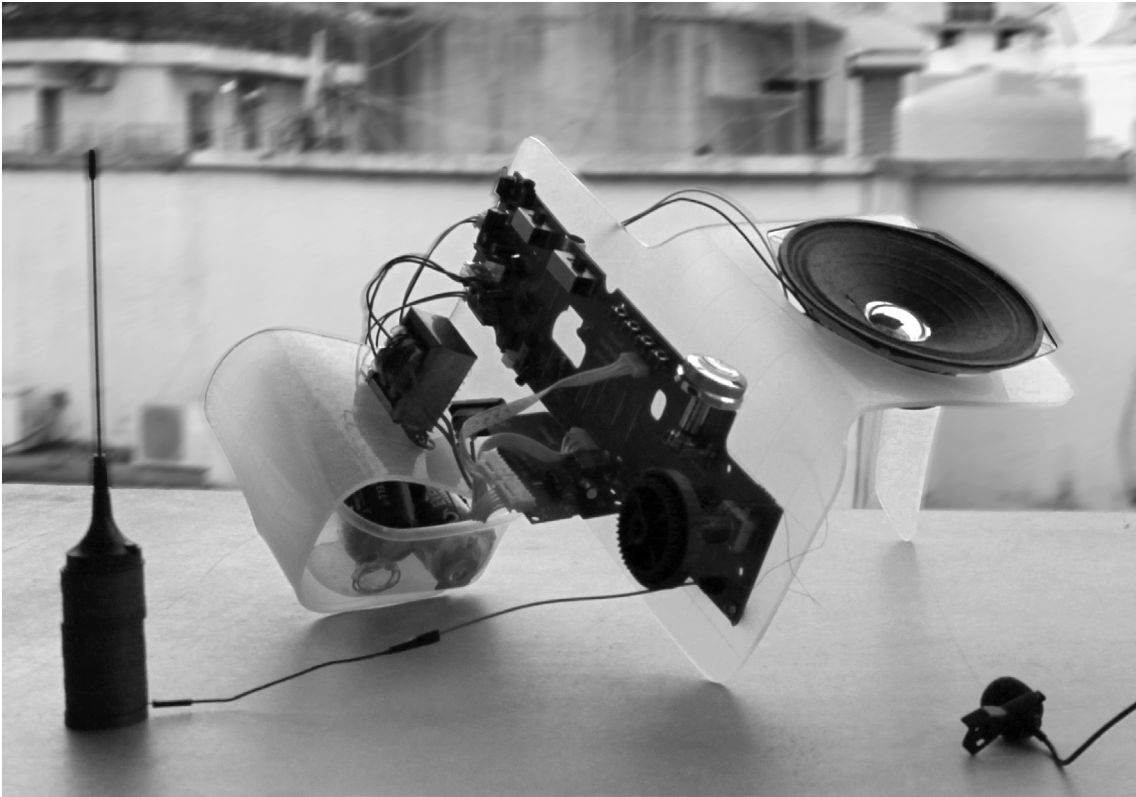


Fig. 3: The sonic-sensory device used for data collection in the field. Source: author.

interviewed, only the ones close to Hezbollah knew about the existence of a reconstruction plan. Tony Bennett, author of *The Birth of the Museum*, explains how a museum has two distinctive political demands: 'the demand that there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within the collecting, exhibition and conservation activities of museums, and the demand that the members of all social groups should have equal practical as well theoretical rights of access to museums'.<sup>10</sup> The first political demand is deliberately overlooked in the Khiam Resistance Museum because the inclusion of other political factions who resisted the Israeli occupation would weaken Hezbollah's exclusive appropriation of resistance. However, the second demand is purposefully articulated by the party to address the sensorial and emotional experience of visitors of all nationalities, religions, and political backgrounds. Hezbollah's growing interest in museums as propaganda/media tools is seen as a way to strengthen the sense of belonging between members of their own community and an opportunity to 'enlighten' outsiders. The investigation of interventions on the built environment of KDC that affect the social production of space is beyond the capacity of this research due to the contested position of the camp. Therefore the focus of this paper is on the social construction of KDC as relayed by the former prisoners.

Furthermore, the dichotomies of visitor experience and prisoner experience are coupled with the dichotomy of the social production and social construction of space to underline the significance of both in the embodied experience of KDC. Visitors would experience the social production of space as manifested in its built structure, and the social construction of space as relayed by Hezbollah prisoners. Through the generated environment's Virtual Relay 01, visitors will be able to experience the space by going for a virtual walk through the 3D model of KDC prior to the Israeli attack and prior

to the Hezbollah reconstruction plan.<sup>11</sup> According to social anthropologist Hilda Kuper, some sites have flexible spatial and symbolic qualities but with no fixed relationship to the physical environment, and are only activated by human intervention.<sup>12</sup> The material setting transforms into a social construct upon the layering of phenomenological experiences dependent on the sensory testimony of former prisoners. This would allow the social construction of space to transgress its confinement in the role of a prisoner to that of a visitor through the use of the generated environment. The collective social constructs that were imagined by the prisoners during incarceration are personified in Virtual Relay 01 as an interactive mesh surface that is suspended in space and time. It is designed to challenge the visitor's freedom of mobility by limiting their visual awareness. Visitors are able to explore the temporality of the prisoners' setting by overlaying their navigation with the prisoner's narration of their struggles to comprehend sound, vision, and space. This allows the visitor to experience a recreation of a prisoner's sense of space. Experiencing KDC through the lens of the social construction and social production of space emphasises the value of both realities. A mediation between the two sets of realities achieves a virtual perception where both experiences can exist simultaneously. The significance of this storage medium lies in its ability to visualise the correlation between sound and space, where sound determines the limitations of the visitor's vision. [Fig. 4]

### **Torture through friction**

That sound perception was an inmate's greatest sensory strength also meant that sound manipulation was a powerful tool mobilised by guards and interrogators to torment prisoners. It was common practice for guards to bang against prison cell doors as they walked past, and place steel buckets over prisoners' heads while hitting against them with batons. Female prisoners recounted the humiliation





Fig. 4: An overview of the content located on the generated environment. Storage Medium 01, December 2019, <http://kdctoge.com>. Source: author.

they experienced being forced to listen guards urinating in their vicinity as they were blindfolded and handcuffed. Sound manipulation was often used by interrogators to extract information from the prisoners. Often, sounds of women screaming hysterically in the room next door were used to convince inmates that it was their mothers, sisters, wives, or daughters who were being tortured in the adjacent room. This technique of torture was applied to weaken the prisoner's internal strength and perseverance, directly attack the emotional resistance of inmates, and persuade them to reveal any information they may have.

Many former prisoners reflect on how the manipulation of sound during their incarceration has been transferred into their daily lives, the experienced symptoms resembling those of PTSD. Everyday rhythmic sounds such as the pulsing sound of a machine or even the recurrent tapping of fingers on a table re-situate former prisoners into the space of KDC. However, this does not mean that former prisoners are the only victims of sound manipulation as a method of torture. Rather, sound has also been instrumentalised by Israeli soldiers for surveillance purposes outside the borders of KDC. Prior to 2000, the IDF practiced various forms of intimidation against Lebanese and Palestinian populations by tapping into or mass-calling landline phones. The messages consisted of subliminal invitations for recruitment, warnings of upcoming attacks, or 'awareness' campaigns relaying the repercussions of cooperating with Hezbollah against Israel. Herein, the sound infrastructure is used as an extension of state control beyond national borders by imposing a sonic 'dialogue' with the inhabitants of another state. The sense of being monitored is a subliminal effect of the recording, whereby those who receive the message assume that they are under surveillance by the Israeli state. The relationship between power and sound is then consolidated through surveillance tactics that mobilise sonic outlets to

demonstrate power over a territory or population. The tactic leaves the victims docile to surveillance, enclosure, and subjugation within a given space.<sup>13</sup>

This passage is a sample of a common 'awareness' campaign sent by the Israeli state to affected populations in Lebanon. It was distributed by mass calling Lebanese phones or by dropping leaflets from military planes (see figure 5 for a sample of an awareness campaign communicated via leaflet). The following is a translation of a quote from a leaflet in Arabic:

This is the Israeli Army. To the residents of Lebanon: the Israeli Army will expand its operations in Lebanon against the continuing terrorism of Hezbollah, in defence of the citizens of the state of Israel.

For the sake of your own safety, and because we wish not to harm any civilians that are not implicated, you must keep away from the locations where Hezbollah is present and acting against the State of Israel.

One of Foucault's best-known discussions regards the structure of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, where the concept is deployed as a political tool to induce a state of self-consciousness and a sense of permanent visibility in inmates, to assure the automatic functioning of power.<sup>14</sup> The former prisoners and current witnesses who live in South Lebanon still experience this sense of 'permanent visibility' even after being physically removed from the KDC.

Surveillance aims to extend the occupation of the electromagnetic field by the political actors in South Lebanon, while having a damaging effect on the livelihood of citizens and especially witnesses. In their testimonies, former prisoners speak of everyday terror, recounting their awareness of Israel's presence. One of the witnesses reveals the extent to which the buzzing sound of Israeli drones

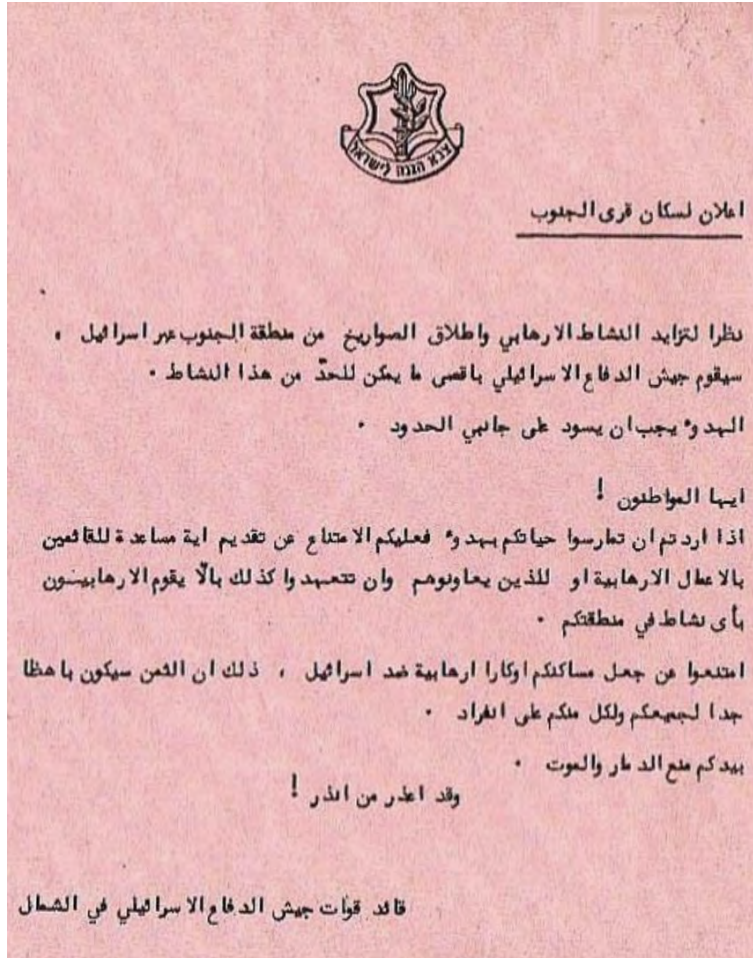


Fig. 5: Israeli leaflet announcing future aggression against a target area; 13 July 2006. Source: <http://psywarrior.com>.

can be heard, suggesting continued surveillance despite the physical border between Lebanon and Israel. He works as an excavator for a water-well company and described how, while digging the wells, the high-pitched buzzing of an Israeli drone can be heard overhead. The awareness of being observed during his routine excavations by Israel has been normalised – not through the sight of the drone, but rather through the sound that the device makes. The feeling of being surveilled is thus located within the sonic vibrations sensed by the population. Sounds of fighter jets are audible as well and identified, in contrast to the drones, by the low-pitched rumbling sound heard from above. Susan Schuppli, a researcher interested in examining material evidence from war and conflict, discusses how sounds produced by drones or jets is a manifestation of military presence that is experienced as a sonic threat in which invisible sound frequencies are converted into states of anxiety, depression, and fear.<sup>15</sup> Acoustics are undoubtedly part of the arsenal of military operations and have been used for centuries to obtain advantage in warfare. Such brazen breaches of the Lebanese border and its sovereignty suggest the expansion and contraction of virtual borders separating Lebanon from Israel, whereby the physical border is constantly violated and holds no actual power.

### **Translation into the generated environment under Virtual Relay 02**

These new realities have produced an extra-territory along the Lebanese side of the border. It manifests as a buffer-zone or an off-grid territory where concepts of privacy, control and freedom of speech are subjected to permanent contestation. One of the most remarkable features challenging the sovereignty of Lebanon over its territory is the inability to contact the Lebanese police hotline (112) from within. In fact, a call to 112 from this territory is answered by Israeli police. This electromagnetic occupation has been the norm well

before the installation of KDC as a detention centre in 1985. Other characteristics further corroborate the omniscience of the dominant political actors who operate the surveillance infrastructure. From within the off-grid territory, the radio show *Nahnu Bikhayr Taminuna Ankom* began broadcasting in 1983 to counter the surveillance of the communication system by innovating a new method that would connect the prisoners with their families. The radio show acted as a media tool to facilitate the transmission of live messages coming from the prisoners' families and letters coming from within the prison. The prohibition of radios in KDC before the arrival of the Red Cross in 1996 rendered the radio show redundant. To combat such restrictions, messages were smuggled to the prisoners either verbally or by the sounds of the guard's radios echoing in the corridors. Nabih Awada, a former communist Lebanese fighter imprisoned in Israel's Askalan Prison for ten years, recounted how prisoners usually communicated by smuggling letters. He explained how prisoners developed a secret writing called *msamsameh*, derived from the wordplay on *semsum* ('sesame seed'), alluding to the minuscule size of the writing. The letters are wrapped in plastic to become a sealed capsule, then passed in kisses or swallowed, excreted and cleaned, and finally delivered.<sup>16</sup> Families and friends wishing to communicate with prisoners equally struggled to bring information into the prison. This difficulty increased the importance of the radio show *Nahnu Bikhayr Taminuna Ankom* as a tool to facilitate basic communication. Unfortunately, because of the time-gap between the live broadcast and the reply from within the prison, messages often took months to be delivered. The complicated nature of the procedure often caused a discrepancy between the question asked by the family and the answers sent back by the prisoner. This discrepancy could be easily identified while listening to the montaged conversations in the archived episodes.

These limitations in communication are reflected in the generated environment in the form of a speech simulation under Virtual Relay 02, featuring delayed auditory feedback. Visitors are instructed to talk into their microphones and then have the choice to calibrate the speed at which their recording is played back to them. Through this storage medium, users are also able to manipulate the pitch at which their recording is rerun. This feature is designed to emulate the style of communication between prisoners and the world outside KDC. The delayed auditory feedback extends the time between speech and auditory perception. Despite being used as a treatment for people who suffer from speech difficulties, the implementation of a 175-millisecond delay has been shown to induce mental stress.<sup>17</sup> As another option in this simulation, visitors are able to listen to selected episodes of *Nahnu Bikhayr Taminuna Ankom*, also with a delayed auditory feedback feature. This allows users to experience the communication process of former prisoners through an interactive reproduction. The tension caused by the delay between the questions asked by the families and the answers sent back by the prisoner is presented in the storage medium through the introduction of glitches into the clean recording of the visitor. By doing so, the simulation attempts to evoke feelings of anxiety and tense waiting through a disruption of the speakers' verbal capacity.

### **Memory conversion: matter to data**

The reconstruction proposal of KDC put forth by Hezbollah was widely criticised by the majority of the witnesses participating in the study. According to Abu Ali, the caretaker of KDC, the proposal aims to bring forth the rebirth of the site through the reconstruction of two out of three demolished prison wings, maintain the third in its state of destruction, and keep the fourth wing in the current intact state. According to the witnesses' testimonies, new building materials would seem inauthentic to the original structure, which would make the restored site seem

either like a new prison or a counterfeit. Hezbollah deliberately maintained the third wing in its ruinous state as a testament to Israel's attack in 2006. Similar museological tactics have been deployed at the Mleeta Resistance Tourist Landmark, inaugurated in 2010, which is located on a strategic mountaintop where Hezbollah fought Israel during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> Here Hezbollah generated a user experience that blurs the dichotomy between a visitor and a fighter within a politically constructed narrative. It is reasonable to expect that the themes of commemoration, memorialisation, and resistance visible in Mleeta will be reiterated in Khiam. Consolidating the site of KDC as their own, Hezbollah thus effectively legitimises their presence as a non-state player valued for its political, social, and cultural roles.

Hezbollah's proposal for the Khiam Resistance Museum is based on a single route that guides visitors from one area of the detention centre to the next. The experience of the visitor begins in a panorama room, a new structure near the front gate of the camp that hosts an audio-visual montage portraying the significance of the site according to an official Hezbollah narrative. After that, the visitors are guided throughout the masterplan from one prison wing to the other where various artefacts are displayed, mostly prisoners' inventions made in detention and some personal belongings of the SLA guards. In the courtyard area there are Katyushas (Russian rocket launchers) pointing towards Israel, and also military gear, weapons, and tools belonging to the Israeli Defence Force that are displayed as spoils of war. The distinction between the historic site and Hezbollah manipulation is blurred as both aspects are juxtaposed with dogmatic fantasy. In the final stop of the journey, a gift shop and an exhibition room occupy the spaces that were previously used as dormitories for the guards. A selection of the gift shop's inventory includes Hezbollah, Iranian and Lebanese flags, bullet-shaped lighters, Kalashnikov

necklaces, and a DVD of a movie that was filmed of KDC on Liberation Day.<sup>19</sup> The exhibition room, which is the final stop, is designed as a replica of the 'salon' where Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, usually meets guests. In the same room there is a 3D model of Hezbollah's Khiam Museum displayed in a glass vitrine that reflects the portraits of Iranian supreme leaders hanging from the wall. [Fig. 6] A multisensory experience that encompasses an audio-visual production, an architectural promenade, and a display of a selection of props and artefacts, is part of Hezbollah's strategy to display both the built environment of KDC and its own political agenda in a carefully-designed narrative.

### **Translation into the generated environment under Virtual Relay 03**

Complaints regarding the reconstruction proposed by Hezbollah are prevalent among former prisoners of KDC who fear the erasure of their own experiences through the production of an inauthentic space that prioritises the experiences of Hezbollah prisoners while disregarding all others. The insistence on keeping the site in its original form reflects the understanding of former prisoners that their memories and emotional scars are manifested in the ruins of KDC. Inscriptions on prison cell walls that include scratched names, tally marks counting the days spent inside, or even marks of blood indicating torture, would all be erased with the proposed reconstruction of the site. Some prisoners interested in the reconstruction suggested alternative methods to restore KDC, such as through the recreation of the sensations that were experienced by inmates. For example, in an attempt to recreate the smells of KDC, a former prisoner proposed enclosing the camp in a dome-like structure that would control environmental factors within. The indoor atmosphere would then be fine-tuned to adequately recreate the environmental conditions present at the time of the prison's operation. This intervention would help simulate the odours endured by former

prisoners, creating conditions for a faithful transfer of experience from the prisoner to the visitor.

Similarly, in an attempt to preserve the sensual experiences of the camp, generated environment relays the memory stored in the built environment by transforming physical matter to sonic data. The idea stems from the sense of urgency of preserving the physical structure of KDC against proposed alterations that might affect the associated memory. This is achieved by generating a sonic representation of the spatial element which is then made available on the generated environment in an accessible format for online users. Due to its popularity as a torture-tool, I chose the red box as the element for the translation of the material setting into audible data, with the idea to recreate the atmosphere of the red box's interior space. In a similar fashion to Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* sound-art piece, I placed the microphone and the speaker on opposing sides of the red box's interior.<sup>20</sup> The experiment is to play the recording of the aforementioned automated message by the IDF into the red box, which is then re-recorded to capture the resonance of the sounds echoed within. The new recording is in turn played back and re-recorded. This process is repeated several times with the aim of morphing the original sound. The specific resonance pertaining to each space (such as size, furnishing, and material) affects sound frequencies as they resonate on the interior layout of the red box. Eventually the words become unintelligible and are replaced by the muffled harmonies and tones of the box itself. Through the conversion from speech modules into the materiality of the red box, the essence of the prisoner's experience is transformed into readable data that may be experienced from the generated environment. Instead of Hezbollah's intention to mould the visitor's experience in accordance with their political narrative, Storage Medium 03 provides visitors an 'untouched' version of KDC's built setting, presented in a different physical state.<sup>21</sup> The generated environment therefore does



Fig. 6: A model of the reconstruction plan proposed by Hezbollah, on display in KDC. Reflected on the model are the portraits of prominent Hezbollah and Iranian figures, including the portrait of young Hassan Nasrallah on the left. Source: author.

not meddle with the current built structure of KDC but it seeks to preserve it – in a sonic state – before further damage or construction takes place.

### **The structure and planned impact of the generated environment**

The generated environment reproduces sense-experiences of former prisoners through the manipulation of sound and vision. It is a digital simulation of prisoner experiences through different media sources and imprints that invite spectators to inhabit the senses of former inmates to better perceive the context of the camp. Through transcluding memory from the three media sources and storage space, the generated environment allows site-users to play with the limitations and imposition of sound, allowing the critical recreation of the site without jeopardising the integrity of the current built environment of KDC. As previously shown, the site of KDC and its electromagnetic field have been occupied by both Israel and Hezbollah, so that the claims of sovereignty of its territory and technological infrastructure are tenuous and rife with the risk of political manipulation. This made the World Wide Web a provisionally more inclusive alternate environment to host a virtual relay of KDC. Herein, the generated environment would assert its virtual presence over the coordinates of KDC as an audio-visual manifestation of the social production and construction of space. Thereby, the generated environment runs against the parallel revisionist histories of both Hezbollah and Israel. Currently, the generated environment exists as an audio-visual extension of this article, with the aspiration to become a feature of a proposed digital repository of KDC.<sup>22</sup> The repository will be assembled by urban planners, researchers, archivists, artists, and former prisoners who have already contributed to the online presence of the prison.<sup>23</sup> It will be a collection of knowledge consisting of a wide range of media collected from different sources. The repository aims to become a post-traumatic urban tool used by the affected citizens and the general

public as a place of healing and recognition. In its current form, the generated environment's target audience is mainly academics who are exploring this article. However, once it is linked to the repository, it will be accessible to the general public of all ages and from all social backgrounds.

Rather than having an overarching concept or theme to the proposed reconstruction, the generated environment reflects the mundane and everyday life of former prisoners. The current proposal for constructing a KDC museum feeds into utopian speculations present in the contemporary political climate in South Lebanon. Hezbollah's approach is aligned with that of an authoritarian power that relies on monumental architecture to convey the concepts of supremacy, resistance, heroism, and martyrdom. The generated environment learns from the dichotomies of social production versus social construction of space, and also the prisoner versus visitor roles, to produce an alternative narrative that is free (or at least, that is the intention) of any biased manipulation. [Fig. 7]

In a similar instance, the research group Forensic Architecture was commissioned by Amnesty International to establish a digital platform for the notorious Syrian prison Saydnaya, to be presented to the general public and specialised legal international circles as evidentiary material. The project employed aesthetic methods to demonstrate how reality is sensed and presented publicly through the use of an interactive audio-visual exploration.<sup>24</sup> The result is the precise and accurate virtual reconstruction of the material setting of the prison. On the other hand, the generated environment is a virtual manifestation of the experience of prisoners based on their personal perception of space and place. The aim the Saydnaya platform is to hold the Assad Regime accountable for torture and mass executions, as access to the site is restricted. Meanwhile, although KDC's site is currently accessible, its physical presence is not aiding the judiciary



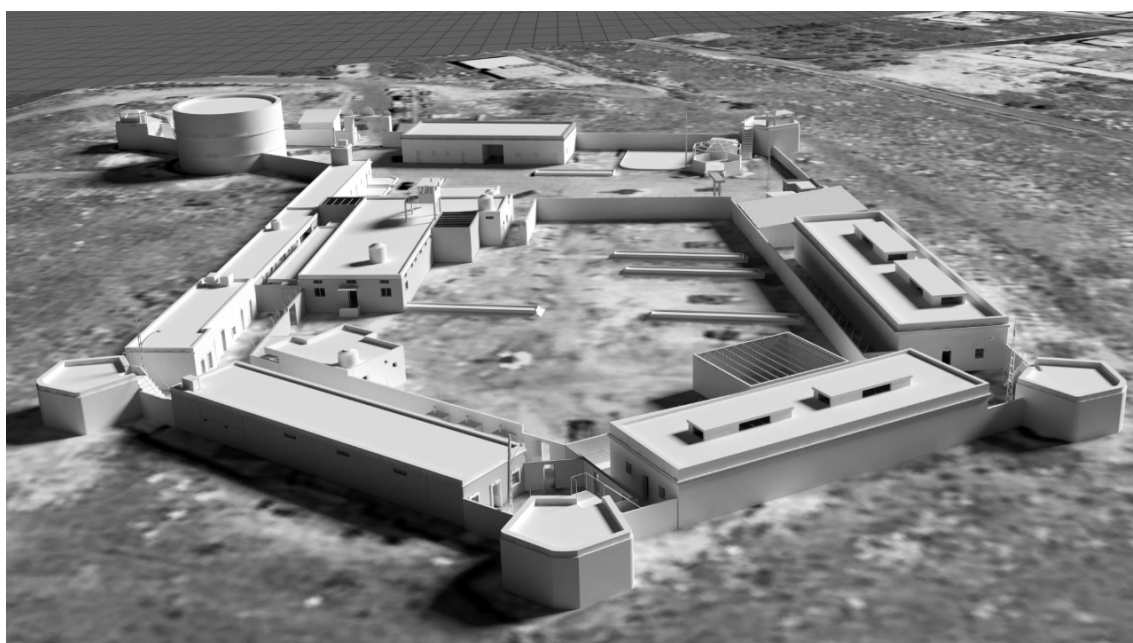


Fig. 7: A computer-generated 3D image of the model of KDC in its operation as a prison. Storage Medium 01, June 2020. <http://kdctoge.com>. Source: author.

process.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, accountability might never be attainable for the caretakers of KDC, regardless of physical evidence and the state of the structure. The generated environment can act as a virtual extension of the site to perpetuate the infamous memory of KDC, and also to help stir public debate towards the protection of human rights.

### Conclusion

The preservation of memory and the reproduction of prisoner experience are the main objectives of this project. The effort to relay and recreate the everyday experiences of former prisoners of KDC is exercised in resistance to the political powers that dominate the region of Khiam. The urgency to explore and implement alternative methods of KDC's restoration is directly inspired by the current reconstruction proposals introduced by Hezbollah that aim to transform the site into a partially-reconstructed and partially-preserved museum. In order to thoroughly counter this reconstruction plan with an alternative model, this study combines the compilation of collective memories of KDC, analysis of its physical remains, and perceptions of surveillance in the South Lebanon. Former prisoners, all being against the proposed reconstruction, expressed interest in relaying their experiences and preserving the memory of torture and oppression. Despite Israel's partial destruction of the site in 2006, former prisoners continue to associate their experiences within the rubble, and interpret the bombing as further justification of the urgent need to preserve the memory. These findings, combined with sentiments of resistance to occupation and oppression that are being exercised through aggressive surveillance tactics, have inspired the construction of the generated environment.

The generated environment seeks to run in parallel with and counter to the politically biased narratives that currently dominate the public sphere surrounding KDC. Potentially, the generated environment could be adapted to a museum

audio-guide device; however, it does not seek to become an ostentatious museum tool but rather a site exploration device. The generated environment can be appropriated and used as an audio-visual guide to further explore KDC in its virtual state. Regardless of any potential physical intervention on structure, the generated environment would override the built environment by offering users its own, constructed experience. In its current state, the generated environment enables individuals to grapple with restrictions of sight, sound, and mobility similar to those experienced by the former prisoners. Each Virtual Relay featured on the generated environment tackles the conceptualisation of oppression and torture experienced by former prisoners and challenges users' ability to produce their own experiences by limiting their ability to use their senses properly. The generated environment is not a recreation of the physical site of KDC. Rather, it is the reproduction of prisoner experiences that took place during their incarceration, that have come back to recreate a version of the site's history worth remembering.

### Notes

1. Transclusion is a term coined by Ted Nelson in his book *Literary Machines* to describe the inclusion of part or all of an electronic document into one or more other documents by hypertext reference. Theodor H. Nelson, *Literary Machines: The report on, and of, project xanadu, concerning word processing, electronic publishing, hypertext, thinkertoys, tomorrow's intellectual revolution, and certain other topics including knowledge, education and freedom* (Swarthmore: T. Nelson, 1987).
2. 'Khiam Detention Centre', *Khiam Detention Centre*. (Khiam: Lebanese Association for Prisoners and Editors, n.d.).
3. Lizzie Porter, 'A Legacy of Torture: Inside Lebanon's Khiam Jail'. Al Jazeera, 14 August 2017, <https://aljazeera.com>.
4. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *Khiam*

- 2000–2007: *The Film* (Lebanon: About Productions, 2007), Digital video, colour, 103 min., Arabic with English subtitles, password-protected Vimeo link <https://vimeo.com>.
5. Alvin Lucier, *I Am Sitting in a Room* (Electronic Music Studio at Brandeis University, 1969).
  6. The platform can be accessed on <http://kdctoge.com>.
  7. Setha M. Low. 'Towards an anthropological theory of space and place', *Semiotica* 175 (2009): 21–22.
  8. Ibid.
  9. Miles Richardson, 'Being-in-the-Plaza Versus Being-in-the-Market: Material Culture and the Construction of Social Reality', *American Ethnologist* 9, no. 2 (1982): 421–36.
  10. Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.
  11. The 3D model can be downloaded from Storage Medium 01 available at <http://kdctoge.com>.
  12. Hilda Kuper, 'The Language of Sites in the Politics of Space', *American Anthropologist New Series* 74, no. 3 (1972): 411–25.
  13. Setha M. Low, ed. *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 113.
  14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 2012), 196.
  15. Susan Schuppli, 'Uneasy Listening', in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, ed. Forensic Architecture (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2014), 386.
  16. Laura U. Marks, *Hanan Al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image* (Cambridge, MAMIT Press, 2015), 79–80.
  17. M. Badian, E. Appel, D. Palm, W. Rupp, W. Sittig, and K. Taeuber. 'Standardized Mental Stress in Healthy Volunteers Induced by Delayed Auditory Feedback (DAF)', *European Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 16, no. 3 (1979): 171–76.
  18. Mleeta Resistance Tourist Landmark, Lebanon, <https://mleeta.com>.
  19. On 25 May 2000 the Israeli Army withdrew from South Lebanon and that day is celebrated yearly as Liberation Day in Lebanon.
  20. Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 281.
  21. Storage Medium 03 can be accessed on <http://kdctoge.com>.
  22. A repository is a central place in which data or knowledge is kept and maintained in an organised way, usually in computer storage, with the ability to selectively extract information from the central storage space and the ability to upload data to it. We should not mistake an archive for a repository, because an archive usually contains knowledge of something obsolete or no longer living, whereas a repository refers to a storage location for data of an entity that is still evolving and growing.
  23. Researchers and artists who have investigated different aspects of Khiam Detention Centre include: Zara Fournier, Lara Deeb, Claire Launchbury, Wajdi Mouawad, Joana Hadjithomas, and Khalil Joreige.
  24. Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 94.
  25. For example, the director of the camp, Amer Fakhoury, nicknamed 'the butcher of Khiam,' was detained while trying to enter Lebanon in October 2019, but was mysteriously acquitted several months later. He died from late-stage lymphoma in the United States on 18 August 2020.

### **Biography**

Ahmad Beydoun (b. 1994, Beirut) is an architect and researcher who frequently operates in artistic settings. He completed his Bachelor of Architecture at the Lebanese American University and the École Spéciale d'Architecture. He is interested in developing research-based projects around collective memory in situ and in generated environments, critical cartographic and pedagogic practices that resist the carceral continuum in architecture and urbanism. Currently, Ahmad is building a repository for the decaying Khiam Detention Center to publicly perpetuate its infamous memory in the face of recent attempts of erasure and biased revisions of its history. He has previously worked as an architect at DW5 Bernard Khoury Architects where he was involved in a multidisciplinary range of work from research projects, to concept discussions, to the illustration and production of digital images and drawings. His research-based projects have been supported by and presented in Technical University of Delft, Art Jameel, Beit Beirut, Hammana Artist House and the internet.